

Lectures on Alchemy

Terence McKenna

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Well, it is a small group and this was my intent by focusing on the *Hermetic Corpus* and alchemy. I've just gotten tired of talking about psychedelic drugs and always saying the same things over and over again; nevertheless, it's a challenge to go outside my own bailiwick. I've had an interest in hermeticism and alchemy since I was about 14 and read Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy*, and it opened for me the fact of the existence of this vast literature, a literature that is very little read or understood in the modern context. The Jungians have made much of it, but to their own purposes and perhaps not always with a complete fidelity to the intent of the tradition. We'll talk a lot about the Jungian approach, but there are other approaches, even within the 20th century. I urged you to read *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* by Dame Frances Yates, and although Frances Yates' scholarship is very controversial, I think that to get an overview of the landscape her book is probably the best single book between covers. It's not pleasing to some factions and we can talk about that. We will probably discover within the group all the strains of alchemical illusion and delusion that have always driven this particular intellectual engine, but I thought that to get one book that sort of covered the territory that was a good one to start with. Well, then I found out that it's very hard to get this book. I didn't realize that, because it's been sitting on my shelf for years. Richard Bird found a reprint at the Bodhi Tree. I wasn't aware of this particular edition, so though probably none of you brought it with you in a heavily underlined form, if after this weekend you want to try and get it, it is available; and if you can't get that edition, a good book search service can probably come up with the first edition, which is Routledge & Kegan Paul.

I wouldn't hold a weekend like this simply to go over a body of ancient literature if I didn't think it had some efficacy or import for the modern dilemma. Some of you may know the song by the Grateful Dead in which the refrain is, "We need a miracle every day." I think any reasonable person can conclude that the redemption of the world, if it's to be achieved, can only be achieved through magic. It's too late for science. It's too late for hortatory politics.

Well, it's very interesting, every ancient literature has its *apokálupsis* and in the Hermetic literature there is a prophecy, I think it's in Book Two but that really doesn't matter, and the prophecy is that a day will come when men will no longer care for the earth, and at that day the gods will depart and everything will be thrown into primal chaos. This prophecy was very strongly in the minds of the strains of non-Christian thought that evolved at the close of the Roman Empire. When you look back into historical time it's when you reach the 1st and 2nd centuries after Christ that you reach a world whose psychology was very much like the psychology of our own time. It was a psychology of despair and exhaustion. This is because Greek science, which had evolved under the aegis of Democritean atomism and Platonic metaphysics, had essentially come to a dead end in those centuries. We can debate the reasons why this happened — an obvious suggestion would be that it was because they failed to develop an experimental method — and so everything just dissolved into competing schools of philosophical speculation and a profound pessimism spread through the Hellenistic world. Out of that pessimism, and in the context of that kind of universal despair which attends the dissolution of great empires, a literature was created from the 1st to the 4th centuries after Christ, which we call the *Hermetic Corpus*, or in some cases the Trismegistic Hymns.

This body of literature was misunderstood by later centuries, especially the Renaissance, because it was taken at face value and assumed to be at least contemporary with Moses, if not much older. So the Renaissance view of Hermeticism was based on a tragic misunderstanding of the true antiquity of this material and there are people, hopefully none in this room, who still would have us believe that this literature antedates the Mosaic Law, that it is as old as dynastic Egypt, but this is an indefensible position from my point of view. In the early 16th century, a father and son, Isaac and Méric Casaubon, showed through the new science of philology that this material was in fact late Hellenistic. Now, I've always said that I am not a classicist in the Viconian sense. There is a certain strain of thought that always wants to believe that the oldest stuff is the best stuff; this is not the case to my mind. To my mind, what is amazing is how recent everything is. I have no sympathy with the fans of lost Atlantis or any of that kind of malarkey because to me what is amazing is how it all is less than 10,000 years old. Anything older than 10,000 years puts us into the realm of an aceramic society relying on chipped flint for its primary technology.

The *Hermetic Corpus* is the most poetic and cleanly expressed outpouring of ancient knowledge that we possess, but it was reworked in the hands of these late Hellenistic peoples. It is essentially a religion of the redemption of the earth through magic. It has great debt to a tradition called Sevillian, which means to me Mandaeanism, and Mandaeanism was a kind of proto-Hellenistic gnosis that laid great stress on the power of life, *zoê*, *bios*, and in that sense it has a tremendously contemporary ring to it. We also are living in the twilight of a great empire, and I don't particularly mean the American empire, I mean the empire of European thinking created in the wake of the Protestant Reformation and the rise of modern industrialism, the empire of science. Science has exhausted itself and become mere *techné*. It's still able to perform its magi-

cal tricks, but it has no claim on a metaphysic with any meaning, because the program of rational understanding that was pursued by science has pushed so deeply into the phenomenon of nature that the internal contradictions of the method are now exposed for all to see. In discussing alchemy we will meet with the concept of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of opposites. This is an idea that is completely alien to science. It's the idea that nothing can be understood unless it is simultaneously viewed as both being what it is and what it is not, and in alchemical symbolism we will meet again and again symbolic expression of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. It may be in the form of a hermaphrodite, it may be in the form of the union of soul and Luna, it may be in the form of the union of mercury with lead or with sulphur. In other words, alchemical thinking is thinking that is always antithetical, always holds the possibility that by a mere shift of perspective its opposite premise will gain power and come into focus.

There's a wonderful book called *The Forge and the Crucible* by Mircea Eliade in which he shows that the shaman is the brother of the smith. The smith is the metallurgist, the worker in metals, and this is where alchemy has its roots. In a sense, alchemy is older than the Trismegistic Corpus, and then it is also given a new lease on life by the philosophical underpinnings which the *Corpus Hermeticum* provides it. The word "alchemy" can be traced back to mean "Egypt" or "a blackening," and in its earliest strata it probably refers to the techniques of dyeing — meaning the coloring of cloth — and gilding of metals, and the forging and working of metal. We who take this for granted have no idea how mysterious and powerful this seemed to ancient people and, in fact, it would seem so to us if we had anything to do with it. I mean, how many of us are welders or casters of metal? It's a magical process to take for instance cinnabar, a red, soft ore, and by the mere act of heating it in a furnace it will sweat liquid mercury onto its surface. We have unconsciously imbibed the ontology of science where we have mind firmly separated out from the world. We take this for granted, it's effortless, because it's the ambience of the civilization that we've been born into, but in an earlier age — some writers would say a more naive age, but I wonder about that — mind and matter were seen to be alloyed together throughout nature so that the sweating of mercury out of cinnabar is not a material process, it's a process in which the mind and the observations of the metalworker maintain an important role.

Let's talk for a moment about mercury, because the spirit Mercurius is almost the patron deity of alchemy. You all know what mercury looks like: at room temperature it's a silvery liquid that flows, it's like a mirror. For the alchemists mercury was mind itself, in a sense, and by tracing through the steps by which they reached that conclusion you can have a taste of what alchemical thinking was about. Mercury takes the form of its container. If I pour mercury into a cup, it takes the shape of the cup, if I pour it into a test tube, it takes the shape of the test tube. This taking the shape of its container is a quality of mind, and yet here it is present in a flowing, silvery metal. The other thing is that mercury is a reflecting surface. You never see mercury: what you see is the world that surrounds it, which is perfectly reflected in its surface like a moving

mirror. If you've ever, as a child — I have no idea how toxic this process is — but I spent a lot of time as a child hounding my grandfather for his hearing aid batteries which I would then smash with a hammer and get the mercury out and collect it in little bottles and carry it around with me. Well, the wonderful thing about mercury is that when you pour it out on a surface and it beads up, then each bead of mercury becomes a little microcosm of the world, and yet the mercury flows back together into a unity. Well, as a child I had not yet imbibed the assumptions and the ontology of science. I was functioning as an alchemist. For me, mercury was this fascinating magical substance onto which I could project the contents of my mind, and a child playing with mercury is an alchemist hard at work, no doubt about it.

This is a phenomenon in the physical world, and then mind is a phenomenon in the Cartesian distinction, which is between the *res extensa* and the *res cogitans*. This is the great splitting of the world into two parts. I remember Al Wong once said to me, we were talking about the yin/yang symbol, and he said, “The interesting thing is not the yin or the yang, the interesting thing is the *S*-shaped surface which runs between them,” and that *S*-shaped surface is a river of alchemical mercury. Where the alchemists saw this river of alchemical mercury was in the boundary between waking and sleeping. There is a place, not quite sleeping, not quite waking, and there flows this river of alchemical mercury where you can project the contents of the unconscious and you can read it back to yourself. This kind of thinking is confounding to scientific thought, where the effort is always to fix everything into a given identity and a given set of behaviors.

The other Hermetic perception that is well illustrated by thinking for a moment about mercury is the notion — and this is central to all Hermetic thinking — of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The notion that somehow the great world, the whole of the cosmos is reflected in the mystery of man — meaning men and women — it's reflected in the mystery of the human mind-body interface. For an alchemist it makes perfect sense to extrapolate from what we call “internal” psychological processes to external processes in the world. That distinction doesn't exist for the alchemist, and I tell you, the longer I live the more convinced I am that this is absolutely the truth. The myth of our society is the existential myth that we are cast into matter, that we are lost in a universe that has no meaning for us, that we must make our meaning. This is what Sartre and Kierkegaard, all those people are saying, that we must make our meaning. It reaches its most absurd expression in Sartre's statement that nature is mute. This is as far from alchemical thinking as you can possibly get, because for the alchemist nature was a great book, an open book to be read by putting nature through processes which revealed not only its inner mechanics, but the inner mechanics of the artifex, the person working upon the material, in other words, the alchemist.

In other contexts I've talked about the importance of language and how our world is made of language, and part of the problem with understanding alchemy is that the language is slipping out of our reach. We are so completely imbued with the Cartesian categories of the *res cogitans*, the world of thought, and the

res extensa, the world of three-dimensional space, causality, the conservation of matter and energy and so forth that in order to do more than carry out a kind of scholarship of alchemy we have to create an alchemical language, or a field in which alchemical language can take place. Some of you may have been with me a couple of weeks ago in Malibu when Joan Halifax and I debated the roots of Buddhism, and I think Joan deserves great credit for saying that Buddhism would never have taken root in America were it not for the psychedelic phenomenon. Not that Buddhism is psychedelic, it in fact is fairly touchy about that, but Buddhism would have gotten nowhere in America had not psychedelics created a context for Buddhist language to take root. I would wager that I would never have gotten to first base with proposing a weekend on alchemy at Esalen were it not understood that psychedelics have prepared people for the notion that mind and world can be poured together like mercury and sulphur, like the Sophic waters, to create a new kind of understanding, because otherwise modernity has fixed our minds in the categories of Cartesian rationalism.

I will not claim, and do not in fact think it's so, that there was anything overtly psychedelic, in the sense of pharmacologically-based, about alchemy. When we look back through the alchemical literature there's very little evidence that it was pharmacologically-driven. Only when you get to the very last adumbrations of the alchemical impulse in someone like Paracelsus do you get the use of opium. It is interesting that the great drugs of modern society were accidentally discovered by alchemists in their researches — distilled alcohol is a product of alchemical work, and as I mentioned, opium was very heavily used by the Peracelsian school — but what they possessed was an ability to liquify their mental categories and then to project the contents of the mind onto these processes and read them back.

This is what made alchemy so fascinating to the Jungian school, because the Jungians were discovering the unconscious. Before Jung's involvement with alchemy the best material for psychotherapy to work upon was dreams and mythology, and these were the two poles of the data field that the discovery of the unconscious was working on. Then Jung had the prescience to realize that alchemy, which to that point had been dismissed as a naive effort to turn base metals into gold — this is the first fiction that you have to absolutely purge from your mind. The only alchemists that ever tried to turn base metals into gold were charlatans, the so-called “puffers.” They were called that not only for their exaggerated speech, but for their use of bellows to drive their fires. Alchemy has always had a core of true adepts and then a surround of misguided souls and outright con artists who were trying to change base metals into gold. Now, it's interesting that science, in its naiveté, in the 20th century has actually completed the program of pseudo-alchemy. You can, if you have a sufficiently powerful nuclear reactor, change lead into gold. The cost is staggering, it has no economic importance whatsoever, but it can be done. By bombarding lead with a sufficient amount of heavy particles, you can change it into gold, but this is not what the original intent was. In fact, when we look at the history of 20th century science we will see that in a way it's a misunderstanding of what the alchemical goals were to be and, one by one, it has done these things that

were stated goals of the alchemists, except that the alchemists always spoke in similes and in a secret control language that was symbolic.

Another point that was brought up was the externalization of the soul. What we're trying to do in this weekend is to study and talk about the idea of redeeming the world through magic. How is this to be done? Well, the philosopher's stone is a complex of ideas that, no matter how you divide it, no matter how you slice it, it's very difficult to hold the pith essence of this concept, but what it really comes down to is the idea that spirit is somehow resident in matter in a very diffuse form, and that the goal of Hermetic thinking, and later alchemy, is the concentration and redemption of this spirit, a focusing of it, a bringing of it together. This is an idea that was common in the Hellenistic world, not only to Hermetic thinking but also to Gnosticism. Gnosticism is the idea that somehow the pure, holy, real light of being was scattered through a universe of darkness and of saturnine power and that the goal is, by a process which we can call yogic, or alchemical, or meditative, or moral/ethical, that the light must be gathered and concentrated in the body and then somehow released and redeemed. All esoteric traditions, East and West, talk about the creation of this body of light and we will not, in this weekend, talk very much about non-Western alchemy, Taoist and Vedic alchemy, but in those systems too the notion is about the creation of this vehicle of light. This is one metaphor for the externalization of the soul.

The philosopher's stone is another, and I will challenge you to try to imagine what the achievement of the philosopher's stone would be like, because it's in trying to think that way that you begin to dissolve the categories of the Cartesian trap. Imagine for a moment an object, a material, which can literally do anything. It can move across categorical boundaries with no difficulty whatsoever. What do I mean? I mean that if you possessed the philosopher's stone and you were hungry, you could eat it. If you needed to go somewhere you could spread it out and sit on it and it would take you there. If you needed a piece of information, it would become the equivalent of a computer screen and it would tell you things. If you needed a companion, it would talk to you. If you needed to take a shower, you would hold it over your head and water would pour out of it. Now, you see, this is an impossibility. That's right, it's a *coincidentia oppositorum*. It is something which behaves like imagination and matter without ever doing damage to the ontological status of one or the other. This sounds like pure pathology in the context of modern thinking, because we expect things to stay still and be what they are and undergo the growth and degradation that is inimical to them; but no, the redemption of spirit and matter means the exteriorization of the human soul and the interiorization of the human body so that it is an image freely commanded in the imagination.

Imagination: I think this is the first time I've used this word this evening. The imagination is central to the alchemical opus because it is literally a process which goes on in the realm of the imagination, taken to be a physical dimension. I think that we cannot understand the history that lies ahead of us unless we think in terms of a journey into the imagination. We have exhausted the world of three-dimensional space. We are polluting it, we are overpopulating

it, we are using it up. Somehow the redemption of the human enterprise lies in the dimension of the imagination, and to do that we have to transcend the categories that we inherit from a thousand years of science and Christianity and rationalism and we have to re-empower and re-encounter the mind; and we can do this psychedelically, we can do this yogically, or we can do it alchemically and Hermetically.

There is present in the world at the moment, or at least I like to think so, an impulse which I have named the Archaic Revival. What happens is that whenever a society really gets in trouble — and you can use this in your own life: when you really get in trouble, what you should do is say, “What did I believe in the last sane moment that I experienced?” and then go back to that moment and act from it even if you no longer believe it — now, in the Renaissance, this happened. The scholastic universe dissolved. New classes, new forms of wealth, new systems of navigation, new scientific tools, made it impossible to maintain the fiction of the medieval cosmology and there was a sense that the world was dissolving, and in that moment the movers and shakers of that civilization reached backwards in time to the last sane moment they had ever known and they discovered that it was Classical Greece. They invented classicism in the 15th and 16th century. The texts which had lain in monasteries in Syria and Asia Minor, forgotten and untranslated for centuries, were brought to the Florentine council by people like Gemistus Pletho and others and translated, and classicism was born: its laws, its philosophy, its aesthetics. We are the inheritors of that tradition, but it is now once again exhausted and our cultural crisis is much greater. It is global, it is total; it involves every man, woman and child on this planet. Every bug, bird and tree is caught up in the cultural crisis that we have engendered. Our ideas are exhausted: the ideas that we inherit out of Christianity and its half-brother science, or its bastard child science. What I’m suggesting is that an Archaic Revival needs to take place and it seems to be well in hand in the form of the revival of Goddess worship and shamanism and partnership, but notice that these things are old — 10,000 years or more old — but there was an unbroken thread that, however thinly drawn, persists right up to the present.

The idea of this weekend is to show the way back to the high magic of the late Paleolithic, to show that there were intellectual traditions, there were minority points of view that kept the faith, that never allowed it to die. To my mind, this alchemical, Hermetic, Gnostic, Egyptian, Chaldean thread is the thread, and if we unravel it with sufficient care and attention then we can build a bridge from the otherwise nearly incomprehensible high magic of the late Paleolithic. We can get it as near to ourselves as John Dee, who died in 1608. We can discover that it’s no further away from us than the beginning of the Thirty Years War; and for my money, after that it gets pretty mucked up. After Éliphas Lévi, who’s already waffling, I’m not very interested in the occultism of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, but it’s not necessary because scholarship gives us the Chaldean Oracles, the Trismegistic Hymns, the library at Nag Hammadi, and so forth and so on. My impulse is to, in the most austere sense, repopularize, reintroduce this kind of thinking so that people can live it out, and then, step

by step, we can evolve our language and evolve our understanding to make our way back to the garden, back to Eden.

It's said that Christ opened the doors to paradise, yes, but he closed the doors to Eden; and paradise is a very airy place where everybody sits around on clouds strumming their lyres. I think that what we want to do is to make our way back to the alchemical garden. That's where our roots are. That's where meaning is. Meaning lies in the confrontation of contradiction, the *coincidentia oppositorum*. That's what we really feel, not these rational schemas that are constantly beating us over the head with the "thou shalt" and "thou should," but rather a recovery of the real ambiguity of being, an ability to see ourselves as at once powerful and weak, noble and ignoble, future-oriented, past-facing. We each need to become Janus-faced and to incorporate into ourselves the banished contradictions of being that so haunt the enterprise of science. We can leave that behind, and when we do we reclaim authentic being; and authentic being, make no mistake about it, is what alchemical gold really is. That's what they're talking about: authentic being.

Audience: So right now we're lead?

That's right, we're lead, we're saturnine; and we'll talk about Saturn and Pluto and all of that. Tomorrow we'll talk about the stages of the alchemical opus, and though the stages are many and multifarious, it all begins in what is called the *nigredo*, the blackening, the depths of the leaden, saturnine, chaotic, fixed place, and that's where we have been left by science and modernity and so forth and so on. That's where the alchemist loves to begin. That's where he or she stokes the furnace and begins the *dissolutio et coagulatio* that leads to the appearance of the stone.

I'll show you some books, and this is by no means exhaustive. The literature of Hermeticism and alchemy is vast and I could have brought five or six boxes of this size from my own library. This a smattering, it doesn't mean that what I show you is the best, it simply tries to spread over a large area. This is a new novel that's just been published by Lindsay Clarke called *The Chymical Wedding*, and I see that last week it was number ten on the New York Times' bestsellers list, which is astonishing for such an obscure subject. It's a retelling of a famous incident in alchemy in the 19th century when a woman named Mary Anne Atwood, who had a very close relationship to her father, Dr. South, and the two of them worked together, she on a text, he on a long poem. To make a long story short, eventually they decided to destroy both the poem and the book, feeling that they had said too much and had given the secret away — at least that's one version. So this is a fictionalized retelling of that incident intercut with a modern cast of characters, very clearly modeled on the poet Robert Graves. So if you like to absorb your information in a fictionalized form, this is a wonderful book. John Boorman, the movie director who made *The Emerald Forest* and *Excalibur*, recently optioned this book, so we may have an alchemical movie downstream a year or two. A number of compendiums of alchemical texts have been published over the centuries and if you wish to study

alchemy you have to obtain these. If you're fortunate enough to read French you should read Festugière and Berthelot. They collected alchemical texts into encyclopedic-size volumes, but unfortunately these have never really come into English. One that did come into English is the *Musaeum Hermeticum*, which A.E. Waite — who some of you may know for his role in the Golden Dawn — collected. There are about forty alchemical texts and all the greats are in here: Llull, Villa Nova, Michael Maier, Basil Valentine, Heinrich Kramer, Edward Kelley and so on and so forth.

The place to begin, I think, is obviously with the question, “Who is Hermes Trismegistus?” What are we talking about here? I mean, this sounds so incredibly exotic to people. The Renaissance had the concept of what it called the *prisca theologia*, and if my Latin and Greek irritates you, you have to understand that you're dealing with a boy from a coal mining town in Colorado, so I do mangle these things. The *prisca theologia* were Orpheus, Moses, and primarily Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes Trismegistus was the primary source, from the point of view of the Renaissance, of this whole mystery tradition and you recall from last night's lecture that this is based on a misunderstanding. The Renaissance believed that Hermes Trismegistus was older than Moses. We know now, thanks to Isaac and Méric Casaubon, two philologists of the early 17th century, that definitely the *Hermetic Corpus* was composed between the 1st and 2nd centuries after Christ. The method of the Casaubons was to examine the philosophical language of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and show that there were words and phrases there that were post-Platonic and derivative of philosophers whose dates we have fully in hand.

Now, if you go to an occult bookstore you will find that to this day this error persists. There are people who still want to claim that this stuff is older than dynastic Egypt. There are even books — I was in Shambhala a week ago — claiming to teach you how to change lead into gold. Well, from my point of view this just evokes a small smile. The old errors persist; the puffers are still at it. But what Hermes Trismegistus is is a character who appears in many guises in these Hermetic dialogues. The Hermetic hymns are usually couched in the form of dialogues between Hermes and his son Thoth, and Thoth takes the role of the uninitiated ingénue who is sitting at the feet of the master. Thoth asks questions: “What is the true nature of the world?” “What is the true nature of man?” and Hermes answers. The general form of these texts — with exceptions, because there are twenty of them — is an intellectual dialogue which builds to an ecstatic revelation and then in the wake of the ecstatic revelation there is a hymn of praise to Hermes Trismegistus. Trismegistus means thrice-blessed and is sometimes called Hermes Triplex to distinguish this Hermes from all the other Hermetes of early, middle and late Greek thinking. Hermes is of course the messenger god, the god of scribes. The reason this ibis-headed being holding a staff is embossed on the cover of each of these books is because this is how Hermes Trismegistus, Thoth Hermes was imagined. He was associated with the scribe god of the Egyptian pantheon.

There are two distinguishing factors that stand out for me that I think you need to incorporate into your thinking about Hermeticism, two very important

concepts. The first is the divinity of human beings, an extraordinarily radical idea in the context of late Hellenistic thinking. We all operate under the spell of the concept of the fall of man: that man is an inferior being, errors were made in the Garden of Eden and that we are far, far from the nature of divinity. All magic — and all magic in the West is derivative of this tradition — takes the position that man is a divine being, men and women are divine beings. The *Corpus Hermeticum* actually refers to man as God's brother; and this is a double-edged perception. It gives tremendous dignity to the human enterprise but it also raises the possibility of the error of pride and hubris. In the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino boiled this notion down to the aphorism, "Man is the measure of all things," and you may notice that this is the position of science: that man is the measure of all things, that it is up to us, we can decide the course of the cosmos. All magic stems from this position. Notice that this position on man empowers tremendous freedom. This is why the Church was so concerned to stamp out magic, because it assigns man an importance that the Church would rather reserve for deity. So that's the first great division between Christian thinking and Hermetic thinking, an entirely different conception of what human beings are; and when we get into the text, I'll read you some of these passages.

The second distinguishing factor in Hermeticism is the belief that we can control fate, that we can escape from cosmic fate. The late Hellenistic mindset, and what you get in the Gnostics, is the belief that because of astrology, because of the stars, we are subject to control from these exterior forces. In most Gnostic thinking the whole concern is to somehow evade what is called the *heimarmene*, cosmic fate, and in the Gnostic systems the only way it can be done is by ascending through the shells of cosmic, ordering forces — the archons, the planets, the planetary demons, and so forth and so on — and then beyond the *heimarmene*, which is actually thought of as a place in space that you burst through, you transcend fate. The Hermetic thought is that these fates become personified as the decans, as the stellar demons, and then it is held that there is a magical system in which it is possible to call these archangels to your side and work with them and not be subject to the inevitable working of the cosmic machinery. This burst like a revelation over the late Hellenistic world because there was such philosophical and emotional and political exhaustion. This is a counterpoise to the message of the New Testament, which is a similar message: that you can be saved in the body, that you can escape the inevitable dissolution and degradation laid upon us by time. So these are the two distinguishing factors: the divinity of man and the possibility of using magic to evade the machinery of fate.

I want to read some of the *Corpus Hermeticum* to you to give you the flavor of it, but before I do, I want to say something about the history of these texts. You're all familiar, more or less I'm sure, with Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, which is a novel of initiation that is late Roman. Apuleius also put together what is called the *Asclepius*, and the *Asclepius* is true Hermetic literature that was not lost. It was the only one that was available throughout the Dark and Middle Ages. All the rest was lying untranslated in Syrian monasteries until Gemistus Pletho in 1460 brought these manuscripts to Florence, to the court

of the de' Medicis, and then the translation project began. The only other Hermetic material that was accessible throughout the high Gothic period was a book of magic called *Picatrix*, and the *Picatrix* was probably written in the 11th century. This elicits screams of dissent from the burning-eyed faction, but reason dictates that we consider *Picatrix* 11th century, so only the *Asclepius* and the *Picatrix* represented this strain of thought before the 1460s. The importance of Hermetic thinking can be seen by the fact that Gemistus Pletho brought Plato to the Florentine council as well as Hermes Trismegistus, and when Marsilio Ficino sat down to do this translation work Cosimo de' Medici said, "Plato can wait, I'm getting old. You do the *Hermetic Corpus* first, that's much more important. We'll sort out this Plato business in a few years," and so it was done. It was completed in 1463, and in 1464 Cosimo died, so he never saw the translations of Plato. I mention this to show you the importance that was attached to this stuff.

Here is one of the key passages on man's nature. This is from Book One of the *Corpus Hermeticum*:

But Mind the Father of all, He who is life and light, gave birth to Man, a being like to Himself. And He took delight in man as being His own offspring, for Man was very goodly to look on, bearing the likeness of his Father. With good reason then did God take delight in Man, for it was God's own form that God took delight in. And God delivered over to Man all things that had been made.

This is the basis of the Ficinian statement, "Man is the measure of all things."

And Man took station in the Maker's sphere and observed the things made by his Brother who was set over the region of fire. And having observed the Maker's creation in the region of fire he willed to make things for his own part also. And his Father gave permission, having in Himself all the working of the administrators.

This is a reference to the angel hierarchy.

And the administrators took delight in him and each of them gave him a share of his own nature.

So man is the brother of God and a creature at home with the angels. This idea is echoed in the *Asclepius*, which you'll recall was available throughout the Middle Ages. "The range of man is yet wider than that of the demons," meaning the angels; this term is transposable in Hermetic thought. "The individuals of the human kind are diverse and of many characters. They, like the demons, come from above and entering into fellowship with other individuals, they make for themselves many and intimate connections with all other kinds," and then the famous passage:

Man is a marvel then, Asclepius, honor and reverence to such a being. Man takes on him the attributes of a god as though he were

himself a god. And he is familiar with the demonkind for he comes to know that he is sprung from the same source as they. And strong in the assurance of that in him which is divine, he scorns the merely human part of his own nature. How far more happily blended are the properties of Man than those of other beings. He is linked to the Gods inasmuch as there is in him a divinity akin to theirs. He scorns that part of his own being which makes him a thing of earth and all else with which he finds himself connected by heaven's ordering he binds to himself with the tie of his affection.

This is an incredibly radical conception of what it means to be human, so radical that it is unwelcome even in the present context. Notice the modern feeling of this stuff. This is not biblical rhetoric. This is philosophical discourse as we know it and carry it out ourselves. This is a passage on the adept and initiation. Here Thoth speaks to Poimandres, this is Book One: "But tell me this too, said I, God said, "Let the man who has Mind in him recognize himself," but have not all men Mind?" and then Poimandres replies, "'Oh Man," said Mind to me, "Speak not so. I, even Mind, come to those men who are holy and good and pure and merciful, and my coming is a succor to them and forthwith they recognize all things and win the Father's grace by loving worship and give thanks to Him, praising and hymning Him with hearts uplifted to Him in filial affection.'" Again the reference to being God's brother, "in filial affection." "And before they give up the body to the death which is proper to it they loathe the bodily senses, knowing what manner of work the senses do." This introduces the theme of asceticism.

Like the Gnostics, there is in much of the Hermetic literature a kind of horror of the earth, a desire to ascend and to get away from it. Scott makes the distinction between what he calls "pessimistic gnosis" and "optimistic gnosis," and within the twenty texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* you get vacillation on this point. In some cases the Mandaean or Sabian tendency is there and the world soul is invoked, and the whole of creation is seen as a living being involved in this soteriological process, this process of salvational mechanics through magic. In other texts this Gnostic horror of matter is very strongly stressed. It's very clear that the Hellenistic mind was ambivalent on this point, even as we are ambivalent on this point. It's a real question. Are we here to be the caretakers of the earth, or are we strangers in the universe, and is our task to return to a forgotten and hidden home, no trace of which can be found in the saturnine world of matter? It's very hard to have it both ways. You're going to have to take a position on that, and these people were forced into the same dilemma. There's no middle ground between those two positions, and so that dichotomy, that conundrum, haunted a lot of Hermetic thinking.

Here is the Hermetic creation myth. This is Book Three, paragraphs one through a few, and you'll see the comparison and similarities to the Christian creation myth but with extraordinary differences.

There was darkness in the deep and water without form and there was a subtle breath, intelligent, which permeated the things in Chaos

with divine power. Then, when all was yet undistinguished and unwrought, there was shed forth holy light and the elements came into being. All things were divided one from another and the lighter things were parted off on high, the fire being suspended aloft so that it rose unto the air, and the heavier things sank down, and sand was deposited beneath the watery substance, and the dry land was separated out from the watery substance and became solid. And the fiery substance was articulated with the gods therein, and heaven appeared with its seven spheres and the gods visible in starry forms with all their constellations. And heaven revolved and began to run its circling course, riding upon the divine air. And each god by his several powers set forth that which he was bidden to put forth. And there came forth four-footed beasts and creeping things and fishes and winged birds and grass and every flowering herb, all having seed in them according to their diverse natures, for they generated within themselves the seed by which their races should be renewed.

Then it goes on to describe the birth of man. This kind of thinking is what alchemy seized upon in its ambitions. One way of thinking about what alchemy came to attempt is that since man is God's brother, the purpose of man is to intercede in time. It was believed that ores, precious metals and things like this grew in the earth; it was a thoroughgoing theory of evolution that reached right down into the organic realm. It was thought that gold deposits in the earth would actually replenish themselves over time. It's passages like this that give permission for that kind of thinking. In line with that, we're now in Book Four; and remember that the tone changes slightly from book to book. They were, after all, written over a 300 year period by various people.

You must understand, then, that God is preexistent and ever existent, and that He alone made all things and created by His will the things that are. And when the Creator had made the ordered universe, He willed to set in order the earth also and so he sent down Man, a mortal creature made in the image of an immortal being, to be an embellishment of the divine Body, for it is Man's function.

Here it comes, the purpose of man according to Book Four:

For it is Man's function to contemplate the works of God and for this purpose he was made, that he might view the universe with wondering awe and come to know its maker. Man has this advantage over all other living beings, that he possess mind and speech. Now speech, my son, God imparted to all men but mind he did not impart to all. Not that he grudged it to any, for the grudging temper does not start from heaven above, but comes from being here below in the souls of those men who are devoid of mind.

This introduces the concept of an elect or a perfectee, a hierarchy of human accomplishment and understanding, and this is also basic to Gnosticism. It's not

for everyone, they're saying, it's for the pure of heart, and what "pure of heart" means depends on the school you're looking at. For some, it was mathematical accomplishment; for others, it was contact with the Logos; for others, it was an ability to resist the temptations of the senses, but there was always this sense of the higher and lower possibility within the human experience.

This is at the opening of Book Twelve, and this is a book with a heavy Mandaean sensitivity, this sensitivity to life. Notice how this transcends even the Buddhist point of view, because in Buddhism plants have no soul. This is a tremendous failure in the Buddhist conception as far as I'm concerned.

Now this whole cosmos, which is a great God and an image of Him who is greater and is united with Him and maintains its order in accordance with that will, is one mass of life. And there is not anything in the cosmos, nor has been through all time from the first foundation of the universe, neither in the whole, nor among the several things contained in it that is not alive. There is not, and has never been, and never will be in the cosmos, anything that is dead, for it was the Father's will that the cosmos, as long as it exists, should be a living being and therefore it must needs be a god also. How then, my son, could there be dead things in that which is a god, in that which is an image of the Father, in that which is one mass of life. Deathness is corruption and corruption is destruction. How then can any part of that which is incorruptible be corrupted or any part of that which is a God be destroyed?

And there are other passages. This is a good one; this is Book Eighteen:

For as the sun, who nurtures all vegetation, also gathers the first fruits of the produce with his rays, as it were with mighty hands, plucking the sweetest odors of the plants, even so we too, having received into our own souls, which are plants of heavenly origin, the efflux of God's wisdom, must in return use his service for all that springs up in us.

This conception that the human soul is a plant is a unique idea. I don't know of another tradition. Those of you who were with us in Ojai heard Johannes Wilbert talk about how among the Amazon Indians, the Warao, the men actually marry trees. They actually take trees as their wives, a tree, and it is a man's job throughout his life to take care of this tree with the same tenderness and affection which he lavishes on a living wife. This is a more radical conception than that. This is the conception that the most important part of us is a plant. It reminds me of the joke that I occasionally make in these groups, the notion that animals are something invented by plants to carry them from place to place. Well, according to this, that's right on. The sensitivity to the vegetative nature of the world is so great that it raises the plant to be the pith essence, the soul of man, the brother of God! So the valuation of the vegetative universe here is of an extremely radical type.

Audience: The upper echelon of humanity that was given the mind, was that predetermined at birth or can someone develop a mind?

No, it is not predetermined. It is something that is acquired through cultivation of a relationship to, in the Hermetic language, *nous*, the higher mind, and in the Gnostic language *Logos*, the informing spirit. Nothing is predetermined in the Hermetic system because through magic we can overcome the energies of cosmic fate. This is the great good news of Hermeticism, that we are not subject to fate. We should probably talk a little about this Logos concept. This is something which seems very alien to modern people unless they are psychedelically sophisticated. The Logos was the sine qua non of Hellenistic religion and it was an informing voice that spoke in your head or your heart, wherever you want to put it, and it told you the right way to live. You get this idea even in the later Old Testament where it's said that the truth of the heart can be known, that it is no great dilemma to know good from evil, you simply inquire of your heart, "Is it good or evil?" and you will discover a voice which will tell you. All the great thinkers of this Greco-Hellenistic period sought and cultivated the Logos; Plato had his daemon. Everyone sought the informing voice of the *nous*, that's what it's called in Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, and then in Gnosticism the Logos.

The only way I've ever had this experience is in the presence of psychedelic substances, and then it is just crystal clear, there is no ambiguity about it. Somehow it's possible for an informing voice to come into cognition that knows more than you do. It is a connection with the collective unconscious, I suppose, that is convivial, conversational, and just talks to you about the nature of being in the world and the nature of your being in the world. It's puzzling to us because it seems so remote. For us a voice in the head or the heart is pathology. You may know the famous story: in the 1st century, some fishermen were off the shore of the island of Argos in the Mediterranean Sea and they heard a great voice from the sky and the voice said, "The great Pan is dead." Well, people like Lactantius and Eusebius, these patristic fathers, the people who built Christianity, who took the Gospels and turned it into a world religion, they took this annunciation from the sky of the death of Pan as the annunciation of the change of the aeon.

By the aeon, I mean these roughly 2,000 year periods that are associated with the equinoctial precession. Do you all understand how this works? That over 26,000 years, the heliacal rising of the solstitial sun slips slowly from one house to another and around A.D. 100 — there's argument because these things are never precise — the age of Pisces began, the previous aeon ceased and the great gears of the largest scale of the cosmic machinery clicked past a certain point and into the age of Pisces, and this was then taken as very fortuitous for Christianity because Christ was associated with the sign of the fish and it was seen as a Piscean movement. I believe that it's entirely possible that the Logos, at that rough moment in time, fell silent, and it has been silent for 2,000 years. What we have had then is the exegesis of text and noetic archeology of the

sort we're carrying on here. Now, a phenomenon as trivial and hype-haunted as channeling can be seen as the reawakening of the Logos. The long night of Piscean silence is ending and the spirit of *nous* is again moving in the world, speaking in the minds of the adepts and the hierophants who have the techniques and the will to connect with this stuff. I don't know how I got off on that, but obviously this kind of literature can be seen as the last message from the fading Logos, the last statements before the change of the aeon rendered this control language very difficult and non-intuitive and somewhat incomprehensible.

Audience: In the reading, I had a puzzlement about the use of the word "mind." What, in this context, does this refer to?

It's Scott's translation of this word *nous*. It simply means this universal, permeating intelligence.

Audience: The statement there is that it is only available to an elite through...?

Through asceticism and desire, intent. There are proscriptions, we haven't gotten into this, but they lived a life of purity, although their definitions of purity varied widely.

Audience: Isn't there a kind of flip-flop that man is the brother of God and still we have to earn it? It makes it kind of a denial of that.

That's right. This persists right up until this moment. The quote I always love is from Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*. Thomas Hobbes, as you know, was the great theoretician of modern government and social organization and he was basically a paranoid S.O.B. He says in the *Leviathan*, "Man to man is like unto an arrant beast and man to man is like unto a god." It's absolutely true, our noblest aspirations and our most hideously dehumanizing activities take place in the context of our relationship to other people. This is what the alchemists were trying to do: they were trying to separate the gold from the dross. They were trying to take the arrant beast, and when we look at alchemical art we will see dragons, dogs, pigs, we will see the arrant beasts and we will see the angelic beings that are trying to be separated out of our nature. This is within each and every one of us. Man to man is like unto a god and man to man is like unto an arrant beast.

Audience: This question has to do with mind. According to my understanding of some of the Platonic tradition and Neoplatonic thought, this has to do with the divided line in Plato. You can divide that line into five stages of knowing. You start with the senses as being agency or avenue, knowing something about something, the most external form of knowledge. The level above the senses is designated as the instincts, it's an inactive knowing, in that sense a biologically active knowing that we have. The third stage is described sometimes as esti-

mation, that is, an approximation. This characterized mainly logical activity, and then the next level of cognitive activity is reason. This reason is not the type of reason we normally engage in, it's a very different, a very creative type of activity. Above the reason is what they call intuition or intellect or *nous* and that's put in as the fifth. Reason is a creative activity and one can generate and think things through with creative ability. One goes through stages of the activity and things transpire over time and one comes to complete understanding of the thing one is trying to grasp, and sometimes that's described as discursive activity, although the logical activity is discursive. So you're moving through a process and the *nous* or the intellect of the higher mind grasps things in totality.

You raise an important point. It further complicates the picture, but that's how it was, folks. The reference here is to Neoplatonism, which is a kind of parallel tradition to what we're talking about. Plato had at least a couple of phases in the evolution of his thinking. The young Plato is a rational thinker but the later Plato, apparently after he fell under the influence of Pythagorean schools, becomes a full-blown mystic. Then in the late Roman empire, almost a thousand years after Plato — in our mind all these people get squeezed together like they could all have dinner together, but Proclus is as far from Plato as we are from King Canute, so you have to bear in mind the scale of history — 600-800 years after Plato, a Byzantine school of philosophy arose around Porphyry, Plotinus and Proclus as the major exponents and they worked with the late Plato and elaborated a beautiful mystical cosmology. This is what I did a workshop on here a year ago and many of those ideas and terms parallel conceptually the stuff in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and if you're of a certain intellectual bent you may find yourself more comfortable with the Neoplatonists than with this. This material tends to be emotional, evocative, poetic and while there's great poetry in Plotinus there's also very tight thinking that goes along with it.

There are other traditions, I'm making it simple for you, there was a whole tradition of what was called the Chaldean Oracles, all of which remains is a collection of 100 or more fragments and the great commentaries of Eusebius and Iamblichus. That's all lost, we don't have that material and it is, in a way, the most mysterious of these traditions because it just didn't survive. It may be that the Chaldean Oracles are the missing link to push this stuff several centuries back into time, because the Chaldean Oracles may actually be pre-Platonic. There's considerable evidence of that. But these are very arcane matters; you have to give yourself over to a lifetime of learning these languages and the philology of these languages to penetrate this stuff.

Neoplatonism was Byzantine, basically Constantinople. The *Hermetic Corpus* was largely Alexandrian; there were also Christian Platonists in Alexandria. There were certain centers: Rome, Byzantium, Alexandria. Heliopolis in Egypt was a cult site that was maintained for a very long time. If you're interested in this stuff but don't like to absorb it this way, Flaubert, of all people, the Flaubert of *Madame Bovary*, wrote an incredible novel called *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* in which he describes 2nd century Alexandria in a fictionalized

form and gives you a real flavor for the intellectual complexity of the Alexandrian world. Christianity had not yet gelled, it was many things, so you not only have Gnostics of five or six schools — Simonists, Valentinians, Basilideans and so forth — but you also have Christians, a number of cults calling themselves Christians that were also in furious competition: Docetists, Montanists, and later Nestorians. There were Gymnosophists from India, people who were actually carrying yogic doctrines into the Mediterranean world, plus you then have all the surviving cults of the older Egyptian strata, the cults of Isis and Seville and Adonis and Dionysus, it just goes on and on. There's nothing comparable in our experience to the richness of this intellectual world, and it shows the passion with which people were trying to understand the dilemma of a dying world, because this is what they were confronted with. The intellectuals of the empire could feel it all slipping through their hands, and Flaubert gives a wonderful picture of this. Flaubert has a very romantic streak. It's like smoking hashish to read this book, the attention to fabric and architecture, food and odor, and because the subject matter is the temptation of Saint Anthony, it's an excuse to describe these temptations in all their sensual richness and erotic kinkiness. It's a wonderful way to absorb this material.

Audience: Somebody else raised the point about elitism, or an elite group of people. If one considers a society like the one you had in Alexandria or some of the other centers, the only people who really had access to this were people who, first of all, had money and who were well educated and could read, so already you had an elite group.

Yes, definitely. What survives from a civilization are its literatures, and these literatures are usually the production of an elite. We have to remember not to have any illusions about the Roman Empire. I always think of the wonderful description, I don't even know why it's there, Boris Pasternak in *Doctor Zhivago* goes off on a riff about ancient Rome and he describes it as "a bargain basement on three floors." This was an empire that lived by human cruelty. It was on the backs of slaves that this airy intellectual speculation was based. It was a tremendously pluralistic society, but that pluralism was maintained by standing armies of enormous size and policies of occupation of enormous cruelty. Because of our relationship to the Christian tradition we're aware of such things as the Zealot Revolt of 69 and the reign of Herod and Antiochus in Jerusalem, but that was just one little corner of the empire and in Armenia, in Gaul, in Spain, in North Africa, military governors were carrying out outrageous suppressions of native populations. It was not a pretty time to be alive, and what comes down to us, then, is the yearning to escape from that. No wonder these people saw the earth as a cesspool and a trap, because that's what it was for them, without doubt. Our own age is very similar. We do not have slavery but we suffer under propaganda, mass manipulation of ideas and the degradation and exploitation of the Third World on a scale the Roman Empire couldn't even dream of; so there is a great affinity.

If any of you are interested in this kind of thing, I highly recommend a book

by Hans Jonas called *The Phenomenon of Life*. It's a book of philosophical essays, but there's one essay in there called Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism in which he shows that once you take Gnosticism and dump the angels and the star demons and all the colorful bric-a-brac of late Roman thinking, what you have is a thoroughgoing existentialism completely compatible with Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Genet and the kind of intellectual despair that characterized the post-World War II generation in Europe. Heidegger is thoroughly Gnostic in his intentionality, it's just that the language is modern and stripped of this magical thinking, and by being stripped of magical thinking, in a way the modern recension of that state of mind is even more hopeless and disempowering.

Fortunately I think we're moving out of the shadow of that, but I'm 44 years old, I grew up reading those people and it made my adolescence much harder than it needed to be. I mean, my God, there wasn't an iota of hope anywhere to be found. That's why for me psychedelics broke over that intellectual world like a tidal wave of revelation. I quoted to you last night Jean-Paul Sartre's statement, "Nature is mute." Now I see this as an obscenity almost, an intellectual crime against reason and intuition. It's the absolute antithesis of the Logos, and much of our world is ruled by men older than I am who are fully connected into that without any question, and they just think all the rest of this is just namby-pamby ecological softheartedness of some sort. There is no openness to the power of *bios*, to the fact of a living cosmos. The reinvestiture of spirit into matter, the rebirth of the world soul is a necessary concomitant to what we now understand about the real nature of the world.

In a way, the theory of evolution, which was born in the 1850s, is the beginning of the turning of the tide, because even though the first hundred years of evolutionary theory was fantastically concerned to eliminate teleology, eliminate purpose, nevertheless nobody ever understood that except the hardcore evolutionists. To everybody else, evolution meant ascent to higher form. I once heard someone say, "If it doesn't have to do with genes, it ain't evolution." Well, that's a tremendously limited view of what evolution is. The inorganic world is evolving, the organic world is evolving and there the currency is genes; but also the social and intellectual world of human beings is evolving, and there the currency is not genes but memes, so that idea carries with it the implication of ascent to higher form and correctly broadened and understood becomes permission for a return to optimism and to the kind of hope that these folks were trying to articulate.

Audience: The concept of mind as something that is attainable and not necessary is a separation and therefore, for me, it's a lie. I assume there are many different definitions of mind — I don't mean functions of mind, I mean definitions of mind — and I'm toying now with the notion of the meshing of the notion of mind and the notion of Logos. For Logos is, and it seems to me that mind is, if it is available through trial then we're back in a separation, and this is to me a false separation.

Yes, you're right, but it's a separation necessary for philosophical discourse.

That's why philosophical discourse is not the top of the mountain. Language itself is the process of making distinctions that are false. This is why all language is a lie. This is why the ultimate truth lies in something unspeakable, but the ascent to the unspeakable is through this kind of philosophical analysis.

Audience: Language is only the vehicle.

Well, it's the vehicle but eventually there's no road and you have to park the vehicle and get out and walk, and that's the journey. Plotinus, the great Neoplatonist, has this wonderful phrase: he calls the mystical experience, "The flight of the alone to the alone," and I love this image. It's so uncompromising and it's about as true as something can be and still move in the realm of language, because it's saying: finally words fall away, and finally there is only that which cannot be said. Many of you who've stuck with me know that I love to quote this poem by this obscure poet who died in the trenches of France in the First World War, Trumbull Stickney, and he wrote a poem called "The Soul of Time," and the punch line goes like this: "I cannot understand you / 'Tis because I lean over your meaning's edge and feel / A dizziness of the things I have not said," and I think that every one of these weekends, this is the effort: to carry you to the edge of an abyss and then push you over into the dizziness of the things unsaid; and they will always be unsaid.

Wittgenstein, God bless him, had the concept of the unspeakable. He said, "Philosophy operates in the realm of the speakable but eventually we must confront that which cannot be said." The dizziness of things unsaid, and that's where real authenticity then flows back into the world of community and speech, but it comes from a place of utter silence and unsayability. How could it be otherwise? What hubris it would be to expect that the small mouth noises of English could encompass being. That's a primary error that all philosophy chooses to make at the beginning of its enterprise in order to set up shop at all. No, these are lower-dimensional slices of a reality that is ultimately unitary, ineffable, unspeakable and dazzling.

Audience: So philosophical discourse is verbal and mental masturbation?

Absolutely. Masturbation, because there's a pun here, it's autopoietic, it is completely out of yourself, there is no union with the Other, and the Other is what you're always trying to get to. The Other is a common term in these literatures; the Other is that which cannot be fully known. I always like to quote the British biologist J. B. S. Haldane, who made a wonderful statement. He said, "The universe is not only stranger than we suppose, it is stranger than we *can* suppose," and that's a dizzying perception. It's one thing to think that it's very strange; it's quite another thing to realize that it is stranger than you can suppose. You may suppose and suppose and suppose and you will fall so short of the mark that it's absurd. That's what it means to be in the presence of a mystery. The modern word mystery translates out to "unsolved problem." That's not what a mystery is. A mystery is not an unsolved problem. A mys-

tery is a mystery, and ratiocination can exhaust itself and make no progress with it. That's what's at the core of our being, and that was what was at the core of this ancient perception. These were thoroughly modern people. They were shoved up against the same things that tug at our hearts and our minds and our souls, and beyond that there's not a whole hell of a lot that you can say about it.

Audience: I just wanted to add that the idea of the earth as a living organism makes an appearance in psychology at the end of the last century with Gustav Fechner, who survives in footnotes of textbooks as the father of experimental psychology. I read a book about the soul life of plants, and that whole part of his work is utterly ignored, it didn't influence anybody but William James.

This is an idea that will not die, but its practitioners end up in footnotes. They do not have a happy fate. Certainly Henri Bergson with his idea of the *élan vital*; this is an effort to preserve this idea of the world soul, and yet the fate of Bergson, his influence on modern philosophy is certainly minimal. Alfred North Whitehead is my great favorite. I think that Whitehead is the cat's pajamas, and he has this idea of a living cosmos, that life and vitality extend right down into the electron, yet in spite of his mathematical contributions, the fact that he wrote *Principia Mathematica* with Bertrand Russell, Whitehead is not taught. I think there's one university in this country where they take him seriously. Modern philosophy is a desert for my money. Who cares about it? Nobody cares about it. Who's living their life according to the conceptions of modern philosophy? Nobody, as far as I can see. But yes, vitalism was this impulse in biology that persisted clear up to the 1920s with embryologists like Dreisch and his school, and mechanical biology has been at great pains to suppress that.

Audience: What about the Native Americans that were living that philosophy in the West?

Yes, well, aboriginal people, not only the Native Americans but the tribes of the Amazon, if you live next to nature this is such an overwhelming perception that it's never called into question; but, you see, most of us trace our civilization to desert dwellers who invented agriculture which gave us surpluses, so then we had to build walled enclosures to defend our surpluses from starving neighbors, and we're talking 6,000 B.C. at Jericho for this kind of stuff. So we have been cut off from the natural mind longer than any other group of people on earth. This is how we are able to carry out the demonic, in the negative sense, reconstruction of the world that we have. If there is a sin, then we have sinned. J. Robert Oppenheimer said, "Beyond all rational argument the physicists have known sin," and it's because they reached into the heart of matter without reverence. Their best trick was to call down the light that burns at the center of stars, and they call it down to the test centers of our deserts and onto the heads of our enemies, if necessary; but this is a cosmic sin, it's an abomination. It's the story of Western civilization.

The first great error was urbanization — well, I don't know if it's the first

great error, the invention of agriculture was a pretty staggering bad turn — and then a piece of bad luck that really we didn't need to have befall us was the invention of the phonetic alphabet. With the invention of the phonetic alphabet we moved away from symbolism and lost even the symbolic connection to the world, and that happened with the evolution of Demotic Greek and even earlier languages, Linear A and B and that kind of stuff. McLuhan talks a lot about this. We live in a universe so alienated that we can barely conceive of the way back but, hopefully, archeology is a wonderful thing. We are actually digging into the stratigraphic layers of our past and reconstructing these ancient intellectual machines and setting their gears turning and seeing how it works. We're like amnesiacs, people who don't remember who we are or where we came from, we just wander mumbling through the streets of our cities foraging in garbage cans and frightening other people; and yet if we could wake up, and archeology and the rebirth of an awareness of the Goddess and the pushing of science to the point where its irrational foundations become more clear — this is all part of a program of awakening, of an Archaic Revival that will then make us part of the living world rather than a disease, a parasitic force upon it.

Audience: It struck me that one comment you read talked about the creation of the world. It said that the elements were brought forth and at first I was thinking earth, air, fire and water, but I was thinking in relationship to some other elements of life that being, life and intellect are what come into manifestation from the one who pours forth the world and creates the world and that those are the first elements that come into existence. Life itself is an element of the cosmos as it were. It's an irreducible aspect of things, and you're paying respect to the fact that life is an omnipresent thing in the foundation of things. It's one of the elements.

I think that in one of the other things I read it said that everything that exists, that ever has been, that ever will be, is alive. I'll read a bit more of this. This refers to the theme I touched on a little bit last night of the importance of the imagination and how I think that our destiny lies in the imagination. "God is ever existent and makes manifest all else, but He himself is hidden because He is ever existent. He manifests all things but is not manifested. He is not Himself brought into being in images presented through our senses but He presents all things to us in such images. It is only things which are brought into being that are presented through sense. Coming into being is nothing else than presentation through sense." This is so thoroughly modern, it's staggering. For 1,500 years people couldn't say anything that clearly.

It is evident then that He who alone has not come into being cannot be presented through sense and that being so, He is hidden from our sight. But He presents all things to us through our senses and thereby manifests Himself through all things and in all things, and especially to those to whom He wills to manifest Himself. For thought alone can see that which is hidden, inasmuch as thought

itself is hidden from sight, and if even the thought which is within you is hidden from your sight, how can He, being in Himself, be manifest to you through your bodily eyes? But if you have power to see with the eyes of the mind, then, my son, He will manifest Himself to you; for the Lord manifests Himself ungrudgingly through all the universe, and you can behold God's image with your eyes and lay hold on it with your hands.

To my mind, this is permission for the psychedelic experience, that we lay hold of the image of the ineffable through the eyes.

If you wish to see Him, think on the sun, think on the course of the moon, think on the order of the stars. Who is it that maintains that order? The sun is the greatest of the gods in heaven. To him as to their king and overlord, all the kings of heaven yield place; and yet this mighty god, greater than earth and sea, submits to having smaller stars circling above him. Who is it then, my son, that he always obeys with reverence and awe? Each of these stars too is confined by measured limits and has an appointed space to range in. Why do not all the stars in heaven run like and equal courses? Who is it that has assigned to each its place and marked out for each the extent of its course?

Then it goes on and on. Here is an amazing anticipation of modernity:

Would that it were possible for you to grow wings and soar into the air! Poised between earth and heaven, you might see the solid earth, the fluid sea and the streaming rivers, the wandering air, the penetrating fire, the courses of the stars and the swiftness of the movement with which heaven encompasses all. What happiness were that, my son, to see all these borne along with one impulse, and to behold Him who is unmoved moving in all that moves, and Him who is hidden made manifest through His works.

This is an image of the planets seen from space. It's absolutely the unified image of our planet. It is, I think, the central image in this early Hermetic thing. This is as close to an image of what Godhead is that they were able to reach. I mean, this is a shamanic flight that delivers a scientific description of the earth moving in space. This is written A.D. 150. Nobody had that in sight until we reach Giordano Bruno, and if you read *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* you know that Bruno was burned at the stake. The reason he was burned at the stake was because he looked up into the sky and did not see the stellar shells and the angelic hierarchies; Bruno had a mystical experience and when it was over he said, "The universe is infinite. The stars go on forever." That single statement was the intellectual dynamite that destroyed the whole medieval, Hellenistic cosmological vision. The entire previous cosmological vision was left behind with that single statement. It was such a powerful statement that he had to go to the stake for that, and we have never recovered from that

perception. It was a fundamental perception and it occurred because he looked without preconception into the night sky and did not see wheels and demons and angels and shells of cosmic fate and necessity and he just said, "That's bullshit. What is there is infinite space and infinite time; the stars are hung like lamps unto the utmost regions of infinity." This then inaugurates the beginning of modernity and it's a perception that arose on the foundation of all of this earlier thinking.

Audience: Is the implication that there's a meditation that one does where one tries to go inside and see the universe on a cosmic scale?

Well, we know a lot less about the practice because there was much secrecy around this. What we have are the philosophical discourses. When we talk about alchemy this afternoon we'll see that there the technique becomes projection onto matter, that you enter into a kind of self-hypnosis where by having what we call "naive" ontological categories, in other words not being sure exactly how much of mind is in matter or how much matter is in mind, you can erase the boundary between self and world and project the contents of the unconscious onto chemical processes. What went on in the early phase here we don't know. The Trismegistic Hymns are largely as you see them here, philosophical discourses. There was stress on diet and purity; asceticism was typical of the Hermetic approach. In Gnosticism it went one of several ways. There were schools of Gnosticism which were vegetarian and puristic and then because they felt that man was no part of the universe, that man was somehow hermetically sealed against contamination from the universe, some Gnostic schools said, "You can do anything you want. You can have any kind of sexual arrangement you want, you can do anything you want. Do not think that you are part of the universe," and so you had Gnostic schools side by side, some orgiastic and quasi-tantric and some ascetic.

Because the idea was that light was trapped in matter by the act of procreation, there were Gnostic sects that only practiced forms of sexual union that couldn't lead to conception. So there were presumably exclusively homosexual sects, there were sects which only practiced anal intercourse. For them that was the same as celibacy because the real concern was not to trap any more of the light. I don't seriously advocate this but I think that in our current situation of overpopulation a little dose of this kind of thinking wouldn't be a bad thing; too much light is trapped in the organic matrix. These Gnostic sects that were for instance exclusively homosexual or exclusively practiced anal intercourse, of course they were suicide sects. They disappeared very quickly because they could only make converts by missionary conversion. You didn't have children, you couldn't hand it on. It shows how thoroughgoing their rejection of the world was, how contaminated they felt themselves to be by the material world; but then you also had, as I mentioned, these optimistic schools that saw nature as something to be perfected, and said, "Man has been set onto the earth not to reject it but to perfect it." Utopianism, the belief that one can create a perfect society, goes back into these Hermetic ideals, because the idea was that a perfect

society could be the goal of the alchemical work.

Let me read you a passage from *Giordano Bruno*. This is a wonderful passage from the *Picatrix*. This was the book of 12th century magical texts that began to introduce these Hermetic ideas, and this passage is the core passage that inspired the Rosicrucians and numerous other utopian movements. Here is Frances Yates:

Hermes Trismegistus is often mentioned as the source for some talismanic images and in other connections, but there is in particular one very striking passage in the fourth book of *Picatrix* in which Hermes is stated to have been the first to use magical images and is credited with having founded a marvelous city in Egypt.

And here is the passage from the *Picatrix*:

There are among the Chaldeans very perfect masters in this art and they affirm that Hermes was the first who constructed images by means of which he knew how to regulate the Nile against the motion of the moon. This man also built a temple to the sun and he knew how to hide himself from all so that no one could see him although he was within it.

Those of you who are scholars in Rosicrucianism know that one of the things that was always said about Rosicrucians was that they were invisible. This was how Robert Fludd proved to people that he wasn't a Rosicrucian, he'd say "You're looking at me, so how can I be one?" So, he's in the temple but he could not be seen within it:

It was he, Hermes Trismegistus, too, who in the east of Egypt constructed a city 12 miles long, within which he constructed a castle which had four gates within each of its four parts. On the eastern gate he placed the form of an eagle; on the western gate, the form of a bull; on the southern gate, the form of a lion; and on the northern gate he constructed the form of a dog. Into these images he introduced spirits which spoke with voices, nor could anyone enter the gates of the city except by their permission. There he planted trees in the midst of which was a great tree which bore the fruit of all generation. On the summit of the castle he caused to be raised a tower 30 cubits high on the top of which he ordered to be placed a lighthouse the color of which changed every day until the seventh day, after which it returned to the first color, and so the city was illuminated with these colors. Near the city there was an abundance of waters in which dwelt many kinds of fish. Around the circumference of the city he placed engraved images and ordered them in such a manner that by their virtue the inhabitants were made virtuous and withdrawn from all wickedness and harm. The name of the city was Adocentyn.

Now, what we're familiar with from the Platonic literature is a quasi-rational, largely rational approach to utopian thinking that you get in the *Republic*. However, students of the *Republic* will recall that the tenth book contains the Myth of Er, which we went over in detail in the section I did on Neoplatonism. The Myth of Er is one of the most bizarre and puzzling passages in the entire ancient literature. You recall that Er was a soldier who died, he was killed in battle, but after eight days he returned to life and then he told a story that is the absolute puzzlement of ancient scholars. It's highly mathematical, it has to do with the spindle of necessity and the description of some kind of cosmic machine and all the ratios of the gears of this machine are given and nobody knows what is being talked about, but here we have a different thrust: a magical utopianism and the idea of a perfected human society using magic. These engraved images that he ordered in such a manner that by their virtue the inhabitants were made virtuous, that means that he was able to deflect the energies of cosmic fate. The city was immune to astrological, malefic influence, it was protected. When we talk later about the alchemical aspirations of the Rosicrucians and John Dee and Frederick the Elector Palatine of Bohemia, we'll see that this impulse toward an alchemical kingdom returns again and again. In a way the four-gated city of utopian magical dreaming is one version of the philosopher's stone. It's a kind of diffuse notion of the philosopher's stone, but it's a society in perfect harmony, with fully realized beings living within it practicing a cosmic religion that frees them from the exigencies of cosmic fate.

The other thing that is going on in some of this alchemical imagery as a kind of subtext of late alchemy is what's called the *ars memoria*, the art of memory, and in fact Frances Yates has a book called *The Art of Memory*. This is a lost art, literally. It begins with the Roman orator Cicero and was practiced up until the early 17th century. What it consisted of was that it was considered very bad form to read your speech if you were an orator and so you had to memorize your speech, and there were tricks of memory. The commonest mnemonic trick was to think of a building that is familiar to you, it was called the memory palace. I've done this myself with the University of California because it's an area that I'm very familiar with because I was a student there and there are many buildings and many hallways and many floors, and what you do when you make your speech is that in your mind you are moving through the memory palace and at various points you construct what are called emblemata, and the idea of these emblemata is that they be as unusual, shocking and unexpected as possible in order to be memorable to you.

Say you're giving a speech about the seven deadly sins, so then *luxuria* might be for you a nun copulating with a dog, and you'll set the nun and the dog in a little niche in the hallway of the memory palace; then when you reach that place in your imaginary journey, all these associations will spring to mind and you'll be able to give your speech flawlessly. To us this sounds tortured and peculiar, but it works quite well. One of the great practitioners of the *ars memoria* was Giordano Bruno and he wrote a book called *Lo Spaccio de la Bestia Trionfante*, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, and my God, Max Ernst, eat your heart out! This is a surreal epic read as straight plaintext because that's not how it's

supposed to be read. It's an agglomeration of these mnemonic emblemata that led him on to probably give a fairly conventional disputation on one subject or another, but there are even old books of these emblemata that were before surrealism some of the wildest images that the Western mind would tolerate.

The one thing that we didn't get into this morning was talking about the astrological side of it and the role of the decans. The decans are these demons, three to a sign, so there are 36 of them, and this was thought to be an astrological conceit that goes back to Egypt, as opposed to the ordinary zodiacal signifiers which go back to Hauran in what is now modern Iraq. These decans were the demons that were summoned by these Renaissance magi in an effort to control and manipulate fate. If you were paying attention this morning, you may have noticed that in all the reading I did from the *Corpus Hermeticum* there was really nothing explicitly magical about it. It was philosophical. There was one mention, I think, of animating statues in the description of the four-gated city, but it was those magical animation passages that really captured the imagination of the Renaissance, and they built on that. The idea, simply put, is that these decans and zodiacal signs are at the center of associative schemata which include plants, minerals, odors, certain flowers, certain animals, everything had its decanic assignment; and so, if you were involved in promoting an affair with a woman or something like that, then you would do an invocation to Venus and you would gather the associated minerals, stones and animals and you would put them in a room and then certain tonal modes were also associated with these things. So you would play the music, you would have the flowers present, the minerals present, do the invocations and what you were trying to do was create a microcosm of the macrocosm to draw down this stellar energy. It wasn't about the classical Hollywood appearance of demons in a circle, that's the stuff of *Picatrix*, the earlier, somewhat less refined, style of magic.

I wanted to read you one passage from Frances Yates' *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* because this describes this change of status of the magician that we're interested in; and also what we didn't talk about this morning was the importance of Kabbalah, which came in quite late but was then worked out in great detail. This was the Jewish contribution to this kind of magic; it was the idea that since the world had been made by Jehovah, by the speaking of words, "In principio erat Verbum, et Verbo caro factum est," in other words, the speaking of Hebrew was thought to be the use of a primary linguistic tool for the purposes of creation. The problem for these Italians was that very few of them spoke Hebrew, so it was sometimes practiced silently. The mere constructing of these Hebrew letters and the setting out of messages in Hebrew was deemed efficacious as well. Then a further declension, for people who were even frustrated with that, was to channel magical languages that were pseudo-Hebraic in structure and appearance. This is a whole branch of research, much too arcane for us to go into here. The only non-Hebraic magical language that I may mention here will be Enochian. Enochian was an angelic language channeled by John Dee and used by him in his magical evocations, and later it was taken up by Aleister Crowley and the folks of the Golden Dawn, but there were many of these magical languages. The *Voynich Manuscript* is written in one of

them.

I want to read you this passage about how the Renaissance changed the status of the magician:

We begin to perceive here an extraordinary change in the status of the magician. The necromancer concocting his filthy mixtures, the conjurer making his frightening invocations were both outcasts from society, regarded as dangers to religion and forced into plying their trades in secrecy. These old-fashioned characters are hardly recognizable in the philosophical and pious magi of the Renaissance. There is a change in status almost comparable to the change in status of the artist from the mere mechanic of the Middle Ages to the learned and refined companion of princes of the Renaissance, and the magics themselves are changed almost out of recognition. Who could recognize the necromancer studying his *Picatrix* in secret in the elegant Ficino, with his infinitely refined use of sympathies, his classical incantations, his elaborately Neoplatonized talismans? Who could recognize the conjurer using the barbarous techniques of some *Clavis Salomonis* in the mystical Pico lost in the religious ecstasies of Kabbalah, drawing archangels to his side? And yet there is a kind of continuity, because the techniques are at bottom based on the same principles. Ficino's magic is an infinitely refined and reformed version of pneumatic necromancy. Pico's practical Kabbalah is an intensely religious and mystical version of conjuring.

Now we move in this realm; these were the companions of princes. There was in that 120 years, from let's say 1500 to the beginning of the Thirty Years War, a constant effort in various parts of Europe to try to turn European society toward a kind of magical revolution. The Europe of the 11th and 12th century was entirely ruled by scholastic rationalism. Witchcraft was virtually unknown and very curious. It's the 15th and 16th centuries where you get this tremendous proliferation of magical systems, magical ideas and social hysterias related to witchcraft, alchemy, conjuring and magic. Those are the centuries when these things really broke out into the open, and alchemy in that period is basically a story of wonderful personalities, too many for us to really talk about in detail. We have Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel who sought and found the philosopher's stone, according to legend, and according to legend are living to this day somewhere in Central Asia in perfect happiness, having achieved not only the Chemical Wedding but the Water Stone of the Wise. Then we have Basil Valentine, who refined red wine and distilled it in distillation apparatus until he got essentially pure alcohol, and upon drinking this he was so convinced that he had found the philosopher's stone that he announced the imminent approach of the end of the world based on his discovery, and he was not secretive at all. He propagated his recipes and in fact sampled the distillates of some of his brother alchemists and popularized this very widely. To this day, the reason certain cognacs are in the hands of monastic orders and no one else can make

these things is because they were originally alchemical secrets. Many of these early alchemists were men of the cloth, quite a number of them.

What I thought I would do is, in a highly chaotic fashion, read you some of this alchemical literature. The big bringdown about alchemical literature is that apparently the muse didn't always smile on the alchemist and some of this poetry is pretty tormented stuff. Why this is, who can say, but let's try one here and see if you can bear with it. Also, my Middle English is not as good as it might be. This is a short one, and typical, and you will see why the alchemists were charged with unbearable obscurity and prolix prose. This poem is called "A Description of the Stone":

Though Daphne fly from Phoebus bright, yet shall they both be one
And if you understand this right you have our hidden stone
For Daphne she is fair and white but volatile is she
Phoebus a fixed god of might and red as blood is he
Daphne is a water nymph and hath of moisture store
Which Phoebus doth confine and heat and dries her very shore
They being dried into one of crystal flood must drink
'Til they be brought to a white stone which wash with virgin's milk
So long until they flow as wax and no fume you can see
Then have you all you need to ask: praise God and thankful be.

This is a recipe for the production of the philosopher's stone and the author, I'm sure, felt that he'd spoken as clearly as he dare speak, and yet making something of this is no easy task. This is from the *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* and the late phase of alchemy. Here's another one:

The world is a maze and what you why
Forsooth of late a great rich man did die
And as he lay dying on his bed
These words in secret to his son he said
"My son," quoth he, "'Tis good for thee
I die, for thou shall much the better be thereby
And when thou seest that life hath me bereft
Take what thou findest and where I have it left
Thou dost not know, nor what my riches be
All which I will declare, give ear to me
An earth I had all venom to expel
And that I cast into a mighty well
A water eke to cleanse what was amiss
I threw into the earth, and there it is
My silver all into the sea I cast
My gold into the air and at the last
Into the fire for fear it should be found
I threw a stone worth forty thousand pound
Which stone was given me by a mighty king
Who bade me wear it in a fair gold ring."

Quoth he, "This stone is by that ring found out
 If wisely thou canst turn this ring about
 For every hoop contrary is to other
 Yet well agree and of the stone is mother
 So now, my son, I will declare a wonder
 That when I die this ring must break asunder."
 The king said so, but when he said, "Withal
 Although the ring be broken in pieces small
 An easy fire shall soon it close again
 Who this can do he need not work in vain
 'Til this my hidden treasure be found out
 When I am dead, my spirit shall walk about
 Make him to bring your fire from the grave
 And stay with him 'til you my riches have."
 These words a worldly man did chance to hear
 Who daily watched the spirit but near the near
 And yet it met with him and every one
 Yet tells him not where is this hidden stone.

This stuff is obscure, it's deliberately obscure, it was obscure to its contemporaries and the whole effort became one of collecting this kind of material and finding it out; and you have to understand that this was all circulating in manuscript, very little of this was printed. The *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* was not printed until 1652. This was a world without vehicular transportation other than the horse and carriage, and these people were paranoid of being discovered and persecuted for wizardry and witchcraft by the Church. So each alchemist working in secret with a limited number of texts, with a local control language, created this vast conceptual patchwork of ideas and this is in large measure responsible for the obscurity of what is said.

Then another factor which impinges on this and further complicates the matter is that the name of the game was projection of the contents of the imagination onto physical processes, so taking red cinnabar and heating it in a furnace until it sweats mercury, for one alchemist this is the incineration of the red salamander and the collection of ur-Mercurius in the Great Pelican. They named their chemical apparatus after animals and gods, and so the pelican is a standard distillation apparatus, basically a condenser on top of something which is boiled, and then these materials would be collected, ground, powdered, refired, mixed with other materials, refired again and in the process these people were living in what we call a waking dream — it's such a weak term, the projection of the intellect into this dimension — and many of the recipes are designed to wipe out the boundaries between waking and sleeping.

Remember how I talked about the river of mercury that runs between the yin and yang? Many of the alchemical processes were of 40 days duration. Well, you can imagine a hermit fearing discovery by the Church, trying to keep his fires not too hot, not too cold, working day after day, night after night. Eventually all boundaries dissolve and you're just living in a pure world of intellectual

projection, and then in the swirling of the alembic, in the chemical processes going on in the retort, you begin to be able to project your consciousness onto this. It's what we call visualization, but for us it's kind of a weak term because we are never really able to — except in the psychedelic state — transcend the belief in the inner world and the outer world being somehow separate. For us it's always separate from us, but they were able to wipe out that boundary and then what they saw in their swirling retorts and alembics was not carbonization, calcination, condensation of various molecular weights of liquids and oils, but rather the birth of the Red Lion, the coming of the Eagle, the appearance of the Smaragdine Stone. They had hundreds and hundreds of these words. I didn't bring any with me, but much of alchemical literature is dictionaries. Martinus Rulandus' *Alchemical Dictionary* is a huge book of words with special meanings in the alchemical context.

So why do this, and what happens when you do it? Well, no matter what alchemist you're reading, there's always an agreement that there are stages in the great work, stages in the opus, as they called it. You can't get any agreement on in what order these stages come, but roughly it's something like this: most agree that it begins in the *nigredo*, the blackening, ur-Crow, the saturnine world of what we would call manic depression, despair, and that ur-Chaos — a chaotic, near-psychotic state of unbounded hopelessness — is the precondition then for the alchemical work. I had a dream last night that was, I think, triggered by an illustration in Fabricius that I'll show you tonight, but it was a classical alchemical dream. It was that I was at a country fair, and its antiquity was indicated by the fact that it was happening on the schoolyard of my childhood, and as I moved among the participants of this country fair I began to notice that they were freaky. There were people with withered arms and one side of their face slid down and so forth and so on. The whole thing began to drift toward nightmare, and Richard Hermes Bird appeared in my dream as my alchemical compadre and at one point a black woman — perfect symbolism for the *nigredo* — with three withered arms and six or seven breasts slid herself sideways in front of me, and it was at that point that I went and found Richard and said, "I think we'd better get out of here."

Now, an alchemist would greet a dream like this with great anticipation and joy and would understand that this sets the stage now for the next movement forward. Well, then accounts differ. Those of you who really want to get into this, I recommend that you read *Mysterium Coniunctionis* by Jung, the Mysterious Conjunction. He discusses the *nigredo* in great detail. Another symbol for the *nigredo* is the *senex*, the old man, because the old man is just short of death and that's the state that the *nigredo* makes you feel. Then you must take this raw, chaotic, unformed material, often compared to feces, compared to corruption, compared to the contents of an opened grave, and you must cook it in the alchemical fires of contemplation, prayer, and ascetic self-control, and then you will move through a series of stages that are associated with colors. There is the *rubedo*, the reddening, there is the *citrinitas*, the yellowing, there is the *viriditas*, the greening, and the order in which these occur differs according to who you follow, but then there is closure at the end of the

process. Most alchemists, although certainly not all, agree that the higher state is the *albedo*, the whitening, the *purificatio*. At each stage there are substages of dissolution, *dissolutio et coagulatio*. There's one alchemical aphorism that says, "*Dissolutio et coagulatio*, know this and this is all ye need to know." It's a melting and a recasting and a purifying of psychic contents. So finally you reach the *albedo*, the whitening, the highest stage, the stage of great purity.

Remember how I said last night that mercury was always the metaphor for mind in alchemy, or one of the metaphors for mind in alchemy, and I talked about its mutability and its ability to take the shape of its container, and how when you shatter it it then splits into many reflections? So once you move into the domain of the *albedo*, the whitening, then a whole new problem arises for the alchemist. This is the problem of the fixing of the stone. Somehow the mutability of mercury must be overcome and it must be crystallized, it must be fixed so that it doesn't get away from you, so that it doesn't slip through your fingers. To achieve ur-Mercury is nothing unless you have the secret of the *coagulatio*. There is a huge amount of effort devoted to this.

What is being described is what Jungians call the individuation process: a dissolving of the boundaries of the ego, an allowing of the chaotic material of the unconscious to pour forth where it can be inspected by consciousness, and we'll see tonight when we look at this art that these images are full of ravening beasts, incestuous mother/son pairs, incestuous brother/sister pairs, hermaphrodites. All taboos are broken, this stuff just boils up from the unconscious, is sublimed through these processes and then is somehow fixed, and this fixing is the culmination of alchemy. If you can bring off this trick then you possess the ur-Stone, the philosopher's stone, the lapis, the Sophic Hydrolith of the Wise, Eirenaeus Philalethes calls it. There are hundreds of control words for naming the secret difficult to obtain: alchemical gold, in short, this is what we're after. If you possess it, nothing else is worth anything because it is psychic completion, peace of mind. Jung called it the self. It's the self that we are trying to recover, and remember how we talked about the Gnostic myth of the light trapped in matter? Well this is the *lumina lumen*, the light of light, the *lux natura*, the light drawn out of nature and condensed into a fixed form which then becomes the universal panacea, and I'm using as many of these alchemical terms as I can draw out of my memory to give you a feeling for it. This is the universal medicine. It cures all ills, it brings you riches, fame, wealth, self-respect. It's the answer, it's what everyone is looking for and no one can find.

This became a consuming passion of the 15th and 16th century mind. They thought they were on the brink of it, and along the way they were discovering stuff like distilled alcohol, phosphorous, gun powder, all of these things were coming out of the alchemical laboratories, but that was not it. They kept driving themselves onward because they knew that this was not the real thing, and they were pursuing the real thing. Then for some people it became reassociated with this notion of the utopia that I mentioned this morning in the passage that I read about the city of Hermes Trismegistus, and they began to see — it's almost like the crisis which overcame Buddhism — that it must be an archetypal, and notice how rarely we've used that word here, it must be almost an archetypal

stage in human thought. Theravāda Buddhism stressed individual redemption through meditation on emptiness, and then with the great reforms of Nāgārjuna the idea of Bodhisattvic compassion was introduced and that carries with it political freight, an obligation to society and mankind.

As the 15th and 16th century progressed there began to be this awareness that what was wanted was not for an alchemist to break through to his own personal salvation, but somehow to create an alchemical world. You get then the notion of the *multiplicatio*, the idea that the stone, once created, will replicate itself and be able to change base matter into itself, almost like a virus spreading through the ontological structure of matter itself, and the world will be reborn. What was happening was that these alchemists were getting bolder. Printing was invented in Mainz, near Frankfurt, in 1439, and the distribution of these alchemical books was changing the character of alchemy. It was no more the solitary hermit working away in his cave or mountaintop, far away from the minions of the Church. These alchemists began to dream of banding together, of forming societies, of creating brotherhoods that were united in the sharing of their knowledge and their purpose.

This brings us to the curious episode in history called the Rosicrucian Enlightenment. Dame Frances Yates once again got there first. She wrote a book called *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* which traces the history of these alchemical brotherhoods and reveals to us what they were really about. What they were about was this dream of somehow taking the philosopher's stone and the power, the immortality, the insight that it would bring and making it a general utility of mankind. I have a friend who claims that the summoning of the Holy Spirit into matter can be seen as the creation of the modern world of electrical energy, that people like Helmholtz and Faraday were completing the alchemical work. It's very hard for us to realize how mysterious the electromagnetic field seemed to the 19th century. The 19th century had entirely imbued itself with the spirit of Democritean atomism translated through Newtonian physics and they believed that everything was little balls of hard matter winging through space. When Helmholtz and Faraday and these people began to talk about action at a distance and generating the electromagnetic field and trapping lightning in Leyden jars and running it through wires, what could this be but *numen*, what could this be but the trapping of *spiritus*? What could it be but the literal descent of the Holy Ghost into history? Give it a moment's thought: for thousands of years, electricity was something that you saw when you took an amber rod and a piece of cat fur and went into a darkened room and stroked the cat fur, and then when you would bring the amber rod close to the cat fur you would see the crackle of static electricity. For thousands of years that's what electricity was. Who would dream that you could light cities, that you could smelt metals, that you could illuminate the earth with this energy, and yet from the 1850s to the present this was done. It's almost the final literalizing of the alchemical dream.

But to go back now — I digress, I fear — let's go back to the climate of the 1580s. The central culprit here, and to my mind a giant figure casting an enormous shadow over the landscape of alchemy and of modern science,

is the Englishman John Dee. John Dee united in himself the complete spirit of the medieval magus and the complete spirit of the modern scientist. He invented the navigational instruments that allowed the conquest of the round earth. When Francis Drake sailed up the coast of California he had navigational instruments that were top secret — the French, the Spanish, must be kept away from this stuff — and these were navigational instruments created by John Dee that allowed him to locate himself anywhere on the globe. On a late summer evening at John Dee's house in Mortlake outside of London the angel Gabriel descended into his garden and gave him what he called the Shew Stone, *shew* in Old English. The Shew Stone exists to this day, you can see it in the British Museum, and what's amazing about it is that it's a piece of polished obsidian, it's an Aztec mirror. There was a ruler of the Aztecs named Smoky Mirror. How John Dee got this thing, we cannot even imagine. He says he got it from an angel, nobody can really naysay that. However I suspect that Cortez, on his first return to Spain from the New World, brought a number of objects with him that he had collected in Central Mexico and somehow John Dee got his hands on this thing. It was for him a television screen into the Logos, and he used it over a number of years to direct the foreign policy of England.

He was the confidante of Queen Elizabeth the First and he was also the most accomplished astrologer in Europe. He used his ability to cast horoscopes as an entree into all the great houses of Europe, the kings and nobles of Europe. Well, he was functioning as an intelligence agent, he was a spy for the British Crown insinuating himself into these various courtly scenes and then writing back to Elizabeth in ciphers that had previously only been used for magical purposes. He was sending back data on the strength of military garrisons and the placement of fortifications and this sort of thing. This was what he was doing in the 1580s; he kept the Shew Stone for a number of years and he didn't seem to be able to make much progress with it. He had other methods too, he had wax tables and sigils, but finally into his life came a very mysterious character named Edward Kelley. Some accounts say that Edward Kelley had no ears, which indicates that he had had his ears removed for being a charlatan and a mountebank. This was a common punishment in the provinces of England. So Edward Kelley was a very dubious character, I think. One strong piece of evidence that he was a shady character was that John Dee was married to a much younger woman named Jane Dee, who by all accounts was quite a beauty, and after gaining Dee's confidence as a sryer, the person who could look into the Shew Stone and lay out these scenarios that the angels and the entities coming and going in the Shew Stone were putting forth, Kelley revealed to Dee that the angels had instructed him to hit the hay with Jane. This was a great crisis in their relationship. However, according to Dee's diary, "And so it was done," we read. So hanky panky didn't begin with the Golden Dawn, believe me.

In 1582, Jane Dee, John Dee and Edward Kelley set out for Bohemia. Rudolf, the Mad King of Bohemia, held sway at that time. This is another one of these bizarre figures in this whole story. Rudolf collected dwarfs, he collected giants. He had what was called a *wunderkammer*, a wonder cabinet. You see, before

Linnaeus, before modern scientific classification, these great patrons of the arts and natural sciences would just collect weird stuff, and that was all you could say about it. I mean, it was rhinoceros horns, fossil ammonites, broken pieces of statues from antiquity, giant insects from southern India, seashells, all this stuff would just be thrown together in these *wunderkammer*, these wonder cabinets. Rudolf was a great patron of the arts, and Kelley sent the word that he and Dee had perfected the alchemical process. Rudolf immediately paid their way to Prague and patronized them very lavishly over a number of months, but then they didn't seem to be coming through, and he ordered a castle put at their disposal in Bohemia and they still weren't able to come through. The *Voynich Manuscript* figures in here too, because Kelley's entree to Dee was that he had a manuscript in an unknown language, and I believe that this probably was the *Voynich Manuscript*. The *Voynich Manuscript* turns up in the estate of Rudolf and the very month that he paid 600 gold ducats for it to persons unknown, Dee, who was always writing back to the Elizabethan court hounding them to send money, entered in his account book that they received 600 gold ducats from an unknown source.

Dee was able to talk himself out of this alchemical imprisonment, but not before he had written a book called the *Hieroglyphic Monad*. You have to understand the importance of this. As late as the 1920s, in the better schools of England, like Eton, when you studied geometry you studied Euclid's works, and Euclid's geometry was always preceded by Dee's preface to Euclid. Until the 1920s every English schoolchild studied this. He was a master mathematician as well as all these other things; this was how he was able to produce these navigation instruments. Dee, while imprisoned in Bohemia, wrote a book called the *Hieroglyphic Monad* in which he proposed to prove, through a series of occult theorems, a certain diagram, basically the symbol for mercury, which looks like the symbol for female with horns on it, and then there were some adumbrations to that. By a series of theorems he built up this *Hieroglyphic Monad* and he initiated a couple of young men named Johannes Andreae and Michael Maier into the mysteries of the *Hieroglyphic Monad*. Then he was able to get out of Bohemia and he went back to England.

Kelley, who had made much more extravagant claims, Rudolf kept at work on the alchemical opus and Kelley became more and more desperate to escape. One night in 1597 he crept out on the parapet of this Bohemian castle and a roof tile slipped beneath his feet and he fell to his death and became, so far as I can tell, alchemy's only true martyr. Dee returned to England; he was now very old and he died at Mortlake in 1608. Elizabeth died in 1603; Shakespeare was happening, Sir Philip Sidney was happening through this period. John Dee reputedly had over 6,000 books in his library. He had more books than any man in England. We have a partial catalog of his library; he had books that do not exist now. He had Roger Bacon manuscripts, because when Henry the Eighth kicked the Catholic Church out of England the Northumbrian monasteries were looted by the Earl of Northumberland and Dee was allowed to pick over the loot from these monasteries. There were Roger Bacon manuscripts which perished when Dee's library was burned by an angry mob while he was on the continent

because he was suspected of being a wizard. He was the model for Faust in the later recensions of Faust, and whenever you see an old man with a white beard and a pointed cap, this image is referent to Dee.

Well, Elizabeth died in 1603 and James the First became King of England. James was a peculiar character. The wags of the time liked to say, “Elizabeth was King and now James is Queen!” Not only that, he hated occultism, he had no patience with the whole magical court that Elizabeth had assembled around herself. Meanwhile, in 1614, a very mysterious document began to circulate in Europe and in England called the *Fama* — this is the first word of a string of Latin words — and two years later the *Confessio*. These were announcements that an alchemical brotherhood was seeking recruits. These are the primary documents of Rosicrucianism. Rosicrucianism was based on a fiction and a fictional person, Christian Rosenkreuz, who was imagined to have lived almost 200 years earlier, in the 1450s, and to have been a great alchemist. It was claimed that his tomb had been recently opened and that there were books inside it which set the stage for the alchemical revolution of the world; notice how this occult mind always tries to reach back in time to give itself validity. Christian Rosenkreuz was claimed to be the author of a series of books, the chief of which is called the *Chymical Wedding*.

What this was all about, I believe, and *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* makes it fairly clear, was that Dee, during the period when he had been in Bohemia, had set out to lay the groundwork for an alchemical revolution in Central Europe, and he had made Johannes Andreae and Michael Maier his agents in this plot. It was a plot to meddle with European history and to turn the Protestant Reformation toward an alchemical completion. They felt that Luther and Calvin and these people had only gone so far and that the culmination of throwing off the yoke of the Church would be the establishment of an alchemical kingdom in Central Europe. The target, then, of the attention of Michael Maier and Johannes Andreae and a number of these alchemists became the young Frederick the Elector Palatine. He was a prince of the Northern League in Germany; he ruled in Heidelberg. Heidelberg, as you know, is a thousand-year-old university city and I believe I mentioned that the alchemical press of Theodore de Bry was operating out of Heidelberg. Heidelberg became a magnet for all the occult thinking going on in Europe. All the puffers and alchemists, the gold makers, the philosophers, the charlatans, they all converged on Heidelberg, and Andreae and Maier were advisors of the young Frederick. They steered him by a series of political manipulations too complex to tell toward a marriage with the daughter of James the First of England, who was named Elizabeth, interestingly enough. So Frederick the Elector made Elizabeth, the daughter of James of England, his wife. Frederick here made a serious miscalculation because he thought that if James would give the hand of his daughter in marriage that this was his way of blessing this alchemical conspiracy. Actually, what was on James’ mind was that he was about to give one of his sons in marriage to a Spanish princess of the Hapsburg line, a Catholic. In other words, he was playing both sides against each other. He was not giving the green light to an alchemical revolution at all, but it was assumed so.

Then in 1612 Rudolf the Emperor finally dies at a very ripe old age. At that time the Protestant League, which was made up of these princes of these small principalities scattered across Germany and Poland, they actually elected the emperor. It was not by right of *primogenitor*, but by election by what was called the Northern League, this group of princes. Frederick and his alchemical cohorts had done their political groundwork very skillfully and they were able to engineer the election of Frederick to Emperor, and he became Frederick the Elector Palatine of Bohemia. This set the stage for an episode called the episode of the Winter King and Queen. After Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel, this is one of the great romantic stories of alchemy. They moved their court from Heidelberg to Prague and all the alchemists went with them, and they assumed that English armies would support them if there was any squawk from the Hapsburgs. In the winter of 1619 they ruled there and began to lay the groundwork for the transformation of Northern Europe into an alchemical kingdom. The problem was, as I said, the faithlessness and duplicity of James the First of England. He did not support them in spite of the fact that the fate of his daughter hung in the balance, and by May of 1620 the local bishop of the Catholic Church was fully aroused and word had been sent to Madrid, and the Hapsburgs raised an army and laid siege to Prague. In the summer of 1620 the Winter King and Queen were driven from Prague, the city fell to Catholic forces, the alchemical presses were smashed and Michael Maier, who was like the prime minister of this scene, was murdered in an alley of Prague and the entire alchemical dream went down the drain. Frederick was killed in the siege of the city and Elizabeth escaped to The Hague where she lived in exile for many years.

Until recently I thought that was the end of the story, but there is a coda that is amusing, if nothing else. In that Hapsburg army, there was a young soldier of fortune, only 19 years old, still wet behind the ears, knowing nothing, happily soldiering and wenching his way around Europe while he decided what to do with himself. His name was René Descartes, a Frenchman. Descartes in his later years reminisced about his period as a soldier in this army, and I like to think that it was actually Descartes who murdered Maier. One of my ambitions is to write a play or a novel where these two confront each other in a back alley of burning Prague and carry on a debate about the future of Europe before Michael Maier falls to the sword of Descartes. That may be apocryphal, but what is not apocryphal is that this Hapsburg army, having laid siege and destroyed the alchemical kingdom, began to retreat across Europe that fall and by mid-September was camped near the town of Olm in southern Germany. By a strange coincidence, Olm is the birthplace of Einstein some hundreds of years later. On the night of September 16, 1620, Descartes had a dream, and in this dream an angel appeared to him — this is documented by his own hand — and the angel said to Descartes, “The conquest of nature is to be achieved through measure and number.” That revelation laid the basis for modern science. René Descartes is the founder of the distinction between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*, the founder of modern science, the founder of the scientific method that created the philosophical engines that created the modern world. How many scientists, working at their workbenches, understand that an angel chartered

modern science? It's the alchemical angel which will not die. It returns again and again to guide the destinies of nations and peoples toward an unimaginable conclusion.

That's not the last time that this angelic intervention in the history of science has occurred. Some of you may know the story in the 19th century of Kekulé, the German chemist who was struggling with the molecular structure of benzene, couldn't get it straight, and then had a dream in which he saw the ouroboric snake take its tail in its mouth, and he awoke from that dream with the carbon ring burning in his mind. Well, the hexagonal form of the carbon ring is the basis for all organic chemistry, and I mentioned earlier Faraday and Helmholtz and the rise of the electromagnetic field. The point I'm trying to make is that however rational we may assume ourselves to be, however rational we may assume modern science to be, it is all really founded on angelic revelation, demonic intercession and an extremely mysterious relationship between the human mind and the world of what science calls inert matter, which from this point of view is revealed to be not inert at all but alive and pregnant with purpose for mankind.

There were a series of adumbrations of this kind of thinking. Many of you may know about the history of Freemasonry and the many Freemason revolts in Bohemia and Bavaria throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Adam Weishaupt and the Illuminati are another effort to do this, and even the Royal Society, founded by Newton and Hook, was still an effort to redeem science for the spirit. The alchemical spirit lives on; it never really died, it's just that it has taken peculiar forms in our own day. I mentioned last night that when you enter into nuclear chemistry the most literal dreams of the profane side of alchemy, the transformation of lead into gold, have actually been achieved. It has no economic significance because the instrumentality to do it costs tens of millions of dollars but nevertheless, yes, lead in our time has been changed into gold.

Audience: To take you back to the *Voynich Manuscript* for a minute, there was this thing about it being a liturgical manual of some sort. Is that your opinion of it?

Yes, this is kind of a footnote on all of this. Remember how I said that Kelley's entree to Dee was that he had a mysterious book? You can tell from what I've said already that Dee was as big a sucker for books as I am. Kelley's story was that he had gone to sleep in the ruins of a Northumbrian monastery and slept in an open sepulcher, a crypt of some sort, and when he awoke he found beneath him two things: a vial of red powder which he said was the transmuting powder, a necessary part to the alchemical opus, and a book in an unknown language which he called the *Book of Saint Dunstan*, possibly because this monastery had been dedicated to Saint Dunstan. Now, Arthur Dee was John Dee's son. He became an alchemist in his own right, and he said that when he was growing up he recalled that his father spent many hours puzzling over a book, as he put it, "All covered with hieroglyphiks," but Dee, who elaborated the angelologic language called Enochian, never actually wrote about or discussed the book that he had

received from Kelley. It is definitely not written in Enochian. Enochian, when grammatically analyzed by computers, has a curious relationship to 16th century English. When Dee and Kelley traveled to Europe they were talking up Roger Bacon, who was a 14th century English monk who had dabbled in alchemy, and they claimed to have Bacon manuscripts. Rudolf became very interested in this and wanted to obtain some of these Baconian manuscripts. I suspect that what happened was that Dee, by this time, had given up on deciphering the *Book of Saint Dunstan* and decided that he would palm it off on the emperor as a Bacon manuscript. He didn't want to give up a real Bacon manuscript because they were too valuable to him, so for 600 gold ducats this thing changed hands and Kelley, Dee and Jane were able to pay their bills. Rudolf had immense resources because of his position as Emperor and he brought his cryptographers and decipherers in to work on this *Book of Saint Dunstan* and got nowhere.

Then when Rudolf died a mysterious book was numbered among the artifacts of his estate, and I think we can assume that it's this book. One of the interesting things about this book is that it has pages and pages of plant drawings, over 150 watercolors of plants, each carefully labeled and captioned in this unknown language. If you know anything about decipherment, this is what a decipherer dreams of, because if you have a picture of the thing and the caption it doesn't take too much smarts to be able to figure out what's going on. Nevertheless, this was completely unhelpful. A third of the manuscript has pseudoastrological material; in other words, what look like horoscopes and drawings of stars and stellar shells but when carefully analyzed dissolve into meaninglessness, cannot be associated with anything. Then a third of the manuscript shows little naked ladies in what can only be described as elaborate plumbing systems. It was thought at one time that these must be drawings of the humors of the body in the liver, that these little naked women represented spirits moving inside the human body. Somebody else's guess was that it must show an obscure form of German hydrotherapy, because if you've ever been to Baden-Baden or Marienbad or these places where people take the waters, those places are old, old. All this stuff is captioned and there are even tables of contents which again you would think would yield to decipherment, and so when Rudolf died, because of the botanical material in this book it passed to the court botanist, a man named Hořický, and he got nowhere with it.

Then in the early 16th century a great alchemist and polymath, some of whose art we'll see this evening, was Heinrich Khunrath. Heinrich Khunrath was fascinated by artificial languages and he heard about the *Voynich Manuscript*. We have a whole bunch of letters from Khunrath to the keepers of the estate of the emperor trying to obtain this manuscript, which he finally did obtain, and then at that point he makes no further mention of it in his diaries; the conclusion being that he too could get nowhere with this thing, it just defied decipherment. In 1619, at the outbreak of the Thirty Years War — and this is what I forgot to mention in my earlier discussion: this episode of the Winter King and Queen is one way of debating the Thirty Years War. It's usually considered to be the moment when a certain personage was hurled from a third story window in Prague and then fighting broke out in the streets, but really the episode of the

Winter King and Queen brought the thing to a head. Well, in 1619, to avoid being caught up in the Thirty Years War, Khunrath decided to take holy orders and become a Jesuit, and so he gave his library, which was compendious, to the monastery that he joined, which was a monastery in southern Italy. There this thing sat until 1906, when a New York rare book dealer named Wilfrid Voynich bought the entire contents of this monastic library. When he got it all back to New York and cataloged it, it was all very predictable 16th century theological and alchemical speculation, except that here was this book in an unknown language. Voynich kept it throughout his life and then when he died he gave it to Yale, and it is to this day at the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale.

In the 1960s the CIA became interested in it, because the CIA is in the business of code making and breaking. A huge amount of energy goes into this. If you know anything about the Enigma Project in World War II, you know that vast energies go into the production of unbreakable codes, and so they very systematically sought out all examples of encrypted material throughout history and just lickety-split deciphered it, one after another. All occult and magical codes known to exist in Europe can be traced back virtually to one person: Trithemius, Abbot of Sponheim, who was the great teacher of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa. All magical codes, if you know the Trithemian method, within a few hours you can get plaintext. The *Voynich Manuscript* did not yield at all to this method and the CIA formed a working group that for over ten years would invite scholars in to have a look at this. If you're interested in this, Mary D'Imperio, who was a great Renaissance scholar, wrote a book called *The Voynich Manuscript: An Elegant Enigma*, in which she traces the efforts of the CIA to figure this thing out and to figure out what it could be.

There the matter rested until about three years ago when Leo Levitov, some kind of military historian, one of these peculiar people who live for this stuff, got a hold of it. D'Imperio goes through all the decipherment, and there were many efforts at decipherment. There was a scholar at Yale in the '30s named Brumbaugh, who was a very respected man who ruined himself by claiming a complete decipherment of the *Voynich Manuscript*. The way the game is played is that you say what your rules for the decipherment are, you give the rules to a colleague and you give your colleague a page of text. If he can't translate it with your rules then you are viewed as a deluded and misguided person and your career goes down in flames. Well, the Brumbaughian method for deciphering the *Voynich Manuscript* had to do with confined pools of letters where it would get you to a pool of five or six letters but then you could freely choose which one you used, and critics of Brumbaugh demonstrated that you could make this thing say anything you wanted it to. Brumbaugh supported Dee's claim, he claimed that it deciphered out into a Roger Bacon manuscript that described a series of riots between the students and the Blackfriars in 1291 at Oxford at Christmastime, but nobody else could make it say that or make it say anything, so Brumbaugh disgraced himself and ruined his career.

Then there were other efforts at decipherment which I won't bore you with, but along comes Leo Levitov just four years ago. He wrote a book called *Solution*

of the Voynich Manuscript: A Liturgical Manual for the Endura Rite of the Cathari Heresy, the Cult of Isis, and his great breakthrough — if you accept his translation, and I do; I know people who don't but they don't seem to have read him as carefully as I have, I think the dude has it pretty well nailed to the barn door — his great breakthrough was to realize that it's not in code. It is not an encrypted manuscript at all. It's a synthetic alphabet; yes, it's an alphabet. One of the things that baffled the CIA was that they looted the libraries of Europe and they could never find another example of what is called *Voynich* script, and this was just baffling. How could there be no other example of this script? It appears that what happened was that someone created a synthetic alphabet, and then in a mixture of medieval polyglot Flemish with a huge number of loan words from Old French, Middle High German and Swedish, wrote down a sacramental manual for the dying in the Cathar sect.

Now, what is the Cathar sect? You're probably familiar with something called the Albigensian Crusade. This was not a crusade carried on against the infidel for the recovery of Jerusalem but rather a series of military actions carried out by the pope against communities in Southern France in the early 1200s. These people were Cathars as far as we can tell, and we can't tell much because we only have descriptions of Cathars written by the people who were burning them at the stake. In other words, no original Cathar documents survive, we just have what they screamed out on the rack as they were being put to death by the bishops of the Church. This was a horrific incident in European history. To give you the flavor of it, the second Albigensian Crusade was prosecuted by a general of the pope named Simon de Monfort. Some of you may have visited the city of Carcassonne in Southern France, which is a very beautiful walled medieval city. Simon de Monfort's lieutenants came to him and they said, "We have cornered the Cathars at Carcassonne, but the problem is that there are 6,000 Catholics within the city walls," and he said, "Kill everybody; God will recognize his own." So that was the spirit in which this thing went forth, and they did, they did.

What we do know about the Cathars is that they had a sacrament. Well, first let me tell you a little bit more about them. At first it was thought that they were pretty much heterodox Christians. They were into nudity and vegetarianism; they sound like early hippies, as far as we can tell. They got together, men and women, they took off their clothes, they bathed; whether there were orgies or not we don't know. They were vegetarians, and the one thing that we do know is that they had a sacrament called the *consolamentum*. When you were dying, a fellow Cathar would cut your wrists and open your veins in a warm bath of water and you would die in that state, you did not die a natural death. This was called the *consolamentum*. What Leo Levitov is claiming is that the *Voynich Manuscript* is a description, a manual for the Perfecti of the Cathar sect, telling how to properly carry out the *consolamentum*. I see no reason to challenge it. Even with my limited knowledge of German, once you get the vowel and letter assignments into this weird language and change it into English alphabetic text, you can see that there's enough German there and then these loan words in Flemish and so forth; it looks to be true.

What emerges from this, if we accept the *Voynich Manuscript* as the only primary document on the Cathar faith, is that this was not a form of heterodox Christianity at all, it was much more radical than that, and this may explain the Church's fury at this group of people. It was a cult of Isis. It can be traced straight back into the mystery religions of Io, Isis in Egypt, and I have not seen any critical commentary on Levitov's work. His book was published by this weird press in Redondo Beach that specializes only in books on military encryption. Their catalog is a revelation to see, it's amazing, and the book on the *Voynich Manuscript* stands out like a sore thumb because most of it is dictionaries of three letter words in Swahili and their numerical transforms and stuff like that. So that's the history to date of the *Voynich Manuscript*, and it's not that askew of our subject because all of this heterodoxy in Europe blends together.

The presence of Theodore de Bry as an alchemical printer in Heidelberg may be a clue, because there were survivals of this Cathar faith in the form of a heresy called the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit. If any of you are familiar with the altarpiece called *The Garden of Earthly Delights* by Hieronymus Bosch, it's thought that this was created by commission for a congregation of the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit. The Brotherhood of the Free Spirit was always associated for some reason, we don't know why, with printers. Printers seem to be the profession that the Brotherhood favored, and like the Cathars they practiced ritual nudity, vegetarianism and gathering together in a ritual bath. There is much still to be learned and to be teased apart in the art history and the history of heterodox thinking in Europe, of which alchemy is seen to be one facet of a faceted gem that includes the Brotherhood of the Free Spirit, early Freemasonry, Cathars, survivals of Manichaeism, Bogomils in Yugoslavia — there are Bogomil graves on the southern coast of Thessalonica — and just a whole zoo of intellectual systems that have been forgotten and overlooked. This what I meant when I said that we will explore the stratigraphy of lost thought systems. In some cases we possess quite complete skeletons, in the case of alchemy. What we possess in the cases of the Bogomils and the Cathars is almost a foot bone or a tooth or a footprint but someday, with luck, new textual material will emerge and a new understanding of the role of heterodoxy in the formation of modern thought will emerge.

Audience: I've just finished the *Born in Blood* book on Freemasonry that's recently been published, and this person is a Medieval English historian from Kentucky. I think he's finally solved the Freemason history, which is a very interesting history because the Masonic historians themselves have been arguing for a couple hundred years. It's strange that this *Voynich Manuscript* should be all of a sudden resolved in the last couple of years, because it seems that this Freemason thing is also resolved.

Yes, you make an interesting point. John Glavis brought me an article yesterday. We're all tied up now in this Pluto return. I'm not an astrologer but John brought me an article that's talking about how, I don't know if it's the

last time or the time before last that the Pluto return occurred, is precisely the 1490s, the period that we're talking about when the *Corpus Hermeticum* was translated. We are now in a period that is astrologically exactly equivalent to that period, and the *Voynich Manuscript* appears to have been accepted. You mentioned this revelation about the true nature of Freemasonry, and of course what is going on at the moment — that is askew of our subject but tremendously exciting and relevant to the idea of lost knowledge coming to light — is that this is the golden moment in Mayan studies.

It is happening right now, day by day, minute by minute. The logjam has been broken. The Mayan glyphs are being deciphered, no shit, and it has to do with an entirely new approach that some Russian linguists have taken. It will never happen again so far as I know; there are now, with the Mayan decipherment, no real undeciphered languages left. Harappan was deciphered a few years ago, but really it wasn't that interesting because we only possess about 6,000 characters in Harappan. But the literature of the Maya, when you take not only the hieroglyphic, the stone texts, but when you add in the ceramic texts, we have a lot of Mayan material and it is being deciphered at a furious rate. If you're interested in this, Linda Schele has written a book called *A Forest of Kings* and how I do envy this woman because what she is doing is writing the first history of the Maya in a thousand years. We're not now dealing in the realm of gods and myths, we're dealing with stuff like, "On the 29th of April, 562, an army from Caracol met an army from Tikal and triumphed and deposed Double Bird and placed on the throne..." It's this kind of stuff, real history. The conceits of Mayan religion and Mayan courtly life are all coming into focus and it's very exciting. All the people who have tried to make the Maya into some kind of Atlantean civilization should be running for cover at this point, because the picture that emerges is not as pretty as we might wish, but, hey, know the truth and the truth will set you free. I would choose truth over illusion anytime, no matter how damaging it might be to somebody's conceptions of these things.

If any of you are interested in these subjects, some of you may know the book by John Chadwick called *The Decipherment of Linear B*. Linear B is a proto-Minoan language and a linguist at Cambridge named Michael Ventris, a genius, deciphered this language in the '50s. There was no Rosetta Stone, this is the amazing thing. You know what I mean by a Rosetta Stone? You see, in the 19th century the great mystery was how to read the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Before they were deciphered, the Egyptians were treated like the Maya and people thought that the secrets of the universe were chiseled on those obelisks and tombs. Then a soldier in the grand army of Napoleon found a tablet which had a column of Demotic, a column of Ancient Greek and a column of Egyptian hieroglyphs, and they were able to realize that it was saying the same thing three times and that opened it up for them; but that's like a crib sheet, it's easy if you have the same text in a known language. In the case of the Maya, in the case of Linear B and in the case of Harappan, there was no Rosetta Stone, so then it's an excruciatingly difficult problem to solve. I'll explain how it was done with the Maya because it's so neat.

It turns out that Mayan is a rebus language. What does this mean? Do you

remember how, when we were kids, in comic books there would be these things where it would show a picture of an eye, and then it would show a picture of a saw going through a piece of wood, and then it would show a picture of an ant, and then it would show a picture of a red rose? This is a sentence which says, "I saw aunt Rose." Now notice what's going on here. It all depends on puns that depend on a knowledge of the spoken language. If you lose the sounds of the spoken language, how the hell could you ever tell that a picture of an eye, a saw, an insect and a rose says, "I saw my maternal relative on my mother's side"? It's absolutely impossible in that situation to reconstruct meaning unless you have sounds. How do you recover the sounds of a language dead a thousand years? Well, these Soviet linguists had the good sense to go and look at living Mayan languages, of which there are 15 in the Americas, and they discovered one of these dialects where, when you set Mayan hieroglyphs in front of these people and they named what they saw, meaning came out of their mouths. That broke the logjam and then you just rev up your computers and use all the standard tools of modern linguistics and philology and the stuff begins to just pour out, clear as day, no problem.

Audience: So they asked the Mayans?

Yes, they had to go to a Mayan. You're right, good point, it had never occurred to them, because always before when showing it to Mayans they would say, "What does it mean?" instead of, "What do you see here?" and then what they said they saw. Their meaning came out of their mouths, it was very neat. It shows once again the hubris of modern scientific methods; we tend to dismiss the aboriginal and the primitive. To turn it toward my own favorite subject, this was the state of modern medicine. Nobody would ask the native in the Amazon Basin, "What plants do you use for malaria, brain tumors, shrinkage?" and so on and so forth, because they were just dismissed as superstitious primitives. It was thought that the doctrine of signatures was operating. They didn't realize how subtle and how complete human knowledge systems grow under the care of those to whom it really matters.

The project of the redemption of spirit from matter turned into the project of redeeming the general society of the time toward a utopian vision. This is working right up to the present. Millenarianism is still with us. Marxism is the last great millenarian faith, the belief in the worker's state. It occupies the same relationship to these alchemical utopias as Heideggerian existentialism has to 2nd century Gnosticism. The poetry has gone, the baroque imagery has been stripped away, but the impulse is still toward a perfect society where, "From each according to his ability to each according to his needs." It lives on. Democracy is also an effort, let us not forget, to recapture the style of 5th century Athens. We forget that this was a city-state half of whose inhabitants were slaves, and yet we are so under the spell of the utopian dream that we continue, and not without important reason, to try to labor toward a just and decent world where the lion lies down with the lamb. That was and remains the alchemical dream.

Flashbacks of my life: I majored in history in college, and the first history teacher that I had was a wonderful old man who really, now that I look back on it, taught the history of ideas. My major was involved with politics and all of this kind of thing, and it's such a wonderful experience to suddenly get back to what turned me on to history. It gets me turned on and opens my mind again, looking at some of these thoughts that I'd just forgotten or suppressed, put down and said, "That's bullshit," as a traditionally trained scientist and so on. It opened my eyes to the fact that we can learn from what's gone on before. The ideas are out there, we just have to grasp them and apply them, and I am interested in how we make this more meaningful for the future.

I once, in one of these revelatory dialogues with the Logos, asked the question, "Why me? Why are you telling me this?" because I was a poor hippie, I was penniless, I was a traveler; and the answer was instantaneous. It was, "Because you don't believe in anything," and I think that that's a very pure position to hold. We're not trying to ensnare you to abandon your Jewishness or your Presbyterianism or belief. If you believe in something then you have precluded the possibility of believing in its opposite and you have hence limited your freedom. Everything is to be judged by its efficacy, by its effectiveness in the real world, and I think that I have a horror in all belief systems, I just don't like them. If somebody tells you that he has the answer, flee from this person, they are obviously some sort of low being who has not recognized the true size and dimension of the cosmos that we're living in. If you can keep yourself free of encumbering beliefs then your dialogue with the Logos can go forward unhindered.

Sometimes when I'm in the trance of psilocybin I will say to the entity, "Begin to show me yourself as you are for yourself. Don't give me the scaled-down, humanized version, show me your true nature," and after a few moments of this then I have to raise my hand and say, "Enough, I can't handle more than that." This goes back to the statement made yesterday or the day before about how the universe is not only stranger than we suppose, it's stranger than we can suppose; therefore we are given tremendous latitude in what we can think and what we conceive, but if you begin to believe in something then you are pulled down, because everything that you believe has consequences. A perfect example: as some of you may know, when Mohammed ascended into heaven from the site of what was to become the Mosque of Omar, from the site of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, he happened to be on horseback. Now if you believe that Mohammed ascended to heaven, imagine the theological and hermeneutic problems posed by the horse he was riding, because it went with him. This is a perfect example of how intellectual baggage drags us down, because belief always contains absurdity. The ontological status of this horse has troubled Islamic theologians for centuries. If they would just let go of the whole idea complex they would be liberated from this kind of minutia. Belief kills the spirit, spirit transcends belief.

Then someone asked about Bruno and Dee; since I suggested that you read *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* it's ironic that so little time was spent on Bruno. On the other hand, I recommended that you read the book,

so you should be well informed on Bruno. We just didn't get into that particular historical episode because I wanted to tell you about the Rosicrucian Enlightenment, but the thing to remember about Bruno is his discovery of the infinitude of the cosmos and that by an act of unencumbered observation — I mean, how many people had looked at the night sky before Bruno and had not seen what he saw, which was infinite space and suns hung like lamps unto the utmost extremes of infinity? By an act of pure cognition, he was able to destroy an entire cosmological vision that had limited and confined the human soul for millennia. That's half of his story. The other half is that he was burned at the stake for refusing to back down from this. It's a model for us all: trust your perception, trust your intuition and then accept the consequences, because this is what existential validity must be.

As far as the relationship between Dee and Bruno, the relationship is that they were both derivative of the magical school that can be traced back to Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, who was another model for Faust. Agrippa wrote *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres*, three books of occult philosophy, and that was the core work for European magic. All European magic can be traced back to the Agrippan system. Agrippa was the direct student of the Abbot Trithemius of Sponheim, who we mentioned yesterday as the source of all the magical codes of the Middle Ages. If you're interested in a brilliant but fictional treatment of John Dee and Giordano Bruno, I'd like to recommend a novel to you. It's called *Ægypt*. It's by John Crowley, the same gentleman who wrote *Little, Big*, which is a wonderful novel about the magical interface between two worlds. In his book *Ægypt*, fully half of the book is given over to a wonderfully rich retelling of the relationship between Bruno and Dee. Some people have wanted to say that Dee and Bruno actually crossed physical paths in London, but I've looked into it and they missed each other by about two weeks. Bruno was setting sail for England as Dee was setting sail for France and the Rosicrucian Enlightenment episode that I talked about.

Then someone asked about tantra and the contrast between the imaginative internalized invocation of the anima or the animus, depending on your own sexuality, and that contrasted with something which actually happens between two people. We didn't talk that much about the concept of the Chemical Wedding or the alchemical marriage, but this is the Western resonance to the Eastern idea of tantra and it is the idea that sexual energy, being the rawest and most accessible energy to the organism, can be channeled into a higher spirituality. It's entirely so, the problem is that of all paths this is probably fraught with the greatest difficulty because sexuality is such a debased coinage in the modern world. In other words, you have to make your way with great care and great purity of intent into this. In Eastern tantra that is actually practiced in this physical manner there is usually the admonition that you should have no attachment to your *tantrica*, that the relationship should be entirely given over to the technical details of this union, and of course it has to do with the forestalling of orgasm and the raising of energy within the organism.

In the Chemical Wedding, in the alchemical marriage, due honor is given to the importance and uniqueness of the other person. In other words, it isn't the

idea of the temple prostitute who serves as the vessel for this process, but there's actually an effort to keep individual identities and individual dignity in some sense together. The higher up the mountain you go the steeper it becomes, and when you begin to scale the heights of alchemical or tantric sexuality the fall back into the *nigredo* can be shocking indeed. That's just an admonition, it's not designed to scare you off, it's just to say that in an age as sexually obsessed as our own, you have to, as the *I Ching* says, "Inquire of the oracle once again if you have purity of intent."

Audience: Isn't there also a healing between the two?

Yes, it's a complete alchemical system and the energy is passed between. This is probably the highest completion that is possible. The ideal of romantic love was introduced into Europe in the 1100s and earlier at the Poitiers Court of Eleanor of Aquitaine by troubadours. Scholarship now reveals pretty convincingly that this troubadour tradition is an esoteric Sufi system. It also occurs in Indian teachers such as Chaitanya, the guy that the Hare Krishnas go back to. The radical teaching of Chaitanya was that you could achieve ecstasy not by sitting in yoga but by dancing and singing on street corners. It's now pretty clearly shown that the penetration of Sufi ideas into Bengal was happening at the same time that these Sufi ideas were coming across from North Africa and into Spain and Southern France. So it's a tremendously old and vital tradition, but you have to be very careful. The romantic impulse is a real double-edged sword. It has been ever since the early 19th century, because the rise of romanticism — as that term is normally understood, meaning the movements in art and literature of the early 19th century — was a response to the dehumanization that was going on at that time, the rise of industrialism and the further retreat into cities more massive than any that had ever been built before.

Audience: I wanted to add, the question was about healing, and I think there's a tremendous difference between the Indian and Tibetan tantric systems. All this practice in Taoism is in terms of single copulation and dual copulation. In the Taoist system, self-healing is of paramount importance before you can even consider dual copulation. Dual copulation is then begun, then again other considerations come in, but the Indian and Tibetan systems where *Dakinis* and various deities are invoked in the process of their alchemical union is really quite different from the Taoist system, which is devoid of belief in gods.

That's a good point. I talked yesterday about the alchemical stages; when you have reached the *albedo*, the final whitening of these processes, that final whitening is, from a higher perspective, a new *nigredo*, and you must always build and build again. So you have to be fairly confident that you have already realized a certain portion of yourself before you embark upon these tantric double experiments. A lot of tantric text reads as very vampirical; it's all about expelling the semen and then sucking it back in, and it's like an energy war. It turns into black magic. The losing partner in these deals is just left a withered

husk, and this is not a higher completion to be sought for.

Audience: You're correct. There are supposedly, whether they're myths or documented, stories about one Chinese empress who caused the deaths of more than a thousand men because of her vampirism, and it was sexual in nature.

Just a couple of other points here. The gentleman here who had nothing to comment reminded me, since we were talking about the Valentinian system this morning. My favorite archon, besides Sophia, who's so interesting because of the little story about how she made the universe, but the 12th archon in the Gnostic system is a unique entity. I don't know of another religious system that has this notion. The 12th archon in the Valentinian system is called the Watcher. That's all he does. He does not input into the system at all but is the witness, and somehow this creates a validating dimension that is very important. I just want to affirm that the Watcher is a very strong platform on which to stand. I mean, would that I could learn to keep my mouth shut; would that we all could. So the Watcher is a good archon to keep active on your inner altar.

If you extrapolate all that has been said here then you should see that — remember how I said that one view of alchemy was that the alchemist intervened in natural process in the role of a catalyst? For those of you who aren't chemists, a catalyst is something that causes a chemical reaction which is going on anyway to proceed at a faster rate, but the catalyst is not consumed in this process, it simply accelerates it. If we think of nature as a great alchemical furnace that continuously produces and brings forth wonders, then must it not be that humanity is the yeast of the Gaian alchemical rarefaction and that human history is the process of catalyzing the alchemical condensation? If we look back into nature, before the advent of speaking and writing human beings in the last 15,000 years, what we see are very leisurely processes. The speciation of a single plant from another can occupy fifty or sixty thousand years, it never happens more quickly than that; and the grinding down of glaciers from the poles, these are processes that take hundreds of thousands of years.

With the advent of human beings, an entirely new *ontos* of becoming is introduced into the entire cosmos — as far as we know, because we cannot verify that there are other self-reflecting beings in the universe — and this new *ontos* of becoming is what I call epigenetic, as opposed to genetic. All other change in the living world, in the world of *bios*, of *zoë*, occurs through genetic change, random modification of the genome which is then subject to random selection, but with the advent of speech and writing epigenetic processes become possible and time accelerates. One way of thinking about what is happening in this cosmos is that it is a gradual conquest of dimensionality by becoming or process, we hardly have a word inclusive enough.

The earliest forms of life were probably slimes on certain kinds of clays, self-replicating molecular systems, and then certain portions of this chemistry became light sensitive, and then there was the sense of the division of light and darkness which generated the notion of here and there on some tremendously

basic level within these early organisms. Once you have the concept of here and there, motility, the ability to move, the cilia that dot the surface of protozoans and stuff like this are elaborated and a new dimension enters the picture, the dimension of time, because notice that a journey from *here to there* is a journey from *now to then*. Then as more refined perceptual apparatus and more refined systems of moving animal bodies arose, a steady conquest of dimensionality occurred, the movement of animals onto the land and so forth.

Then with the advent of memory — and memory must be mediated by language except at a very crude, instinctual level — memory is a time binding function. It's a way of somehow taking the past and calling up its essential properties so that they are copresent with the given moment of experience. It's one thing at the level of the song and dance of preliterate peoples, but once you begin to chisel stone and write books then you're into the epigenetic domain in a big way. Once you cross the threshold into the world of electronic media, once you achieve powered flight, once you can hurl instruments outside of the solar system, these are time binding functions. The alchemical intent, recall, was to accelerate nature's intent toward perfection, and the alchemists all believed that nature was growing toward a state of unity and perfection, that given millions and millions of years everything would turn to gold, everything would find its way toward the Plotinian One.

Now we live in a world that appears to be on the brink of its own death or extinction, and the reason we make that assumption is because our bridges are burning behind us. We see no way back to the world of the hunting and gathering pastoralists of the high Paleolithic or the Saharan grasslands. We see no way back to the Gothic piety of a Europe with under 30 million people in it. Our bridges are burning, and our religions — Islam, Judaism, Christianity — the major Western religions persistently insist that we are caught in a tightening spiral of ever-increasing speed that is carrying us toward an unimaginable confrontation with something which they call God, the Second Coming, the messiah, you name it. As coolheaded a rationalist as Arnold Toynbee, when he sat down to write *A Study of History*, finally had to face the question, "What is history for?" and the best he could come up with is that history must be about the entry of God into the domain of three-dimensional space.

Well, we don't know what God is. Let's not call it God, let's call it the philosopher's stone, let's call it the Sophic Hydrolith, and I believe that the chaos of our world, the apocalyptic intuition that informs our religions and our dreams is because ahead of us in time, and now not that far ahead of us in time, is something which, taking a page from the mathematical concern called dynamics, we can call an attractor. The attractor lies ahead of us in time. Universal process is not driven by a downward cascade of Cartesian casuistry. That's the scientific notion and it leads to a universe of entropy and heat death millions of years in the future, but what we see around us is a continuing and accelerating complexification as human beings, machines, ecosystems, the solar system itself is beginning to knit itself into a tighter and tighter organization. I believe that alchemy provides the best metaphors for understanding this. Nature is the great alchemist *par excellence* and we, as its minions through history, are accelerating

the condensation of being toward the unimaginable so that in my system, my way of thinking, there's ultimately a symmetry break with ordinary history. I call it all kinds of different things, but here this morning: the transcendent Other.

The transcendent Other casts an enormous shadow across the lower-dimensional landscape of time. The stirring of the earliest life forms in the Devonian seas caught the call and every step that has been taken since then has been ever quicker toward the transcendental Other. It beckons us, and history is haunted by this thing. History is the shock wave of eschatology. History is a process that lasts, let's be generous, 25,000 years, the wink of an eye in geological time. In that 25,000 years religious rise and fall, governmental systems, teachers come and go, and there is a sense of being caught in a whirlpool that is spinning us toward fusion with the unimaginable. This is why the skies of Earth are haunted by flying saucers. They aren't coming from other solar systems, they are scintillas — remember this alchemical term, sparks — they are scintillas being thrown off from the alchemical quintessence which lies like a great attractor at the end of time. The purpose of science and *techne* and electronic media and information transfer and all of this stuff is to knit us together, to dissolve our boundaries and to bring us to a point of singularity where language fails, where we lean over meaning's edge and feel the dizziness of things unsaid.

This lies now, I believe, within our lifetimes. Within the lifetime of most of us this is actually going to break through. I'm like one of those people carrying a sign that says, "Repent, for the end is near." It's as nutty a position as you can possibly hold. That's why I suspect it has a reasonable chance of being dead on. That is the point of talking about alchemy and this melding, the production of the quintessence and all that. It is because we are a gnat's eyelash away from a full confrontation with the transcendent Other. Our dreams are haunted by it, our reveries are filled with it. If we take a psychedelic drug, it's revealed before us in all its splendor. This is the force that is pulling us inexorably toward completion.

I remember once in a psilocybin trance I expressed concern about the state of the world and the *nous* spoke, the Logos spoke, and it said, "No big deal, this is what it's like when a species prepares to depart for the stars." We are in the birth canal of a planetary birthing process, and as you know, if you come upon a birth in progress you would never dream that this is the culmination of a natural process. It looks like a catastrophe of some sort. There is moaning and groaning and screaming and thrashing and blood is being shed and there is a feeling that the walls are closing in, and yet it is scripted into each of us as a microcosmic reflection of the completion of human history — and not only human history — because we are simply the hands and eyes of all life, all process on this planet.

The Gnostics believe that the earth is like an egg and that a moment will come when the egg must be split asunder. I love to quote the Grateful Dead, "You can't go back and you can't stand still. If the thunder don't get you then the lightning will." That is what we are being funnelled toward, that is the message of alchemy. That is the quintessence and perfection of the human

enterprise, the biological enterprise. I like to recall the Irish toast, “May you be alive at the end of the world,” and we have a real crack at it. It’s not a pessimistic vision. It’s the most optimistic vision that one can suppose, and I think that’s where I’d like to leave it this morning.