

“Heaven in the World”: Can a Lost Tradition of Nature Reverence Reenchant Our Worldview?



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Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

— Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

Contemplate then the beautiful arrangement of the world and see that it is alive, and that all matter is full of life.

— Book 12, *Corpus Hermeticum*

Of proposed fixes for our ailing planet we have plenty. But have we the will to implement them in time as seas rise, storms intensify, and released methane seeps skyward?

The fix-it mentality so typical of Modernity's overemphasis on rational arguments and measurable outcomes overlooks a key fact of human history, and therefore of human nature: We seldom get behind a massive change in collective life unless a change of worldview accompanies it. Without values that stir the conscience, learnings that guide the mind, and inspirations that beckon the soul, plans for long-term change bring little prospect of widespread acceptance. Especially when what we need is not a quick fix or a judgmental scolding, but a renaissance of awakening to the crisis and possibility of our continuing specieshood on Earth.

An irony of our catastrophe is that white-coated proponents of materialism and mechanism joined forces with religious heresy-fighters four centuries ago to push underground a tradition that encouraged its initiants to feel loving, protective excitement for Earth, matter, and cosmos. These bullies on the left and the right shrank the lifeworld to a lifeless stage setting for all-important human affairs. But the setting is now collapsing.

As membership in traditional religion drops even while the technological assault on nature makes us sick, some of us have tried scraping together what's left of druidism, witchcraft, and other pagan traditions. Seekers have also tried appropriating indigenous practices, to the distress of those who grow up with them and fight hard to preserve them against further encroachment. Or we have tinkered with New Age methods, even when sold to us by dubious sources.

Can a long-suppressed wisdom tradition return to speak to us and illuminate our darkening day?

Egyptian Sunrise: The Dawn of the Hermetic Way

My initial education in depth psychology, the kind that studies how conscious and unconscious interact, lacked two important emphases relevant to this overview. The first is that ancient Greek philosophers praised by C. G. Jung and James Hillman either got deep training from philosophers in Egypt or were inspired by their ideas. The second is that alchemy as a wisdom path is a branch of technical Hermeticism that cannot be understood outside of that context.

What came to be called Hermeticism arose from the esoteric studies, rituals, and initiatory practices of Egyptian priests long before Alexander invaded Egypt in 332 BCE.

We know a few things about what these priests did. As keepers of spiritual lore, they led ceremonies that included chants of sacred vowel sounds, told and preserved sacred tales, watched the cycling stars and seasons, experimented with the chemistries of embalming and healing, crafted and polished statues of the gods, and embarked on soul journeys of consciousness: meditative excursions through which they met shining Atum ("Complete" or "Whole"), the primal divine presence beyond word, idea, or gender. Humanity arose from Atum's tears of joy.

The priests also understood the difference between a symbol and what it stood for. They depicted Atum as a serpent, but nobody thought the ultimate deity literally was one, or for that matter an

ape, lizard, lion, or scarab, let alone what John Steinbeck referred to in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* as a bearded interstellar dictator. Over time, Atum also shows up as Agathodaimon, the snaky power of place, wisdom, health, and good fortune. The ouroboros symbol of a snake eating its tail refers to Atum's timeless powers of self-creation and self-reflection.



Thoth.

A child of Agathodaimon and Amun, ibis-headed Thoth served as the magus of the Egyptian pantheon of cosmic powers. He brought writing and hieroglyphs, incantations and eloquence, science and calendars, and final judgment of the dead in the Duat, the underworld realm. His mate was Ma'at, bringer of cosmic order and balance. Although a messenger of the solar deity Ra, Thoth was strongly associated with the moon. He bridges what is normally seen as separated.

The Persians conquered Egypt in 525 BCE and brought Indians and Zoroastrians with them. This enriched the esoteric mixture, as did the eventual arrival of Jews and Greeks bringing their own deep lore and wisdom practices. Some of the newcomers sought out the Egyptian priests. In the mid-3rd century BCE, the Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya Dynasty of India sent a Buddhist mission to Egypt.

After Alexandria rose in 332 BCE on the ruins of Ra-Kedet ("Constructing"), a northern Egyptian building yard, overlapping groups of resident Egyptians, Jews, and Greeks began sharing tales of woe and disenchantment. Repeated conquests of Egypt; priestly greed and political corruption. Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE; royalty and priests turning YHWH into a moody super-king who punished the exiles as often as

succored them. Indifferent Greek gods silent while atheist playwrights turned them into parodies of benevolent powers. Who Up There looked out for human beings in peril here below?

When disaster came, where was God or the gods? Perhaps the real question, however, was: Where were human beings? Why did we expect any gods to look after us? Maybe we were here to look out for each other.

Although we cannot know the precise content of all these Alexandrian reflections, we know some of what the participants brought to the conversation. From the Egyptians, millennia of lore, contemplative methods, awe of world and cosmos, and self-reflection as a gateway to the ultimate. From the Jews, ethics of care and communal responsibility, a sense of the sacred unfolding in history, and mysticisms that coagulated much later into Kabbalah and other esoteric systems. From the Greeks, Neoplatonic speculation and strands of Orphism, a mystery tradition from the 6th century BCE, sparked when a Mongolian shaman named Arabis (or “Airwalker”) visited Greece and taught its early philosophers. Orphics emphasized the divinity of the soul, the value of ritual, and sacred passwords to answer and pass by underworld guardians. Persian angelology and a possible Buddhist influence thickened the mix.

The resulting alchemies coagulated on the one hand into what in Greek was called “the Way of Hermes,” a growth of the wisdom tree first flowering in Egyptian soil, and on the other into Gnosticism, its biblical branch. Whereas Gnosticism sought spiritual release from a fallen Creation, Hermeticism turned instead to appreciation of “the body of God.”

An Ibis Eye View of Hermeticism

To start with the name:

For reasons that appear below, some scholars refer to “hermetism” when speaking about its disciplines and literature as practiced and written before 1460 and to “hermeticism” for what comes after that year. In this essay I follow Antoine Faivre and others in calling them all “hermeticism.”

Around 430 BCE, the Greek historian Herodotus considered the figure of Thoth and made two problematic moves. The first was to try to assimilate him into the Greek pantheon. The second was to equate him with Hermes.

Trying to fathom a deity by studying their associated traits is rather like assuming that all men with beards are somehow similar underneath them. Zeus, for example, is commonly equated with Thor because both are bold and throw lightning. They are not otherwise like one another in role or character: Zeus is an aerial king, and Thor is a muscular hero. When Herodotus read accounts of Thoth’s association with eloquence, healing, and passage between worlds, he assumed Thoth to be like Hermes. Plutarch did too, later. But Thoth is actually a magician, and Hermes a trickster. These are altogether different roles, psychologies, and archetypes.



Hermes Trismegistus (“Thrice-Great”).

In Alexandria, “thrice-great” Thoth met Hermes, and from this amalgam emerged Hermes Trismegistus—who in spite of Herodotus and other Greek trait theorists was still a magician. “The Way of Hermes” is actually the magical way, the wizardly way, not the trickster way. (Another example of different deities under the same name is Brigid of Ireland, who starts out like assertive Athena and transforms into a quiet hearth presence like Hestia.)

The Way was not so much a particular school as an esoteric path of study, ritual, practice, and attainment. As with Gnosticism, the aim was *gnosis*: direct inner contact with the divine. The teaching was that the sacred Presence at the heart of everything also dwells in the depths of each of us. This Presence can be known. But where Gnosticism most values gnosis, the Way also values other forms of knowledge, including *technê* (artisanal, technical) and *epistemê* (theoretical, mathematical).

Gnostics sought transit through the *kenoma* (emptiness) of the sublunary world into the *pleroma* (fullness) of the celestial heights; hermeticists wanted to enjoy the trip. They replaced the dismal fall of humanity in Eden with the willing descent of the primal Human into Nature to achieve graceful effulgent expression. Joyful at how this blueprint for humanity had taken into itself the best attributes of the seven planetary governors, Nature embraced this heavenly form and gave it flesh. Forever after, when each of us enters the world and becomes a “magnum miraculum” according to the *Asclepius*, a being worthy of respect and honor, we repeat the incarnation by which spirit finds love in matter.

Hermeticists appreciated the beauty of the world, facing east for sunrise prayer and chants and south at sunset. Their chants included the heptagram: the Egyptian seven sacred vowels, each associated with one of the visible planets. According to Eusebius, the early bishop who wrote

Preparatio Evangelica, the chanters enacted this ritual at dawn to greet heaven on earth in seven directions:

Speaking to the rising sun, stretching out your hands to the left, say **A**. To the North, putting forward your right fist, say **E**. Then to the West, extending both hands before you, say **Ē**. To the South, holding both hands on your stomach, say **I**. To the Earth, bending over, touching the ends of your toes, say **O**. Looking into the air, having your hand on your heart, say **U**. Looking into the sky, having both hands on your head, say **Ō**.

They ate vegetarian meals together and thought of animals as enspirited kindred. Their primary ethic was to care for one another.

Some hermeticists practiced alchemy, not merely to turn lead into gold, but as a system of metaphoric wisdoms combined with herbal medicines and chemical experimentation.

Some also practiced astrology, which they considered preliminary to aligning one's life with the powers of the cosmos, a grand creation in which earth and sky were one. In Hellenistic times the stars (planets) were thought to determine one's fate, but followers of the Way considered them stations of learning on a path beyond fate to godlikeness. Hermeticists did not share this fatalism or the Gnostic bias that both planets and zodiacal constellations were oppressive, disempowering archons. They certainly could be, but a hermeticist who had passed through the death and rebirth of inward initiation received from these celestial (Jung would say: psychological) powers a celebratory Hymn of Regeneration. Planets and constellations then operated as interior dynamisms aiding rather than hindering the soul's ascent to the ultimate God while mortal feet remained in touch with loving nature. Grace bypassed predestination.

Initiants practiced the Way in Egypt up to the 4th century. The early alchemist Zosimos was familiar with their texts, and the dreams he recorded borrowed their imagery.

In his dreams, fantastic priestly characters were dismembered, burned, fermented, and reborn. Perhaps these images said something about the coming trials to be faced by Hermeticism and its practitioners.

The Hermetica

For a time, the early church allied itself with hermeticist heroes like Hermes Trismegistus. In 1460, for example, the monk Leonardo of Pistoia brought a Greek manuscript to Florence. Leonardo was an agent of the powerful and wealthy Cosimo de Medici. The manuscript was a codex (an early book with loose pages) of fourteen treatises attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. We now call it the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*CH* for short).

Cosimo asked Marsilio Ficino to translate the codex. Ficino took up the task believing the texts to have been written down in ancient Egypt. As a priest of the Renaissance, his agenda was to show that Christianity had been foreshadowed by not only the great Plato (reintroduced into Europe by Gemistus Pletho in 1438), but by Thrice-Great Hermes, an even older and wiser adept. Like Plutarch, Ficino believed in and wrote about a perennial line of spiritual teachings

passing through time but remaining more or less unchanged, whatever their language. The codex was retranslated and published in 1507.

The chapters of the text present various teachers (Poimandres, Hermes) giving instruction to learners: Tat, sometimes Hermes, and Asclepius, known in Egypt as Imhotep. The texts discourse upon the nature of reality, initiation into the spiritual life, living ethically, and other important matters.

The *CH* begins with a dialog between Poimandres (“mind of Ra”) and his student Hermes Trismegistus. Poimandres describes himself as *Nous*, normally translated “mind” or “intellect” but in a hermeticist context more accurately understood as “creative consciousness.” We share this ungendered quality, which no gods or angels possess, with the ultimate Source of all.

Poimandres/Nous shares a vision:

All had become light, a gentle and joyous light...I saw in my own Nous that the light was in innumerable powers, having become an infinite world....The earth and the water were separated from each other, as Nous willed, and the earth brought forth from herself what she possesses, four-footed animals, reptiles, beasts wild and tame.

Among the created are humans, “very beautiful,” whom the “Father” (“a Father beyond gender”) “loved as his own child...It was really his own form that God loved...”

The books generally describe the world of nature favorably:

When she (Nature) had seen the beauty which never satiates of him who had in himself all the energy of the powers and the form of God, she smiled with love, because she had seen the image of the most beautiful form of Man in the water and his shadow upon the earth.

As in the Upanishads of India, an emphasis falls on the sheer *delight* of conscious living.

In most of the Hermetica, the literature of the Way, that delight includes being fully embodied. We arrive here as en fleshed sexual beings. We should not succumb entirely to material pleasures, but neither should we ignore them. (In these texts, instructions to close the eyes, be silent, and “separate from the body” mean meditating, not trying to escape mortality.) Book 2 even affirms that the cosmos itself is a body, the body of God.



A depiction of the Big Bang. A cosmic trumpet?

Book 3 of the *CH* offers images that for contemporary readers might evoke the Big Bang: “A holy light was sent forth, and the elements from the watery substance [plasma] solidified under the earth.” At first, everything was fire, with the gods (powers of the cosmos) appearing as stars: “Each god sent forth by his own power what had been appointed to him. There came into being four-footed animals, reptiles, fish and fowl; all prolific seed, and herb and the shoot of every flower...” We are all made of star stuff. “The cosmos has its own sense and understanding” (Book 9).

It’s worth noting that Copernicus read from the *CH*, where the Sun is described as the center of things (“for Hermes Trismegistus it is the invisible god”) and Earth as in motion. “It would be absurd to suppose that this nurse of all beings should be immobile, she who gives birth to all things, for without movement it is impossible to give birth.” We are to “be the active witness of nature...For nature is also seated in God.” Just as the Qur’anic image of “signs” left by God in nature spurred Islamic science while inquiry languished in the European Dark Ages, so Hermetic praise of nature encouraged early scientific exploration.

Book 5 links continual and ongoing creation of everything by God with the power of human imagination:

If you wish to see Him, consider the sun, the course of the moon, the order of the stars...O that you could grow wings and fly up into the air, and that, poised between earth and heaven, you might see the firmness of earth, the liquidity of the sea, the course of the rivers and the free flow of the air, the piercing fire, the revolution of the stars, the swiftness of the heavenly movement encircling these things...This is the very order of the universe and this is the beauty of the order.

From Book 11:

Sense as one within yourself the entire creation: fire, water, the dry and the moist. Conceive yourself to be in all places at the same time: in earth, in the sea, in heaven; that you are not yet born, that you are within the womb, that you are young, old, dead; that you are beyond death. Conceive all things at once: times, places, actions, qualities and quantities; then you can understand God.

We can also see God through mortal beings “who are on earth and in the sea.” “In the cosmos not one dead thing has come to be, is, or will be... Therefore the cosmos must needs be a god also.” And what is God? “God is both around all and through all, he is activity and power...” (Book 12). Matter is God’s material nature.

Imagination, empathy, self-reflection, and service to each other: in engaging with these earnestly and consistently, we share in the glow of things divine. “Look up with the eyes of the heart” (Book 7). Through imagination we can do something even gods cannot:

Not one of the heavenly gods will leave the boundaries of heaven and come down to earth, but man ascends to heaven and measures it and he knows the high from the low, and he understands all the other things there exactly; and even more amazing, he ascends while not leaving the earth. So great is his range (Book 9).

To live is to be able to participate in a miracle ever in motion. To die is to be recycled back into the whole of it. “Consider the vast multitude of beings, both immortal and mortal and how between them the moon pursues her round. And all beings are full of soul” (Book 9).

In the same book: “Mankind is one.” The interconnection of everything, including what are normally thought of as opposites (e.g. higher and lower), provides a foundation for hermeticist ethics. How we act impacts everyone else, which is why Book 11 says, “Be not evil.” We are to act in accord with our real nature, for as Book 12 insists, “Humanity is akin to divinity.” That we fall short is on us. Book 14: “Just as the coppersmith does not make the copper green, or parents the dirt on their child’s body, so God does not create evil. We do.”

In addition to the *CH*, of which three more books were discovered after Ficino’s translations, the *Hermetica*, the total extant body of hermetic writings, includes excerpts gathered by 5th-century anthologist Johannes Stobaeus (including the *Kore Kosmou* or “Virgin of the World”), the *Asclepius* (or *Perfect Discourse*), three texts in the Nag Hammadi codices discovered in 1945, the Greek and Armenian *Definitions of Hermes to Asclepius* (one sentence of which shows up in the 1st-century *Gospel of Thomas*), and various fragments. Those are primarily philosophical writings; technical writings include alchemical literature from Zosimos onward, including the *Emerald Tablet* eventually translated by Sir Isaac Newton.

From Egypt, then, hermeticist teachings proliferated outward, crossing divisions of culture, nation, religion, and time through the collective action of what alchemy knew as two operations: *Proiectio*, when the Philosopher’s Stone begins to radiate, and *Multiplicatio*, when it makes more of itself as its influence extends into the world.

Hermeticism Suppressed and Revived

Even as Ficino crafted his translations, some in the church questioned what he did. He had to go out of his way to be clear that the esoteric operations he wrote about were “natural magic,” not the devilish kind. As Christian scholars read deeper into the Hermetica, they realized that references to “Son of God” actually meant a lower demiurge-creator, and that “Logos” referred to something deeper than “Word.”

Augustine, who thought the Creation fallen, had accused prior hermeticists of being full of demons. The real issue was not creed, but rivalry. In time, more and more among influential Christian leaders saw Hermeticism as a religious and political competitor. A competitor whose members loved the world, enjoyed science, watched the stars, welcomed and studied with women, regarded God as ungendered and abundant, ate no meat, recognized no authoritarian priesthood, paid no tithes or indulgences, proved uninterested in being foot soldiers for empires, believed everyone equal before God, and tried to live what they learned and taught. Imagine that.

One of them was Giordano Bruno. After supporting Copernicus, writing about Nous, and expressing a belief in life on other worlds, he was burned at the stake in 1600 in Rome.



An alchemical vessel in which “opposites” mix.

Even so, churchly campaigns against the hermeticists remained uneven, even after alchemy was banned in many Christian countries. However, as religious influence waned, followers of the Way faced a more formidable and unforgiving foe: the Modernity mentality of mechanism, otherwise known as the materialist worldview.

Although Rene Descartes is often singled out for de-souling the world and reducing living presences to objects and coordinates, he merely gave philosophical expression to a trend that included much more strident voices. One was Galileo, who insisted that science deal only with what could be quantified. Another was Marin Mersenne, who took it upon himself to wage literary war against magicians and visionaries, hermeticists in particular. He was soon joined by Pierre Gassendi. Materialist intellectuals had aligned themselves with religious believers against a world-affirming Way.

In 1614, Swiss Calvinist Isaac Casaubon blew up a long-standing belief in the hoary age of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by demonstrating a more realistic date and place of composition: 1st-3rd century Alexandria. There was truth in this, but also misunderstanding. The documents were not forged, but pseudepigraphic: a customary practice of the day, whereby anonymous authors signed off as Hermes or Asclepius. The four Gospels are an example, written centuries after Mark and the others had lived. Literalism again, against which the hermeticists and Gnostics both warned.

Furthermore, Casaubon failed to acknowledge the *CH* as the relatively late product of a long oral tradition of lore and practice. Many parallels to teachings and events in ancient Egyptian wisdom literature show up in the *CH*. (Evidence at the temple in Esna suggests Egyptian religion to have been vital through at least the second century CE.) Astrological hermeticism circulated in the second and first centuries BCE. Other parts of the *Hermetica* might reach back to the 6th century BCE.

But even the “Enlightenment” could not permanently darken Hermeticism. It flowed on, often underground, its works translated into a variety of languages around the world. Alchemists wrote, painted, left woodcuts and books of recipes. German and French Romantic poets praised the spiritual in the natural and the everyday. Depth psychology benefited from C. G. Jung’s studies of Hermeticism and Gnosticism. If not a literal perennial philosophy, Hermetic thought and practice and even art meandered forward through time in a “silver chain” of awakenings here and there.

As Jung pointed out, every tradition casts a shadow. Hermeticism found itself occulted by the hoax of Rosicrucianism, the machinations of Freemasonry, the flagrant con-artistry of early theosophy and its mutant offshoots. Spurned by rationalists, neglected by academics, Western esotericism fell into the hands of unscrupulous salesman eager to trade apparent magic for hard cash.

One year after Jung’s 1944 publication of *Psychology and Alchemy*, the lost codices recovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt revealed to the world a treasury of Gnostic writings. Among them nestled

a copy of the Hermetic *Asclepius* and *The Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*, a text not seen for centuries. Hermes Trismegistus had spoken once again.

Recognize the spirit within us,
for from you the cosmos received soul...

Hermeticism as Terragnosis

We have here a lost wisdom tradition of ecological affirmation, psychological depth, cosmological spaciousness, literary beauty, cultural diversity, and deep appreciative practice. Beginning in ancient Egypt, it forms the core strand of a Silver Chain that reaches through the West as well, gathering imaginings and insights along the way. It holds matter as animate, animals as kin, and humans as imaginative participants in a vast network of intricate relations. It offers contemplative possibilities, encouragement of science, and ethical trans-species imperatives. It keeps its feet on the ground while gazing up at the luminous heavens.

A wisdom tradition and worldview that reenchants everyone would be too much to expect. How might the argent glow of Hermeticism light the time for those who feel drawn to the way of the magus and identify as seekers after gnosis?

Here is a modest sampler of initial suggestions for “dreaming the myth onward,” as Jung put it in another context, and fashioning a contemporary, Earth-honoring, cosmically fascinated Hermeticism:

- Let go of the gendered language. The hermeticists used terms like “father” and “son” metaphorically rather than literally, but feminism has taught us that even as metaphors, gendered words matter. We can be more inclusive, and the imagery and mythology of Hermeticism tends to melt unworkable binaries.
- Promote social justice, equity, and diversity, a program of fairness and compassion inherent to both Hermeticism’s ethical conduct code and its delight in earthly and cosmic variation.
- Support animal rights. The original hermeticists were vegetarians. Today, given the cruelty to animals and ecological destruction behind the mass production of dairy, they would undoubtedly be vegan.
- Clarify the distinction between science, a set of exploratory and verificational skills and disciplines, and scientism, the absolutist ideology that only what we can measure counts as knowledge. Hermeticism supports the first but opposes the second.
- Continue the hermeticist refusal to split Earth and sky. It’s all nature. At the same time, though, the nature “down” here on Earth is in urgent peril, as are we. Because humans are both material and spiritual, we are responsible for tending not only heavenly but earthly matters too. Earth reverence must fortify Earth protection, and the sooner the better.
- Lead with wonder. Shaming people for not doing what we want them to do arouses resentment and opposition. Hermeticism’s inward turn encourages us to manage our

anger instead of self-righteously splashing others with it and expecting them to somehow get the message.

- Accent the hermeticist emphasis on appreciation, beauty, and mystery while leaving behind the religiously regressive demand for belief in a literal deity. Gnosis is not about belief, but about presence, experience, and active faith that the cosmos intelligently self-organizes. A good many people who consider themselves atheist or agnostic enjoy deeply spiritual states of consciousness but don't always feel welcome saying so. Perhaps a post-belief path would help.
- Tend astrological and other symbols as metaphors, not as facts. From the hermeticist perspective, astrology involves relationships too complex to be served by either literalism (e.g., Mars makes us angry) or fatalism, both subverted by the conviction that astrology has no power over one's relationship to Nous. Astrology can be tended much more imaginatively than by degrading it to fortune-telling. The same for magic.
- Reimagine animism as animate presence. When hermeticists say the world is ensouled and matter intelligent, they don't mean that rocks think. What they describe is an experiential truth available to anyone willing to play with the transition from a world of dead objects to one of presences interacting with us continually. Animism is usually considered a worldview of uninvaded indigenous communities, but it has a long tradition in the West as well.
- Develop a capacity for disidentifying with archetypes. In *The Religious Function of the Psyche*, Lionel Corbett uses "transarchetypal" to mean free states of consciousness undominated by particular "gods" (to use James Hillman's terminology). Hermeticism and Gnosticism both diagnose states of archetypal possession as having fallen under the sway of archontic (extra-human) forces. Seeing the Saturn or Mercury or any other archetype at work in one's mood, value, or viewpoint sublates their intensity. Inner liberation is one reason for cultivating gnosis of undomesticatable Nous.
- Trace Hermeticism's influences in contemporary culture, including fiction and fantasy. Sometimes the influences are unconscious. I doubt anyone deliberately pulled "Nothing unreal exists" from the *CH* and placed it in the mouth of a Vulcan philosopher in the universe of Star Trek, but the statement is still hermeticist. So is the idea of IDIC: Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations.
- Tell the tales onward. Although the literature of classical hermeticism is quite large if we count alchemical texts and art from the Middle East and elsewhere, we know a lot has vanished, leaving gaps in our understanding. That need not deter us. What remains can inspire us to new storytelling and ritual, art and music, theater and thought, through access to all-creative Nous.

All of these show up, by the way, in terrapsychology, a growing field of studies, ideas, and practices for reimagining and restorying how deeply and intimately our psychological life is involved with our surroundings, whether human or other than human. We tend how the world gets into the heart and how the heart reflects the world. Perhaps we might think of spiritually informed terrapsychology as terragnosis, a contemporary link in the Silver Chain of hermeticist continuity of wisdom sought in a world ensouled.

Can we redesign and transform enough not only to save ourselves, but to visualize and assemble the kind of just and Earth-honoring society—not unattainably perfect, but hopefully sustaining—that we most desire and dream of? Why not at least try for what the *CH* referred to as “heaven in the world”?

Whatever direction it flows in next, we can expect hermeticism to retain and develop its mood of gratitude for Earth, for each other, and for a cosmos in which all beings deserve the chance to awaken in accord with their nature. As the *Asclepius* expresses it so well as a prayer,

We ask only this:
That you wish us to persist in the love of your knowledge
And that we never be cut off from such a life as this.

