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Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
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The Soul Drama

stories, morality, sky, psyche

Nicholas Campion

University of Wales Trinity Saint
David

‘The Soul Drama’

Richard August Reitzenstein (2 April 1861 - March 1931)

Also used term ‘Soul Journey’.

German classical philologist and scholar of ancient Greek religion, Hermeticism and Gnosticism.

One of the major figures of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (*history of religions school*).

Emphasised influence of Gnosticism in the New Testament.



Nicholas Campion, ‘Astronomy, Ethics and the Planets’, *Mediterranean Archaeology & Archaeometry* Vol. 18, 2018 issue 4, pp. 259-64.

<https://www.maajournal.com/index.php/maa/article/view/730/658>

‘The Soul Drama’ and the Sky

The phrase was used by Morton
Bloomfield (1913-1987)

The soul’s descent through the seven
planetary spheres before birth
(eight if we include the stars).

The soul’s ascent through the spheres
after death.

Each sphere assumes a moral quality
which the soul either acquires or
abandons on the journey.

The seven planets then become
associated with the seven deadly, or
cardinal, sins of Roman Catholicism.

The sky is then seen as either (a)
containing such phenomena as
good and evil, or (b) representing
them in story/mythic form

Bloomfield, Morton W., *The Seven
Deadly Sins; and Introduction to the
History of a Religious Concept, with
Special Reference to Medieval
English Literature* (Ann Arbor:
Michigan State College Press, 1952).

Bloomfield, Morton W., ‘The Origin of
the Concept of the Seven Cardinal
Sins’, *The Harvard Theological
Review*, Vol. 34 no 2 (Apr. 1941), pp.
121-128.JSTOR



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The Descent of Innana (Ishtar/Venus)

Sumer (Mesopotamia/southern Iraq), before 2000 BCE.

Myth associated with (a) Venus's period of invisibility, when it is too close to the Sun to be seen (b) later, as descent of Kore/Demeter to the underworld associated with winter)

The goddess descends through seven gates to the underworld, shedding a 'me' (one of her attributes) at each, in order to rescue her dead lover Dumuzi (later Tammuz).

Kramer, Samuel Noah and Diane Wolkstein, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1983).

Later associated with Salome's dance (Salome, the daughter of the Jewish queen Herodias, dances for her stepfather, Herod, and demands the head of the prophet John the Baptist, in return) and in the 19th c becomes the dance of the seven veils.

Gustav Moreau 1876 *Salome Dancing Before Herod*



Plato: the individual soul and the stars



Each individual soul has a star (metaphorical?)

The individual soul originates in the sphere of the stars

The individual soul incarnates via the planetary spheres

The levels of the soul:

1. Rational: we could call this the higher mind; roughly equates to the immortal part of the soul; can contact the divine.
2. Emotional: feelings, desires; irrational.
3. Animal: the physical body and its needs; irrational.

Sometimes Platonic writers talk of these as if they are three distinct kinds of soul, but they can also be separate functions of a single soul, each of which is a fragment of soul which permeates the entire cosmos

The Republic X 614 C-E

When souls are judged the righteous ascend to the sky, the unjust descend to the earth.



The Myth of Er

Plato, *Republic*, 2 Vols., trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1935.

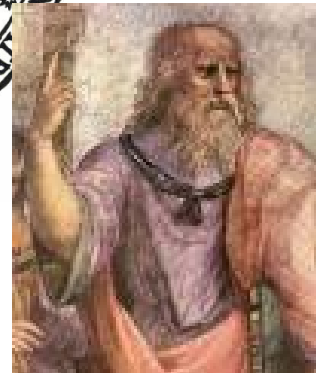
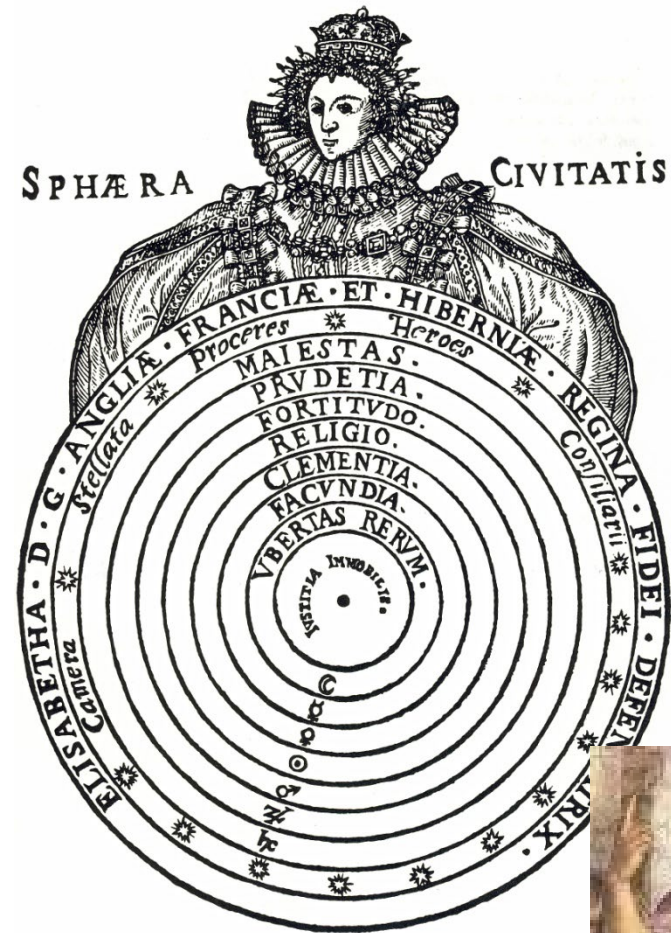
The Myth of Er

In the Republic Book X, Plato set out the rules by which reincarnation relates to the structure of the universe. The account was given through the words of a man called Er who had been killed in battle but had later revived having been dead for twelve days (614B).

The Structure of the Universe.

The whole universe spins on the 'spindle of Necessity' which extends outwards from the earth's poles. The planets are positioned on concentric spheres which enclose the earth and which rotate on the spindle of Necessity (616B-617D).

And the spindle turned on the knees of Necessity, and up above on each of the rims of the circle a Siren stood, borne around in its revolution and ordering one sound, one note, and from all the eight there was the concord of a single harmon (617B).



The Myth of Er

The Fates

The three Fates, or Moirae, are daughters of Necessity. They sing in unison with the sirens who sing the harmony of the spheres (X.617C). Lachesis sings of the past, Clotho of the present and Atropos of the future.

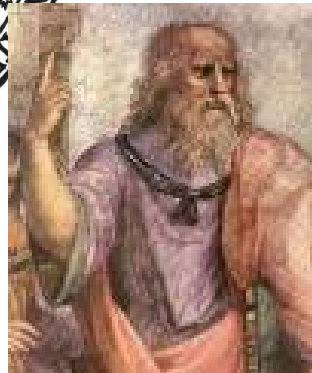
Moira was depicted by Homer as an allotted share of anything--meat, booty, land, years of life - that was arbitrarily distributed by Zeus.

This concept was personified by Hesiod as the triple goddess Moira, the three Fates as spinners and weavers of human destiny.

The word moira means a portion, part or allocation, as in the division of some whole that is allocated to some thing or some one in particular.

Thus the basic core concept of fate in Greek may be spatial. In this sense one's fate is not what is going to happen to one so much as it is what place in the scheme of things has been allotted to one.

Later on moira was also used to mean a degree of the zodiac.)



The Myth of Er

Reincarnation

Souls waiting to be reincarnated assemble before Lachesis.

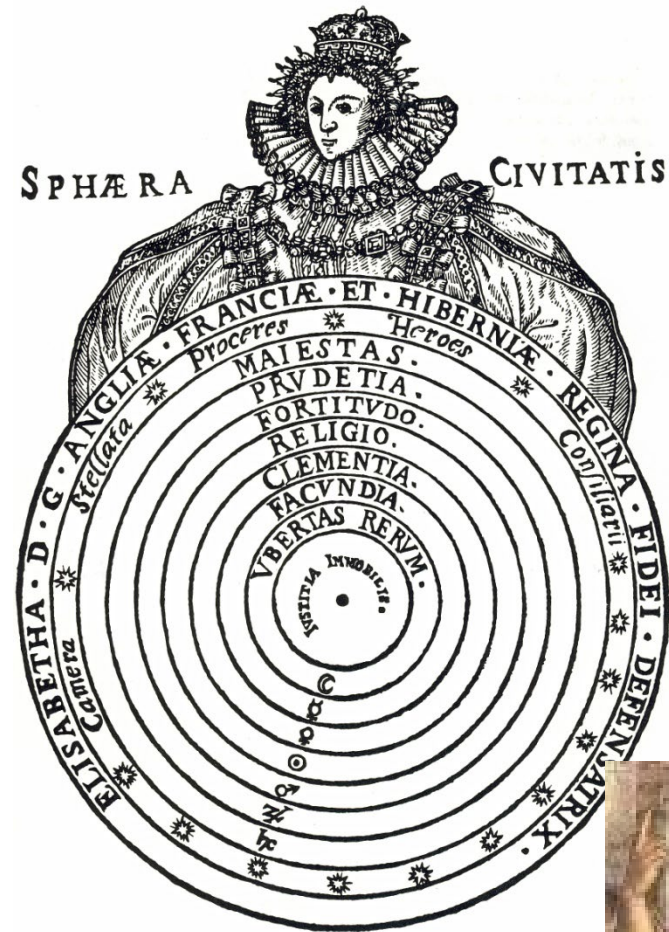
A 'prophet' then took from Lachesis' lap 'lots and patterns of lives'. These were then thrown on the ground and each of the souls had to pick up a lot.

The prophet then revealed the possible patterns of lives, of which there were far more than the souls present. The souls then chose their lives; they were therefore absolutely responsible for the fortune or misfortune they were to encounter in their lives.

Each soul was then sent to Lachesis again to receive the 'genius' or 'daemon', the 'guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice' (X.620D-E).

This 'divinity' then led the soul to Clotho who ratified the choice of life and finally to Atropos who spun the web of its destiny.

The choice was then irreversible and the soul passed first under the throne of Necessity and then to the Plain of Oblivion where it slept by the River of Forgetfulness and drunk its water. In the middle of the night there was a great shaking and each soul wafted upward to its birth 'like a shooting star' (X.621.B).

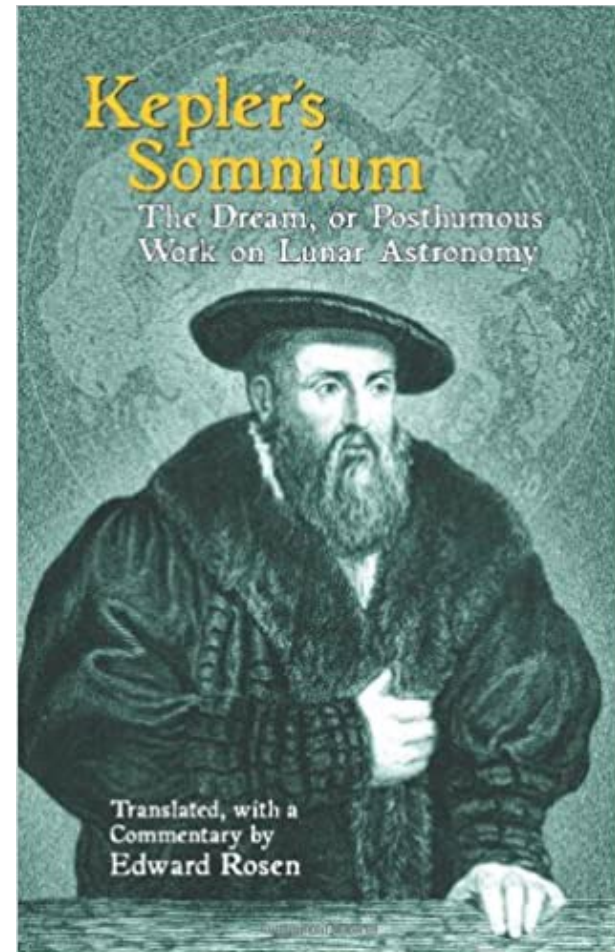


The Celestial Dream

Cicero, *The Dream of Scipio* in *Republic*, trans. C.W.Keyes, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, London, 1927.

Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. W.H.Stahl, New York: Columbia University Press 1990 [1952].

Johannes Kepler *Somnium* , 1608 (pub 1634)



The Ptolemaic Planets

Claudius Ptolemy (c.100-170 CE)

Tetrabiblos 1.5

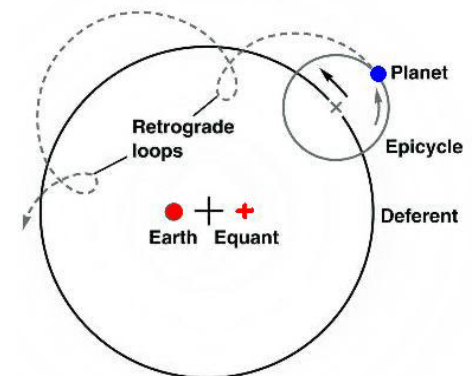
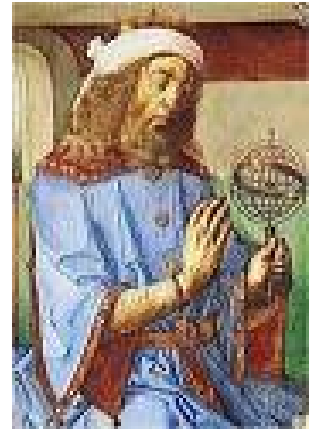
Benevolent: Moon, Venus, Jupiter.

Malevolent: Mars, Saturn.

Mixed: Sun, Mercury

(the system occurs in 5th c Mesopotamia)

When the planets move through the zodiac signs and houses, and form aspects to each other, the absolute morality embodied in each planet varies. Morality therefore alters with time, place and motion



Negotiating Sin and Salvation

The *Corpus Hermeticum*

Greek c 1st – 3rd centuries CE

The soul is free from the influence of the planets:

*“the planets replace one another from moment to moment; they do not go on working without change, but succeed one another in rotation. These daemons then make their way through the body, and enter the two irrational parts of the soul;[\[1\]](#) and each daemon perverts the soul in a different way, according to his special mode of action. **But the rational part of the soul remains free from the dominion of the daemons, and fit to receive God in itself.** If then the rational part of a man's soul is illumined by a ray of light from God, for that [in] man the working of the daemons is brought to nought; for no daemon and no god has power against a single ray of the light of God.”*

Libellus XVI. 15-16 in Scott, Walter (trans.), *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* (4 vols, Boulder CO: Shambala, 1982), p. 271.

[\[1\]](#) The parts which feel desire and repugnance; see Scott, *Hermetica*, p. 271, n. 2; Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N. Fowler (Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1914) 246A, 253 C-D.



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The Corpus Hermeticum

For those virtuous individuals who are blessed with *Nous* [divine mind], the way back to God is through the planetary spheres.

At each one, the vices associated with that planet are shed, [in a pastiche of the Sumerian Inanna's shedding of her jewellery and clothing on her descent to the underworld].

As the soul passes the moon it sheds growth and decay, Mercury trickery, Venus deceit, the sun the qualities of being a ruler, Mars daring and recklessness, Jupiter greed and Saturn falsehood.

At the eighth sphere, that of the stars, the soul beings to praise God, and is encouraged by the sound of voices from the higher levels. Finally the soul ascends to God and, in the logical climax of Platonic theology, it is reunited with God. In fact, it becomes God.

Libellus I.25, in Scott, Walter (trans.), *Hermetica: The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophic Teachings Ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus* (4 vols, Boulder CO: Shambala, 1982), Vol. 1, p. 129.

Also see Bloomfield, Morton W., 'The origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins', *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 34 no 2 (Apr. 1941), pp. 121-128.

Self-awareness is vital for the individual's relationship with her cosmos.

Poimandres, speaking to Hermes:

Look 'at what you yourself have in you; for in you too, the word is son, and the mind is father of the word...Now fix your thought upon the Light...and learn to know it.

Libellus I. 6, in Scott, *Hermetica*, Vol. 1, p. 117.

'He who has recognised himself [acknowledged the divinity within] enters into the Good'.

[2] Libellus I.18, in Scott, *Hermetica*, Vol. 1, p. 125.

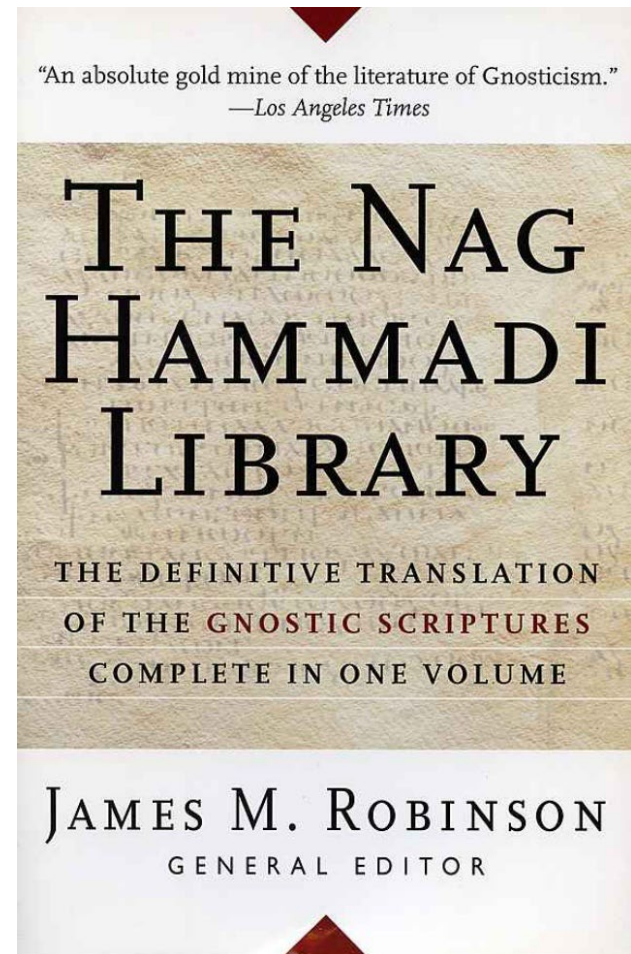


Gnosticism: the cosmos as prison

The physical universe human's inhabit was created by the evil god Yaldabaoth (the demiurge – creator the universe)

'And he [Yaldabaoth] placed seven kings - each corresponding to the firmaments of heaven - over the seven heavens, and five over the depths of the abyss, that they may reign. And he shared his fire with them, but he did not send forth from the power of the light which he had taken from his mother, for he is ignorant darkness'.^[1]

^[1] 'The Apocryphon of John', x-xi, pp. 110-11, Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 384-6.

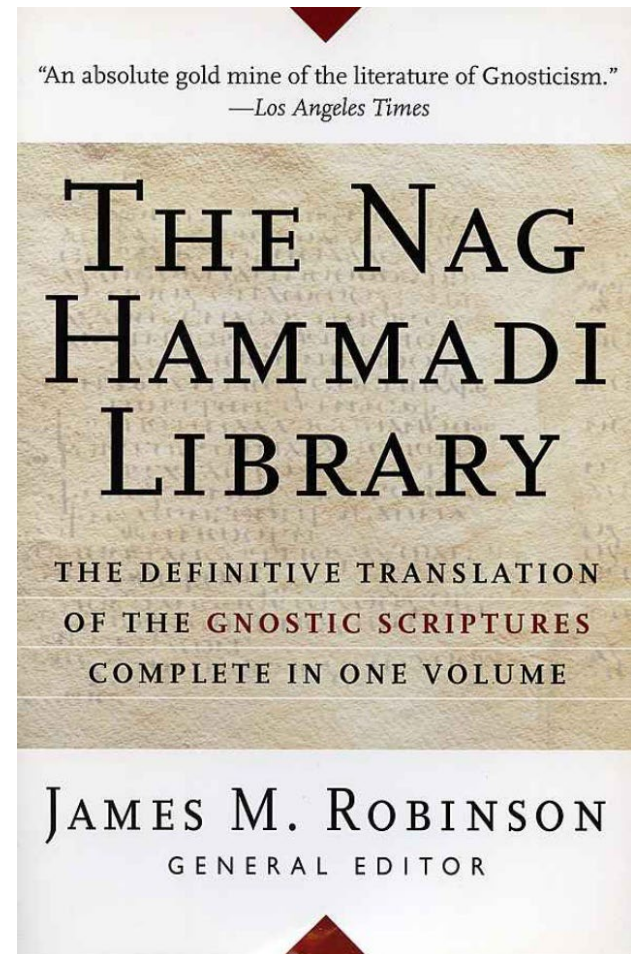


Gnosticism: salvation through Christ

But salvation was possible through Christ

'Live with Christ, and he will save you. For he is the true light and the sun of life. For just as the sun which is visible and makes light for the eyes of the flesh, so Christ illuminates every mind and the heart...the light of Christ, which is reason...For everything which is visible is a copy of that which is hidden. For as a fire which burns in a place without being confined to it, so it is with the sun which is in the sky, all of whose rays extend to places on the earth. Similarly, Christ has a single being, and he gives light to every place. This is also the way in which he speaks of our mind, as if it were a lamp which burns up the place. (Being) in a part of the soul, it gives light to all the parts'.^[1]

^[1] 'The Teachings of Silvanus', 96-98, in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 385-8.



Gnosticism: Christ and the Planetary Spheres

At his ascension to Heaven, Christ travels through the planetary spheres, destroying their malign power:

'I came into the houses of the spheres shining exceedingly, there being no measure to the light which I had. And all the archons and all those who were in that sphere were agitated together. And they saw the great light which I had. And they looked upon my garment, they saw the mystery of their name within it. And they were increasingly agitated, and they were in great fear, saying: 'How, has the Lord of the All passed through us without our knowing?' And all their bonds were loosened, and their places and their ranks. And each one abandoned his rank.'[\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Pistis Sophia, Book one, translation Carl Schmidt and Violet Mcdermott

<http://www.gnosis.org/library/psoph1.htm>. See Lieven, Alexandra von, 'Gnosis and Astrology: "Book IV" of the Pistis Sophia', in Steele, John M. and Annette Imhausen, *Under One Sky: Astronomy and Mathematics in the Ancient Near East*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament Bnd 297, Munster: Ugarit Verlag 2002, pp. 223-236.



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Thirteenth Century: Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274)

Summa Contra Gentiles (1259 and 1265). III.91.2:

Of course acts of choice and movements of the will are controlled by God. And human intellectual knowledge is ordered by God through the mediation of the angels. **Whereas matters pertinent to bodily things**, whether they are internal or external, when they come within the use of man, are **governed by God by means of the angels and the celestial bodies**.

III.92.2: 'man is ordered in regard to his body under the celestial bodies, in regard to his intellect under the angels, and in regard to his will under God

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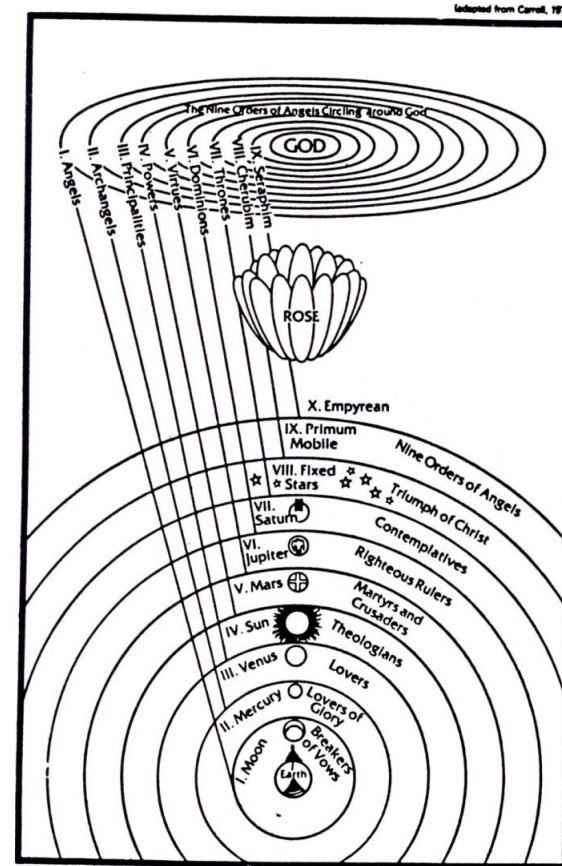


Dante: the celestial journey

Dante Alighieri (c. 1265 – 1321).

The *Comedìa*, Divine Comedy (c 1308-1320).

Exploration of the universe through a journey through Hell, Purgatory (where souls go to be purged prior to entry into Heaven) and Heaven



Christine de Pizan

Cristina da Pizzano (1364 – c. 1430).

Poet at the court of Charles VI of France

L'Avision Christine

A commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: a journey through the Heavens in order to gain wisdom

'[Sebille] showed me everything, and told me the names and powers of the planets, and she made every effort to teach me the courses of the moving stars, both the fixed and the wandering. And she told me the properties, the effects, the contraries, the powers and the influences, and their various arrangements'.

Weber, Alan, 'Changes in Celestial Journey Literature, 1400-1650', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 1 no 1, Spring/Summer 1997, pp. 34-50.

<http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/abstracts/1-1-Weber.php>



The celestial journey despiritualised

Francis Godwin *Man in the Moone* (published 1638).

Domingo Gonsales, a Spanish Hidalgo, narrates his remarkable life story. After killing a man in a duel, Gonsales departs on a series of sea voyages which finally land him on the island of St. Helena.

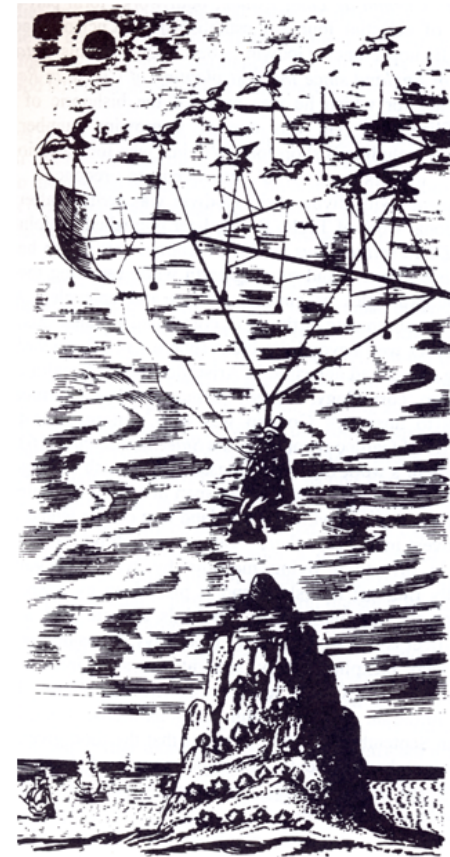
He discovers huge geese there - gansas - which he trains to carry heavy loads. He invents a flying machine by tying the gansas together, eventually flies off the island and is picked up by a Spanish ship.

Gonsales escapes with his gansas who inexplicably fly straight upwards into the atmosphere towards the moon.

On his lunar voyage he encounters pleasing shapes floating in the air who bring him delicious foods. When he reaches the moon, on September 21, 1599, he finds that the food given to him by the aerial beings has turned to 'a mingle mangle of dry leaves, of Goats haire, Sheepe, or Goats-dung, Mosse, and such like trash'

Weber, Alan, 'Changes in Celestial Journey Literature, 1400-1650', *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 1 no 1, Spring/Summer 1997, pp. 34-50.

<http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/abstracts/1-1-Weber.php>



Gonsales en route to the Moon,
from Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638)

The celestial journey despiritualised

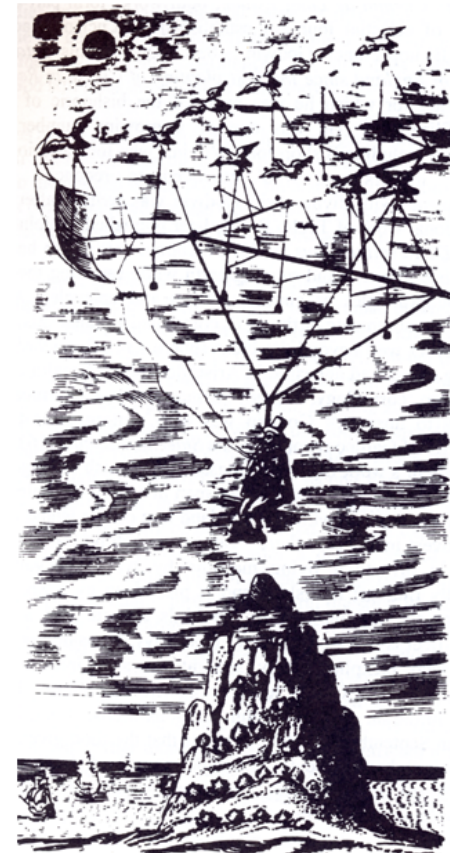
Francis Godwin *Man in the Moone* (published 1638).

(Galileo published his telescopic observations in 1610)

‘will not go so far as *Copernicus*, that maketh the Sunne the Center of the Earth, and unmoveable, neither will I define any thing one way or other. Only this I say, allow the Earth his motion (which these eyes of mine can testifie to be his due) and these absurdities are quite taken away, every one having his single and proper Motion onely’ (p. 60)

Weber, Alan, ‘Changes in Celestial Journey Literature, 1400-1650’, *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 1 no 1, Spring/Summer 1997, pp. 34-50.

<http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/abstracts/1-1-Weber.php>



Gonsales en route to the Moon,
from Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638)

Film

Beatriz García, Estela Reynoso, Silvina Pérez Alvarez and Raúl Gabellone, 'Inspiration of astronomy in the movies: a history of a close encounter', eds. Nicholas Campion and Rolf Sinclair, *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 16 nos. 1 and 2, 2012, pp. 357-371.

http://www.cultureandcosmos.org/pdfs/16/Garcia_et_al_INSAPVII_Astronomy_in_the_Movies.pdf

Culture and Cosmos Vol. 16 – on line

The plot lines in some space dramas are often explicitly moralistic – Star Trek



Figure 1. George Melies, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902)



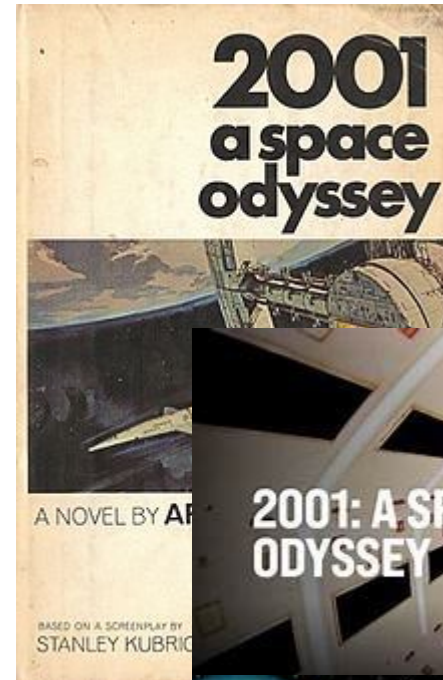
Figure 2. Travels and crews: Star Trek, Lost in Space, The Next Generation, Serenity, Space 1999

2001: Space Odyssey

Literature: Arthur C. Clarke, short story, 'The Sentinel', 1951.

Film: Stanley Kubrick, 1968.

Establishes the template of the space film as a journey of exploration/ renewal/ transformation/ rebirth.





Looking back to Earth from the Sky

Ecology, environmental movement, green politics,
counter-culture

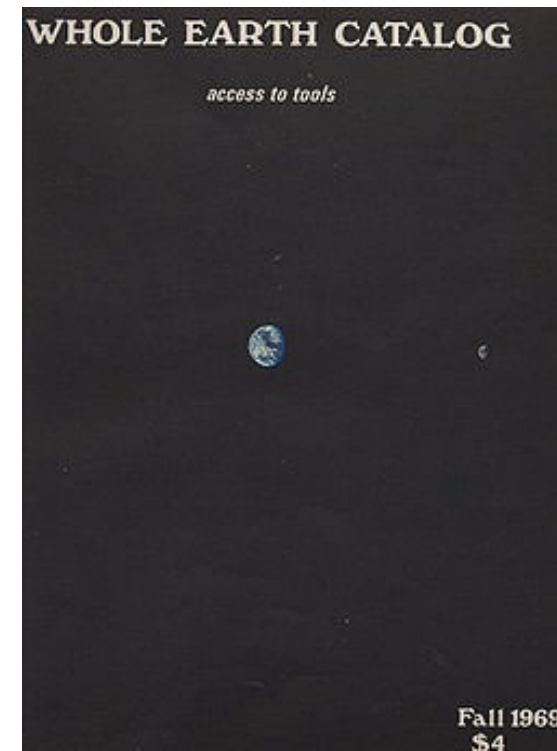
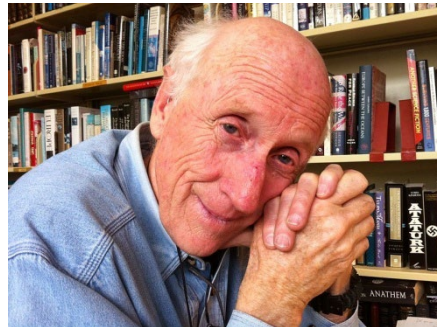
The *Whole Earth Catalogue* (published 1968-72,
occasionally to 1988)

Stewart Brand (below in 2010):

Biologist, associated with Ken Kesey,
early LSD use



Chronicle / Bill Young, File





The Overview Effect

Named by Frank White in 1987 in order to describe the experiences reported by some astronauts when seeing Earth from space for the first time.

Frank White, *The Overview Effect—Space Exploration and Human Evolution* (Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1987).





The Overview Institute.

The Institute's apocalyptic and Utopian agenda is clearly spelled out:

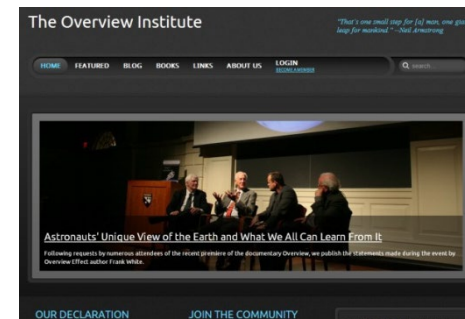
'We live at a critical moment in human history. The challenges of climate change, food, water and energy shortages as well as the increasing disparity between the developed and developing nations are testing our will to unite, while differences in religions, cultures, and politics continue to keep us apart. The creation of a 'global village' through satellite TV and the Internet is still struggling to connect the world into one community. At this critical moment, our greatest need is for a global vision of planetary unity and purpose for humanity as a whole.'

'Overview', <http://vimeo.com/55073825>; The Overview Institute, <http://www.overviewinstitute.org/>.

The Overview Institute: Declaration of Vision and Principles,

<http://www.overviewinstitute.org/index.php/about-us/declaration-of-vision-and-principles>

[accessed 25 May 2013].



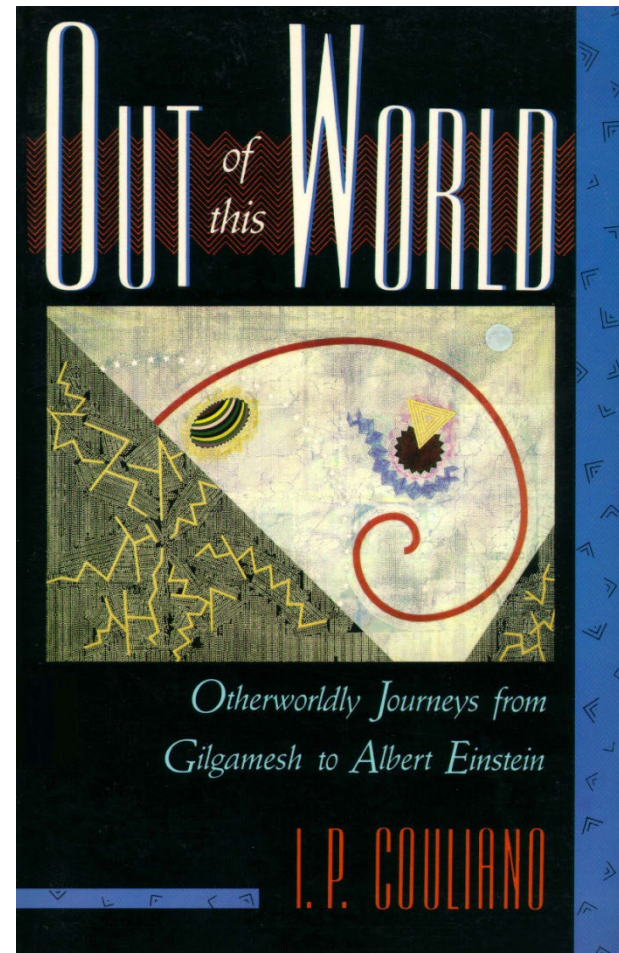
Some Further Reading

Books to find if you can:

Couliano, I.P. *Out of this World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein*. Boston: Shambhala, 1991.

Zaleski, Carol, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Idel, Moshe, *Ascension on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, Budapest: Central Europe University Press, 2005.



Conclusion

In the history of astronomy/ the sky – including modern astronomy – we should explore cultural contexts (myth, story, plot, narrative, discourses).

To look at, participate in or with the sky is to witness and/or engage in a moral drama and a process of renewal.

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