

McKNIGHT, Stephen A. (1989): *Sacralizing the Secular: The Renaissance Origins of Modernity*, Louisiana State University Press, USA.

This work by Steven McKnight represents an attempt to reinterpret the nature of modernity. His essential thesis is that the valuation of rationality was not the most significant determining influence in the development of the European "Enlightenment". The change in consciousness associated with the Enlightenment is generally identified with a movement away from the sacred and towards the secular. McKnight contends rather that the Enlightenment represents a more extensive historic movement driven by a sacralising of the phenomenal world and of human potentialities.

McKnight suggests that this movement finds its origins in the Hermetic tradition, the body of work and system of thought believed to be derived from Hermes Trismegistus, the great magus of Egypt. The Hermetic project is envisioned as a progressive divinisation of humanity. But reading between the lines, this divinisation is a highly selective process and tends to be associated mainly with ruling elites rather than humanity as a whole.

Although McKnight presents a fascinating thesis supported by equally fascinating historical details, he does not quite crack the kernel. And one could suggest that even if he did, he would find within it a shrivelled and denatured vestige of an old story. For underlying many of the utopian systems created by the so-called god-men in McKnight's vision are nascent technocracies as capable of enslavement and tyranny as any theocracy.

At another and more essential level, McKnight has failed to meet with the Hermetic tradition on its own terms. Quoting extensively from the writings of Ficino, McKnight interprets the "spiritus mundi" or "quintessentia" as metaphors for an intellectual development that became the source and justification of a nascent Prometheanism.

These terms point towards an aspect of reality that was everywhere addressed or alluded to in the writings of Hermetic practitioners throughout the Renaissance. Paracelsus constantly referred to the "Light of Nature." Michael Sendivogius wrote of the "New Light of Alchemy." The Hermetic tradition was not so much concerned with articulating the foundations of a nascent intellection or rationality. Rather, it was concerned with the direct experience of spirit, of a coherent luminous energy that informs, directs and empowers the lives of practitioner/adepts.

By invoking Francis Bacon, Auguste Comte and Karl Marx as exemplars of the Hermetic project, McKnight has effectively crossed the poetic divide and sided with those who hold that technical and social engineering represent the ultimate sources of human salvation.

We have seen enough over the course of the past two centuries to know that technical mastery guarantees neither the exercise of wisdom nor enlightened leadership. There remains much to be done on the personal level before true freedom can become the birthright of all. This has ever been understood by those who pursued the wisdom traditions in all their manifestations.

Although the "prisca theologia" invoked by McKnight remains a source of deep knowledge that is capable of bestowing both power and freedom, it remains but one of the ways that have been revealed and developed by many great souls throughout history.

The real task is to uncover the means whereby individual transformation can be activated and encouraged. Enlightened leadership will inevitably fail if it does not also create a population of enlightened followers.

VDS, Belgrave ~1995
Revised November 2011

Preface

Another major scholarly development was the increasing recognition of the importance of what D.P. Walker called the *prisca theologia*, or Ancient Wisdom, tradition in Renaissance thought. This Ancient Wisdom includes a wide array of esoteric religious and pseudo-scientific traditions that are now recognized as a valued part of the Renaissance recovery of ancient learning. The analysis of these materials and the revaluation of their impact on philosophy and theology were begun by historians of science such as Lynn Thorndike and then carried forward by D.P. Walker, Eugenio Garin, Frances Yates, and other Renaissance specialists. As I examined these works and the primary sources on which they were based I became convinced that many features of modern thought and experience that had been identified with ancient Gnosticism could more properly be traced to this Ancient Wisdom tradition. pp ix-x

Introduction: A New Perspective on the Modern Age

The analysis of secularization focuses on the writings of Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and Galileo to demonstrate that secularization splits the two poles apart in an effort to establish the secular as an autonomous field. The examination of sacralization focuses on one of the Ancient Wisdom texts, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, to show that it is a key source for the Renaissance sacralizing pattern that obliterates distinctions between the secular and the sacred. As a result, man is depicted as a terrestrial god and society as an earthly paradise. p 6

Modern reformers such as Bacon, Comte, and Marx claim that their programs for social improvement derive from natural science. New evidence, however, demonstrates close parallels to the sacralizing aims of the pseudo-sciences of magic and alchemy. p 7

Secularizing and Sacralizing Patterns in Modernity

The most distinctive feature of modernity is the underlying conviction that an epochal break separates it from the preceding “dark age.” Integral to this epochal consciousness is a new confidence in man’s capacity for self-determination, and this in turn derives from the conviction that an epistemological breakthrough provides man with the capacity to change the conditions of his existence. p 9

By the eighteenth century the accumulated pressures to integrate the recent political, cultural, and intellectual advances into a coherent, intelligible pattern of historical development became a major preoccupation. Voltaire’s proposal to develop a “philosophy of history” to replace the outmoded theology of history is emblematic of

the direction taken. Voltaire and his contemporaries shifted the focus of history from the saving acts of the Judaeo-Christian God to the unfolding progress of human reason and morality. In the nineteenth century, Auguste Comte refined the eighteenth-century model and presented the famous three-stage pattern of historical evolution that supplied the basic historiographical model for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This Comtean paradigm, like the Vasarian prototype, traces three stages in the maturation of human consciousness from its infancy in religion through its metaphysical adolescence to its scientific maturity. p 14



For the “modernists,” secularization referred to the emancipation of man, society, and the world from ecclesiastical and theological domination. The critics of modernity saw in the secularizing movement - particularly in the doctrines of progress and social perfectibility - an effort to transform man into God and society into the Kingdom of God. This effort, the critics argued, constituted a blasphemous misconception of reality and deformation of the understanding of human nature and society. p 16

The principal myths and symbols of sacralization enter into modern thought and experience through the Renaissance revival of the *prisca theologia* tradition.

While we know that most of the materials in the Ancient Wisdom tradition appear late in the Hellenistic period, the philosophers and theologians of the Renaissance understood them to be the earliest and the most complete revelations to non-Christian wise men (*prisca theologi*), for example, Pythagoras and Zoroaster. In the fifteenth century the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus came to be the most highly revered of all the ancient revelations. Through a curious set of circumstances, he even gained a reputation as the spiritual mentor of both Moses and Plato. p 20

By the sixteenth century, the Ancient Wisdom was a fundamental element in the mounting criticism of traditional theology and metaphysics and in the call for a thoroughgoing religious reorientation and political reformation. As we shall see, myths and symbols from the Ancient Wisdom tradition are found in the utopian dreams of social perfection that develop in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the programs of social reformation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. p 21

Secularization and Sacralization in the Renaissance

The secularized view of human nature minimizes or altogether ignores the sacred in favor of the physical and material. While Christian theology would regard this as a truncated, distorted view of man, the Renaissance secularizing tradition regards it as a breakthrough in human self-understanding. Three quite different advocates of this position are Boccaccio, Machiavelli, and Galileo, whose works, taken together, show the pervasive influence of secularization on literature, political thought, and science during the early modern period. p 26

In Boccaccio and Machiavelli, the well-ordered, providentially guided world disappears and, as a result, so does the human capacity to comprehend it. Reason becomes insignificant because it is associated with the yearning for the transcendent, divine source of beauty and truth. In Boccaccio, there is a gulf between human understanding and God's actions in the world. In Machiavelli, the transcendent ground of being is nonexistent; therefore, reason also disappears and is replaced by prudent planning and military cunning. p 36



Galileo has set out a fundamental feature of secularization. Theology's reign is restricted to knowledge of salvation. The other areas of inquiry that had been subject to her rule are now autonomous fields with their own epistemological principles. By implication, Galileo is also revising the long-standing view of reason and its relation to revelation. In scholastic theology, reason's function is to initiate the search for salvation. Galileo removes reason's religious function and establishes it as an autonomous mode of inquiry whose aim is to understand the physical world - to understand how the heavens go, and not how to go to Heaven. p 40

Society is no longer a microcosm of the divine macrocosm. Social and political order and disorder ebb and flow as the cycle of Fortune turns, and human appetites and longings serve as the basis both for social and political upheaval and for efforts at stability. The natural world also gains independence from divine providence. It is either controlled by Fortune and Necessity, as in the work of Boccaccio and Machiavelli, or it is a self-contained system indifferent to man, as in Galileo. God is either remote from this world and human affairs or is dismissed altogether as irrelevant. pp 40-41

While secularization minimizes or altogether dismisses the sacred, the process of sacralization obliterates the categorical distinctions so that the secular becomes indistinguishable from the sacred. The process also produces profound changes in the traditional medieval view of human nature: man loses his creaturely limitations and becomes a terrestrial god capable of creating an earthly Paradise.

The source for this sacralizing process is the Ancient Wisdom tradition, particularly the Hermetic writings. p 41

According to this text, [the *Picatrix*] Hermes used the knowledge made available to him to establish a perfect social order operating in harmony with the divine cosmos. In this brief passage, we find that man first controls those events in nature that adversely affect him, for example, the flooding of the Nile. The second creative act is to use the knowledge of the natural order to produce an abundant supply of food to meet man's physical needs. The third is to protect the inhabitants of the city from external threats. It is the final act, however, that is truly extraordinary. By manipulating the influence of astral powers, the legislator-priest is able to make the city's inhabitants virtuous. p 44

Ficino and the Neoplatonists did not find pronounced conflicts between the Hermetic materials and Christianity. For Ficino, the apparent conflicts in the various ancient revelations were to be reconciled by establishing the essential core common to all the texts. p 45

Given the fundamental Gnostic doctrines of the world as a prison and of *gnosis* as producing salvation through liberation from the physical world, it is difficult to understand how Gnostic myths can be equated with modern programs of social reformation. On the other hand, the Hermetic myths and symbols have a close correspondence to modern dreams of innerworldly fulfillment. The Hermetic materials present man as magus, who possesses God-like knowledge to master nature and to perfect society. p 48

Ficino, Pico, and the New God: Anthropos

This “new understanding of human nature” is developed further in the *De vita triplici*. In the introduction, Ficino explains that it is a medical textbook intended for use by scholars to counteract the physical debilitation brought on by their intellectual pursuits. The scope is much broader than this description suggests, however. . . .

Ficino offers a “new understanding” of the world in which the material and the spiritual elements of the cosmos are linked by the world soul (*anima mundi*) and the world spirit (*spiritus mundi*). According to Ficino, the Ancient Wisdom reveals how to draw upon the power of the world spirit to enhance man’s physical and spiritual condition and to control the powers of nature in the way the *prisci theologi* did. . . .

Ficino introduces his work by explaining that he had sought to be a physician of the soul in his previous writings, and now he intends to minister to the general health and well-being of intellectuals, who often neglect the physical in pursuit of the spiritual. In Book 1, Ficino explains that scholars are particularly susceptible to melancholia. This condition can be treated, however, by drawing on the beneficial influence of Saturn and other planets favorable to intellectual endeavor. Most of Book 1 is then given to an account of the substances that contain concentrations of these planetary influences. In the last section, Ficino exhorts scholars to attend to the intellect as well: “It is not all right just to take care of the body, which is only the servant of the soul, and neglect the soul, which is the king and master of the body.” The care of the soul, then, becomes the subject of the second book.

Book II acknowledges that a long life is necessary if the scholar is to perfect his knowledge. Long life, however, is not something given by fate. In fact, intellectual efforts have a debilitating effect on the body. There is a solution, however, because man is not like other beings: “Long life is not only a matter of what the Fates have put in store for us from the beginning, but something our diligence takes care of as well.”

In Book III, Ficino “explains how man can alter the decrees of fate.” The key component is an extended discussion of the interrelation of the material and the spiritual elements in the world. Herein is Ficino’s “new understanding” of the world soul and the world spirit. Just as man must have a soul as the mediating link between the material and the spiritual, so must there be a world soul. pp 57-58

Ficino indicates that the degeneration and disintegration occurring in “fallen nature” can be overcome by using the world soul to draw the material entity back into conformity with its eternal form or idea. The agent for this re-formation is the world spirit, the force flowing through the world that actually accomplishes the infusion of the divine into the material.

While the world spirit permeates the whole world, it is concentrated in some materials more than others. By using these knowledgeably, man can draw its regenerative benefits into his soul. p 59

Ficino explains that the fifth essence (*spiritus mundi*) can be absorbed by us, if we know how to separate it from the other elements with which it is heavily mixed, or at least if we know how to use those things that contain it. This especially true for things in which it is pure, as in select wines and sugars, balsam and gold, precious stones, etc. (Ficino, Bk. III, Chap. 1. 562/Boer, 89). p 59

Ficino begins Chapter 20 by indicating that certain natural substances are so potent with the benefits of the world spirit that, through them, it is possible to rejuvenate both the body and the soul so that the recipient seems almost reborn. p 60

Ficino’s reformulation of magic provides the epistemological foundation for a new image of man as the master of the natural world and the shaper of his own destiny. This is essential to Ficino’s description of man as a terrestrial god. Furthermore, a fundamental reconceptualization of God and the world is integral to the development of Ficino’s new understanding of human nature. This reconceptualization is oriented around the root concept of the world soul that links the material world to the ideal forms that give it its beauty and its purpose. The most important element of Ficino’s discussion of the world soul for our consideration is his claim that any degeneration or disorder in the natural world can be corrected by reinfusing the material world with super-celestial influences. Because man’s own soul is a microcosm of this macrocosmic order, he can participate directly in the restoration of order and in the creation of beauty and harmony. We have in this notion, then, a full presentation of the concept of sacralization. The sacred is the source of order, beauty, and harmony in the secular world; the secular is the incarnation of the divine. p 64

Pico claims the notable achievement of having assembled an extraordinary library of documents of the Ancient Wisdom. This recovery of these precious documents will in itself serve as a means of overcoming the ignorance and error that have afflicted human philosophizing and theologizing. But Pico says that his achievement is not simply as collector. His distinctive accomplishment is that he has drawn together and reconciled the essential core of these various teachings into a single coherent system “by means of which whoever holds them will be able . . . to answer any question whatever proposed in natural philosophy or divinity.” . . .

Pico states that he has also established the proper role of magic in philosophy and theology. In this segment he is quick to say that demonic magic is to be avoided, but that natural magic, “when it is rightly pursued, is nothing else than the utter perfection of natural philosophy.” To defend this controversial view, Pico cites the Ancient Wisdom and the many *prisci theologi* who regard magic as “a perfect and most high

wisdom.” Pico then examines the nature of the magic that these ancient traditions hold in such high esteem: “If we ask Plato what the magic of both these men was, he will reply, in his *Alcibiades*, that the magic of Zoroaster was none other than the science of the Divine in which the kings of the Persians instructed their sons, to the end that they might be taught to rule their own commonwealth by the example of the commonwealth of the world. He will answer, in the *Charmides*, that the magic of Zamolxis was that medicine of the soul through which temperance is brought to the soul as through temperance health is brought to the body.” The two magical traditions that Plato cites have had many noble followers. Pico suggests that the number of magi is even larger than has been recognized thus far and that he will prove this in his forthcoming *Poetic Theology*. p 68

While Pico’s myth closely parallels the Hermetic view, its concept of man contrasts sharply with the Judaeo-Christian creation stories. In Pico’s myth, man has no boundaries to his nature; he can be whatever he wills to be also. Man’s desire to God-like knowledge serves as a bond between man and God, not as a source of sin and alienation. p 69

Sacralization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

Agrippa attacks Church corruption and theological confusion as evidence of a profound state of alienation and disorder. Like the Protestant reformers, Agrippa calls for a recovery of pristine Christianity, but his is an esoteric Christianity closely tied to the Cabala. Bruno also criticizes the intellectual and spiritual disorientation of the Church and calls for a re-institution of Hermetic religion as a replacement for Christianity. Campanella, the author of the famous utopia, *La Citta del Sole*, leads a revolt that is intended to establish a Hermetic City of the Sun as the new political and religious center of Western civilization. Through an examination of their writings, it is possible to see how the sacralizing tradition serves as a source for the modern vision of an epochal break with the Christian “dark age” and for the advent of modern messianic figures who propose to lead man out of his alienated condition into a utopian paradise. p 71



Agrippa finds three paths provided by God to enable man to overcome his ignorance and alienation and recover his full humanity: the book of nature, the book of law, and the gospel. . . . For Agrippa, the key to a proper understanding of nature, the law, and the gospel is the teaching of the *prisci theologi*. Like Ficino, Agrippa is convinced that the ancient theologies have a core that can serve as the means of recovering the essence of Christianity. There is one significant difference, however. For Ficino, the primary guide to understanding the Ancient Wisdom was Hermes Trismegistus, who was regarded as the teacher of both Plato and Moses. For Agrippa, the primary source is not the Hermetic teaching but the

Cabala, the Jewish esoteric tradition supposedly given to Moses during his forty days and nights on Mount Sinai. According to this view, the law expressed in the

Decalogue is only a minor part of God's revelation. The deeper part was not made public, it was kept among a highly select group of priests who were able to understand its full import. In Agrippa's time a Christianized Cabala was emerging.

pp 73-74

Nature - the first of Agrippa's three paths to true knowledge - can only be understood properly if one follows the occult teachings of the Ancient Wisdom. On this point, Agrippa's position is similar to Ficino's effort to develop a cosmology that links the physical and the spiritual worlds and connects man's knowledge of the cosmos with the power to restore nature and to perfect the human condition. His perspective on the law, the second path, derives from the cabalist tradition, which he is convinced provides the power to ascend through the orders of nature to direct communion with God. Thus man gains full knowledge of the workings of nature and the operative power to change the conditions of existence. The return to the gospel, the third path, is through a reading of the Ancient Wisdom traditions, finally clarifying the role God wants man to assume.

pp 74-75

Ficino gave primacy to the Hermetic materials in developing his concept of natural magic; Agrippa is convinced that God's fullest revelation outside Christianity occurs in the Cabala.

p 76

The *De Occulta* was one of the most widely known texts in the sixteenth century and contributed to Agrippa's growing international reputation as the master magician of his age. This reputation gained him invitations as a university lecturer and as a counsellor to royal courts. Given his renown as "one of the most extraordinary men of an extraordinary age" it is puzzling that some twenty years after preparing the *De Occulta*, he published the *De Vanitate*, a scathing attack on the vanity and futility of all forms of human knowledge. In this work, Agrippa uses his command of philosophy, theology, the humanist tradition, and occult tradition to argue that all these modes of inquiry have been corrupted through sin and have led to human suffering and alienation from God.

p 76

Agrippa, like Ficino and Pico, rejects astrology because its basic premise is that man's fate is knowable because it is determined by the stars. Agrippa maintains that man can use astral magic to manipulate the stars and other celestial divinities to serve his own purpose and to alter his fate.

p 77

Throughout his life, Agrippa was convinced that the key to recovering man's true nature was in a proper reading and understanding of the Christian revelation. Furthermore, the key to this revelation was not in the literal words of the gospel but in their secret, esoteric meaning that could be brought to light by use of the Cabala and other Ancient Wisdom traditions.

p 77

[Giordano] Bruno criticizes the general state of learned ignorance among university philosophers and Church theologians in ways that recall Agrippa's criticisms in the *De Triplici Ratione* and the *De Vanitate*. Also, like Agrippa, Bruno maintains that the way out of that state is through the teachings of the "Chaldeans, of the Egyptians, of the Magi, of the Orphics, of the Pythagoreans and other early thinkers." Bruno reveres Copernicus' work because he thinks it is inspired by this Ancient Wisdom tradition

and therefore signals a recovery of the true understanding of the cosmos.

p 80

"[The Ancient Wisdom] produced men who were temperate in their lives, expert in the arts of healing, judicious in contemplation, remarkable in divination, having miraculous powers in magic, wary of superstitions, law-abiding, of irreproachable morality, penetrating in theology, heroic in all their ways. This is shown in the length of their lives, the greater strength of their bodies, their most lofty inventions, their prophecies which have come true; they knew how to transform substances and how to live peacefully in society; their sacraments were inviolable, their executions most just, they were in communion with good and tutelary spirits, and the vestiges of their amazing prowess endure unto this day." (Giordano Bruno, 43-44/Yates, 238ff.)

p. 82

Yates demonstrates that "the legend that Bruno was prosecuted as a philosophical thinker, was burned for his daring views on innumerable worlds or on the movement of the earth, can no longer stand." It is now clear that Bruno was condemned for his belief that the Egyptian religion was the highest religion given by God, reversing the view of Ficino and others that the ancient theology pointed the way to the fuller revelation of Christianity. Moreover, he understood his mission as one of a religious reformer who would be an instrument in purging the Church and in instituting a new ecumenic religion based on Hermetism and magic.

pp 83-84

Bacon, Comte, and Marx: A Reevaluation

This reconsideration of key elements in the work of Bacon, Comte, and Marx demonstrates parallels between their writings and the sacralizing pattern. It must be emphasized that this analysis does not attempt to discredit or disregard secularizing patterns within their writings. Rather, the purpose is to show that there are additional sacralizing influences that affect their formulations of a new epistemology and a new program of social reformation.

p 91

Each writer's work displays the three primary characteristics of modernity: the consciousness of an epochal break with the past; a conviction that this break is due to an epistemological advance; and the belief that this new knowledge provides man the means of overcoming his alienation and regaining his true humanity.

p 91

The main lines of *The Advancement of Learning* are generally known. In it Bacon criticises the disorder and confusion of the various scholarly traditions and urges a fundamental reform so that man can gain an accurate knowledge of the natural world and use his knowledge to improve the human condition. . . . Bacon's vision of the social benefits to be gained from the reform and the advancement of learning is presented in his later work, *The New Atlantis*.

p 93

From both *The Advancement of Learning* and *The New Atlantis*, it is evident that Bacon's understanding of man's true nature is similar to the mythic description in the sacralizing tradition of man as a terrestrial god possessing the knowledge to control nature and to perfect society. These parallels become clearer and more substantial in a close consideration of themes and images in *The New Atlantis*.

p 94

Comte's signal contribution to modern thought is found in the creation of social science (*physique sociale*), positivist philosophy, and his famous three-stage progressivist construction of history. He is regarded as a secularist because he argues that theology and metaphysics represent the childhood and adolescent phases in the development of Western rationalism and because he asserts that man regains his dignity and self-determination by ridding himself of the oppressive delusion of God.

p 97

Cours [de Philosophie Positive] sets out his critique of the state of the various disciplines and contains his call to abandon theological and metaphysical speculations as useless and counterproductive. He also proposes a new philosophy that discards metaphysical inquiries into origins or purpose and concentrates on phenomena as they are known through the laws of nature and as they contribute to the welfare of humanity. This element of his work is responsible for his reputation as one of the great modernists. His criticism of metaphysics as a garbled and jumbled mess resulting from the confusion of theology with classical philosophy and his consequent proposal to model all knowledge upon the principles of the natural sciences are a systematic statement of the spirit of the modern age.

p 98

In Comte's new society, scientists and priests have an encyclopaedic knowledge of the natural world and of human nature, and they are able to master nature, to reform religion, and to perfect society. Consequently, they can direct the individual and society toward meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. Moreover, as the priest-philosopher and political leader of this group, Comte seems very much in the tradition of the first great magus, Hermes Trismegistus. To a great degree, Comte's program aims at creating a society much like Adocentyn or the new Atlantis. Bacon had put the new Atlantis far away in space. Comte, even more sure about the coming reformation, locates the new society in Europe and in the immediate future.

p 99

The critique of philosophy and religion is a theme that runs throughout Marx's writings. In his doctoral dissertation on Democritus, for example, he criticizes traditional philosophy's contemplative, passive acceptance of the human condition and calls for a new active philosophy that takes Prometheus as its patron saint. Prometheus, the mythical "hater of the gods," steals their fire and gives it to man. This gift is, first of all, symbolic of the civilizational resources and skills man needs to alter the given conditions of existence to suit him. Second, it represents a new autonomy for man - a break from dependence on the gods. The most famous and concise statement of the intention of Marx's Promethean man is in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world; the goal however, is to *change* it."

p 103

From the time of Ficino onward, the sacralizing tradition was associated with efforts to reform the understanding of reality propounded in conventional theology and philosophy. Some aimed at renewing and revitalizing Christianity; others - for example, Agrippa and Bruno - sought to correct the derailments brought on by Christianity and its merger with classical philosophy. Marx wants to present an active merger of theory and practice that will allow man to change the conditions of his existence. This basic characteristic of the sacralizing tradition was first introduced by Ficino in his reconceptualization of magic as the highest form of natural philosophy.

p 106

Another correlation between the Marxian project and the sacralizing tradition is in the purpose and goal of the Communist Revolution. Marx makes very clear his purpose to overcome man's alienation and restore man to his true humanity. This liberation means that man can use his instrumental and theoretical knowledge to be whatever he wishes to be. This corresponds closely to the Hermetic yearning to make man a terrestrial god. The Marxist view here contrasts sharply with the secularist views of Boccaccio and Machiavelli. For them, man is an active shaper of his life. But Fortune and Necessity mean that man is not in control, that man is not self-determining.

pp 107-108

Marx possesses profound knowledge of the forces governing nature and society, through which he expects to be able to liberate man from his alienation and to perfect society. This is the basic role of the magus in the Hermetic tradition. The magus is the one who combines the knowledge of nature with the transformation of man in this world, and that is Marx's ultimate goal.

p 108

Conclusion: The Sacralizing Tradition in the Modern Age

These studies make it evident that conventional treatments of modernity and secularization must be supplemented and revised in light of the opposite yet complementary influence of sacralization.

p 109