

Humankind as a Microcosm of the Macrocosm
Before the Anthropocentric Turn

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Then God said, “Let us make humans¹ in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth² and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”
Genesis 1:26

It was not always this way—this, the current state of modernity where humankind seems abstractedly isolated from the macrocosm of created nature, the heavens, and the divine. It is ironic that the anthropocentric turn that led to our current state of modernity was given impetus by a new form of visioning and ordering of the cosmos—the very cosmos that for millennia had been relied upon for prophesy and discernment of man’s destiny. Those ancient heavenly accountings extend back to 12th century BCE Babylonian star catalogs³, to key landmarks, like the Giza Pyramid in Egypt (2650 BCE) aligned with the then-pole-star Thuban⁴ where the flooding of the Nile was predicted by looking for the rise of Sirius⁵, and to celestial observatories, like the one discovered at the ruins of Taosi, a Longshan tribal settlement in China dating back to 2300 BCE⁶.

This new vision of the heavenly ordering—the heliocentric finding revealed by Copernicus (1543), enhanced by Kepler, and taken up by Galileo—reverberates through our minds, hearts, and souls to this day. The initiatory fissure begun by Copernicus’s discovery took years to deepen and widen—somewhat innocuously, and much in sway of the triumphal charge

¹ Hebrew - “adam”

² Hebrew - “ and over all the earth”

³ “Wikipedia: Babylonian Star Catalogs,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified August 25, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_star_catalogues#cite_note-1.

⁴ “Wikipedia: Great pyramid of Giza,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified December 9, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza.

⁵ Fred Wendorf and Romuald Schild, *Holocene Settlement of the Egyptian Sahara: Volume 1, The Archaeology of Nabta Playa* (New York: Springer, 2001), 500.

⁶ Li Feng, *Early China: A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 33.

of progress. Before humankind even realized it, it had divorced itself from the garden and taken charge as being above and beyond its lush organic environment.

Although Genesis 1:26 suggests an anthropocentric vision of a Christian God, such was not the intent when Genesis was scribed in the mid- to late- 8th century BCE.⁷ In ancient Israel, mankind⁸ may have been given dominion over the fishes, birds, and cattle, but he was still considered part of the nature fold, each species or kind having its own distinct vocation.⁹ Mankind was still a part of nature, not separate from it. Man was a creation of God, in the image of God, and as such was himself a microcosm of the macrocosm.

In ancient Greece, the whole of the cosmos was alive and imbued with what was considered the *psyché kosmos*, *anima mundi*, or world soul. It was first discussed in Plato's *Timaeus*, written in 360 BCE:

Thus, then, in accordance with the likely account, we must declare that this Cosmos has verily come into existence as a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason owing to the providence of God. ... He constructed it as a Living Creature, one and visible, containing within itself all the living creatures which are by nature akin to itself.¹⁰

Aristotle, for his part, believed that knowing was the domain of the world-soul which infiltrated all things. There was no individual knowledge, no “subjective locus of knowing,” and

⁷ Robert Bellah, *Religion in Human Evolution* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press: 2011), 308.

⁸ Note: “Mankind” versus “humankind” is used often in this paper since at the time of many of its sources the male gender was the common shorthand for humans in general.

⁹ Elizabeth Theokritoff, “The Vision of St. Maximus the Confessor: That Creation May All Be One,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology*, ed. John Hart (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2017), 225.

¹⁰ Plato, “*Timaeus*,” in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 9, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1925), 30, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0180:text=Tim.:page=30>.

no objective standard of knowledge.¹¹ The existence of individual consciousness was not even considered until the late 17th century. For the ancient Greeks, theories did not need to have practical application; there was only sought-after equanimity in consideration of that which was unknown. As Anderson Weekes explains in his essay about the history of consciousness:

What seems to make all the difference between modern and Hellenistic outlooks is, therefore, a very different distribution of theory and practice. ...the epistemological crisis at the focus of Hellenistic philosophy was almost entirely theoretical, while the remedy sought was essentially practical—cultivating equanimity and peace of mind in the face of unanswered questions.¹²

Galileo (1564-1642), in furtherance of the breach put in motion by Copernicus, was intent upon propagating a new type of reason that focused, not upon divination of the stars and planets, but on measurement and spatial relationships between them. In *The Assayer* he writes:

Philosophy is written in this grand book – I mean the universe – which stands continually open to our gaze, but it cannot be understood unless one first learns to comprehend the language and interpret the characters in which it is written. It is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures, without which it is humanly impossible to comprehend a single word of it... without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.... nature takes no delight in poetry.¹³

René Descartes (1596-1650), a younger contemporary of Galileo, who came of age in the early 17th century, was desperate to devise criteria for certainty in knowledge and the achievement of stability in the intellectual world.¹⁴ He had inherited the unsettled chaos of the

¹¹ Anderson Weekes, “Consciousness as a Topic of Investigation in Western Thought,” in *Process Approaches to Consciousness in Psychology, Neuroscience, and Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Michel Weber and Anderson Weekes (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 91 & 99.

¹² Weekes, “Consciousness as a Topic,” 101.

¹³ Galileo Galilei, *The Assayer* (1623), trans. Stillman Drake, Stanford University, accessed November 27, 2024 at <https://web.stanford.edu/~jsabol/certainty/readings/Galileo-Assayer.pdf>.

¹⁴ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 194.

16th century *episteme* — a time rich in hermeticism and resemblances¹⁵, skepticism ignited by the discovery of the Hellenistic writer *Sextus Empiricus* and the translated dissemination of his thoughts by Michel de Montaigne in 1580¹⁶, and social uncertainty due to the Reformation (1543-1687), and its challenge to the pope’s authority.

Hans Jonas in his poignant essay, “Seventeenth Century and After: The Meaning of the Scientific and Technological Revolution,” underscores the Scientific revolution’s multivalent nature that brings flourish to the reductionistic way in which it is often viewed. According to Jonas, the discovery of the earth moving about the sun instigated questions about: 1) religious biblical truth; 2) circles as indicative of God’s perfection; 3) nature being poetic, inherently alive, and as a doorway to *knowing* God; 4) hermeticism¹⁷ as a valid source for explaining the world; 5) magic (either black or white) as a parallel truth to erudition; 6) objective standards for discerning truth; 7) God (the Church) as the final arbiter of truth; 8) the connection between body and soul; 9) the providential disposition of the planets; 10) plants and nature in general having teleological purpose; and 11) the wisdom of the ancients in light of newness, novelty, and progress.

Descartes’ philosophical project, along with those of fellow French Machinists, strove against “naturalism, vitalism, and animistic magic”; replaced the sense of world spirit and soul with a mechanical “corpuscular ether”; and in reaction to secret sects, such as the Rosicrucians,

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge Classics, 2001), 33.

¹⁶ Weekes, “Consciousness as a Topic,” 91-92.

¹⁷ Note: Hermeticism refers to a mix of traditions brought together by the rediscovery of the Hermetic writings in the Renaissance and include alchemy, magic, Neoplatonism, mysticism, Rosicrucianism and other esoteric traditions. Hermetism refers to the philosophical schools of late antiquity that produced the *Corpus Hermeticum* and other related texts.

did away with any sense of individual passion and religious interpretation in favor of “self-control, temperance, reasonable judgment, and sovereign law.”¹⁸

Descartes turned to mathematics, like Galileo, as the key to understanding. “God sets up mathematical laws in nature as a king sets up laws in his kingdom,”¹⁹ he wrote to fellow machinist, Mersenne, in 1630. His was a rational, quantitative approach of numbers, measurement, and ratios by which reality could be pinned down and visualized. It is no coincidence that his *Discourse on the Method* and *Geometry* manuscripts were both published in the same year (1637). In his now-famous discourse, he asserts two notions of duality: the distinction between mind and body, and the distinction between humans/the human mind and all of nature.

However, prior to this mind-body/human-nature split engendered by the scientific revolution and subsequent Enlightenment, nature was a book upon which the mystery and beauty of life could be contemplated, and which also provided a path to divine transcendence. Every living thing that was below on Earth was a microcosm of the heavenly abode above. Figure 1. provides a chronology of classical antiquity and medieval theologians and scholars who influenced the mystical contemplation of nature.

Plutarch (45-120 CE), a Platonist who believed that the human soul was but a derivation from the world soul²⁰, spread the word through his espousal of two ancient Egyptian religious

¹⁸ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 195.

¹⁹ René Descartes, "Lettre a Mersenne," April 15, 1630, *Oeuvres*, vol. I, 145, quoted in Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 205.

²⁰ “Plutarch,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified on December 5, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plutarch/>.

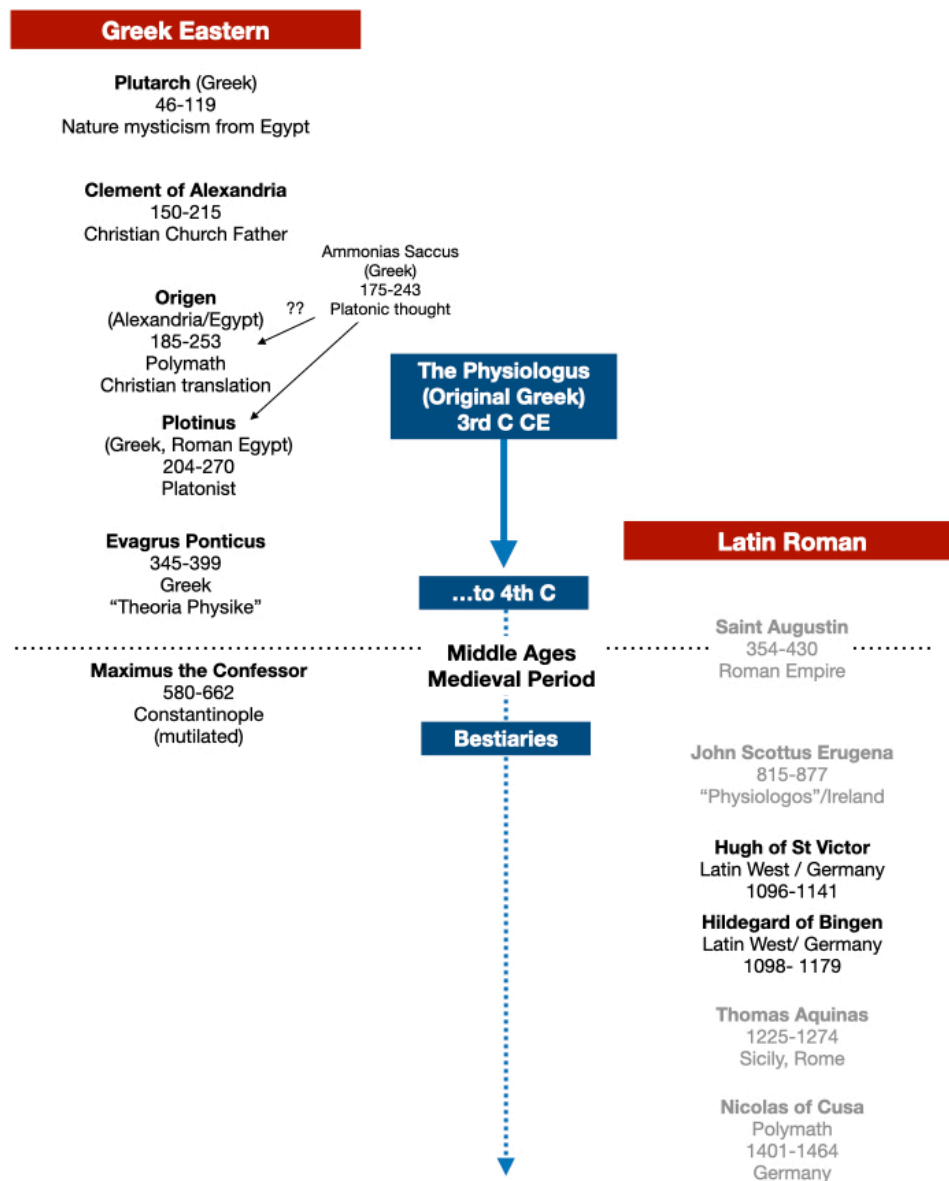


Figure 1. Classical Antiquity and Medieval Chronology

themes that relate to the sacredness of *everything below the heavens* that included man and nature.

First, is the microcosm-macrocosm theme of the relation between heaven and earth.

Plutarch writes in *Isis and Osiris*:

Osiris has a name made up from "holy" (hosision) and "sacred" (hieron); for he is the combined relation of the things in the heavens and in the lower world, the former of

which it was customary for people of olden time to call sacred and the latter to call holy. But the relation which discloses the things in the heavens and belongs to the things which tend upward is sometimes named Anubis and sometimes Hermanubis as belonging in part to the things above and in part to the things below.²¹

Second, is the notion that all living creatures on earth are filled with the universal *Intelligence* which guides and moves through the entirety of the cosmos.²² In *Isis and Osiris*, he recounts how among the Egyptians, animals are often connected with the Gods themselves, or that certain Gods have the traits of particular animals:

The crocodile, certainly, has acquired honour which is not devoid of a plausible reason, but he is declared to be a living representation of God, since he is the only creature without a tongue; for the Divine Word has no need of a voice...²³

Such Egyptian religious ideas pervaded the ancient Greco-Roman world. Origen (185-253), a Christian scholar and theologian born sixty-five years after Plutarch's death, captures the microcosm-macrocosm theme, but now within a Christian context. He sees "heavenly patterns" as extending throughout all of nature, even in something as small as the mustard seed.²⁴ For Origen, the heavenly kingdom is found in all things no matter the scale: the mustard seed, plants, and animals. He posited that "though they [plants, animals] do serve the bodily needs of men, yet they also have the shapes and likenesses of incorporate things; and thus,

²¹ Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," in *Plutarch Moralia*, Volume 5, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 145.

²² Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," 179-181.

²³ Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," 173.

²⁴ "And perhaps, even as God made man to His own image and likeness, so also did He create the other creatures after the likeness of some other heavenly patterns. And perhaps the correspondence the between all things on earth and their celestial prototypes goes so far, that even the grain of mustard seed, ... which is the least of all seeds, has something in heaven whose image and likeness it bears; ... the likeness that it bears is not merely that of some heavenly pattern, but of the kingdom of heaven itself." Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, edited by R.P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 219.

by them the soul may be instructed and taught how to contemplate those other things that are invisible and heavenly.²⁵

Plotinus (204-270), a younger contemporary of Origen, both of whom may have been students of the Neoplatonist Ammonius Saccus (175-243), felt that there was a universal plan that was not necessarily pre-deterministic, and could be swayed qualitatively “for the worse” or “for the better.” However, he felt that the body of man, the sounding board for his soul, might have been given in a sub-par form in which attuning it “for the better” might be difficult:

It is like a lyre that has not been constructed in such a way that it can receive precise attunement for the rendering of musical sounds.²⁶

Nonetheless, the contemplation of Nature with its hidden, microcosmos of the macrocosmos sense was viewed as a vehicle for reckoning such shortfalls to enable sonorous soundings of the soul. As Origen concludes in his commentary on the *Song of Songs*:

Paul the apostle teaches us that the invisible things of God are understood by means of things that are visible, and that the things that are not seen are beheld through their relationship and likeness to things seen. He thus shows that this visible world teaches us about that which is invisible, and that this earthly scene contains certain patterns of things heavenly. Thus it is to be possible for us to mount up from things below to things above, and to perceive and understand from the things we see on earth the things that belong to heaven. On the pattern of these the Creator gave to His creatures on earth a likeness to these, so that thus their great diversity might be more easily deduced and understood.²⁷

From such inspiration, the *Physiologus* came into being. Its interlacing of theology with the nature of animals through metaphor provided a very early form of Nature contemplation for

²⁵ Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, ed. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1957), 220.

²⁶ Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., “On Whether the Stars Are Causes,” *Chapter in Plotinus: The Enneads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 158.

²⁷ Origen, *The Song of Songs*, 218

religious adepts as well as the general populace. Its author is unknown, but it is believed to have been scribed as early as the third century—slightly later than the time that Origen was referring to the hidden aspects of the divine revealed through contemplation of the visible forms of nature. German scholar, Max Wellman (1863-1933), who studied the manuscript prodigiously, found early uses of the *Physiologus* in the writings of Rufinus of Quileia (344-411), Saint Ambrose of Milan (339-397), and Pseudo-Eustathius (375-500), and thus places its origin between 255 and 370 CE.²⁸ From the original Greek in which it was written, it was translated into a host of other languages, including Ethiopian, Armenian, Syrian, Arabic, Latin, Russian, Flemish, Provençal, Old English, Middle English, Icelandic, and others.²⁹ Further, its use spanned centuries. E. P. Evans concludes that “no book except the Bible has ever been so widely distributed among so many people and for so many centuries as the *Physiologus*”³⁰. It was highly influential, and as Charles Jossierand notes, is seen in the works of Dante (1265-1321), Cervantes (1547-1616), and Shakespeare (1564-1616).³¹

The *Physiologus* consists of fifty-one sections each of which has a natural-fantastical description of a plant, animal, or mineral that is coupled with an opening scripture from the Old Testament and closes with one from the New Testament. There is a moral (or perhaps several morals) to be drawn from and contemplated with each reading. It seems written to evoke

²⁸ Charles Jossierand, “Max Wellman: Der Physiologus, Eine religionsgeschicht-naturwissenschaftliche Untersuchung,” in *Philologus, Supplementband XXII*, in *L'antiquité classique* 2, no. 1 (1933): 239, https://www.persee.fr/doc/antiq_0770-2817_1933_num_2_1_2976_t1_0239_0000_2.

²⁹ Mary Allyson Armistead, “The Middle English Physiologus: A Critical Translation and Commentary” (MA diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University, 2001), 5, <https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/items/358910bd-adee-44e3-bc48-22471208de53>.

³⁰ E.P. Evans, *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Art* (New York: Harry Holt, 1896), 62.

³¹ Jossierand, “Max Wellman,” 239.

conversation and interpretation shared around a fire, rather than to deliver a finite religious maxim proclaimed by a priest from a high pulpit. For example, the entry about the lion seems to speak both to the omnipresence of Christ and the omnipotence of God:

Jacob, blessing his son Judah, said, "Judah is a lion's whelp" [Genesis. 49: 9]. Physiologus, who wrote about the nature of these words, said that the lion has three natures. His first nature is that when he walks following a scent in the mountains, and the odor of a hunter reaches him, he covers his tracks with his tail wherever he has walked so that the hunter may not follow them and find his den and capture him. Thus also, our Savior, the spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David [cf. Revelation. 5: 5], having been sent down by his coeternal Father, hid his intelligible tracks (that is, his divine nature) from the unbelieving Jews...

The second nature of the lion is that, although he has fallen asleep, his eyes keep watch for him, for they remain open. In the Song of Songs the betrothed bears witness, saying, "I sleep, but my heart is awake" [5. of S. 5: 2].

The third nature of the lion is that, when the lioness has given birth to her whelp, she brings it forth dead. And she guards it for three days until its sire arrives on the third day and, breathing into its face on the third day, he awakens it. Thus did the almighty Father of all awaken from the dead on the third day the firstborn of every creature [cf. Colossians 1: 15].³²

The richness of this entry through metaphor, analogy, chapter and verse defies rational analysis and begs for interpretations of its meaning. There is the analogy of Christ as a spiritual lion. The metaphor of the lion's keen sensing and all-knowing nature being able to hide its tracks, just as Christ hid his divine nature from unbelieving Jews. And the third lion nature, in alignment with Christ's third day resurrection through the breath of God, suggests God's omnipotence and the Christ-like presence found in every creature. The breath of the lioness, perhaps also interpreted also as the holy spirit, gives her whelp, and by extension, *everything* life.

³² *Physiologus*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3-4.



Figure 2. Illustration from the Rochester Bestiary (late 1200s)

The *Physiologus* through its numerous translations and editions gradually morphed into the bestiary form, a manuscript that was especially well-liked due to its illustrations of animals (See Figure 2.). These bestiaries also included more chapters than the *Physiologus* about mammals, fish, birds, and even fictitious animals, as well as information taken from Isidore of Seville's (560-636) encyclopedic *Etymologiae*.³³

For Origen and the theologians who followed, the scriptures had multiple layers of meaning and interpretation. The hermeneutics of scripture were equally spiritual, intellectual, and contemplative. Thus, the Bible was read and interpreted literally, topologically, allegorically, and anagogically. The topological sense pertained to its moral lessons; the allegorical, to its prefiguring of God's future plans and unfolding purpose; and the anagogical, to its mystical and divine sacred secrets.³⁴

This tradition reached a high degree of beauty and sophistication by the 12th century in the Latin Roman realm through the writings of theologian and scholar Hugh of Saint Victor, and theologian, musician, and prophetic visionary, Hildegard of Bingen. Hugh of Saint Victor was born in 1096 in the Duchy of Saxony, a region in present-day Germany. He died in 1141 at the

³³ Armistead, "The Middle English Physiologus," 7.

³⁴ Jacob Sherman, "Reading Nature Mystically and Allegorically: Early Christian Sources," PCC Course Lecture, San Francisco, September 6, 2024, 40 min., 32 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xu5esEPnGu0>.

Abbey of Saint Victor outside of Paris where he had lived most of his adult life.³⁵ His much-celebrated contemporary, Hildegard of Bingen, was born two years later in 1098 in Bermersheim, Rheinhessen, also in Germany, at that time part of the Holy Roman Empire. She died in 1179 at the St. Rupertsberg monastery, that she founded in 1150, near present-day Mainz, Germany.³⁶

In accordance with the contemplative hermeneutics of Origen, as well as the man and nature microcosm-of-the-macrocosm perspective, Hugh of Saint Victor originated and taught using a very specific educational process. His students were trained to study the visible world around them, like a veritable book of learning, to come to know themselves, and subsequently to gain knowledge of that which is invisible and of the divine realm—the larger, cosmic view. Thus, his pedagogy unfolded through a belief in this microcosm-macrocosm connection. First, one learned to “see” the multitudinous facets of nature, i.e., God’s creations. Through such study one came to know oneself. And finally, through that self-knowing, one was opened to knowledge of the eternal, omnipresent nature of God. He delineated this process in *De tribus diebus—On the Three Days*:

Since the Apostle says that through visible things in the world the invisible things in God are manifested, it is necessary that whoever desires to attain knowledge of invisible things through visible ones must first be familiar with those visible things.³⁷

and...

³⁵ “Wikipedia: Hugh of Saint Victor,” Wikimedia Foundation, last modified June 23, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_of_Saint_Victor.

³⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Readings*, trans. Mark Atherton (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 1i-1v.

³⁷ Hugh of Saint Victor, *De tribus diebus—On the Three Days*, trans. Hugh Feiss OSB. Edition Unknown. (Facsimile reproduction used), 75.

Therefore, the first and principal representation of uncreated wisdom is created wisdom, that is, the rational creature, which because in one aspect it is visible and in another invisible, becomes a door and path of contemplation. It is a door insofar as it is visible; it is a path insofar as it is invisible. It is a door because for the one entering into contemplation it offers a first access. It is a path because it leads the mind that is hastening along in contemplation to its goal. It is a door because in some fashion it shows invisible things visibly. It is a path because it leads those going from the visible through the invisible to see the one who is Creator equally of the visible and the invisible.... Therefore, the door to contemplation opens for one who, under the guidance of his reason, enters to know himself.³⁸

While Hugh of Saint Victor took a more pedagogic, though also deeply theological and philosophical approach, Hildegard of Bergen shared this microcosm-macrocosm notion through her visions that were accompanied by multi-layered interpretations intoned as she was experiencing them. In addition, she provided magnificent illustrations of the visions to aid the understanding of the people who read or heard them read.

Hildegard of Bingen, also referred to as the Sibyl of the Rhine, had her first vision at age three. Although the visions continued throughout her early and mid-life years, it wasn't until 1141, when she was forty-three years old, that she had a particularly apocryphal one when she was told to begin sharing all that she saw and heard:

Oh human, who receives these things meant to manifest what is hidden not in the disquiet of deception, but in the purity of simplicity, write, therefore, the things you see and hear."³⁹

³⁸ Hugh of Saint Victor, *De tribes diebus*, 77.

³⁹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columbia Hart and Jane Bishop (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), 60.

She was reluctant to comply, but after she began to have physical ailments from keeping her visions to herself and resisting this council, she finally succumbed and began to write them down.

Scivias, her first book completed in 1151 or 1152, is divided into three parts, and includes a total of twenty-six visions (six in Part I; seven, Part II; and thirteen, Part III). In the third vision of Part I, the nature of the universe was revealed, with a symbolic representation of mankind at its center (Figure 3.) The egg shape of the cosmos, she was told, depicted humanity's unfolding.



Figure 3. *Scivias* I, Vision 3

At the top, the shape was narrow due to the simplicity and unknowingness of human activity; in the middle, it widened from the spreading of the Old and New Testaments; and finally, at the bottom, it narrowed once again as humans came to their end of days and experienced numerous

troubles. At the center of the visionary image was a sandy ball, which she was told signified humankind made from the clay of the earth.⁴⁰

Like the teachings of Hugh of Saint Victor, this vision announced how it is that “invisible and eternal things are made known through visible and temporal things,”⁴¹ an articulation of the microcosm-macrocosm theme:

God, who created all things in his will, made them so that his name would be known and honored. Through his creation he not only makes known visible and temporal things but also invisible and eternal things.⁴²

Another vision that addresses the microcosm-macrocosm theme in a different fashion is found in her later work, *Liber Divinorum Operum—The Book of Divine Works*, completed in 1173-1174. The second vision in *The Book of Divine Works* (Figure 4.) is like the egg-shaped cosmic vision of the *Scivias* except now the cosmos has taken on a spheric shape. It includes a series of concentric circles, all connected, with the outermost representing a circle of bright fire, followed by another circle of black fire. There are additional circular layers of pure ether, watery air, bright white air, and finally, thin air carrying clouds both lofty and low hanging.⁴³ In the center of all the concentric circles is a human form with outstretched arms, and feet and head touching the bright white air. It is through the interpretation of the human figure, as well as the blowing winds from the mouths of the various animals, that Hildegard of Bergen established the micro-macro connection between human beings and the cosmos:

⁴⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Readings*, 91.

⁴¹ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Readings*, 91.

⁴² Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Readings*, 91.

⁴³ Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of Divine Works*, trans. Nathaniel M. Campbell (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 2018), 47-48.



Figure 4. *Liber Divinorum Operum* I, Vision 1

For without forgetfulness and in the knowledge of true Love, which is God, the form of the world exists, indissolubly swirling—the wonderful form too of human nature—so that it can neither be consumed by any old age nor increased by any novelty; but as it was created by God, so it will endure to the end of the world. Indeed, in its foreknowledge and operation, divinity is like a shield, whole and utterly undivided, for it has neither beginning nor ending, nor can anything grasp or surround it, for it is outside of time. And as a circle surrounds and contains all that lies inside of it, so holy divinity contains and exceeds all things infinitely, for no one can divide or overcome it in its power, or bring it to an end.⁴⁴

Another important facet of Hildegard’s religious and nature passion is found in *veriditas*, the vital green power she associated with the greening power of all creation. Her initial descriptive use of it appeared in *Scivias* I as “the greenness of paradise” as a “vital force still

⁴⁴ Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of Divine Works*, 54-55.

connected to the earth, just as the soul is connected to the body.”⁴⁵ Veriditas is fecundity. It provides the dry earth with fortifying moisture. It is an aspect of divine emanation delivered via the holy spirit, as seen when she writes to Bernard of Clairvaux that “the sweet power of green vigor sent the Word to the Virgin’s womb where it took on flesh like the honey in the honeycomb!”⁴⁶

These selected passage from both Hugh of Saint Victor and Hildegard of Bergen illustrate how in the twelfth century there was not yet a separation between human beings and the divine cosmos of which they were apart. Humans were a microcosm of the macrocosm. They perceived themselves as special creatures of God himself, yet they were intertwined with all of creation, and all was in God’s service:

With all these things in the world he surrounded and fortified humankind and everywhere imbued them with the greatest strength, so that creation might assist them in all things and partake in all human works, so that they might do their work with creation—for humankind can neither live nor even exist without creation, as shall be shown to you in the present vision.⁴⁷

After the advent of scientific empiricism and the notion of personal subjectivity and knowing, mankind started its isolating descent and turned away from the nature-cosmos embrace. The anthropocentric turn had begun, and the initiatory fissure of the Copernican discovery deepened.

Nonetheless, there have been those in modernity who have worked for the greening microcosm reconnection, albeit without specific orthodox religious connection. We see it in Aldo

⁴⁵ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Readings*, xxxviii.

⁴⁶ Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Readings*, 5.

⁴⁷ Hildegard of Bingen, *The Book of Divine Works*, 54.

Leopold's (1887-1948) personal revelatory awakening when he witnessed the "green fire" in a dying wolf's eyes. He expands this green power essence into *The Land Ethic* when he speaks of recalibrating humans' role within the "land community" — from conqueror and overlord to plain member and citizen.⁴⁸ In his view, all is once again a microcosm of something greater and relationally intertwined.

Rachel Carson (1907-1964) acknowledges the sacred, green importance when she reminds us that "our origins are of the earth" and that "there is in us a deeply seated response to the natural universe, which is part of our humanity."⁴⁹ She expresses its essence when she confides that "no one could write truthfully about the sea and leave out the poetry"⁵⁰. She conveys it to us in stories of her nephew, Roger, who she took out to the beach on a rainy night when he was a mere twenty months, so that he might experience the thundering sea and its salty presence. It was a rendezvous of pure joy.

We experience it in the beliefs of Russian philosopher Pyotr Ouspensky (1878-1947), who influenced Aldo Leopold's thinking about *The Land Ethic* and ecology. Ouspensky's mystical insights, often revealed through the contemplative practices of meditation, yoga, prayer, fasting, and sometimes breathing nitrous oxide⁵¹, led him to hold that "all living things—including the earth—has its own *noumenon*, consisting of life and psyche, binding them into

⁴⁸ Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 204.

⁴⁹ Rachel Carson, *Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson*, ed. Lind Lear (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 120.

⁵⁰ Carson, *Lost Woods*, 75.

⁵¹ Ashley Pryor, "Thinking Like a Mystic: The Legacy of P.D. Ouspensky's Tertium Organum on the Development of Aldo Leopold's Thinking Like a Mountain," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 5, no 4 (2011), 467.

certain *wholes* incomprehensible to us”⁵². He felt that this mystical fourth dimension was accessible to all. One of the “expanded forms of receptivity” was right outside our doors, in the *viriditas*, the green powering essence of Nature herself.⁵³

Perhaps the passion of the visionary medieval theologians, already discussed, along with Pyotr Ouspensky’s mystic vision, Rachel Carson’s deep connection, and Aldo Leopold’s “green fire” awakening can inspire us. Nature awaits with her wisdom, secrets, and sacred spirit. May we avail ourselves to all she offers us.

⁵² Pryor, “Thinking Like a Mystic,” 468.

⁵³ Pryor, “Thinking Like a Mystic,” 479.

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