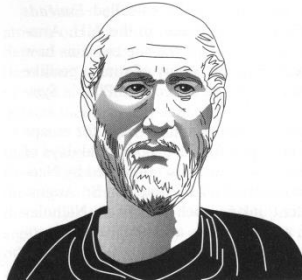


Discovering Neo-Platonism in Theoricus SRICF (Revised)

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Plotinus

A.D. 204–270



Neo-Platonism is mainly derived from the idealism of Plato (428/427 – 348/347 BCE); the metaphysics of Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and the mysticism of Pythagoras (570-495 BCE) from which politics was removed. The philosophy was absorbed into Christianity, Islam (Sufism¹) and compatible with earlier religious thinking of Judaism, Zoroastrianism² and Hinduism. It influenced medieval art and literature³. Neo-Platonism was developed in the Third Century CE by Plotinus from the teachings of the Platonist, Ammonius Saccas⁴.

Plotinus was born in Lycopolis, Egypt in 204 or 205 C.E. After 11 years study with the Ammonius Saccas School of Philosophy in Alexandria and another period of travel, thought and study he began his own School at his home in Rome. It would seem that he was wealthy and enjoyed the patronage of aristocratic friends, including the Emperor Gallienus (218-268 CE). Many of the influential members of society placed their children in his care. His Academy was based upon discussion of ideas and its philosophy was written into the six Enneads (groups of nine tractates or books). This did not take place until after he had been teaching for ten years. This work was carried out by his student Porphyry from badly written notes made by

¹ **Sufism** is the name for the inner or esoteric and mystical dimension of Islam – considered the compassionate side of Islam

² Founded by the Iranian prophet and reformer Zoroaster in the 6th century BC, Zoroastrianism contains both monotheistic and dualistic features. Its concepts of one God, judgment, heaven and hell likely influenced the major Western religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Driven out of Iran by the Muslims in the 8th Century CE it moved to what is now Pakistan as the Parsi or Parsee religion.

³ ART Michelangelo, Botticelli, Donatello. Poetry Donne to name a few.

⁴ **Ammonius Saccas** (175 -242 CE) (Ancient Greek: Ἀμμώνιος Σακκάς) was a Greek philosopher from Alexandria. He is mainly known as the teacher of Plotinus, from 232 to 243.

Plotinus. The 'Enneads' of Plotinus are a varied and complex set of writings that are very difficult to follow without guidance from authors who have studied his work.

The main thrust of the philosophy is derived from Plato's concept of the 'One' (Monad), 'Forms'⁵ and 'Soul'⁶ and the allegory of the 'Cave' but differed from Plato as it centred on Mysticism.

The concept of Plotinus, who was a Pagan, is that the 'One' came into being and from this Divine power overflowed the **emanation**⁷. The first *emanation* from the 'One' is both 'part of the Universe' and 'beyond existence'⁸. This first emanation of the Spirit (Nous)/Intelligence contemplates the One and spins off Forms that creates the third *emanation* of the World Soul. The world Soul then emanates the Individual Soul and into the Material World. These second and third emanations diminish (like a copy of a copy) and are less than the One. The material world is good, perfect and embraces the 'All'. (These four worlds are shown on Pages 11 and 17)

The 'All' is explained in the IV Ennead 4 Tractate, No 32. (Referred to as: IV 4.32). It requires a stretch of the mind to grasp the concept. I see it as an artist who paints a picture; the picture is the combination of the artist's mental conception and the application of his physical skill. The picture and artist are separate but come together on the canvas. The artist may leave the picture many times (much as we may approach and depart from God's grace) but the artist leaves his distinctiveness on the canvas. When he finally leaves the completed canvas it is part of the quintessence (*or ALL*) of the artist and the picture remains as his extension or from the ONE. In the 'All' God is omnipresent and each entity animate or inanimate is his quintessence. He is part of the existence and yet beyond the existence. 'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21) Fr. Tom Worrel IX grade reminded me of the oft times quotation 'The One is the ALL and the ALL is the ONE'.

In this era of ecological awareness we see that the inanimate parts of the earth when consumed or spoiled can impact the environment and the living parts. In that sense the creation is the

⁵ **Forms** as a Material (through sensation) and Immaterial (ideas) – reference the allegory of Plato's 'Cave'

⁶ **Soul** Stanford Encyclopedia '...soul is the distinguishing mark of all living things, including plants, the Greek notion of soul is, as we have seen already, broader than our concept of mind.'

⁷ Fifth Ennead First Tractate No 1 '...that the Soul is the author of all living things' and Webster: '...the origination of the world by a series of hierarchically descending radiations from the Godhead through intermediate stages to matter'

⁸ Fifth Ennead First Tractate No 1 to 6

essence of God and we view the inanimate also as the soul of the 'One'. In the Second grade of Theoricus II⁹ this concept is introduced to explain the interdependence upon the four elements⁹ that create the Material World. Plotinus goes to great length to explain this in his Enneads and I cannot confine his rationale in this short paper.

Plotinus conceived that the 'Soul' is in two spheres or 'forms' - the 'Material world' and the 'Spiritual World'. The Soul is in constant pressure not to remain in the Material world but to strive to rise to the Spiritual World and find unity with the 'One'. In life we see this as the individual's search for enlightenment and desire for spiritual and intellectual discovery.

There is no mention or instruction as to how this search may be directed but it is inherent that in the Greek/Roman period Theurgy was a common practice. *'Further, it is not the goal sanctioned by the Judeo-Christian-Islamic theologies, which points that a large gap remains between God and man even at the height of Spiritual attainment. That is why mystics are considered as heretics if they aspire to know God more intimately than theological doctrine deems possible.'*¹⁰ The concept of Neo-Platonism allows freedom for the individual to find direction without being directed.

'Evil to be an Ideal form, seeing that it manifests itself as the very absence of Good?'¹¹ This concept was introduced by Zoroaster in the 6th or 7th Century BCE. Plotinus argues that as Goodness diminish through emanation from the One to the Spirit, to the Soul and Material world so evil becomes more prevailing. 'Evil in the Soul, recognise it as the mere absence of Good.' (I 5.11). Plotinus continues by stressing the evil in the Soul is there because the Soul has not cleansed itself from Matter/Material World. (I.5.14). The Soul is in constant struggle to aspire from the Material to the Spiritual and sustain the Good. The Good lessens the evil.

Neo-Platonism did not conceive the existence of a Devil and this found a commonality with Judaism. Plotinus did not envision a Purgatory or redemption of the Soul which did not go down well with the newly formed Christian Church – and is still condemned! He also showed opposition to the Gnostics and is revealed in his Second Ennead, Ninth Tractate (II.9) entitled 'Against those that affirm the

⁹ Ritual Pages 36-39

¹⁰ Hines "Return to the One" Page 303

¹¹ First Ennead. Eighth Tractate No 1

Creator of the Cosmos and the Cosmos to be evil'. And is quoted 'Against the Gnostics'.

St. Paul considered that the material world had fallen through the corruption of Adam and was adopted by Christianity whereas a sect of the Syrian Gnostics believed it was the result of an evil creator¹². Neo-Platonism steers clear of both concepts.

Plotinus recognised GNOSIS - 'Knowledge' attained through four ways:

1. Sense – of truth '*elaborates them to visibility*'
2. Reason – of things '*Soul is the reason-Principle*'
3. Intellect – of ourselves '*to have intuition by memory*'
4. Ecstasy – of the supernatural (God is One and Creation is varied so to commune with Him. It is a two way street with many obstacles and failures but has many transitory triumphs). Buddhists refer to this as 'Nirvana' and Christians as 'Communion with the Saints'.

To sum up: the Soul rests between the Material and the Spiritual. The Soul is in constant conflict between corruption and perfection. The Soul has the choice to become self-assertive to ascend or fall into depravity. The Soul is independent of external direction and can chose to be able to save itself through Theurgy and achieve unity with the One.

Neo-Platonism is a realistic Monism¹³, it is like a tide that flows back and forth and does not do so automatically but erratically and then by **emanations**.

EMANATIONS

¹² 'With regard to the problem of evil, the most peculiar sect were the Gnostics of Syria whom the Church fathers called serpent-worshippers or Ophites, because on becoming acquainted with the Biblical books they regarded Yahweh, the demiurge or author of this visible and material world, as an evil deity...'

¹³ **Monism** is any philosophical view which holds that there is unity in a given field of inquiry, where this is not to be expected. Thus, some philosophers may hold that the universe is really just one thing, despite its many appearances and diversities; or theology may support the view that there is one God, with many manifestations in different religions. Hinduism is considered to be primary proponent of Monism.

1. The view in metaphysics that reality is a unified whole and that all existing things can be ascribed to or described by a single concept or system.

2. The doctrine that mind and matter are formed from, or reducible to, the same ultimate substance or principle of being.

Gatti 'Plotinus – The Platonic Tradition...'

1. "One" – the 'absolute' 'nameless' 'good' and the 'infinite' as God. God is the **Divine** power, source of existence, perfection that overflowed by:

2. The *first emanations* into the mind (spirit/nous¹⁴). The 'nous' is the first immaterial world of Forms or spirit/intellect which is an image of the "One" and is **creation**.

3. The *second emanation* is to the 'soul' which descended from the "One". The 'psyche' or soul is an image of the original 'nous' but is also a distinct entity and is diminished to a lesser form of the One. This has two kinds of contemplations: a. directed towards the intellect b. directed towards the material world of **formation** and is therefore twice removed and thereby diminished from the 'One'.

4. The *third emanation* is to the **material** world of the Universe. This is filled with good and evil and in doing so loses its Divine nature. This Divine nature will return to the Divine source or the "One" after it sheds the physical being and material world.

The divine existence of the "One" overflows by emanation into the rest of the universe not only as lesser entities but also as less perfect reflections of the "One". Hence, each emanation is less perfect than the previous emanation. This perfection of the One overflows Goodness and spreads light. The All is 'Good' and it is the lack of Good that creates evil. Evil is the absence of 'light' (knowledge). (I.8.1) SEE DIAGRAM ON PAGE 17 B

The SOUL exists at different levels. At its highest it is not identified with the Individual soul. It is at the highest level of Intellect and through contemplation of Beauty (VI Enneads - Beauty) that the Soul reaches out towards unity with the 'One'. At its lowest level it is grounded in the physical and material world. Plotinus was an aesthetic who regarded his physical body as an encumbrance and impediment to his goal.

Human beings, according to Neo-Platonism, approach God through the Soul, after setting aside the physical and material world by the pursuit of 'Knowledge' (*Gnosis*¹⁵). This is achieved through re-routing the material and physical world that separates it from God. Thus, the Soul becomes liberated. The progress towards this is by *purification* (*catharsis*¹⁶). This concept is found in the practice of many religions but especially in various Eastern Esoteric traditions.

¹⁴ Mind or intellect

¹⁵ Gnosis (from one of the Greek words for knowledge, γνῶσις) is the spiritual knowledge of a saint^[1] or mystically enlightened human being

¹⁶ Catharsis or katharsis (Ancient Greek: κάθαρσις) is a Greek word meaning "cleansing" or "purging".

1. The first stage of attaining *virtue* is assisted by the practice of temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice¹⁷ that leads to master the temporal world and shed the trivialities of the material world governed by the senses. This is the essential discipline of mastering 'self'.
2. The second stage is through contemplation and meditation which is divided into: A. aesthetic – to discover the beauty and goodness of the soul through the Intellect. (VI Enneads) B. rational – to discover truth and the 'Revelation' that allows the mind to become both receptive and passive so as to create a union with God.
3. The final stage is Ecstasy. This mystical experience, derived through prayer, Theurgy and contemplation, can result in God's emanation of 'Light' (Knowledge) from which we can ultimately become a receptacle of God as a Spiritual prophet. This mystical experience is rare and the union of the Soul and God which makes the Soul a part of God is not compatible with Christian doctrine. This union is not consistent and ebbs and flow! 'To be ALONE with the ALONE'.

Plotinus explains that God, the 'One', the 'Good' is Omnipotent, (All powerful) Omnipresent (All Knowing) and Omniscient (Everywhere) in all things both material and spiritual. Yet he is impassive and does not intrude into the Soul or the material world. In this respect the One does not control the material world. Most religions pray for divine intervention.

According to Neo-Platonism such prayer will not produce a result or change the course of events. The 'mystical experience' relates the Soul with the One and benefits the Soul by enrichment. Prayer will NOT cause the achievement or change the outcome of a goal through the intervention of the One but may focus the mind to enable the individual to find a way of attaining the goal.

Further development of Neo-Platonism was by Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Sallust, Julian the Apostate (Christian), Philo-Judaeus (Jewish) and evolved into a diverse philosophy. It is regarded as the synthesis of Greek metaphysics. After the Roman Emperor Constantine is said to have converted to Christianity at the battle of Saxa Rubra in 312 C.E. and the edicts of the Council of Nicaea in 325

¹⁷ From Plato and absorbed into Jewish and Christian concepts. Then into Freemasonry. Enneads I.2.1 and 2 (Virtue)

C.E. Christianity became the dominant religion and by the 6th Century C.E Neo-Platonism became moribund.

Porphyry's Theurgy according to Tobias Churton contained '*an eclectic mixture of Pythagorean, Stoic doctrines along with Persian (Zoroastrianism), Babylonian and Syrian materials*'. While Porphyry did not support much of the Persian, Babylonian and Syrian Theurgy Iamblichus did. Both Iamblichus and later Proclus supported 'Henosis' (*deification or union with god*) which is found in Plato's Theaitus 'a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible'; and with Christian Orthodoxy 'Theosis'. Iamblichus perused this through Theurgy with material help from incantations, liturgy, stones, water, herbs and gems whereas the Christians used liturgy, wine, bread, incense and water.

Iamblichus also asserted the concept of the Monad into a Triad of the Divine Nous, (Father/spirit/Elohim) '*Thou shall fear the Lord Thy God*'¹⁸ Intellectual Nous (Maker/El Shadai - Demiurge¹⁹) and the Intelligible Nous (Material/I am) with the 'psyche/soul' able to reach these different worlds. This Neo-Platonism of a Triad was accepted by many early Christian Scholars and philosophers as was the concepts of asceticism²⁰.

Jesus as the Saviour of mankind was not a Neo-Platonic concept but an aspect of Hermeticism. Neo-Platonism consider that the Soul could attain perfection in the material world and did not have to wait for death or redemption from purgatory. This concept separated it from Christian ideology. '*The belief of the Theurgists Be free agents in the divine cosmos.... Like the Gods that lived within them were endowed with immortality and the spark of gnosis.*' Churton - Gnostic Philosophy Page 129

¹⁸ Deuteronomy vi 13

19 **Demiurge** is a concept from the **Platonic, Neo-Pythagorean, Middle Platonic, and Neo-Platonism** schools of philosophy for an artisan-like figure responsible for the fashioning and maintenance of the physical universe. The term was subsequently adopted by the **Gnostics**. Although a fashioner, the demiurge is not quite the creator figure in the familiar **monotheistic** sense; both the demiurge itself and the material from which the demiurge fashions the universe are considered either uncreated or eternal, or the product of some other being, depending on the system.

1 a Platonic subordinate deity who fashions the sensible world in the light of eternal ideas *b* : a Gnostic subordinate deity who is the creator of the material world

2 one that is an autonomous creative force or decisive power

²⁰ practicing strict self-denial as a measure of personal and especially spiritual discipline

St Augustine (354-430) found in Neo-Platonism a philosophy that correlated with Christianity. Richard Tarnas states '*Plotinus's philosophy was pivotal in Augustine's gradual conversion to Christianity*'. St. Augustine was a Neo-Platonist during the middle period of his life. Nowhere in Plotinus's philosophy does he mention a 'saviour' to intercede between God and Humanity and this was where St. Augustine found a problem. St. Augustine wrote: '*It was somewhat after this, I admit, that I learned how, with regards to those words "The Word was made flesh, Catholic truth is distinguished from the false teachings of Plotinus*'.²¹ Nonetheless, Neo-Platonism found its way into the Augustinian teaching and greatly influenced Christian doctrine and Western thinking.

Aristotle was the popular philosopher that shaped much of the 11th/12th Century major Western and Middle East religious Traditions through Moses Maimonides (Judaism) Thomas Aquinas (Christianity) Averroes (Islam). However, Fabio Venzi asserts that Neo-Platonism in the Middle Ages was of equal importance²². It can be classified in three separate areas: Europe, Byzantine and Islam.

In 2008, John Ubersax wrote: '*Platonism and Neo-Platonism then disappeared in Christian culture for several centuries. They did not fully reappear until the Renaissance -- most notably in Latin translations by Marsilio Ficino and his contemporaries. However, these traditions remained in Islamic culture, influencing philosophy and theology there. In the Middle Ages, Islamic Neo-Platonism indirectly influenced Christian philosophers like St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.) via the works of Avicenna (981-1037 C.E.) and Averroes (1126-1198 C.E.) A second thread of influence was felt "underground", as it were, in the development of Western esotericism, which borrowed from Spanish Sufi mysticism and other Islamic sources. Likely the Cabala tradition, and certainly Alchemy, were strongly influenced by Islamic Neo-Platonist and Neo-Pythagorean writings.*'²³

In the 11th Century Solomon Ibn Gabirol²⁴ (1021-1058 C.E.) wrote a book on Neo-Platonism called 'The Source of Life' in Hebrew. It was translated into Latin and mistakenly assumed by Christians to be

²¹ The Confessions of St. Augustine Book 7 – Ch. 1 -19.

²² The Influence of Neo-Platonic thought on Freemasonry – Fabio Venzi - The Cornerstone Society

²³ **In the 16th Century** some Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam during the Moghul invasion of India. Sufi Moslems were more tolerant and there is a temple that co-mingles both faiths under the same roof.

²⁴ **Solomon Ibn Gabirol**, also Solomon ben Judah. Arabic and Hebrew writer. Zaragoza and Valencia. Spain

a Christian work. Some of its' Neo-Platonism was absorbed into the doctrines of Christianity

In England, among the many Neoplatonist Roger Bacon (1220 – 1292 CE) was a scientist, philosopher and Franciscan Friar who upset the Church with his views on Aristotle and Christianity. Another Neoplatonist was Dr. John Dee²⁵ (1527-1609 C.E.) who travelled extensively and visited Florence. He became an occultist, astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I and in his later years is said to 'communed' with the angels. Other activists were A. E. Waite (late 19th Century), Aleister Crowley and Madame Blavatsky (early 20th Century).

The Cambridge Platonists²⁶ met between 1633 and 1668 included Cudworth, More, Culverwell, Smith and Sterry who were prominent free thinkers.

The 'Invisible College'²⁷ was in existence in about 1646 at about the same time the Royal Society began to gather in London. It included Robert Boyle, (Boyle's Law) John Wilkins, John Wallis, John Evelyn, Robert Hooke, (Hooke's Law) Christopher Wren* (Architect) and William Petty as members.

The Royal Society founded in 1662 from a recommendation by Sir Robert Moray* was chartered by King Charles II. The first meetings took place 1645 and was the centre of both scientific and philosophical study at Gresham College. London²⁸. Membership included John Locke*, John Wilkins, John Auberry* Jonathan Goddard, Robert Hooke, Christopher Wren*, William Petty, Isaac Newton (not a Freemason) and Robert Boyle. (*Freemasons). Other later members were Theophilus Desaguilliers (who became Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England in 1719) and Benjamin Franklin. One of the Royal

²⁵ **John Dee** was a noted English mathematician, astronomer, astrologer, occultist, navigator, imperialist and consultant to Queen Elizabeth I. He devoted much of his life to the study of alchemy, divination, and Hermetic philosophy. Wikipedia

²⁶ The **Cambridge Platonists** were a group of philosophers at Cambridge University, England in the middle of the 17th century (between 1633 and 1688).

²⁷ **Invisible College** picture at the beginning of this Paper may be a significant link between Neo-Platonism and Freemasonry!

²⁸ John Wallis *'About the year 1645, while I lived in London (at a time when, by our civil wars, academical studies were much interrupted in both our Universities), ... I had the opportunity of being acquainted with divers worthy persons, inquisitive natural philosophy, and other parts of human learning; and particularly of what hath been called the New Philosophy or Experimental Philosophy. We did by agreements, divers of us, meet weekly in London on a certain day and hour, under a certain penalty, and a weekly contribution for the charge of experiments, with certain rules agreed amongst us, to treat and discourse of such affairs...*

Society popular lecturers was Sir Christopher Wren and one of the Presidents of the Society was Sir Isaac Newton.

There is no substantive evidence to support the popular writings of recent authors that these Societies were the 'founding fathers' of Freemasonry in 1717. However, it is more than possible that many members brought their knowledge and philosophy into Speculative Freemasonry. Hermeticism, Rosicrucianism, Alchemy, Ancient history and understanding of cabalistic concepts were part of the ethos of intellectual society. It is recorded that speculative Freemasonry emerged in 1717 in London with the formation of the first Grand Lodge²⁹ that included members of the Royal Society and Invisible College

Bro. Fabio Venzi, Grand Master of Italy (Grand Loge d'Italia) from 2002 and a renowned Masonic scholar: *"My theory is that, beginning with Pico della Mirandola, (above all from the Oratio de Hominis Dignitate³⁰), it is possible to trace a line which passes through the interpretation of Christian Cabbalism, as interpreted by Francesco Zorzi, the Rosacrucianism of Robert Fludd³¹ and John Dee and arrives, at the fertile ground represented by the Neoplatonic School of Cambridge.*

In England, and this is the point I want to bring to light, some humanists chose Masonic symbolism, to reveal ethical and moral principles, and their particular conception of mankind, giving life to speculative Freemasonry. Within the vast panorama of research, on the origins of Freemasonry, I have concentrated on the studies, which do not hold credible, the theory that modern Freemasonry descended directly from operative masons, and that instead, estimate the birth of speculative Freemasonry, to be in the late 1600's".

Bro. W. Kirk MacNulty in 'The Way of the Craftsman' depicts four worlds derived from the Kabbalah:

- World of **Divinity** – Fire – calling - Aziluth (Divine emanation)
- World of Spirit – air – **creation** - Beriah (Creation)

²⁹ There are many Historical accounts including 'Grand Lodge 1717-1797' and 'History of English Freemasonry' by John Hamill

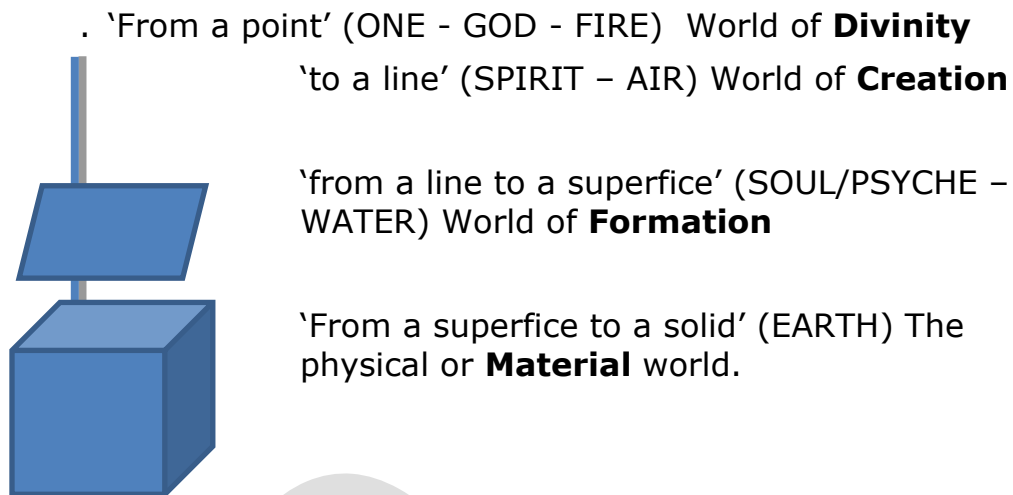
³⁰ Oration on the Dignity of Man

³¹ Robert Fludd (1574-1637 C.E.) supported Rosicrucianism in his 'Apolgia Compendiaria' 1616 C.E.
EWF

- World of Psyche – water – **formation** (*id, ego unconscious - Jung*) - Yezirah (Formation)
 - World of Physicality - earth – making - **material** - Asiyyah - Action or Material world in which we live.
- I see these four worlds present in the Craft Lodge. The Entered Apprentice comes from darkness and chaos of the preparation room to be placed in the Material world for prayer. Symbolically, as an Entered Apprentice he discovers himself. The perambulations around the Lodge is indicative of visiting the four worlds without recognition. He returns to the Material world and progress to kneel at the Altar in the world of Formation. In Formation as a Fellowcraft he will explore his relationships with society. At the junction of the World of Formation and Intellectual he is obligated. As an Entered Apprentice we note the two parallel lines. There we may see imposed the Tree of Life. The two lines representing wisdom and strength. Beauty is distinguished as the candidate assumes an obligation to be a Freemason from the Worshipful Master. We also see Jacobs ladder in the position of the altar and location of Stewards and Treasurer.(I have an extensive paper on this aspect). It is worth noting that the candidate sits in the Creation world to prove his proficiency and received the lecture.



Masonic ritual in the Fellowcraft degree states: **'From a point** [*Creation – World of Divinity - God*] **to a line,** [*Spirit – World of Creation*] **from a line to a superfice** [*Soul/Psyche – world of Formation- unconscious*] **and from a superfice to a sold** [*earth – world of physicality*]³² Diagram:



In a Paper MacNulty delivered on June 30th 1999 he states: 'Neo-Platonism and the Royal Arch Triple Tau'. He goes into great depth demonstrating various Platonic objects and Neo-platonic concepts in Freemasonry. In summation he stated, *'It seems to me that a careful interpretation of this symbolism in the context of the philosophical ideas which were prominent at the time our Craft came into being suggests that this is a symbolic statement of Neo-Platonism'*.

In Rosicrucianism we see the Masonic Lodge with Air in the East, Water in the West, Fire in the South and Earth in the North. EWF.

A study of THE GRADES.

Review the THEORICUS Ritual as on pages 29 to 48. I suggest you open your ritual book and read the degree before continuing with this Paper.

*'Fire first with wings expand mounts on high
 Pure, void of weight, and dwells in upper sky;*

³² MacNulty Pg 15. 'Freemasonry' Pg. 17 'Way of the Craftsman'

*The Air because unclogg'd in upper sky;
Flies after Fire and claims the second place;
But weighty water in her nature guides,
Lies on Earth; and mother Earth subsides'*
'Of the Pythagorean philosophy.'
By John Dryden. 1631 – 1700

This corresponds to the Zelator grade where the stations of the Ancients are starting in the East: Fire, Air, Water and Earth. The perambulation is in a clockwise direction starting in the West. See *Page 15 A*.

The Zelator enters carrying a cross as shown on *Page 17 A*. In the 'Rose Petal' Ritual of 1881 of the SRICF the candidate is conducted on four circuits to a 'Hymn to Chimia' (*Alchemy*). This is omitted in the modern version. The words of the hymn seem more appropriate for the 'Alchemical' Practicus III^o Grade.

In the current ritual the four elements are explained by the Four Ancients which you can read at your leisure. I draw your attention to the address by the Exponent on page 39 – 41 that explains the Worlds much as in Neo-Platonism.

In the second paragraph on page 40 there is 'At the death of man the Spirit returns to God Who gave it, the Soul passes to the Judgment Hall for reward or punishment.' This is not Neo-Platonism as I have explained but a Christian concept that is also found in



the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead'.

These concepts of good and evil are derived from Zoroastrianism that impacted early religions. Hinduism being the first known religion dating from around 4,500 years. It was followed by Judaism around 2,800 years ago. Zoroastrianism emerged next at about the same time as Buddhism. Zoroastrianism is both monotheistic and dualist having developed in Persia and now practiced by Parsees in India.

(The S.R.I.C.F. Encourages us as Christian to explore other religions and beliefs to enable us to establish our faith in Christianity).
In Neo-Platonism the Soul does not wait for judgment but returns to the One at death.

The final address by the Celebrant on pages 41 and 42 has a correspondence to the philosophy explained in this Paper relating to Neo-Platonism. The mystic letters F.I.A.T. - meaning 'decree to make happen' or 'Let it be done' and was first used in 1631.³³ The grand word Zaph-nath Paan-cah is the name given by Pharaoh to Joseph and translates as 'Revealer of the word'. The S. R. I. A. (England) ritual gives it as 'Receiver of Secrets' and McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia (1882) gives the meaning as 'Saviour of the world'. See diagram 17A

The first paragraph of the Lecture on 'COLOURS' has a reference to 'Emanations'. It states: 'Beginning was soon diversified, the light being **reflected** in a myriad of ways from the air, fire, water and earth of the material world...' It is not quite the way expounded in Neo-Platonism! The word 'reflected' does not suggest 'created' and the syntheses could be 'replicated' which would suggest emanation. The lecture later states: The three primary colours red, yellow and blue have also been attributed to the Three Great Devine qualities ; viz., - Red to His Omnipotence, Yellow to His Omniscience and Blue to His Omnipresence; or in other words to His Power, Wisdom and Universality'. This relates to the colours on the Cross carried by the Zelator.

The Theoricus (theoretical) and Practicus (practical) are two significant grades that are linked with Neo-Platonism and Alchemy. In the IV Philosophus (love of Wisdom) this is expanded '*... in this grade consider the doctrines of the most famous philosophers and compare the tenets of the several great religions of the world*'. The Philosophus is the platform for the expansion into the College of Adepts. The three orders of Theoricus, Practicus and Philosophus deserve more attention by Fratres than has been given and worthy of demonstration in the College. Fr. Bransgrove during his tenure as Celebrant had a 'demonstration' of Theoricus in 2007.

In the opening ritual of an English Emulation Lodge there is a question asked in respect to finding the genuine secrets of a Master Mason the answer is 'With the c.' The ritual continues to explain 'a

³³ Webster dictionary

point within a c. from which every part of the circumference is equidistant'. It then asks 'Why with the c? The response is 'that point from which a M.M. cannot err.'

A similar discourse is included in the Ninth Ennead, Tractate 8. (IX.8) It begins with " *Every soul that knows its history is aware, also, that the movement, unthwarted, is not that of an outgoing line; its natural course may be likened to that in which a circle turns not upon some external but on its own centre.....Is then this 'centre' of our souls the Principle of which we are seeking? We must look yet further The soul is not a centre in the sense of the geometric figure but that it at once contained the Primal Nature (as centre) and is contained by it (as circumferences), a self-contained entity.*"

Joseph Campbell in 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' page 40-41, The 'World Navel' states: *'The torrent from an invisible source, the point of entry bring the centre of a symbolic circle of the universe, the immovable spot of the Buddha legend'*.

In England there is no due-guard and English Masons in the M.M. degree hold the sign on the centre i.e. the navel. It is also significant that the letter 'C' - ('soul') in an English Lodge is suspended in the centre of the Lodge room. (The Prestonian Lecture explains the Lodge as a 'parallelepipedon'... 'from East to West and from North to South, from the surface of the earth to the centre and even as high as the heavens'. This describes the Lodge as a representation of the world - microcosm of a macrocosm. It also offers a reason why the letter G is in the centre and not in the East as in California Lodges?. The English concept seems appropriate to me if we accept the Neo-Platonic view³⁴.

As an initiate I was asked: 'What is Freemasonry?' My rote response from the ritual was the much quoted: 'A peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.' I was also told to contemplate upon the working tools of a Freemason. When I began to explore and speak about the esoteric aspects of Freemasonry I ran into trouble from many English Masons including many Grand Lodge Officers. Most Masons considered Freemasonry as one dimensional with the emphasis on rote memorisation for the discharge of good ritual, the excellence of dinner at the fraternal Festive Board and the size of donations made by individuals and Lodges to Grand Lodge charity.

³⁴ Not shared by Wilmshurst 'The Meaning of Masonry' Page 46

It is difficult to prove to what extent the arcane philosophies and disciplines that came before the advent of Speculative Freemasonry, were imbedded into Masonic ritual. There are many Masonic scholars who give little or no credence to any esoteric explanation of Masonic Symbolism. Over the course of 293 years of Masonic history this tide of believability over Masonic esoteric symbolism has ebbed and flowed.

We are now in era where information is easily accessible through the Internet. There are a number of Masonic scholars and especially many younger Masons seeking an esoteric content to Freemasonry. The generation gap in Freemasonry seems to have brought a new resurgence that has tended to leave many older Freemasons behind. We see the formation of 'Traditional Observance' Lodges' trying to infuse a respect for the Lodge Room³⁵.

In England my wife never saw the inside of the Lodge until one day in 1979 there was an 'official' tour for the ladies without any Officers in their stations, no regalia on show or any paraphernalia. The first tour of the Lodge Room in 100 years! Maybe that is too excessive and isolates Freeman's. However, Is that all bad? It is an indication that in many Lodges in England the Lodge room is considered a special place designated as the 'Sanctum Sanctorum' of Freemasonry. Before the Lodge opens members observe a code of respect as solemn music is played. In California and in some Lodges around the world the Lodge has become an 'all purpose' meeting place. If so, can we when in a Lodge Room for a conferral of a degree return it to the dignity for which the ceremony is so necessary? As I visit Lodges I see the tendency for frivolous and casual behaviour that denigrates Masonic ritual and ceremonial.

To many Freemasons all Masonic symbolism is exoteric and extends to a simple explanation given in the ritual. These explanations are based upon morality as expressed by allegory as depicted by the Working Tools of the degrees and the Charges. To discover the esoteric takes time, effort and an open mind.

Neo-Platonism is a means of inner discovery and a connection with divinity, not uncommon with many philosophies and religions. It teaches that the journey is an understanding and connection with God, nature and man. This journey reaches towards unity with Divinity but is never a part of it and retreats to become an entity within itself to achieve a harmonious life. It invites us to have an open mind that will

³⁵ Wilmshurst 'Masonic Initiation' Page 30

transcend all false preconceptions; that will enable us to derive virtue and a good life – even serenity. All this is not uncommon with many disciplines, religions, and philosophies.

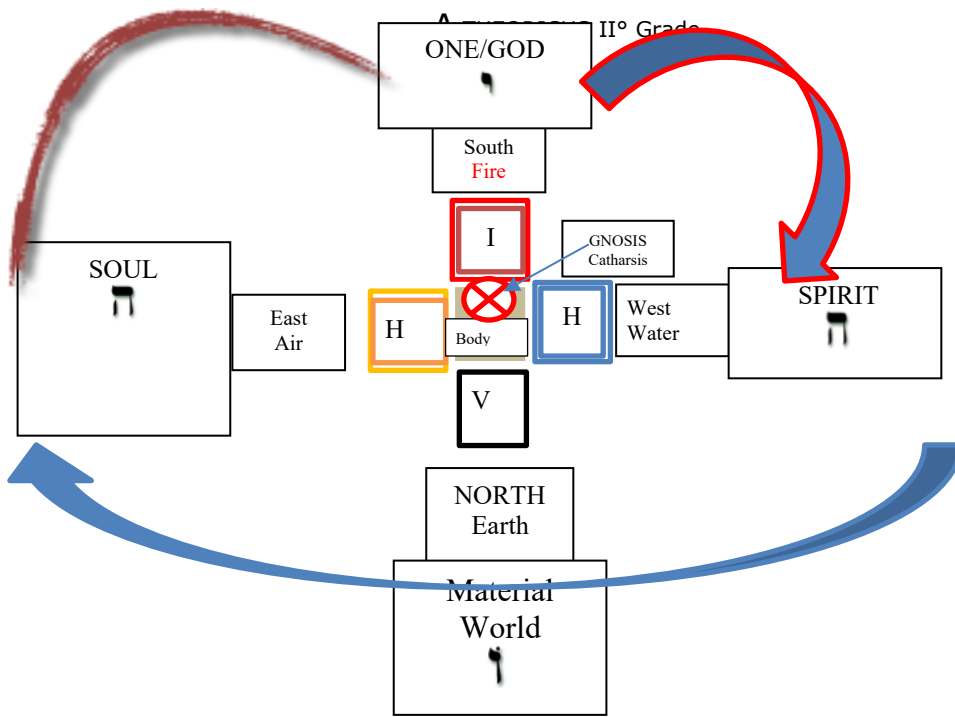
Neo-Platonism respect God; respect humanity; respect a return of the Soul to the Divine; respect other religions when these religions and beliefs are based upon the concept of a benevolent God and an afterlife – *something like Freemasonry?*

My brief study of Neo-Platonism has been like climbing on to a bus that takes a winding and devious route into unknown territory up a mountain road. It makes many stops as it head towards the top of the mountain where we will find communion and even unity with the 'One' - God. Unfortunately, my journey has involved many stops and many exits with many returns to previous stops and still has a long way to go!

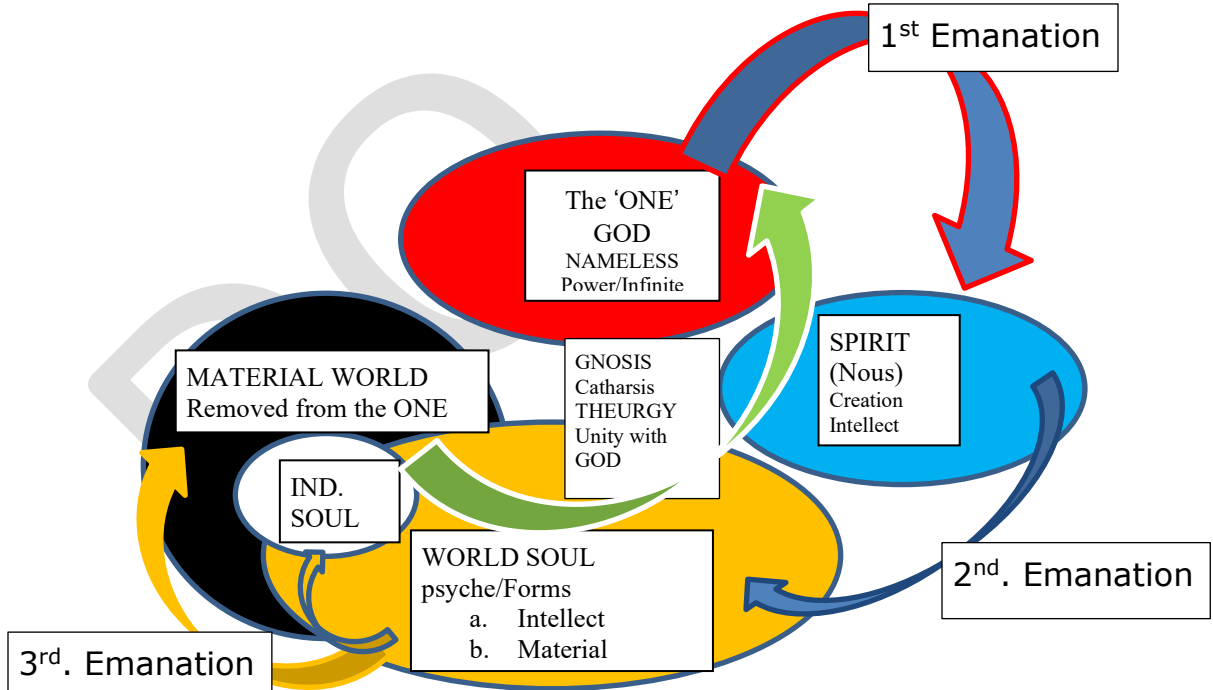
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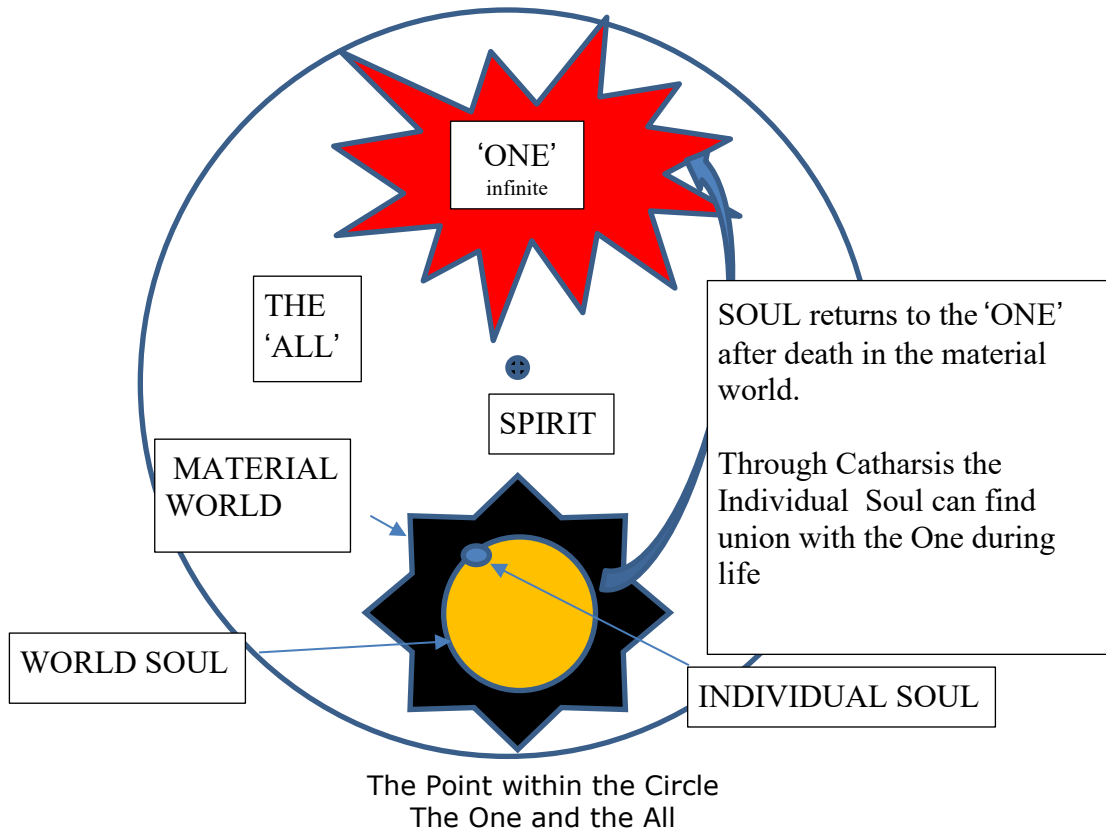
Cel: '....refer to the Four Worlds of Existence, the Divine, Angelic, Formative and Material'. 'You, my Frater, are a Temple of God and may the Spirit of God always send you light'.





B.





From Greg.

This seems to be integral to our Masonic teachings; a direct correlation to the process of smoothing out the rough edges of our ashlar, our character. The true meaning of the phrase, "Making good men better."

Mer (Ma) - ka (ha) - ba (bon)

Light. Spirit. Body.

"In Ancient Egypt, this primal pattern was called the Mer-Ka-Ba. It was actually three words, not one. Mer meant a kind of light that rotated within itself. Ka meant spirit, in this case referring to the human spirit. And Ba meant the human body — though it also could mean the concept of Reality that spirit holds. And so the entire word in ancient Egypt referred to a rotating light that would take the spirit and the body from one world into another..."

...One of the functions of the Mer-Ka-Ba, as we said, is to act as the vehicle to take the spirit and the body into the next world.

However, this function — and most of the other possibilities — is impossible to obtain



The Sombrero Galaxy

until something changes within the person. The Mer-Ka-Ba is situated around the human body like a three-dimensional geometric web that is dormant and nonfunctional, waiting for the right moment. When the spirit that inhabits the body remembers that it is there and begins to change certain aspects of itself, an incredible transformation begins to grow...

...Your character is the key to your ascension. Regardless of who you are at this moment, good or bad, you can change your character. Like losing weight, it is completely within your control if you focus.

*In changing yourself, your Mer-Ka-Ba can become alive. And once it is alive, everything is possible." My very best, and may light show the path,
Greg*

Fr. Fentum,

The paper was excellent. It has been hole-punched and added to my permanent papers. You definitely touched upon the issues and connections I mentioned briefly in a previous email to you. I enjoyed it, learned new information and found some of the exhibits very useful for reference (especially the timelines of Neo-Platonist philosophers).

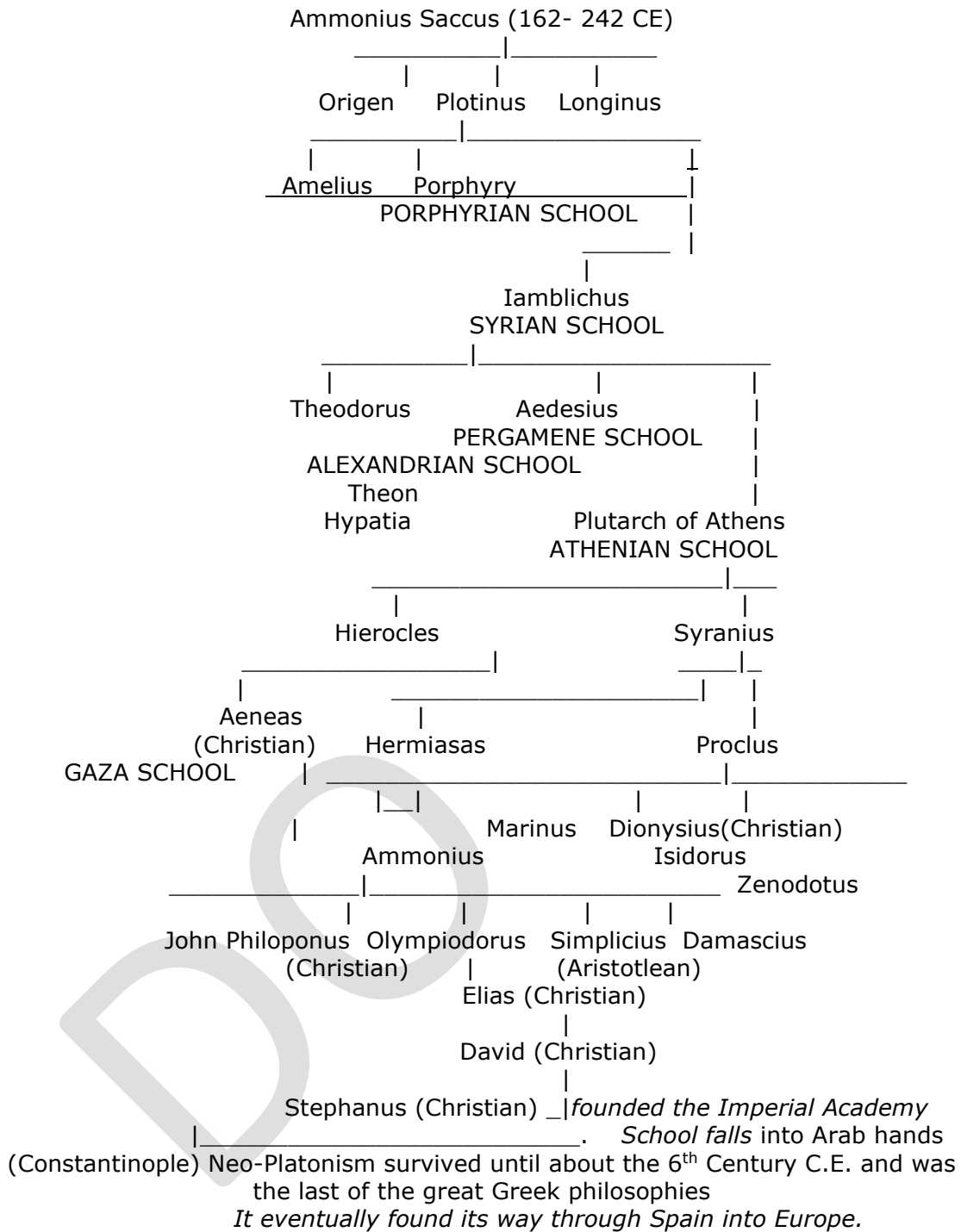
A couple things you might find interesting is comparing the concept of "metanoia" to these topics. It is usually translated (in the New Testament) as "conversion" which does little or nothing to capture the essence or meaning of this term. The meaning of the word in Greek/Aramaic usage is more like "radical reversal" or "profound transformation." The process of catharsis you mention is related. One purpose of initiation is to trigger metanoia in the candidate and/or depict the process/experience of metanoia.

Related to the ideas you discuss, and which you did touch upon in your paper, is the process of deification which is a primary doctrine of the Eastern Church whose ideas are frequently overlooked in the west. You appear to be familiar with it. It seems to me that the Eastern Church's idea of divinized man is very different from Western dogma and the process of divinization is actually encouraged and believed to be obtainable (however infrequently). Thus it is believed we all have the potential to be God-men – in union with God. As you note, the process of divinization in the Eastern Church still does not result in a complete identification with Divine but the idea is much more analogous to the objectives of Theurgy or oriental concepts of enlightenment than anything I've found in the Western Church (as a doctrine – of course a handful of western saints and mystics have come much closer to this conception e.g. Eckhart, Boehme etc etc). The Western Church appears to have largely rejected these ideas.

*Yours in the M***** C******

Steven Rafalovich

Copy From Internet



This heart centre is also often represented as the crux of two pyramids, one pointed up from the earth and the other hanging down from the sky, with the two points of each pyramid joined as the centre of an hour-glass shape. This was the concluding symbol in The DaVinci Code where it represents the Holy Grail, the final goal of the quest. It

is also called the zero point. Our own heart is therefore both the Holy Grail and philosopher's stone. The two pyramids when combined together into an overlapping six-sided stone is the Merkabah (*), the chariot of the soul's ascension, and represents the two alchemical principles *solve et coagula* (or loosing and binding, or chalice and blade) combined. This is also the "alchemical marriage."

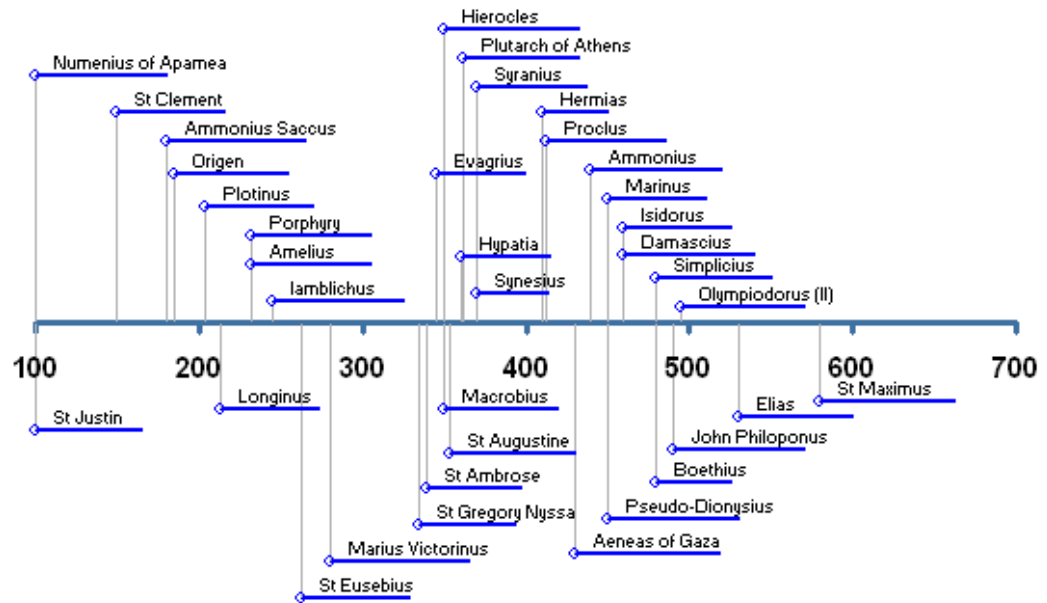
Richard Tarnas in his book *The Passion of the Western Mind*, "in Plotinus' thought the rationality of the world and of the philosopher's quest is but the prelude to a more transcendent existent beyond reason. 'Neo-platonism and Alchemy, the Forgotten Philosophy'

by Eric A. (E. Alan) Meece March/April, 2005 Updated 2023

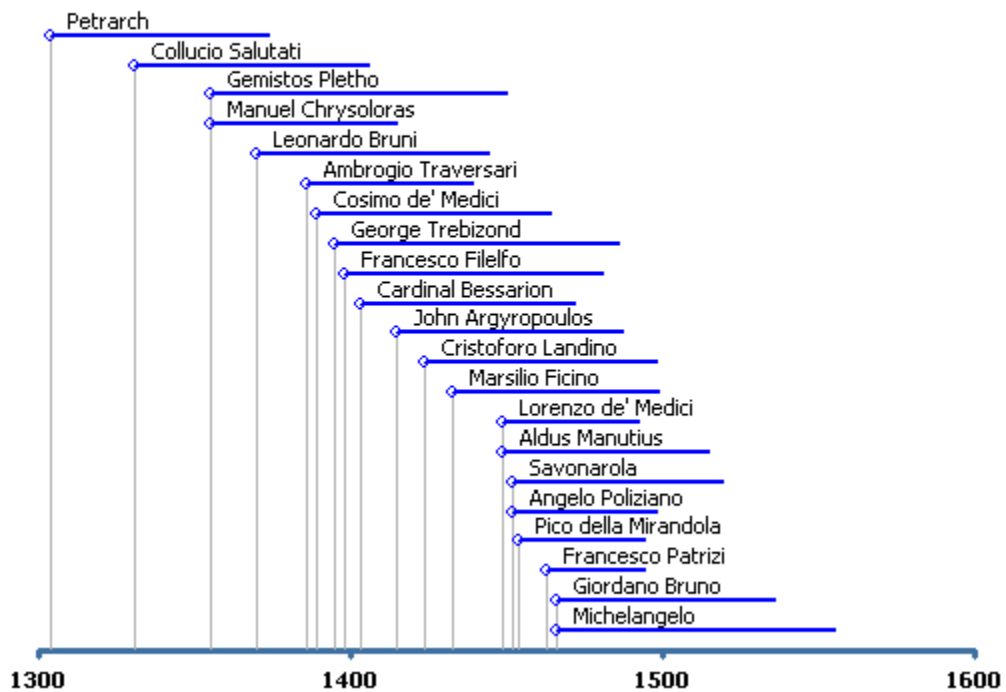
Ezekiel's Wheel in St. John the Baptist Church in Kratovo, Macedonia from XIX Century. Jewish Mysticism of the Chariot. It is said to have four angels facing in four directions. The four angels have the faces of the lion, ox, man and eagle. In Royal Arch Masonry and on the crest of the United Grand Lodge of England we see the lion, ox, man and eagle. Symbolically said to represent the courage of the lion, patience of the ox, intelligence of the man and the swiftness of the eagle.



Pagan and Christian Platonists/Neoplatonists



Major Figures Associated with the Italian Platonic Revival



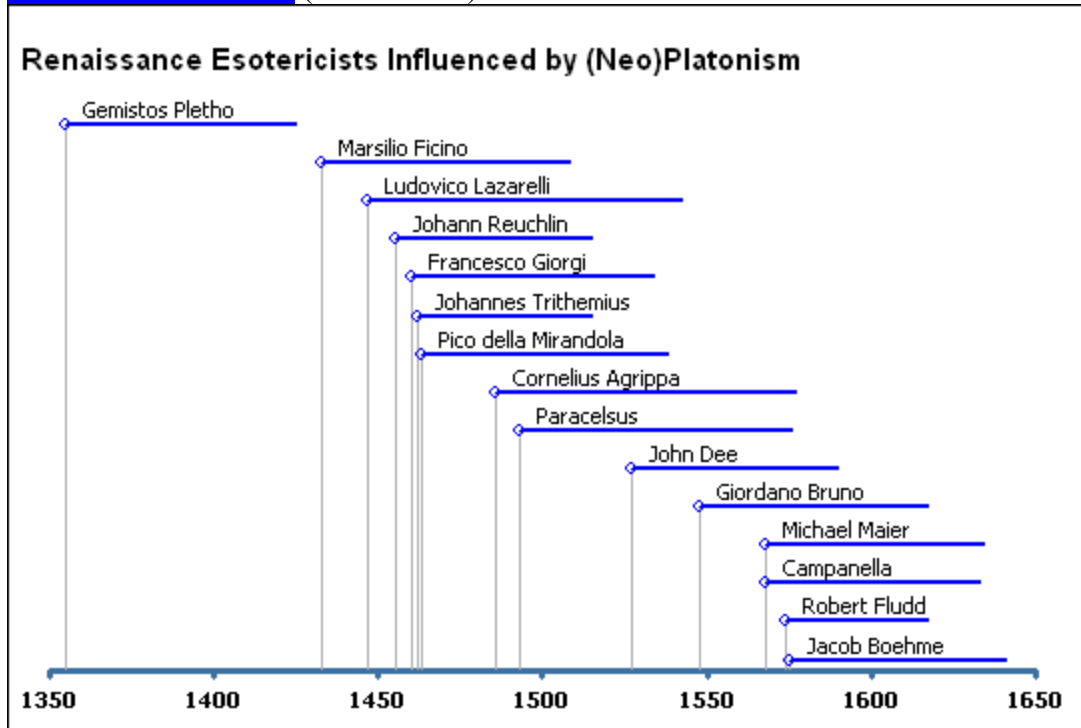
Enneads translated into English by Mac Kenna and
Page
Return to the One by Brian Hines
Neo-Platonism by Manly P. Hall
Freemasonry by Kirk Mac Nulty
Gnostic Philosophy by Tobias Churton
Plato's Republic, Symposium
Philosophy by Stumpf
The Hero with a Thousand Faces Joseph Campbell
Medieval Philosophy Kaufmann & Baird
Emulation Ritual and Lectures U.G.L.E.
Freemasonry – Its hidden meaning George Steinmetz
S.R.I.C.F. Rose Petal and Standard Rituals. S.R.I.A. Ritual

Edgar W. Fentum
29th January 2011

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References:
Enneads translated into English by Mac Kenna and Page

- [Benjamin Whichcote](#) (1609 - 1683)



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