

Geocentric and Cosmocentric Spiritualities from a Contemporary Western Pagan Perspective

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This article explores the divergent views between and the possible consequences of various cosmocentric understandings including that of Astronism and the geocentric/biocentric concerns of contemporary pagan spirituality. These contrasting religious positions are discussed using the sociological measuring tool of the ideal-type. In actuality, no religion conforms fully to its ideal conception. Instead, the device is employed as an analytic. Vis-à-vis humanity itself, however, the question turns to whether we attempt ultimately to escape our earthly confines or rectify and restore our terrestrial conditions.

Keywords: cosmocentrism, geocentrism, ideal-type, pagan spirituality, Western paganism

Variety in doctrines of salvation

The notion of salvation is peculiarly Abrahamic and specifically Christian. Broadly, salvation refers to the act of saving or protecting from harm, injury, risk, loss and destruction. Still, theologically it is concerned with redemption, namely, the deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. This constitutes the beliefs and doctrines of soteriology. In the Christian sense, it is the achievement of a final release from suffering, evil, finitude and death. From the viewpoint of Christianity, because of Adam as the first man and his disobedience to God's mandate, humanity lives in a fallen state and depraved world. Accordingly, so that the human collective could be redeemed from its sinful affair, God himself incarnated as a human being and underwent sacrifice and death for universal atonement. This last is still dependent on the individual's acceptance of Jesus Christ as God and saviour. But where salvation for the Christian usually means bodily resurrection on Earth, for Islam salvation is the eventual entrance into Paradise. This last is contingent upon the individual's belief in Allah as the one and only God along with the acceptance of Muhammed's teachings and obedience to Shari'ah law. Salvation in Judaism is similarly concerned with the conformity of the individual to God's commandments as revealed in the Torah. Though their practices and scriptures are different, Islam is closer to Judaism in rejecting the Trinitarian concept

developed by Christianity. The Abrahamic God has disowned the son that emerged with Christianity between Hebrew and Muslim religions and once again proclaimed a monotheistic oneness.

By contrast, with the Dharmic religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, the material world is an illusion (*māyā*), or at least without intrinsic value. In these traditions, salvation is self-attained rather than achieved through the transcendent grace of God. It refers to release (*mukti*), or liberation (*moksha*), from the continuing cycle of rebirth (*samsāra*), in the illusion or worthlessness of physical existence. The various paths of yoga or the adherence to the 'Eightfold Path' lead one, respectively, to *samadhi* (union with the Absolute or Brahman), or *nirvana* ('extinguishment').

Different from both the Abrahamic and Dharmic spiritualities, what has become reclaimed as 'paganism' is the acceptance and affirmation of the material world, not as something to escape but rather to enjoy and cherish. If and when paganism endorses a belief in reincarnation, it is usually argued that this is what allows an individual to once again re-enjoy terrestrial existence. For most contemporary Western pagans (CWPs), 'God' is not something completely other and transcendent to this world but instead immanent in physical reality. The divine becomes understood as various aspects of the world or cosmos (polytheism), or as identical with the cosmic all (pantheism). Robert Corrington

expresses this in the following way: “There is nothing whatsoever outside of nature. The sacred is in and of nature and cannot outstrip nature.” The great concern of paganism at present is the environment and the restoration of the natural ecological balance of the planet.¹

Much of this same conservationist concern is shared with those who have no belief or decisive conviction in the supernatural, namely, the secularists whether they be atheists or agnostics. As with the pagans, secularistic salvation entails not the attainment of a heavenly afterlife or the obliteration of personal existence but rather the well-being of the planet and material existence. In paganism or secularism or both, salvation (from Greek *sōtēria* via Latin *salvare/salvation*) is the restoration or raising of the natural world to a more complete or better realm or state of being.

Philosophical commonalities and differences

What paganism and Astronism share in common is the non-rejection of corporeal existence. Both are principally this-worldly rather than focused solely on the afterlife although more recent Astronist discourse has affirmed the doctrine of transcosmisation which is the belief that transcension will lead to species escaping cosmic limited reality. Their difference in respect to salvation is to see it as linear for the one and cyclic for the other. In a word, paganism is geocentric while Astronism

is cosmocentric. Astronist soteriology contrasts with Buddhism for example by embracing the material through the application of technologies of space exploration as a technique for eventually circumventing the physical world and escaping limited reality. Despite the more recent emergence of this transcosmisation doctrine, Astronism's vision of reality still focuses on the importance of the cosmos. Again, like telluric or pantheistic forms of paganism, Astronism can include the intracosmic "belief that the answers to our existence are to be found within The Cosmos rather than beyond it."² While the emphasis for some pagans is indeed anthropocentric, the growing re-evaluation for increasing numbers is for the Earth herself as the centre; not in the former Eudoxian or Ptolemaic astronomical sense but instead in the biocentric emphasis of valuing the telluric first and foremost above all. Not all pagans are tellurian, but some are instead gnostic and wish to translate to a 'higher' non-physical or ethereal existence. Many of these last entertain similar to Astronists a panentheistic belief in that while God is part of this world, he/it is also simultaneously something other or transcendent to it. Pagans, however, and especially telluric pagans, tend to see panentheism ('all in God') as a derivative of the Christian theological wish both to have their cake and eat it too—God being transcendent but also immanent.

Perhaps, unlike Astronists, pagans do not think in evaluative terms such as 'Higher Levels'. Knowledge is understood as augmentative rather than necessarily 'elevated'. For CWPs, this vertical metaphor is a legacy of the West's Judaeo-Christian heritage. Instead, knowledge is assessed more along an axis of the simple-to-complex and in the pragmatic terms of accessibility, applicability, expansion and practicality. Paganism does not shun the ethereal, mysterious and ineffable and can employ shamanistic, ritual and other non-ordinary methods in the pursuit of such, but it virtually always endeavours to balance the supernatural or preternatural quest with the utilitarian and down-to-earth. The commonsensical is always vitally important and stressed alongside the esoteric.

Information about earthly and other worlds is not philosophy as such but empirically gained knowledge that can be applied to improving life on Earth, the growth of technology and exploration of non-terrestrial outer space. Philosophies (literally, the 'loves of wisdom') provide guiding principles for human behaviour. They can range from Platonic, Neo-platonic and Cartesian dualism to Nietzschean and Spinozan mind-body unity, but they all address the questions of existence, meaning, value, reason, language and consciousness. The branches of philosophy are epistemology, metaphysics, logic, axiology and governmental politics. Basically,

philosophy is the attempt to understand human nature. Science is the determination and application of empirical data. The two are not the same. The first allows us to reach into outer space; the second is concerned with the logical construction of ideas. Both might provide happiness, but their approaches are different.

If “‘Law and order’ is what the Cosmos is based on ... [and] if any part of the cosmic body, organ or cell begins to fail and starts producing defective energy,”³ any attempt to eliminate this disruptive energy for the benefit of the organism must occur within the understanding that nature herself both on Earth and throughout the universe—as best we can understand—is a natural process whether we humans like it or not and whether it is a volcanic eruption, a hurricane, a meteoritic collision or a supernova. It is really humanity alone who is responsible for the production of disruptive energy in such forms as capitalistic exploitation, colonial imperialism, the institution of slavery and engagement in destructive conflict. Cosmic law or the laws of nature are not options as are human rules and regulations but simply the way nature functions and works. The ‘law and order’ statutes are not the *lex naturalis* governing natural phenomena that humans have gained through observation but are human-made creations designed and legislated for the co-functionality of humanity and interpersonal conduct. It is here where philosophy and religious codes play a role, but

it is also here where the proliferation or variety of philosophies and religions can collide. Paganism and Astronism along with secularism and—to a degree—Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism have a greater potentiality morally to coincide. The Abrahamic religions appear, by contrast, to be more divisive and factional and capable of crusades, Islamic state puritanism and Israeli-engineered genocides. This is not to deny that compatible and even admirable ethical achievement can also emerge from Abrahamic spirituality (e.g., Quakerism, New Age Christianity, Islamic Sufism and the like), but when an alleged spiritual endorsement operates in promoting holy lands and the allowance of supposedly righteous exclusion of others and the equally supposedly unsaved, the danger of disruptive energy operates the most fully and uncontrollably.

The four worldviews

Differently from Astronism, a Prezi educational presentation considers there to be four different worldviews: the cosmocentric, theocentric, anthropocentric and secular.⁴ The last is “a worldview that does not accept the supernatural as influencing current people's lives.” It is economically centred and dedicated to the progress of society. The examples given are the Church of Euthanasia and the Satanic Temple. The secular is opposed to religion, believes in the values of the present

with no concern for eternity, no belief in a divine creator, and regards nothing as sacred. Instead, values are held to be relative; there is no right or wrong. Nature itself is only matter and exists here for human needs alone.

For the theocentric worldview that is God-centred, the same presentation considers that God is “the timeless, changeless source and sustainer of the universe and the source of all knowledge, discloses otherwise indiscernible foundational truths through Scripture, and that these otherwise hidden disclosures rightly frame and give direction to human questions to make sense of anything, including communication.”⁵ The examples given are Islam, Judaism and Christianity. Clearly, this is the Abrahamic worldview. Life is thought to come from a loving, powerful and wise God, and the purpose of life is to know God. Values in society are integral for the helping of others, and all actions should be pleasing to God. By contrast, the anthropocentric worldview is instead human-centred by assigning intrinsic value to humanity alone and considering humans as the most important thing on at least the planet Earth if not the universe as well. The Prezi site gives no concrete examples for the anthropocentric but claims that for this outlook charity is an obligation; human rights, lives and communities are critical; the common good is fostered by the ‘best’ human values; and knowledge is respected, and along with free will, is

the key to improving the world. Rather strangely, the site also considers ‘community worship’ as important for the anthropocentric perspective.

It should be clear, by this point, that Prezi is discussing the sociological concept of the ‘ideal-type’. Sociology employs these types for measurement purposes in determining how much any specific religion or spiritual orientation conforms to or comes close to the ‘ideal’ and then seeks to explain why it is different than the ideal itself. In actuality, most religious persuasions are blends of the various ideal constructs. When it comes to the cosmocentric, this is explained by the Prezi educational site as the “belief that the natural state of our universe should remain as it is, without human attempts to terraform planets for human habitation.” This is not the Astronistic view but instead overlaps to an extent with both the theocentric and anthropocentric outlooks. In this alternative version of the cosmocentric, it is argued that nature is alive and is spirited, all life is dependent on the environment and nature, everything consists of an interconnected web, and the individual is not a priority. This description amounts to the biocentric and geocentric understandings of paganism, and the examples given for the cosmocentric are aboriginal spirituality and Wicca but also both Hinduism and Buddhism.

Another Prezi website, here by Hannah J., considers only three main worldviews, namely the cosmocentric, theocentric and

anthropocentric.⁶ Again the theocentric is centred on God who is in control of people's lives, and the anthropocentric is centred instead on humans who are considered to be the most important species with the Earth to be used as humanity needs. While humans are dependent on nature, nature herself/itself exists for humankind's benefit. In contrast to both of these views, the cosmocentric is supposedly centred on both fate and astrology. It is predominantly focused on Mother Nature than on people themselves. Humanity is not held to be "the most important species." We are more dependent on the Earth than the Earth is on us.

The non-anthropocentric view expressed by Hannah J. resonates with much contemporary Western paganism if not world paganism more broadly (e.g., Bron Taylor's Dark Green Religion⁷; Mark Green's Atheopaganism⁸), as well as with some of Astronism. As Astronism's founder Cometan expresses, thinking cosmocentrically is actually "unnatural' for humans as a worldview to take ... because it demands that humans accept the insignificance of themselves, the species to which they belong, and the planet on which they have resided for all history."⁹ This, however, coincides completely with the biocentrism and geocentrism of CWP. Where the pagan perspectives differ from that of Cometan would be the absence of a grading order between the outlooks. Instead, Cometan presents a 'Hierarchy of Worldviews' from highest to lowest: 1. Cosmocentrism (Astronistic), 2. Biocentrism

(Vegan), 3. Anthropocentrism (Collectivistic), 4. Ethnocentrism (Nationalistic), and 5. Egocentrism (Individualistic). In fact, “the singular defining belief of Astronism and the worldview of the entire Astronic tradition [is that] The Cosmos is considered to be the only empirically real entity to provide existential purpose to humanity.” As such, “cosmocentricity involves placing The Cosmos at the centre of individual and societal spiritual, intellectual, economic and practical life.”¹⁰ Here, cosmocentrism is contrasted with theocentrism, anthropocentrism, technocentrism and geocentrism among others.

Claims of a prehistoric legacy

Another similarity between the pagan and Astronist traditions is that both claim their origins in prehistoric times. Contemporary Western paganism draws from the heritage of the Greco-Romans, the ancient Egyptians, the Mesopotamians and Canaanites, the Celts and Germanics, the Proto-Indo-Europeans as well as the Afro-Latin, indigenous and Stone Age cultures. According to the BBC, “Contemporary Paganism is the restoration of indigenous religion, especially that of ancient Europe.”¹¹ Further:

The first Pagan tradition to be restored was that of the Druids in Britain. In the mid-seventeenth century stone circles and other monuments built four and a half thousand years previously

began to interest scholars. Some thought that the original Druids (prehistoric tribal people of Europe) had built them. In 1717, one of these scholars, the Irish theologian John Toland, became the first Chosen Chief of the Ancient Druid Order, which became known as the British Circle of the Universal Bond. By the nineteenth century a new outlook was evident as people searched for the fundamental principles of religion by looking at the faiths of different places and times. ...Pagan philosophies, which venerated nature and were polytheistic began to be seen as sophisticated contributions to contemporary spirituality. Across Europe people were rediscovering their indigenous cultures. In northern Europe there was a growing interest in Saxon and Norse traditions. In England, William Morris translated the Icelandic sagas and Cecil Sharp collected village dances and songs. In Germany Schlegel and Schelling in particular were attracted to the nature religion which they saw behind traditional folk customs, and at the beginning of the twentieth century Guido von Liszt pioneered the study of the runes. In north-east Europe, particularly Lithuania, nationalist movements spread and indigenous languages were reclaimed, traditional tales recorded and the old festivals celebrated. Folk

music was part of this reassertion of local identity, preserving traditions which otherwise would have been forgotten.¹²

Similarly, while not the first astronomical religion, Astronism “is the modern manifestation of a long series of astronomical religions tracing their origins back to the Upper Palaeolithic period of the Stone Age some 40,000 years ago.¹³ Astronism is viewed as a naturalistic religion or philosophy by some given its focus on outer space rather than solely on the supernatural. However, like CWP, there are also supernatural understandings of Astronist beliefs as well. In Astronism, these concern transhumanism, transcensionism and transtellationism. Coined by the English biologist and philosopher Julian Huxley in 1957, transhumanism refers basically to the possibility and permission for humanity to employ technology to modify, enhance and expand cognition and bodily function beyond current biological constraints.¹⁴ This could include the extension or development of preternatural capabilities, though it is doubtful that this is what Huxley had in mind. For Astronism, however, the transhumanic refers to eschatology and not only the purpose of death but the study of the soul. While the naturalistic branch of Astronist eschatology, overlapping with the secular worldview, denies the existence of the soul, an afterlife and the supernatural, transtellationism is its opposite and operates in consideration that the soul, post-mortem existence and the supernatural

are at least possibilities if not realities. The transcensionist, by contrast, is naturalistic but also agnostic or indifferent to the ideas of soul, afterlife or involvement with God or the God-concept.¹⁵ For Cometan, the endeavour of transcension is completed by what he calls ‘siderinity’, namely, the capacity for human beings to escape limitedness.¹⁶

However, in establishing the legitimacy of the Astronic tradition, Cometan claims that it “sits alongside the Abrahamic, Dharmic, and Taoic traditions to form the oldest kind of religious tradition.”¹⁷ According to Igor Gojnik and Zorana Sokol-Gojnik, the Taoic signifies all East Asian religions including Confucianism, Chinese folk religion/Shenism, Shinto, Taoism, presumably Korean shamanism and some others. Each of these focuses in one way or another essentially on the Cosmic Dao as ‘the Way of the cosmos’.¹⁸ While the Abrahamic, Dharmic and Taoic institutionalised spiritualities are later religious developments, this assertion still ignores paganism.

Controversy over what is ‘pagan’

The founder of Astronism has considered the term ‘pagan’ to be pejorative as an outdated and/or unfair label. Thanks to the historic and imperialistic ascension of Christianity in the West, this is true to some extent. But in keeping with today’s more acute discernment and critical

assessment of colonialism and governmental expansion over foreign cultures, ‘pagan’ is once again becoming an accepted, positive and valid designation. The American Humanist Association (AHA) understands the designation to derive from the Latin *pāgānus*, but it also considers that this referred to those who lived in the country as opposed to the cities where Christianity initially began to grow. While this last may be true, it is a later development. Originally, as Pierre Chuvin has determined, *pāgani* were simply ‘people of the place’, i.e., those who preserved the native customs of their locality—whether in the town or countryside. A *pāgānus* (in contrast to an *alienus* ‘a person from elsewhere’ and ultimately a Christian who was out of touch with indigenous expressions of polytheism), was simply a resident of a *pāgus*—something like an urban ward in the city or a village, district, canon or province in the country.¹⁹ The term *pāgānus* did come eventually to signify a ‘peasant’ more or less in the sense of ‘country bumpkin’, but the Greek equivalent of the designation, namely, *Hellene*, suggests someone more urban and cultured.

The AHA explains further that ‘pagan’ came to signify anyone who engaged in religious acts, practices or ceremonies that were not Christian. Jews and Muslims employ the term in a similar sense.²⁰ ‘Paganism’ itself has come to be defined either as a religion other than Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, or as no religion

at all. Despite these increasingly obsolete attributions, however, it is now recognised that the common pagan belief is that divine presence is part of nature, and this, in turn, elicits a reverence for the natural order in life.

The Renaissance of the sixteenth century reintroduced the ancient Greek concepts of Paganism. Pagan symbols and traditions entered European art, music, literature, and ethics. The Reformation of the seventeenth century, however, put a temporary halt to Pagan thinking. Greek and Roman classics, with their focus on Paganism, were accepted again during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Paganism experienced another rise in the nineteenth and twentieth century when modern forms of Buddhism and Hinduism were growing in popularity. Following the interest in ancient civilizations that became popular in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, including the popularity of Druid revivals, scholars in the early twentieth century explored the ancient spirituality of the British Isles and Europe. The more current “Pagan Renaissance” grew out of a variety of sources that coalesced between the 1930s and 1950s. Paganism represents a wide variety of traditions that emphasise reverence for nature and a revival of ancient polytheistic and animistic religious practices. Some modern

forms of Paganism have their roots in the nineteenth century, e.g., the British Order of Druids, but most contemporary Pagan groups trace their immediate roots to the 1960s and have an emphasis on a special interest in nature.²¹

My argument in this article is that paganism is a ‘root religion’ and, using a play on words, what might be termed ‘spiritual radicalism’. The world’s other religions are essentially offshoots if not counter-developments of this root religion. Virtually, if and when we wish to understand any specific religion, it is imperative to understand paganism as the root from which the tree of all religions grows.

Inasmuch as paganism is the root of religion, it confronts the earliest, the most immediate, and the least processed apprehensions of the sacred. This is the experiential on which paganism in both its indigenous and contemporary forms wish to concentrate. But while the very notion of the sacred raises theological and philosophical questions, it also presupposes the ethical. In fact, for pagans, the ethical heart of the sacral is what can best be termed *honor*, *trust*, and *friendship*. While all religions may share these goals, the concepts themselves date back to the earliest stages of human encounter, to the time when everyone was pagan. Whatever else these may be, honor, trust and friendship are pagan virtues, and they allow us to recognize

that by virtue of its focus on the sacred, paganism is, by default, an ethical religiosity. The many varied routes of individual paganisms allow adherents different accesses to the experience of the sacred, and as the original custodians of ethical consciousness, paganism today as both a theological option and a religious practice is a spirituality prepared to engage with not only Mother Earth but also all her children, regardless of the differing and even opposing spiritual predilections that they may have. In the long run, pagans would wish to engage with the whole of cosmic nature and all forms of sentience, but the sacred planet and its ‘earthlings’ who comprise the human community are now the task at hand.²²

Consequently, and in contrast to Astronism, the primary concern and focal point is geocentric rather than upon the greater cosmos. This is in keeping with the emphasis on the immediate locality which is where most pagans begin both effort and reflection. We are here now on this blessed Earth, and perhaps before we go elsewhere, we had best first clean up our mess at home. Otherwise, there is a strong interconnection between Astronism and paganism. Both are ethical orientations, both encourage and allow individuality and diversity, and both admire the cosmos and regard it as sacred. A key difference, however, is that paganism does not consider the cosmos or suffering to be intrinsically

evil, whereas in Astronism as long as humans remain in the cosmos they will always be subjected to suffering and evil. Because of this, transcosmisation is regarded to be the end goal of the Astronist doctrine of transcension, that is, “the belief that the expansion of human civilisation into outer space to colonise other planets will bring about such advancements in human technology, physical ability and insight on metaphysical subjects that space exploration will lead humanity to salvation.”²³ Transcension is further explained as:

The salvific process involves human beings physically and metaphysically elevating themselves to the astronomical world. Transcension is therefore not merely space exploration or space expansion but so much more. It is a sacred endeavour that describes a physical ascension to outer space as well as both an intellectual and spiritual ascension to the stars. This latter metaphysical part is crucial because just as our physical bodies will ascend, so must our minds. Humanity’s completion of transcension will result in our coming into union with The Divine at transcosmisation and will thereby constitute our escape from all limitedness and will secure our eternal bliss.²⁴

As an analipsocentric religion, Astronism basically “sees transcension as the principal means of salvation for humankind...by means of elevation and potentialisation.”²⁵ Through transcension and elevation to

the astronomical world, humanity allegedly will become free from the limitations of anthropocentric thought that is founded upon the concept of human centrality.²⁶

Personally, I tend to see Astronism as a kind of paganism. Like paganism, it retains various secular elements—belief in or endorsement of the supernatural is optional. However, there do seem to be more Abrahamic or Christian constructs in Astronist formulations than there are in paganism (e.g., linear salvation, concept of the soul, panentheism, an intended purpose for humanity), though even this last is debatable. Whatever the case, both Astronism and paganism embrace the cosmos (Greek *kosmos* ‘world, order, universe’)—the one more comprehensively; the other more locally. But of the four basic ideal-types of religion, I would argue that the one most applicable to Astronism is that of pagan (*vis-à-vis* Abrahamic, Dharmic or secular).²⁷ Granted that my inclusion of Astronism within the Big Tent of paganism or of Astronism belonging under the pagan umbrella is a debatable issue, religion short of fundamentalism or sectarian dogmatism is always an open arena for dialogue, discussion and exchange—let alone the agreement to disagree.

Other space religions

There are, indeed, several other kinds of space religions besides Astronism. Scientology, Raëlism and Heaven's Gate consider that human beings came to the Earth from some extraterrestrial civilisation. Heaven's Gate held that extraterrestrials had visited humanity in the past and placed humans on Earth and would return to collect a select few. L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology is centred on the belief that humanity's origins were in extraterrestrial cultures with human beings coming to Earth as ancient astronauts or thetans. The thetan is variously explained as either the eternal essence of the true self or the spirit of each individual or as an alien spirit from the Galactic Confederacy that adheres to the body and affects it negatively by trapping it with engrams that are required to be 'cleared'. After death, "the thetan [when identified as the soul] will take up a new body and live a new life though there is no way of knowing when or where."²⁸ In general, however, rebirth is reincarnation on Earth itself. There is with Scientology no desire to escape the world or incarnation as there is with Hinduism and Buddhism.²⁹ In this respect, returning to life on this planet is similar to the belief of many if not most contemporary Western pagans.

Claude Vorilhon's Raëlian movement is also like paganism in its belief in living in the here and now with happiness and laughter. Like Scientologists, however, life on Earth has extraterrestrial origins

through the visiting race of Elohim that Vorilhon/Raël claims were historically mistaken and worshipped as gods. Through genetic engineering, these Elohim created humanity. With this movement, the Raélians believe neither in evolution nor in an afterlife but instead are seeking immortality through the process of scientific cloning. In actuality, Raëlism is a form of atheism, but it accepts the Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammed, Joseph Smith and other prophets as chosen and educated by the Elohim.³⁰

Both Scientologists and Raélians see the future as life on planet Earth, though it is still maintained that life on other planets throughout the cosmos also exists. To this degree, they contrast with both Heaven's Gate and The Order of the Solar Temple who hold that life to come will be through transportation to other planets. The founder of Heaven's Gate, Marshall Applewhite, came to the belief that by suicide his followers and himself would be able to attain heavenly salvation by being beamed post-mortem to the spaceship travelling in the tail of the approaching Hale-Bopp comet "to be taken to their new home in space."³¹ The Solar Temple was a UFO Knights Templar-influenced group that engaged in both suicide and murder to gain access to the utopic Proxima planet orbiting Sirius. For Solar Templers,

[rather] than seeking to survive the ecological apocalypse [of planet Earth], they would, instead, abandon the world to its fate

and effect a transit “with all lucidity and in full consciousness” to their home in the stars.³² The transit became the ultimate ritual of [Solar Temple members’] initiation which marked the passage from the profane world to the spatially pure world of another planet.³³

For Heaven’s Gate,

[the] group committed suicide so that they could ascend to “The Evolutionary Level Above Human.”³⁴

Speaking more personally, my partner’s parents were co-founders of a spiritual commune in the US state of New Mexico near the Columbus-Mexican border: The City of the Sun—a New Age intentional community that was influenced primarily by Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism and Transcendentalism. They would phone on occasion to inform us that they were currently witnessing a fleet of flying saucers in the sky. They would marvel over the phenomenon but being elderly would then after a while simply retire to bed. But my own experience when visiting New Mexico has been that, when asked, most people confirmed that they had seen UFOs in the sky. My parents-in-law subsequently became involved as committed followers of the Human Individual Metamorphosis organisation created by Bo and Peep, “the Two” (Bonnie Nettles and Marshall Applewhite), and we were told that along with others they would be physically ascending to

a spaceship—their shoes being all that was to be left behind in the desert. Consequently, they divided their assets between their three children in the wake of this expectation. Fortunately, however, they became disenchanted and left the group before it became Heaven's Gate and gained notoriety through its members' 1997 mass suicide in San Diego.

With some exception for Scientology, both Raëlism and Astronism reveal little indebtedness to the transcendental ideology of Theosophy. Heaven's Gate, The Order of the Solar Temple and Astronism all seek a trans-geocentric extension of life elsewhere in the universe, but Astronists see this conveyance still as physical rather than as an ethereal sublimation that forsakes everything 'human' including the human body. And this idea of humanity colonising outer space, some forms of contemporary paganism also share. For instance, Church of All Worlds founder, Oberon Zell-Ravenheart, while concentrating on the evolutionary steps that humanity must undertake to regain balance with our planet, likewise envisions:

our greater purpose, capability, and destiny as agents of planetary reproduction via extraterrestrial colonisation and terraforming. The Church of All Worlds is a religion with roots deep in the Earth and branches reaching out to the stars.³⁵

In understanding what he accepts as the primary function of the evolution of a technological species, Zell believes that “humanity has evolved specifically to become the agents of Gaia’s reproduction in the form of space colonisation and terraforming other barren worlds.”³⁶

In contrast to this cosmocentric impetus that focuses outwardly into interstellar space, the geocentric directs its attention from the metagalactic to the Earth herself/itself. A prominent discipline that considers the Earth as the astronomical centre is the divinatory method of astrology. Accordingly, “astrology is a method of predicting mundane events based upon the assumption that the celestial bodies—particularly the planets and the stars considered in their arbitrary combinations or configurations (called constellations)—in some way either determine or indicate changes in the sublunar world.”³⁷ In other words, “astrology is the name given to a series of diverse practices based on the idea that the stars, planets, and other celestial phenomena possess significance and meaning for events on Earth.”³⁸ Its basic assumption is that an interconnection exists between the physical, spiritual and psychological. Hannah J. contends that the cosmocentric centres on astrology and fate, but for contemporary practical astrology, it is rather a discerning of the stars as they centre upon the Earth, and this, following Alan Leo’s aphorism that “the stars incline, they do not compel,”³⁹ the patterns and configurations between the Earth and the

heavens are at best suggestive but not determinative or indicative of fate or predestination.

In the natal chart or horoscope of the individual, our solar system's planets along with the luminaries (the sun and moon) are mapped to the person's birth moment and place on Earth as if it were the centre of the cosmos. This geocentric reflection is used to interpret various aspects and events in the individual's life. It is also employed as a timing device to assist in selecting such things as a fortuitous moment to launch a new project. These configurations amount at best in being non-causal signals. The main problem with astrology, however, and despite its unceasing popularity, is that in the West it is tropical and based on the seasonal cycle of the northern hemisphere, whereas in India it is sidereal in that the Earth's axial precession is considered and corrected for the progressive changing alignments between the astrological signs and the constellations from which they have been named. Consequently, these two systems of astrology are slightly out of sync with each other. The discrepancy between the two is at present approximately twenty-four degrees. What this results in is that a person's zodiacal sign in one system may be that of the adjacent sign in the other.

In the West, astrology had come to interact with the Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic schools of Greek philosophy. It became a

mainstream feature of Greco-Roman society and functioned as a means for deciphering the synchronisations between terrestrial events and celestial phenomena. CWP has inherited some of this legacy, though astrology does not appear to be an integral aspect of contemporary pagan thought with its concentration on the well-being of the planet. But in contrast to this geocentric and biocentric pagan concern, Astronism claims the following:

[it] is only through the physical and spiritual exploration of the cosmos that true existential achievement will be attained. Outer space represents the place where humanity will find answers and become elevated to what is presently still unfathomable.⁴⁰

Salvation is linear for the panentheistic astronomical religion of Astronism, and this is something that distinguishes it from paganism's cyclical regeneration. Whereas the pagan is primarily telluric and focused on Earth, the Astronist contemplates the cosmos "for its spirituality, faith, destiny, hope, future and existential purpose."⁴¹

Consequently, geocentric paganism and cosmocentric Astronism are two different viewpoints—each being individually valid for those who hold them. The main problem for contemporary Western pagans has to do with the "limits of 'infinite space' [and] the growing pile of garbage around us."⁴² In her *Astropia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race*, Mary-Jane Rubenstein articulates a basic pagan

anxiety and acknowledges that the Space Race *myth* itself is founded on the American belief in an unlimited extraterrestrial frontier—an ‘astrofrontierism’ that is grounded on an earthly frontierism which itself has been grounded in biblical land claims. Sadly, despite the 1967 United Nations ratification of the Outer Space Treaty which mandates that outer space is “for the benefit of all peoples” and must only be used “for peaceful purposes,”⁴³ the United States, China and Russia have all refused to ratify the treaty. “‘Space’ is [now] the most recent arena of massive deregulation and privatization under the reigning economic strategy known as neoliberalism.”⁴⁴ To the disappointment of contemporary pagans concerning future explorations of the extraterrestrial, “the only thing likely to trickle down from space is more pollution.”⁴⁵

Perhaps only the very few might still believe in a geocentric universe. Most people of today are aware that we live in a heliocentric solar system. However, as alluring as the cosmocentric call may be for some, for others the importance of maintaining biocentric balance and of the responsibility incumbent upon humanity is represented by a clear, sane and mature geocentric emphasis.

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