

Sky and Psyche – Week 2

Gnosticism and Hermeticism

Purpose of the Week

This week's purpose is to introduce Gnostic and Hermetic thought with emphasis on the soul and its relationship with the celestial realm

Tasks this Week

- Do the required reading, including the discussion reading for Week 3
- Check some of the recommended reading
- Attend the seminar and/or listen to the recording

Class Description

Hans Jonas described Gnosticism as the common features of the numerous sects that had sprung up in the first centuries of the Christian era. In an era of religious syncretism, he wrote, the general religion of the East Mediterranean was 'a dualistic transcendent religion of salvation'.¹ Salvation and the restoration of the soul was achieved by travelling up through the planetary spheres to reunite with the divine.

Hermeticism centres around a group of texts, known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, produced between the 2nd century BCE and the 1st or 2nd centuries CE. According to Nick Campion, Hermeticism should be seen as part of the wider current of Gnosticism, providing the context in which astrology developed in Hellenistic Egypt. The *Corpus Hermeticum* is thus the 'written record of a period of remarkable religious syncretism, a blending of Greek and Egyptian religious traditions, iconography and practice', laying the foundation for Western esotericism and occultism.²

This week we look at some of the Gnostic and Hermetic texts and explore the concept of soul and its relationship with the divine who resides beyond the sphere of the fixed stars.

Thought for the week: Does Gnostic thought influence, in any way, current views of the celestial realm?

¹ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* 2nd ed., rev. edn (Routledge, 1992), p. 32.

² Nick Campion, *A History of Western Astrology, Volume I: The Ancient World* (London and New York: Continuum Books, 2008), pp.188-189.