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The Memetic Evolution of Alchemy from Zosimos to Timothy Leary

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Introduction

The impact of alchemy in history is known to most as footnotes whenever chemistry is introduced to a reader. These references often describe early attempts to discover secrets of nature aimed at producing gold or immortality. Investigating a little deeper, reveals odd manuscripts where processes are explained through complex and mythical images. Taking this investigation further reveals a worldview that has intermingled with global cultures since the ancient world. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on Europe and North America. We'll examine individuals, their ideas rooted in alchemy, and how they transmitted them. Originating in antiquity, alchemy survived through adaptation of religious and philosophical symbol sets. Its adherents used it to explore issues of their generation and its appeal has resided in its assertion of the divinity of the individual. With these traits it has survived as an obscure but durable meme within Western culture.

The individuals reviewed in this paper had one foot in their generation and one foot in the past as they look towards alchemy for answers to their generations issues. When examining the goals, worldviews, and cultural context of its prominent adherents, a central doctrine within alchemy can be observed. It would be apt at this point to give a definition of alchemy. Yet since the focus of this paper is on cultural and religious history surrounding the concept of alchemy, establishing a definition right here is problematic because the word alchemy itself is tenuous. The meaning has changed multiple times over generations. Unraveling some of this confusion is in the spirit of this paper.

Approaching the subject of alchemy requires the researcher to exercise caution and discrimination, or find themselves in a myriad of dead ends and side shows, far removed from their original purpose. It is no wonder that some scholars enjoy the neat and tidy version of calling it the pseudoscience that gave birth to chemistry after it allegedly failed to produce transmutation of gold, the philosophers' stone, or the elixir of life. In a field of study that straddles the worlds of science, philosophy, theology, and the occult, keeping a straight line in an argument can be a challenge.

But what impact has alchemy had on culture? Which prominent figures did it influence and what impact did they make? What about this history remains with us today? Throughout history

several writers mention alchemy yet many seem to mean different things. Is there a core principle that unites them all? Uniting them all can be problematic because even complete consensus has not been met among modern scholars.

Within the field there is still a debate amongst scholars as to what alchemy even is. For example, Lawrence Principe's approach in, *The Secrets of Alchemy* is from the position of scientific history. In his book, he argues that the real alchemists since ancient Alexandria have always just been chemists and their recipes were kept in a secret pictorial code called Decknamen.¹ Supposedly, this secret code has been the source of much confusion over the objectives of the alchemist. He is in agreement with his opponents that the four classical elements fall within the subject of philosophy and religion, yet he draws a line, defining alchemy as strictly metallic transmutation.² This is not to be misunderstood as a literal change but processes that changes the color of metal through exposure to vapor made from various sources.³ So to him, alchemists have always been craftsmen and nothing more.

A large source of controversy in interpreting this history centers on Zosimos of Panopolis (300 CE), an Egyptian citizen who provides us with some of the earliest primary sources for alchemy. A scholar's interpretation of Zosimos determines where they stand in the argument of craftsman alchemy, versus spiritual alchemy. According to Principe, the writings of Zosimos all fall within his definition of Decknamen, and it is faulty to attempt to pull philosophical or spiritual meaning from them.⁴ Several scholars disagree with Principe on this point and assert Zosimos as a mystic and astrologer. John Scarborough insists the Gnosticism, astrology, and magic that Zosimos mentions are inseparable from his alchemical writings and brings in his own unique perspective, that many of the secrets involved psychoactive drugs.⁵

¹. Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013), 18.

². Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 12.

³. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 11.

⁴. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 19.

⁵. John Scarborough, "Gnosticism, Drugs, and Alchemy in Late Roman Egypt," *Pharmacy in History*,

Kyle Fraser's interpretation of Zosimos focuses on his religious dedication to Hermes Trismegistus in his writings.⁶ Hermes Trismegistus is a figure that appears in Greek religious writing, around the 400 BCE. During that time an interpretation of the gods as human beings who attained their divinity in life began to proliferate.⁷ This version of the Greek god Hermes was a syncretic combination of Hermes, Thoth, and various philosophers who had made an impact on history and this meant writings with similar teachings began to become attributed to him.⁸ In these writings, was an assertion of the divinity of regular people which resonated with Gnostics like Zosimos in his time. To Fraser this is enough for him to assert that in the writings of Zosimos we see the beginnings of spiritual alchemy.⁹ Aaron Cheak takes the strongest stance on the side of spiritual alchemy in his book, *Alchemical Traditions: From Antiquity to the Avant-Garde*, where he states:

Alchemy may be described, the words of Baudelaire, as a process of 'distilling the eternal from the transient'. As the art of transmutation *par excellence*, the classical applications of alchemy have always been twofold: *chrysopoeia* and *apotheosis* (gold-making and god-making) – the perfection of metals and mortals. In seeking to turn 'poison into wine', alchemy, like tantra, engages material existence-often at its most dissolute or corruptible-in order to turn it into a vehicle of liberation.¹⁰

This concept of apotheosis is at the core of the idea of the “divinity of the individual” when mentioned in the writings of Hermes, Zosimos, and the historical figures that will be discussed in the following sections.

From perspectives like Cheak's, to ask “what is alchemy?” is to ask “what is apotheosis?” and from there we have a problem of too much subjectivity. At this point we can sympathize with Principe in his desire to organize the field by dealing with the subjectivity, by just sweeping it under the

Vol. 13, No. 4 (1971): 153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41108719>

⁶. Kyle Fraser, “Baptised in Gnosis: The Spiritual Alchemy of Zosimos of Panopolis.” *Dionysis*, Vol. 25 (2005): 1.

⁷. Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus* (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1995), 11.

⁸. Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes*, 12.

⁹. Fraser, “Baptised in Gnosis: The Spiritual Alchemy of Zosimos of Panoopolis.” : 2.

¹⁰. Aaron Cheak, *Alchemical Traditions: From Antiquity to the Avant-Garde* (Melbourne, Australia: Numen Books, 2013), 18.

rug and focusing on the history of the chemistry and craftsmanship. But we can begin to further understand the hermeneutics of the adherents of alchemy when we put them up against the backdrop of the eras they lived in. What is apotheosis? Apotheosis is liberation, and liberation is understood by the obstacle to said liberation. What is the metaphorical prison that the seekers of it are trying to break out of?

Following this course can give us insight to the impact of alchemy and how it survived. An effective lens for focusing this further, comes from Richard Dawkin's book, *The Selfish Gene*, where he introduces the concept of the meme. The meme is described as a unit of culture that evolves and proliferates depending on its psychological appeal to those it reaches.¹¹ With this definition of alchemy as a meme, we can move forward understanding that it can change over time, yet still hold core principles that maintain its appeal.

This paper is going to examine four important eras where alchemy had impacted certain individuals, and inspired them to add to the continuing interpretation of what alchemy is and how its goals are attained. We'll be looking at the Ancient Mediterranean from 500 BCE to 200 CE, Europe from 1100 CE to 1550 CE, Britain from 1800 CE to 1900 CE, and American counterculture from 1940 CE to 1980 CE. The individuals discussed form a line of succession where each takes the writings of the previous and adds the zeitgeist of their own generation to it. From here we'll see how the alchemy meme has interacted with the history of Western civilization.

Origins

The primary language of alchemy comes from the classical four elements that the ancient Greeks put forth as basis of the physical world. The earliest text discussing the elements comes from the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles (490-430 BCE) in his text, "Physics". What he describes is a four-fold cycle of fire, air, water, and earth, moving through a process that is powered by a duality

¹¹. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1976), 299-316.

he calls love and strife.¹² Love and strife essentially means the process of combining and separating. Aristotle would later try and replace this duality with aether but the dualistic model returned with different titles but the same function, especially with the famous Latin maxim associated with alchemy “solve et coagula” meaning to separate and combine.¹³ For Western Europe, Empedocles is the furthest that these ideas can be traced back to. Yet we can't necessarily call the philosophy of Empedocles alchemy. The reason for this is that alchemy is goal-orientated and these are simply thoughts based on observations of nature. The impact of these ideas were massive and became the basis of science and medicine for centuries to come.

During this era, the most important development in forming the basis of alchemy was the association of the elements with astrology. Plato, Aristotle, and Hipparchus are some of the first we see in history to discuss early alchemical concepts and their relationship to human souls, stars, and planets.¹⁴ The Greeks' fixation on astrology naturally melded with this theory of the natural world and would eventually be referred to as astrology and astronomia inferior (alchemy) by John Dee (1527-1608 CE), demonstrating this link lasted well into the fourteenth century.¹⁵

What would become the next step of alchemy began to coalesce from various sources between 200 BCE to 300 CE, in the Mediterranean and Hellenized Egypt. A Pythagorean by the name of Democritus (200 BCE) compiled recipes for purple dye, imitation gold, and discussions of the concept of *pneuma* which binds all things in the universe and creates “sympathy between objects”.¹⁶ This concept of sympathy posits a mystical idea of a connection between objects both living and inanimate. Some exhibit a stronger sympathy because of their likeness or analogy. With Democritus came the sympathy between types of metals and the planets, which became a mainstay of alchemy.¹⁷ Before

¹². M.R. Wright, trans., *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 22.

¹³. Paul T. Keyser, “Alchemy in the Ancient World: From Science to Magic,” *Illinois Classical Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Fall 1990): 368. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23064297>

¹⁴. Keyser “Alchemy in the Ancient World: From Science to Magic,” : 369.

¹⁵. William R. Newman, and Grafton Anthony, eds. *Secrets of Nature: Astrology and Alchemy in Modern Europe* (The MIT Press, 2006), 173.

¹⁶. Keyser “Alchemy in the Ancient World: From Science to Magic,” : 358.

Democritus the craftsmanship that Principe refers to as “real alchemy” had existed for centuries. The mixing of dyes, making imitation gems, changing the color of metal, brewing alcohol, making glass, and processes like distillation had all been guarded trade secrets with really no mystical purpose until Democritus.¹⁸

To the ancient Greeks the stars and planets were a mechanism reminding them of the inevitability of life, with events joyous or tragic, and death. If the earth was infused with the same powers of fate that would place mankind as the intermediary within this relationship of the sky above and the ground below. Since the earth could be manipulated by the hands of men, that means the power of the stars and planets were available to them as well. So in a way, the classification of spiritual alchemy is really astrological magic. This is a magic based on invisible lines of sympathy between objects. At this point in history it was within the nature of the meme to assimilate other things based on their similarities.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke articulates the culture of the period effectively in his book, *The Western Esoteric Traditions* as he says:

With the rise of the Roman Empire, there was a notable change in peoples' religious needs. Greek rationalist philosophy had made the gods abstract and remote from human needs. While public worship of the Olympian gods and agricultural rites were maintained, the absorption of independent cities and states into the empire had created a climate of multiculturalism and religious relativism. New religions, mystery cults, sages, prophets, magicians, and healers arose in response to these new circumstances. The cosmopolitan nature of Hellenistic Alexandrian culture chiefly expressed itself in religion through syncretism.¹⁹

Antoine Faivre discusses that around this time it became popular to re-imagine popular tales and myth in terms of alchemy.²⁰

¹⁷. Keyser “Alchemy in the Ancient World: From Science to Magic,” : 358.

¹⁸. Arthur John Hopkins, “Earliest Alchemy,” *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (Jun. 1918) : 530. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/22599>

¹⁹. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16.

²⁰. Antoine Faivre. *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 7-8.

What began from this is what we call today the “Western occult tradition,” which aims at apotheosis via comparative religion and philosophy, emphasizing contemplation and practice. The standard scholarly definition of this comes from Faivre. This definition requires Faivre to express it in around five pages, so paraphrasing it is necessary. These parameters are correspondence, living nature, imagination as mediation, and transmutation.²¹ Correspondence is similar to the concept of sympathy, discussed earlier, as a belief that objects and symbols share categories where one can effect the other. Living nature is the belief that consciousness exists within nature and ideas. These can be interacted with as if they were human or animal. Imagination as mediation is a belief that thought and visualization is a tool that human beings can use to effect the metaphysical toward impacting the physical. Transmutation is the belief that through use of the other three categories human beings can evolve beyond humanity into a supernatural state.

This region and period of time is marked with significant cultural exchange that gave birth to other concepts that alchemy would merge with. Out of 200 CE came, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Formation* one of the fundamental texts of the Jewish esoteric tradition, Kabbalah. Prior to this text, Kabbalah was a meditative practice based on the vision of Ezekiel with the goal of reproducing a similar experience of his vision of God.²² The leading scholar on Kabbala, Gershom Scholem, theorizes that this text was heavily influenced by or even written by Nichomachus (60 BCE-120 CE) who was a Pythagorean.²³ *Sefer Yetzirah* adds the Hebrew alphabet to the cosmology of sympathies already set in alchemy. It establishes three mother letters corresponding to water, air, and fire (earth is left out), seven letters correspond to the planets, and twelve for the zodiac.²⁴ The Kabbalah is well beyond the scope this paper, yet its important to mention its history where it interacted with the

²¹. Roelef Brock and Wouter J, Hanegraff eds. *Gnosis and Hermeticism from antiquity to modern times* (State University of New York Press, 1998), 112.

²². Gershom Scholem. *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 15.

²³. Scholem. *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 15.

²⁴. Rabbi Akiba Ben Joseph, *The Book of Formation or Sepher Yetzirah*, translated by Knut Stenring (Maine: Ibis Press, 2004), 23.

symbolism of alchemy.

The drive that the Greeks possessed to understand and control their world elevated the appeal of the metaphysical ideas in astrology and alchemy. It appealed to reason because it reconciled the various cultures interacting in the Mediterranean. It soothed anxieties dealing with the helplessness of fate by providing a concept of power one could wield within the material world. While its difficult to discern who exactly viewed themselves as a craftsman, chemist, or magician, its important to establish the origin and motivation behind these ideas.

By the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire most of this knowledge had left Western Europe and had been moved to Byzantium to become a part of the Arab world.²⁵ Translations and further development of alchemy occurred there, until it was reintegrated into the West through the Muslim occupation of Spain. It is interesting to note that several scholars believe that a prophet that appears in the Koran, by the name of Idris is Hermes Trismegistus, mainly because Idris holds similar titles such as “thrice great” and is considered the father of alchemy and astrology much like Hermes is.²⁶

The world view that emerged from this collection of metaphysics, linking celestial phenomenon and the natural world, became a religious and pseudo-scientific point of reference for scholars until the scientific method was finally refined to separate the empirical from the religious. Yet a key concept grew on the religious side that said the invisible world of metaphysics reflected nature in a way that could be investigated. This regard towards the spiritual world for investigation is key for what makes alchemy a memetic concept. When we examine the thinkers of each era that picked it up and asked, “what does this mean” we see alchemy's corpus continuously added to by each generation.

²⁵. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 11.

²⁶. Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, 18.

The Middle Ages and Renaissance

As Muslim rule over the Iberian peninsula began to diminish in the eleventh century, the Latin speaking world began to encounter a body of intellectual work that had been preserved by Muslim scholars. Until then, the Europeans had only fragments of knowledge from the ancient world and now they had volumes of books. They had also discovered that their Muslim neighbors had continued to build on the foundations of the ancient world with their own experiments and advances.²⁷

A desire for more knowledge from the East brought interest in learning Arabic to translate texts. The main challenge would be how Western Europe would incorporate these Hellenistic metaphysics into their Christian world view. It is fortunate that it was monastic men, with an intense interest in

²⁷. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 27.

knowledge, that acquired these sources to translate them into European languages.

On February, 11th 1144 CE, an English monk working in Spain by the name Robert of Chester translated the first alchemical text titled, *On the Composition of Alchemy*. It detailed instructions for creation of a philosophers' stone that would “convert substances into better ones.”²⁸ The philosophers' stone would attract special attention at this time because of other mentions of it by an Arabic alchemist named Jabir Ibn-Hayyan (721-815 CE) along side his interpretation of, “The Emerald Tablet” which is attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.²⁹ The interest came from a specific line in his translation, “That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of the one thing.”³⁰ This juxtaposition led to the belief that the “one thing” was the philosophers' stone with no real consensus on whether it was a literal transformation of metals or some form of apotheosis. But what it indicated, is that a key to it may be in the writings of Hermes. This was the beginning of how the hermetic tradition was brought to Europe.

The figure of Hermes Trismegistus intrigued Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499 CE). He sought out to acquire other writings of his to translate. This led to his translation of, *The Corpus Hermeticum* in Italy.³¹ Ficino was a very influential scholar at the Florentine academy and was at the front lines of making Hellenistic teachings a part of Christian theology.³² Authorities in the church during this time were still debating on where all this belonged in the Christian world. Cities like Florence were more open to learning and ancient traditions making the area attractive to scholars with esoteric interests. This caused a “migration of magicians” which at the time, magician, was a broad term for anyone involved in alchemy, magic, Kabbalah, astrology and philosophy in the various forms they took

²⁸. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 58.

²⁹. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 32.

³⁰. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy*, 32.

³¹. Wouter J. Hanegraaf, “Better than Magic: Cornelius Agrippa and Lazzarellian Hermeticism,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Vol.4 No. 1 (Summer 2009): 1. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>

³². Mellisa. Bullard, “The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino's thought on Astrology” *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter, 1990): 689. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2862785>

at the time.³³ In the *Hermeticum*, Hermes Trismegistus is given a divine revelation about the soul's potential for apotheosis through a being that calls itself Poimandres.³⁴ Poimandres translates into “man-shepard” and the proximity to the symbolism of Christ led Ficino and others to believe it was a manifestation of Christ before the birth of Jesus.³⁵

Ficino's student, Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494 CE), had an intense interest in Kabbalah and worked towards demonstrating its compatibility with both hermeticism and Christianity.³⁶ The correspondences with the Hebrew alphabet, elements, and astrology already laid out in, *Sefer Yetzirah* provided him with an excellent stepping stone towards this. Mirandola's analysis and conclusions became the standard of Kabbalah in the Christian world and from that point became referred to as Cabala to denote that it is the Christian version.³⁷ With the work established by Ficino and Mirandola they established a precedent where Hellenistic concepts of apotheosis were accessible by Christians without being accused of heresy. This addition to the syncretic corpus of alchemy made it accessible through compatibility.

The relationship between Abbot Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516 CE) and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535 CE) played the next significant role in dissemination hermeticism and the Christian view of alchemy. Trithemius continued Ficino's work into the sixteenth century yet had a different, even sinister, reputation. Trithemius openly declared that he owned an extensive library of texts detailing how to summon and control demons, communicate with angels, and cast spells using the power of the elements and planetary powers.³⁸ He was also skilled at church politics as he got away

³³. Robert Griffin, “Agrippa, D'Aubigne, and Sixteenth Century Occultism,” *Romanische Forschungen*, 79. bd., h ½ (1967): 119-120. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27937322>

³⁴. Brian P. Copenhaver, trans. *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction*. (New York. Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-2.

³⁵. Hanegraaf, “Better than Magic: Cornelius Agrippa and Lazzarellian Hermeticism,” : 4.

³⁶. Goodrick-Clarke. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*, 43.

³⁷. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*, 44.

³⁸. Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over the Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe* (State University of New York Press, 1999), 7.

with all of this under the notion that such power was all under the province of the holy trinity.³⁹

Nonetheless, he had a dark reputation and was feared as a black magician. Legends circulated about his powers. One included conjuring the spirit of the wife of Emperor Maximilian I in his own court room.⁴⁰ Trithemius wasn't alone as a monastic with an interest in the occult, but he was the most vocal about it and use his position to promote intellectual understanding of it.

Trithemius used sexual metaphor for his stance on the correct path of alchemy. To those setting up laboratories to practice the art he said they were pursuing, “a chaste whore, who has many lovers but, by deluding them all, is successfully embraced by none among them. It makes rich men paupers.”⁴¹

This demonstrates that Trithemius viewed the attempt to transform metals as an expensive and pointless endeavor. He viewed the truth value to be in its spiritual language. His view of the true religion which flowed through Zoroaster, Moses, Plato, Hermes Trismegistus, then Christ, was a universe balanced by alchemy, numerology, magic, astrology with the holy trinity with angels moving along the invisible strings that connected them.⁴²

The protege of Trithemius, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, eventually overshadowed him in infamy with his compilation of occult knowledge, *De Philosophia Occulta* which is known today as *Three Books on Occult Philosophy*. Agrippa's book became widely read throughout Europe and established itself as a standard occult text because it was a compilation of a majority of texts on the subject circulating at the time.⁴³ Agrippa received a mixed reaction from the Europeans, ranging from extreme praise to people being punished as heretics for even mentioning his work.⁴⁴ Yet he succeeded

³⁹. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over the Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, 4.

⁴⁰. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over the Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, 4.

⁴¹. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over the Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, 70.

⁴². Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over the Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, 114.

⁴³. Owen Davies, *Grimories: A History of Magic Books* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2009), 47.

⁴⁴. Davies, *Grimories: A History of Magic Books*, 48.

at becoming an authority on the subject because of the completeness of his work made the subject more accessible.

Trithemius was excited by Agrippa's goal to produce this massive text and they had a stated joint objective, “to restore ancient magic, the discipline of all the sages, rescued and purged from the errors of impiety and embellished by its own doctrines, and to emancipate it from injury by its detractors.”⁴⁵ Alchemical symbolism forms the core of Agrippa's conception of magic as he concludes his chapter on introducing the four elements, “And this is the root and foundation of all bodies, nature, virtues, and wonderful works; and he which shall know these qualities of the elements, and their mixations, shall easily bring to pass such things that are wonderful, and astonishing, and shall be perfect in magic.”⁴⁶ Their approach was bold and aimed at wide dissemination of occult knowledge.

Agrippa introduces his book with several chapters describing the metaphysical model that the rest of the work is based on. He begins to describe the universe as divided into three portions; the elemental, the celestial, and intellectual.⁴⁷ This essentially means the physical world, the influence of the stars and planets, and the influence of the spiritual world. Agrippa moves forward with a description of the elements and how they exist in all three worlds yet with different “density”.⁴⁸ Using the concept that within man is a reflection of god and creation, he puts forth that man is capable of supernatural feats utilizing the elements that connect these three worlds.⁴⁹ In these passages we see Agrippa continue the unification of hermeticism and Christianity. This third world classified as “the intellectual” incorporates the Christian heaven above the influence of the stars.

⁴⁵. Brann. *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter in the Controversy Over the Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe*, 154.

⁴⁶. Henry Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Translated by John French, (Reproduction of original in Harvard University Libraries, 1651), 8-9.
http://gateway.proquest.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:image:52070:16

⁴⁷. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 1-2.

⁴⁸. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 4-7.

⁴⁹. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 4.

The point of Agrippa's model is to demonstrate that Heaven, The Stars and Planets, and the Earth are all composed of similar forces that work in the same manner. His next point is that these all exist on “strings of sympathy” that makes objects, ideas, and actions influential on each other through proximity of likeness. It is essentially Agrippa's argument on why astrology, alchemy and magic work. Its all sourced from his predecessors yet organized in a single text.

Agrippa's clearest demonstration of his philosophy is written in his chapter on the significance of numbers in occult philosophy. Each number has its own table of correspondence of demonstrating how sets of symbols organize under each number.⁵⁰ The scale of four organizes a table beginning with four Hebrew letters that spell the name of God. These are Yod, Heh, Vau, and Heh and all sets of four that fall under them.⁵¹ On the scale there is the four elements, four categories of metal, four seasons, and four parts of man and continues like this uniting things that come in four. The point is that these are all the same thing existing in different states of being. In the scale of one we have a simple list for symbols of unity. On the scale of unity there is God in the intellectual world, the Sun in the celestial world, and the philosophers' stone in the physical world.⁵²

To Agrippa and Trithemius the philosophers' stone was a manifestation of God on earth. In the scale of four he shows how the elements and man are reflections of the name of God. Their version of apotheosis is found in these relationships where one can become as God. Ficino, Mirandola, Trithemius, and Agrippa all took great effort to integrate these old teachings into Christian Europe.

A mystery still remains over all of this. Were these men genuinely interested in a deeper understanding of Christianity or were they doing their best to avoid charges of heresy? The answer to this question would illuminate their motivation and conception of apotheosis. If they were indeed devout Christians then they believed that something important was lost in their spirituality and the past had the answer. If it was all a cover to avoid execution then it was a desire to educate others who were

⁵⁰. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 241-260.

⁵¹. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 257.

⁵². Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, 242.

like them. In either situation their goal was reclaiming lost knowledge to educate a world they believed had become detached from classical learning.

The impact of *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, was a continuation of the tradition of explaining religious concepts with the broad metaphysical concepts in alchemy. This set groundwork for continued occult study in Europe. Although this form of religious contemplation and practice didn't catch on with common people and remained somewhat obscure and relegated to the category of “the occult”.

Britain in the fin-de-siècle 1880-1900 CE

British culture in the fin-de-siècle was a period of identity crisis for the Victorians. The term, fin-de-siècle (French for turn of the century), is used to describe a mindset of a generation who had a cynical twist on the cultural trends of the nineteenth century. With advances in science and understanding the world was getting smaller and less mystical. Darwin had challenged religious authority in a way that had many in a spiritual malaise.⁵³ The occult provided vague metaphysics, mystery, and the possibility of supernatural contact. This was fertile ground for another occult revival within European culture. In the fin-de-siècle spirit, the British occult revival was a backlash against positivism and the dominance of science that came with it.⁵⁴ Self-declared mediums, magicians, prophets, and mystical orders began to step forward and compete for attention and influence.

While all these figures, events, and publications were flourishing in the public, a man named Samuel Liddell Mathers (1854-1918 CE) would form a secret group to revive Hermeticism.⁵⁵ Mathers

⁵³. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2.

⁵⁴. Helen Farely, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2009), 96.

⁵⁵. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 3.

had several memberships to esoteric groups. He was a Freemason, Theosophist, member of the Hermetic Society, and a member of Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (a group that claims Rosicrucian lineage)⁵⁶ Founded in 1888 CE, Mathers named his group The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It was meant as a teaching order that combined alchemy, Rosicrucianism, Hermeticism, and Pico Mirandola's Cabala into a single system of rituals and mediation.⁵⁷ Mathers' source for making the order came from a paper on alchemy written by Trithemius called *Polygraphiae* (1508 CE)⁵⁸

The Golden Dawn's teachings were rooted in Renaissance occultism yet their approach and view towards apotheosis was heavily rooted in the mind set of its era. Alex Owen articulates the approach, “Like the medical psychology of the day, it sought to elucidate a rationalized self-conscious stripped of romantic excess and interpreted according to the conventions of modern science.”⁵⁹ Why did the Golden Dawn conform to the growing secularism of the age, and what does secular occultism even mean? Each era of alchemy had its perceived prison and method of escape. The Greeks were escaping the fate imposed by the will of the stars, the Europeans of the Renaissance sought to reform the perceived will of God to make room for the divinity of man, fin-de-siècle occultists feared the scientific world yet used it as a spring board into vague mystical territory.

In this era, the path of apotheosis was seen by the Golden Dawn within correspondence and comparative nature of religion, and the occult was a universal formula that was applied like a spiritual form of technology.⁶⁰ There was little dogma about the metaphysical world other than it provided a key to mysteries that couldn't be expressed completely in words. Golden Dawn member Florence Farr (1860-1917 CE) provides an example of the approach in her diary, “thoughts which are above human consciousness clothe themselves with symbolism and present things to our imagination, which cannot

⁵⁶. Davies, *Grimories: A History of Magic Books*, 178.

⁵⁷. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 56-57.

⁵⁸. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 53.

⁵⁹. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 114.

⁶⁰. Farelly, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, 96-97.

be told in words.”⁶¹ From her description it sounds like importance is placed on altered states of consciousness. She provides further insight into what alchemy meant to the Golden Dawn, “What alchemy offers is an understanding of the realities of the self and a symbolic account of the means by which the occultist can attain a state of enlightened perfection. Consciousness of being is the name we give to the white tincture which the adept distills from his human form in the alembic of the mind.”⁶² Its clear that at this point they were discussing alchemy purely as allegory.

Aleister Crowley (1875-1947 CE) joined the Golden Dawn shortly before they went defunct in 1901 CE. In his writings on Golden Dawn style rituals, he took an even stricter stance on a secular approach:

This book is very easy to misunderstand; readers are asked to use the most minute care in the study of it, even as we have done in its preparation. In this book it is spoken of the sephiroth, and the paths; of spirits and conjurations; of Gods, spheres, and planes, and many other things which may or may not exist. It is immaterial whether these exist or not. By doing certain things certain results will follow; students are most earnestly warned against attributing reality or philosophical validity to any of them”.⁶³

Crowley even demanded that his own students be somewhat competent in a chosen field of science and founded his own order with the motto, “The method of science, the aim of religion.”⁶⁴ That motto is the perfect example of the mind set of nineteenth century occultism, in that rules of science are the key to experience of the divine and supernatural. As Crowley demonstrated in the previous quote this means to meditate and conduct rituals consistently with absolutely no expectation and documenting what you experience. To the reader already familiar with Crowley and his reputation for misleading his readers, it is important to take note that this quote it taken from his direct teachings from his stay in the Golden Dawn. So his source here is directly from his teacher Mathers.

⁶¹. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 140.

⁶². Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 125.

⁶³. Aleister Crowley, *Gems From the Equinox* (California. Weiser Publishing, 2007), 277.

⁶⁴. Crowley, *Gems From the Equinox*, 27.

In the fin-de-siècle definitions of alchemy, astrology, and magic were becoming increasingly loose and subject to interpretation. Occult manuals were becoming more widely distributed than any other time in history.⁶⁵ What seems to be the unspoken subject of the fin-de-siècle was the role of faith in an individual's approach to apotheosis. The answer, especially from Crowley, would be that faith hinders the search for truth and that doubt is powerful enough to free you from the clutches of the material world. But is that entirely true? What they placed faith in was the power of symbol and the mind's receptivity to it in a way beyond what psychology had established. In the fin-de-siècle, the line of sympathies connecting all things became pure allegory, used to tap something universal in the human mind. In the effort to conform spirituality with science, the students of alchemy in the fin-de-siècle completely retreated into subjectivity.

⁶⁵. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 221.

Timothy Leary

During a late 1970s PBS interview with Timothy Leary (1920-1996 CE) he proclaimed, “**I’ve been** an admirer of Aleister Crowley and I think I’ve carried on much of the work that he started over a hundred years ago and carried on into the sixties themselves. Crowley said 'do what thou wilt, shall be **the whole of the law**' .”⁶⁶ What did Leary mean by this? Before Crowley's death he had published a massive body of occult work covering many subjects within the occult category. To make the claim that you're carrying on Crowley's work leaves way too much room for speculation. Yet there are several sources we can examine to actually get a fairly good view of what he meant.

It is important to understand that before Leary became the infamous counterculture guru that most know him as today, that he was a rising star in the field of psychology at Harvard. It was 1960 CE, during the peak of his career, when he had a conversation with Aldous Huxley who convinced him that psilocybin mushrooms could play an important role in mental health.⁶⁷ Leary set up an experiment with colleagues and graduate students at his home where they all ingested the mushroom.⁶⁸ Several of them remained sober to take notes of behavior and conversation. It is noted that Leary criticized scholars and scientists as rigid, stated the importance of re-examining Eastern religions, and said it was the most religious experience of his life. Shortly after this experience he began to become more interested in metaphysics than psychology.⁶⁹

⁶⁶. PBS interview with Timothy Leary, “Timothy Leary: I carried on Aleister Crowley's work” Youtube 00:13, uploaded on May 1, 2008.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=2gY3dSqs68A

⁶⁷. Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2010), 16.

⁶⁸. Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 40.

Leary would return to Harvard to set up a department for psychedelic in 1963 CE.⁷⁰
Authorities

at Harvard became concerned for his disregard for the scientific method and proper regulations. He began using LSD with the subjects and ignored orders not to do so. By 1964 CE, Leary and several others had their contracts terminated for refusing to comply to requests to follow the rules.⁷¹ Leary had been trained in psychology then kicked out of the academic world. His new passion was on the mysteries of religion and went onto apply his skill set to that field.

Leary had a connection to Crowley through friends at a publishing company called, “New Falcon” that he published through.⁷² These friends included Israel Regardie (1907-1985 CE) who was a student and secretary of Crowley from 1928-1934 CE. After reading issues of *The Equinox*, Regardie responded to an employment advertisement put out by Crowley for a secretary. He began employment with him in 1928 CE and used it as an opportunity to learn as much about the occult as he possibly could.⁷³

In the dedication of Leary's book, “Exopsychology” both Crowley and Regardie are mentioned, “Aleister Crowley, who did the English translation. Israel Regardie, who kept the Falcon flying high”⁷⁴ Crowley's dedication is in reference to his work making occult material accessible and usable to the common person. Regardie's dedication is for his contribution to the publishing company. It makes sense that Crowley's approach to spiritual discovery would appeal to Leary who had one foot in psychology and the other in mysticism.

When Leary set up the League of Spiritual Discovery, and the New York acid churches, what

⁶⁹. Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 41.

⁷⁰. Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 65.

⁷¹. Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 65.

⁷². Timothy Leary, *Info-Psychology* (New Falcon Publication, 1987), foreword by Christopher S. Hyatt Phd, 1.

⁷³. Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: an interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (Arizona: New Falcon Publications. 1989), 4.

⁷⁴. Leary, *Info-Psychology*, Dedication, 1.

extent did the “alchemy meme” influence him? In 1967 CE he distributed a pamphlet called, “Start your own Religion”.⁷⁵ This pamphlet provides insight to Leary's own interpretation of spiritual discovery. His view of the spirit become entirely neurological yet still within a mythological scope of his predecessors. The introduction lays the groundwork:

The purpose of life is spiritual discovery. That intermediate manifestation of the Divine process that we call the DNA Code has spent the last two-billion years making this planet a Garden of Eden. An intricate web has been woven, a delicate fabric of chemical electrical-seed-tissue-organism specie. A dancing joyous harmony of energy transactions is rooted in 12-inches of top-soil which covers the rock metal fire core of this planet. Into this Garden of Eden each human being is born perfect. We are all born Divine mutants, the DNA codes best answer to joyful survival on this planet. An exquisite package for adaptation based on 2 billion years of consumer research (RNA) and product design (DNA). But each baby, although born perfect, immediately finds himself in an imperfect, artificial, disharmonious social system that robs him of his divinity. Time to “Drop-out”, “Turn-on”, and “Tune -in”. DROP- OUT- detach yourself from external social drama. TURN-ON- Find a sacrament which returns you to the Temple of God, your own body. Go out of your mind. Get high. TUNE-IN-be reborn. Drop back in to express it. Start a new sequence of behavior that reflects your vision.”⁷⁶

To Leary the human mind and body has a biological destiny that has been thrown off course from an outside moral corruption within Western culture. In his view DNA is God and the purpose of spiritual discovery is to receive a clear signal from it to your conscious mind. Much like the form that apotheosis took in the Renaissance, the goal is to become a clear reflection of God through a form of purification. In his process of “drop-out, turn-on, and tune-in” the individual removes themselves from the influences of society and allows themselves to become acquainted with the truth presented in their own biology they were born with. It should be noted that this can be compared to the alchemical maxim mentioned earlier, “solve et coagula” which means dissolve and recombine.

From the fin-de-siècle, he carries the concept of “scientific illumination”, in the way he distills it to a universal formula of instead of religious faith. Similar to pattern of the alchemy meme since the beginning, the prison is defined by the era. Leary's prison is Western culture. This is of course chiefly expressed in the counterculture movement that he was considered a leader in and succinctly stated in

⁷⁵. Devin R. Lander, “Start Your Own Religion:New York State's Acid Churches,” *Novia Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religion*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2011): 65.

⁷⁶. Timothy Leary, *Start Your Own Religion*, Kriya Press. 1967, 1.

the introduction of his pamphlet “Start your own Religion”. In his opinion, LSD was the most effective method of modern people to approach the “turn-on” phase.⁷⁷

Leary liked to take trips to physically follow in the footsteps of people he looked up to and Crowley was no exception. While studying Crowley's work in 1972 CE, Leary took a trip to Algiers to visit a location made famous by Crowley.⁷⁸ Leary and a few friends went out into the desert looking for a spot where Crowley performed rituals in 1909 CE that he documented in his book called, *The Vision and the Voice*.⁷⁹ Crowley was conducting rituals aimed towards inducing visions and facilitating a conversation with otherworldly beings.⁸⁰ Leary had purchased a set of Crowley's own version of tarot cards for this trip and had become quite obsessed with memorizing their symbolism and meaning.⁸¹

The tarot cards are important in this discussion because they became a prominent device for transmission of the alchemy meme. The contents of this style of cards are similar to the set of fifty-two most are familiar with, but they contain twenty-two other cards referred to as trumps. The trumps are a collection of characters and images such as; The Magician, The Tower, The Chariot, The Fool and so on.⁸² The extra cards were originally intended for games until a prominent French occultist by the name of Eliphas Levi (1810-1875 CE) came to the conclusion that they were a pictorial explanation of hermeticism hidden in plain sight.⁸³ Enough connections were there for Levi to come to this conclusion; twenty-two trumps for the twenty-two Hebrew letters, four suits for the four elements, cards numbered one through ten to fit the tree of life in the cabala, and three face cards to represent Agrippa's three worlds.⁸⁴ Whether Levi was correct or not is irrelevant because his opinion became popular and by the end of the nineteenth century his ideas became noticed and proliferated.

⁷⁷. Leary, *Start Your Own Religion*, Kriya Press, 1 .

⁷⁸. Robert Greenfield, *Timothy Leary: A Biography*. (Florida: Harcourt Book, 2006), 431.

⁷⁹. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 196-197.

⁸⁰. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*, 198.

⁸¹. Greenfield, *Timothy Leary: A Biography*, 431.

⁸². Farelly, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, 110.

⁸³. Farelly, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, 111-112.

⁸⁴. Farelly, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, 114-117.

It was Golden Dawn member Arthur Waite (1857-1942 CE), who first re-designed the tarot to further conform to the symbolism that Levi had discussed. His changes made the first tarot deck that actually was a pictorial guide to Western occultism and it became a central teaching tool to the Golden Dawn, including its use as an oracle⁸⁵ Towards the end of his life Crowley created his own deck of Tarot cards that were his view on much needed updates to the system.⁸⁶

In nineteen seventy-seven, Leary wrote a foreword for Robert Anton Wilson's (1932-2007 CE) autobiography, *The Cosmic Trigger*. The book details Wilson's own attempt to process the social landscape of the sixties and the confusing nature of Western occultism. We see a continuation of Leary's thoughts from his, "Start your own Religion" pamphlet in the foreword, "We now understand the mystery and paradox of the great alchemists, philosophers, mystics, sages. They pre-capitulate. They prospectively live out their own nervous systems. The future of evolution, the stages which await in the future of the species. Their nervous systems get into communication with their DNA. They experience what is to happen in the future."⁸⁷ Leary seems pretty confident that he and his peers have finally solved the spiritual mystery of alchemy in this mythology of biological destiny.

Leary's commentary on alchemy (and the Western esoteric tradition in general) can be interpreted as a willful and rapid development of a predetermined neurological evolution. To him all the complex metaphysical language from the past and advanced spiritual states are biological and accessed through a genetic archive contained in DNA. Leary detailed this whole system of occult neurobiology in his book, *Exo-psychology: A Manual on the Use of the Human Nervous System According to the Instructions of the Manufacturers*, in which he declares that its his attempt to synthesize religion and science, "This first attempt is deliberately eclectic and translational- linking the religious-occult to the scientific; the antique to the futique; the legends of the past to the data of the

⁸⁵. Farelly, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, 118-120.

⁸⁶. Farelly, *A Cultural History of Tarot: From Entertainment to Esotericism*, 137-140.

⁸⁷. Robert Anton Wilson, *Cosmic Trigger: The final secret of the Illuminati* (Arizona: New Falcon Publication, 1977) foreword by Timothy Leary Phd, 2.

present.”⁸⁸ This would be a good indication of what he meant when he said claimed to be carrying on

Crowley's work. He goes on to define what “exo-psychology” is:

Exo-psychology views human destiny in terms of an evolving nervous system, designed by DNA intelligence to become symbiotic transceivers of quantum-physical intelligence. Our dialogue with DNA and our conversations with sub-atomic and astronomical energy signals must, however, be two way. The person who can dial and tune the receptive, integrative, transmitting circuits of the nervous system is not just more intelligent, but can be said to operate at a higher more complex level of evolution.⁸⁹

Leary has taken the alchemy meme to a literal extent in his interpretation of it. It became a theological form of biology for him since his prison has been defined as society itself that corrupts life that is born perfect. His apotheosis is complete escape from the planet through evolution. He even includes a communication between the stars and the earth in his form of “as above, so below” and the strings of sympathy between the stars and the elements. He references occult symbolism and its relevance to his view:

The Tarot, The Zodiac, The I-Ching, The playing card deck, The Greco-Roman Pantheon, The Hebrew Alphabet, Icon Systems. These “occult” systems are proto-scientific attempts to predict the course of evolution of life on and off the planet and can be seen as neuro-cultural communication systems in which humanity symbolizes its natural laws.”⁹⁰

Leary unifies all of it under one idea of mankind evolving into an advanced state. He puts forth the key to all of this is to create a clear channel of communication to one's DNA (which is an intelligent form of life that receives signals from intelligences beyond the stars) to the conscious mind. Given that the core nature of the philosophers' stone throughout the evolution of the alchemical meme has been transformation, in Leary's alchemy the psychedelic experience would be the philosophers' stone.

Leary wasn't the only one to in the twentieth century to give the occult a science fiction twist. Kenneth Grant (1924-2011 CE), Crowley's student and successor to the OTO in Europe, believed that

⁸⁸. Timothy Leary, *Exo-Psychology*. (Star Seed/Peace Press Publication. California, 1977), 8.

⁸⁹. Leary, *Exo-Psychology*, 6.

⁹⁰. Leary, *Exo-Psychology*, 8.

the spirits contacted by Crowley were really extra-terrestrials.⁹¹ Jack Parsons (1914-1952 CE), also known as the inventor of the solid-fuel rocket, was Crowley's chosen head of the American OTO in the 1940s. Parsons recruited L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986 CE) to the OTO where Hubbard studied Crowley's brand of occultism under Parsons. Parsons and Hubbard had a falling out which led to Hubbard leaving and began writing his book, *Dianetics* that formed the basis of Scientology. Scientology has been criticized for copying crowleylean occultism, yet giving it a science fiction mythology.⁹² What this meme seems to capitalize on is the desire that has been there since the beginning. Human beings, surrounded by the elements (earth, air, water and fire), look up to the sky at night to feel their spirit compelled upwards to something divine. It is a fair argument to say that this awe of the stars has fueled spiritual ambition since the beginning and each generation processed it differently. But to Leary it was a literal story of DNA compelling us to leave the planet.

Conclusion

What is the alchemy meme? How did it survive into the modern era? From ancient Greece to the twentieth century, it was a flexible, metaphysical language discussing a personal leverage in

⁹¹. Henrik Rogden and Martin P. Starr, eds. *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

⁹². Hugh B Urban, "The Occult Roots of Scientology?: L. Ron Hubbard, Aleister Crowley, and the Origins of a Controversial New Religion." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (February 2012): 91. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/nr.2012.15.3.91>

the spiritual realm. It served as a vehicle for counterculture. The four elements exist at the core of this. For example, a physical fire has a relationship of what is “fiery” inside us. This is a conversation of metaphor where fire could mean several things including, creativity, passion, will to live, fate, and other ideas the culture would put in a similar category. This same aspect of self is a reflection of the elements in the zodiac and planetary forces. They're all connected on the strings of sympathy and gives insight into the supernatural. This notion of sympathy has imbued alchemy with a cumulative effect where it has maintained an “underground theology” that has moved alongside Western civilization as it progressed and adapted to each era.

The encouragement of curiosity has made it unique among marginal religious groups. As each generation looks back and attempts to reinterpret, they re-imagine it with through the themes and issues of their generation. The Hellenistic world was searching for the divinity reflected on the earth, the Renaissance sought to transform Christianity, the fin-de-siècle generation wanted the spirit to be empirical, and the twentieth century looked towards a space age future where they would find divinity in space travel. Yet we keep on seeing freedom being the goal of apotheosis.

But what commonalty did the population of each era share? Alchemy adapted to symbol sets to form larger syncretic groups each time, but there was an additional motivation with its adherents. Each era discussed had seen significant increases of humanism in the zeitgeist. Alchemy appeals to the humanist in a way most religious beliefs don't reach. The individual is elevated in a way that even materialism doesn't reach. In each era discussed there was a significant leap in humanism among the intellectual elite that found its way to become dominant in the overall culture. Once again the notion of freedom is a dominant goal. This field provides another angle on examining the hopes and prejudice of each generation that incorporated alchemy into their world view. The metaphysics were vague enough for them to project themselves onto it, yet ordered enough to continue as a tradition with a central theme and teaching.

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