

The Hermetic Principles: An Interpretation

The Seven Hermetic Principles, upon which the entire Hermetic Philosophy is based, are as follows:

1. The Principle of Mentalism.
2. The Principle of Correspondence.
3. The Principle of Vibration.
4. The Principle of Polarity.
5. The Principle of Rhythm.
6. The Principle of Cause and Effect.
7. The Principle of Gender.¹

The Principle of the All is Mental

The first Hermetic Principle, The All is Mind. A thinking person is one who questions, and then seeks answers. This is the beginning of the throes of Awakening, or the tossing and turning of a sleeping mind dreaming of being awake.

This is the Principle of Mentalism. The All is mental is a bit difficult to comprehend. However, if we are reflections of the All, then we shall endeavor to explore this concept through our experiences. The first point of reference is the common reality. This is the reality we live in because this is the reality all agreement upon.² When we fall out of alignment, we become marginalized or pioneers of thought. We say thought because

¹ (Three Initiates, 1912)

² (Tart, 1983)

everything begins with a thought. While we like to use the example of the development of a thought from an idea to something of substance, other examples exist. For instance, all that we perceive are thoughts being reinterpreted by the brain guided by Mind. All is composed of resonant frequencies of energy. The brain, through mathematical formula, converts matter to energy and energy back to matter.³ Through these formulas, the concept of reality becomes an illusion which in turn is naught but a mental construct.

Upon our awakening, we do not make this discovery. What we do discover is a shift in the level of awareness or a change in consciousness. The question becomes, is it our consciousness that shifts, or is it Jung's collective consciousness that opens to us? It is not the religious experience we seek. It is not purpose we seek. It is unification that draws us forward.

Our shift in conscious is part of the life experience and of the religious experience. Both are tied to altered states of conscious. These states are often imperceptible unless one purposefully pursues the condition. Our baseline conscious is our waking state.⁴ It is our continuous scanning of the environment that separates the baseline from an altered state. The altered state, which a majority of us experience unknowingly, occurs through focus. Of the many ways of achieving an altered state, we are most familiar with meditation. Meditation is the narrowing of our total focus, or the reassignment of focus. We teach that meditation is about awareness and the practice expands that awareness. This occurs by reassigning mental structures. Our baseline conscious is structured through habit, conditioning, and survival. When these functions are altered, so is the state of conscious. Anything that alters that structure puts us into an altered state of conscious.⁵ For our purposes, we are not going to pursue the prospect of drug induced states because they are often pursuits into escapism. However, there is a plethora of paths towards altered states that may aid in the expansion of awareness. We have addressed the use of

³ (Talbot, 1991)

⁴ (Tart, 1983)

⁵ (Tart, 1983)

meditation in a variety of writings as have many well-known authors. Perhaps, we'll suggest a path many are familiar with.

We may be able to adequately demonstrate why the All may be considered mental. Coitus is the way of nature. This is how nature perpetuates life on all levels. We, being intellectuals, take pride in our desire for division and have separated coitus into two distinct pursuits. On the one hand there is the sexual act and on the other hand there is the expression of love. Both bring a sense of satisfaction to the participants. One can be considered mundane and the other esoteric. It is the esoteric path we are delving into. Many past cults engaged in what we lasciviously refer to as orgiastic rituals. Such references have been colored by contemporary religious views. If any are able to move past this conditioning, they may discover something immensely pleasing. Coitus leads us to an altered state of conscious, an altered state of awareness. For an ever-brief moment, our awareness potentially expands beyond the confines of limitation. We experience something that is so moving that many continuously seek to replicate it. Some even become addicted. All of this occurs within Mind.

The altered state is the calling card of awareness. The Hermetic Principles came to us through a religious experience, an altered state of awareness. The 'Divine Pymander of Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus' is of the tale of the birth of Hermetic writings and is an expression of the first principle.

Hermes, while wandering chose to meditate. The writings suggest this place of meditation was desolate and rocky, it does not matter. What does matter is that in his meditation, he moved beyond the sensations of the body.⁶ This is the very experience many seek to replicate, whether through meditation, coitus, or any other path leading towards an altered state of awareness. In this instance, he experienced the great dragon

⁶ (Hall, 1928)

Poimandres. Conscious is a mental state, one which many seek to experience for many reasons. Ours is not to escape the common reality, but to expand it.

Mikaomi Usi, who developed Reiki, received his inspiration while meditating within a waterfall. The place of meditation is irrelevant. What is important is that Reiki was developed through an altered state of awareness. Reiki is a mental contrivance. The Universe is mental because it communicates through Mind, which is nonlocal.

If we continue exploring the idea of Mind being nonlocal, we must dispense with the association of Mind being solely intellectual. Mind is also emotional. We will discuss these aspects more in depth at a later time. For now, we encourage the idea of Mind being both emotional and intellectual. It has to be. We'll discover more as we progress.

The All is Mind because all things originate within Mind. Inspiration, the religious experience, the desire to become one with the Source are projected upon the common reality through Mind. The All, the Source, the Absolute, the Divine is experienced through Mind. Through this reasoning, we arrive at the conclusion that the All is mental.

The Principle of Correspondence

The Gnostics have several creation myths, each differing from the other. However, they have some common threads. The first, is the being from which all emerged from. This is their perfect being, because there were none to compare it with. They call the being many names. We shall call it the Absolute. The second thread is the emanation of the Absolute, which is the first creation, thought. This was called Pistis, which means truth. Others call the first creation Sophia, which is wisdom. The second emanation of the Absolute was the Thrice Blessed One who came forth through Pistis. Thrice Blessed may be interpreted as being the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. What we need to keep in mind about these emanations is that they are androgynous. Another thread of commonality is that through Pistis and the Thrice Blessed One, other emanations came forth. Upon one occasion, Pistis created without the blessing of either. The creation was considered ugly, and in her shame cast it aside into darkness. This our focus.

The creation of Pistis is called Ialdabaoth, or the False God. Ialdabaoth has other names, but we'll remain with this one. Being of Pistis and consequently having some of the properties of the Absolute, Ialdabaoth also created. These creations were also androgynous. For explanation purposes, we'll assign them a gender. Male energy is the initiator. Therefore, Ialdabaoth will be male. As Pistis received from the Absolute and completed what was begun, Pistis will be female.

When Ialdabaoth gazed towards his mother from the darkness, he saw only reflections. The words he heard were only echoes. Yet, from the reflection he modeled his creations. In the Gnostic writings, we are the creations of Ialdabaoth. Yet, because a small portion of the Absolute exists in Ialdabaoth, so does a smaller portion exist within us. Here our story ends, because our focus is upon the second Hermetic Principle.

The second Hermetic Principle is the Principle of Correspondence. Most know this as the cliché, *as above, so below*. Correspondence means connection. Thus, we can say it is the Principle of Connection. Unfortunately, this does not provide us with much insight. Yes, we know all things are connected, but what does that mean? We'll refer to our introduction. Ialdabaoth's creation was based on a reflection. What he created was not even a copy, it was an imitation. Yet, the imitation is a reflection.

The first Hermetic principle is the Principle of Mentalism. The explanation being that all is a mental construct. We perceive all through the cognitive processes of the brain. Therefore, the Universe is a mental construct. What Ialdabaoth created was a perception of what he witnessed, which was a reflection. Reflections are always going to be imperfect, because they are not exact copies. Reflections tend to be blurred, distorted, or misleading. Hence, we call ourselves imperfect beings. There is something more being alluded to.

Focus on the word reflection. We are reflections of the Absolute. The Absolute may be light, or it may be darkness. Most likely it's both. What is important is that we are reflections, whether of Ialdabaoth or of the Absolute. We are also reflections of each other because we are of the same substance as Ialdabaoth and the Absolute.

Forget about gender. Refer to the first principle. We are mental projections. We see ourselves in those we associate with. From a mental perspective, we are reflections of each other. Genders are merely the blur of the reflection viewed. This is where we begin, with ourselves.

We are illustrations of the Principle of Correspondence. Our behaviors and actions are reflections of our emotions.⁷ When we become fearful, or angry, we lash out at those who

⁷ (McKenna, 2007)

are around us. When joyous or excited, we infect those around us. This is mood contagion. Mood contagion is one of the many strands connecting us to one another.⁸

The judgements we make about each other and ourselves are reflections of our beliefs. The beliefs we stand by are values we have made about ourselves and others.⁹ We are intimately connected and through this connection are reflections of those we associate with. These are only one of the many connections that exist.

We are a composition of resonating fields. Within this resonance lay vast amounts of information. The term for this resonating field is the biofield, which is composed of quantum, potential, electromagnetic, and probably other fields yet to be discovered. All things are composed of these fields.¹⁰ This means we are intimately connected to our environment, and through this connection the environment becomes a reflection of us. This also means we are reflections of the environment.

Our health is a reflection of how we integrate ourselves with the surrounding environment. When we are in harmony, we are healthy. When we become discordant with our environment, we become ill. Illness takes many forms. Some illnesses cause us to lash out, reflecting its destructive way. Other forms are more insidious and may take months, years, or decades before being noticed. The effects we have on climate demonstrate this delayed causation.

Information passes from one to another through resonance or when fields are in harmony with each other. As our resonance increases or expands, we begin to communicate with those within its sphere. Through the Principle of Correspondence, we become reflections of the information moving through our awareness. As above, so below

⁸ (De Waal, 2009)

⁹ (Quackenbush, 2001)

¹⁰ (Liboff, 2004)

is more than just saying as it is in spirit, so it is in matter. It is all encompassing. It is another expression of the Divine.

The Hermetic Principle of Vibration

Before moving into the third Hermetic Principle, we want to bring this forth from the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas.

Jesus said, 'If they say to you, where did you come from?' say to them, 'We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established itself and became manifest through their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children, and we are the elect of the Living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the sign of your Father in you?' say to them, 'It is movement and repose.'¹¹

When he says, we came from the light, Jesus is referring to the sun. Even today the sun holds a quality of divineness that is difficult to ignore. The sun provides some of the essential components for life. The ancients often referred to light as being the Divine intellect or Infinite intelligence.¹² We know light is information through recent studies. The place where the light came into being on its own accord and established itself also implies the first Hermetic Principle; the universe is mental. The universe is a vast field of information. Through awareness, we experience it. He then says it became manifest through their image, meaning the light, or knowledge, became clear through its reflection. This is the second Hermetic Principle; as above, so below. Jesus also tells them to say we are its children and are of the Living Father. This is the tricky part. To become children of the Living Father, we must be alive, or awake. To be awake is to become aware. Until then we are, as it is recorded in Luke, the dead tending to the dead.

Now comes the sign of the Father in us. It is movement and repose. Movement and repose are vibration. What is written in the Kabylion is that nothing rests. This is both, correct and incorrect. Vibration, or frequency, is oscillations which is to move back and

¹¹ (The Gospel of Thomas, 1984)

¹² (Hall, 1928)

forth. Each time it reaches its extreme, it rests. When we breath there is a point between the exhale and inhale where nothing occurs.¹³ In meditation, it is here that we are to rest. Here is balance because on the one side there is the inhalation, and on the other is exhalation. Inhalation and exhalation follow the same path, yet they are different; they are reflections of the other. Their commonality is they are action, they are movement and between each move is repose.

Vibration is not just about movement, it is movement. Vibration demonstrates that with movement come rest. These two aspects are reflected in many writings and sayings. Vibration is balance because it rests between movements. Vibration is life, because between birth and death is experience. Vibration is time because between the sowing and reaping there is growth. We are vibration because there is initiation and completion, and between rests the mystery.

¹³ (Rinpoche, 1992)

The Hermetic Principle of Polarity

The fourth Hermetic Principle is the principle of polarity. Here arise the principles of duality. Everything is balanced by its equal, by its opposite. The principle instructs us that everything contains its opposite.

We saw in the Hermetic Principle of Vibration these opposing forces in action. In our breathing example there are the inhalation and the exhalation. These are opposite actions of a process. The principle of polarity suggests these opposites are identical in nature, but different in degrees. Both, inhalation, and exhalation carry the same chemical components. Some are lesser and others are greater with each action. How might this be expressed differently?

There is the cliché that we have a dark side. If the cliché is true, then we have a light side that is the antithesis of the other. When we consider the cruelty witnessed in our common reality, even during the pandemic, this principle tells us those demonstrating such acts are equally as capable of expressing extreme acts of kindness. On any given day at any given moment, we are expressing behaviors of varying degrees of these opposites. This is where most of us exist, in the middle. To see such cruelty and kindness and the relationship between the two is difficult to describe within beings such as ourselves. Thus, we shall use a different approach.

The cards of the Tarot are sometimes referred to as the Book of Thoth, or the Book of Hermetic Principles as they are attributed to the same author. The second card of the major arcana is The High Priestess who resides between two columns. On one side is a white column, or sometimes jade. On it is inscribed the letter 'J' for Joachim. Joachim represents unity or certainty.¹⁴ On the other side is a dark column with the letter 'B' embolden on it. This is the column of Boaz, and according to the Hermetic Principle of Polarity, represents uncertainty. Betwixt these resides the High Priestess.

¹⁴ (Hall, 1928)

Continuing with The High Priestess, a full moon rests between what many have called a horned crown. If we gaze a bit longer at the crown, we will find that her hair moves the eye from the tip of a horn downward along her shoulder, leaving the impression of a quarter moon. A quarter moon is seen on either side of a full moon and easily suggests the waxing and waning phases. One leads us toward the full moon and the other away from it. However, the waning moon not only leads us away from the full moon, but also towards the new moon. In the same fashion, the waxing moon takes us away from the new moon.

This is an ample example of the principle of polarities. On the one hand is the full moon, bright with the light of the sun. On the other hand, we have the new moon with its dark shroud of mystery. They are the same, yet, different. Each gives way to the other. As the full moon wanes, the new moon waxes, each possessing the other in varying degrees. This is often overlooked in favor of the dualist system.

The full moon balances the new moon in every way except one. They do not remain balanced. This is what is overlooked. If they were to remain balanced, there would be no vibration. Without vibration there is no growth, no evolution, and no reflection. The phases of the moon demonstrate the need for encompassing the opposites. The phases of the moon demonstrate the complementary aspects of each. In the Hermetic Principle of Correspondence, we learned how one may reflect another. Through the Hermetic Principle of Vibration, we know the reflections are connected. The principle of polarity demonstrates how they are connected, how they are separate, and how they are the same.

Returning to The High Priestess, who resides between certainty and uncertainty. The High Priestess is also Sophia Pistis, or wisdom. Wisdom occurs when certainty and uncertainty complement each other. Complementary beings work together, whereas those in opposition work against the other. Working against each other suggests a balance has

been struck. Working together, they build harmony. From this, we can easily see balance is the opposite of harmony. We can also see how harmony flows, and balance does not.

We have presented different representations of the Hermetic Principle of Polarity. Through these demonstrations, we can apply this universal concept to all things, beings, and events. Within one, rests the other.¹⁵ We need only look beyond the obvious.

¹⁵ (Three Initiates, 1912)

The Hermetic Principle of Rhythm

While exploring the Hermetic Principle of Polarity, we found that each object and entity in nature contains its exact opposite. These opposites are found in behavior, actions, and properties. We also discovered we display all of the opposing characteristics in varying degrees. It is these varying degrees we are going to explore because they represent the principle of rhythm.

The Hermetic Principle of Rhythm is the natural ebb and flow in nature. We see this in the tides of the oceans, the phases of the moon, the seasons, etc. On the surface, this is clearly evident. What occurs beneath? Much.

All of creation is rhythm. When we gaze at our history, we see how everything moves forward, back upon itself, and forward again. Evolution is no different. From birth to death and perhaps rebirth, it is a continual undulation. The snake, as it moves across the ground imitates the pattern Creation follows. Nature does nothing in a straight line, why should we?

Rhythm is another word for cycles. All of nature operates within cycles. Often her activities are obscure. When referring to the Tarot's Chariot, which often depicts movement, we see Nature and Creation in action. The Chariot represents movement, as it travels across the sky back and forth between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. When we study the apron, we find it is covered in alchemical symbols. These symbols tell of Nature's propensity for growth and decay. Nothing new here. Under the obvious is the suggestion of growth and decay occurring at the same time. Our bodies do not first shed and then replenish the cells and molecules that provide form. The process is simultaneous. All that we experience is of the same rhythm. We experience both detrimental and beneficial events and behaviors simultaneously. Our experience of life vacillates between these poles of duality. It is the nature of Creation.

The Hermetic Principle of Rhythm is a continuous cycle. If we were to gaze at a representation of the principle it would be in the form of a bent circle, better known as the symbol of infinity. Yes, this is the secret of infinity, a continuous cycle that folds in upon itself in such a way as to appear self-perpetuating. A circle demonstrates continuity, as it has no perceptible point of origin or completion. This is the case when gazing at it from above. Yet, when viewed in profile we may see its deception. A bent circle appears to flow in two directions simultaneously. All that we have experienced, will be experienced again and again. Influenced by the Principle of Polarity, we shall experience the events in varying degrees.

The Hermetic Principle of Cause and Effect

The sixth Hermetic Principle is Cause and Effect. Simply put, everything has a cause and every cause is associated with an effect. Another way of putting this is, everything happens according to Law. This is very obvious, and most will not argue its implications. If one were to delve deeper, this explanation may become different.

The principle of cause and effect is best seen in the Tarot's Wheel of Fortune, or more precisely, the Wheel of Life. Within the wheel, along with the letters TARO or TORA are also the Hebrew letters Yod He Vau He. These are expressions of cause and effect. The Yod is viewed as the origin of all things and as the Unity Principle.¹⁶ He is the first division from Unity. It is often referred to as the ego,¹⁷ but it is not. He is the beginning of awareness. We might also refer to the first He as the Gnostic Sophia, but we sense this may be incorrect. Following the Hermetic Principle of Polarity, the first He is in opposition to Yod. Thus, it is division. Vau, where Yod was the initiator and the first He the receptacle, is the mystery linking the two. When Yod and He become complementary, they form something else. Vau is the essence of the origin or unity of all. The Vau is a mystery linking Yod to He. Yod He Vau forms the trinity, and from them comes the second He, also referred to as the Law.¹⁸ The idea proposed is that nothing exists outside the Law. The second He is also referred to as the point of transition.¹⁹ While it is a point of transition, it returns us to the Yod. This reflects the Hermetic Principles of Rhythm and Vibration. This may be difficult to assimilate.

Let's contemplate this another way. The first Hermetic Principle is that the Universe is Mental. This may imply the Universe and all that reside within are but a thought. Consider this. Before we create something, whether it is a plan or building a chair or anything else, it

¹⁶ (Franck, 1926)

¹⁷ (Papus, 1892)

¹⁸ (Papus, 1892)

¹⁹ (Papus, 1892)

begins as an idea, a thought. Where do ideas come from? They come from Mind.

Therefore, everything in existence began as an idea which is cause and effect. That effect became a cause which in turn created an effect.

Another way of postulating this would be that the Universe is self-aware. Through its awareness, it created or caused an idea to form which became an effect initiating a cause. There is no such thing as the supernatural outside of theatre. There is only what we are aware of and what remains a mystery. Nothing exists outside the Law of Creation or the Principle of Cause and Effect. There is only certainty and uncertainty. That is where we reside.

The Principle of Gender

We come to the seventh and final Hermetic Principle, the Principle of Gender. Gender is in all. Everything that is in existence possesses masculine and feminine principles.²⁰ This is also the most misunderstood and misapplied principle. Most people refer to these energies or aspects as male and female sexes. Other ways of expressing this principle is through the yin and yang references, completion, and initiation.

If we wish to gaze beyond the surface, we may find something of interest. In the biblical book of Genesis, there is a verse that refers to man becoming like 'we.' Common teaching suggests the 'we' was Jesus or the Christ with God. What if there were something deeper? When reading the Kabbalah, we are presented with something unusual. We are given light, which has no substance, and water, which has no form. "Had he not shed his light over all creatures, how could we have known him? (Chapt. 3, Continuation of the analysis of the Zohar: The Kabbalists' conception of the nature of God. Par. 6)."²¹ The divine aspect of the sun is wisdom,²² thus, we may infer that its rays are of intelligence or of the intellect. When all attributes have been taken away, there is that which is like a sea.²³ Water is substance, but without form. We are now presented with representations of male and female energy of a traditional sort.

Let's change this up a bit. What if we propose light represents awareness? Light cannot reveal all, only that which is exposed. Through this, we become aware of what we have been exposed to. We interpret it. We shine a light upon it. Until something is revealed and understood, it remains a mystery or in shadow. Light is revelation, because through light, all may be revealed and understood. However, to understand there must be context. There must be a second element. If light is considered the Source, then its opposing aspect may be water. When opposing each other, one is left in a state of confusion or emotionally cold.

²⁰ (Three Initiates, 1912)

²¹ (Franck, 1926)

²² (Hall, 1928)

²³ (Franck, 1926)

When the two come together as complementing forces, they become the mist described in Genesis. We have the germ of life spoken of in many occult writings. We may even have identified the 'We' God referred to in Genesis.

Consider this. We are vessels where intellect and emotion reside. We are formed of these energies often referred to as female and male. We are the Mystery. The Hermetic Principle of Gender returns us to the first Hermetic Principle of Mentalism. We are thoughts within thoughts.

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