

What We Make

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1 Streams of Eschatology and Esotericism in the Modern West

Society's trajectory is reflected in, and influenced by, religions, cults, and philosophies, which serve as the deep ontological structures through which collective meaning is both disclosed and constructed. In modern times, the West has outgrown passive reliance on nature or fate in manifold ways, exemplified by advancements in medicine and technology that have placed natural processes under deliberate human dominion. Breakthroughs in genetic engineering permit the modification of human DNA to avert hereditary maladies, while assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization liberate conception from the contingencies of natural biological constraints. Similarly, CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing and mRNA vaccines embody humanity's ascendancy over biological mechanisms once deemed immutable (Doudna & Charpentier, 2014). These developments, conjoined with artificial intelligence that not only simulates but at times surpasses natural cognitive processes, mark a profound epistemic and ontological rupture: a shift from submission to the inexorable rhythms of physis to an active mastery over the natural order, echoing Descartes' ambition to render ourselves "masters and possessors of nature" through methodical inquiry and instrumental reason (Descartes, 1637/1998). Yet this emancipation from fate's former sovereignty has precipitated a curtain of reality dropping, an ontological disclosure of the groundlessness beneath our former certainties, fostering existential dread, that profound anguish born of the void left by eroded anchors of meaning. As Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the "death of God," heralding an era of nihilism wherein traditional metaphysical guarantors dissolve into the abyss (Nietzsche, 1882/1974, §125), the modern West confronts a valueless universe stripped of transcendent signification. Albert Camus echoed this diagnosis in his articulation of the absurd, wherein the human demand for coherence clashes irreconcilably with the silent indifference of the cosmos, engendering pervasive alienation (Camus, 1942/1955). Jean-Paul Sartre deepened this dread still further, positing that existence precedes essence, thereby

thrusting upon us the burdensome freedom, and concomitant anguish, of forging our own paths amid radical contingency and uncertainty (Sartre, 1943/1956).

However, all that we have achieved through this emancipation grants unprecedented freedom: we can shape the world ever more profoundly through visionary intentionality, and we will inevitably begin to mold our shared reality in conformity with the archetypal sources we draw upon and dream within. Actions, though they yield no final certainty and remain shadowed by contingency, furnish the locus of meaningful striving; it is through dedicated praxis that envisioned realities are progressively manifested. It is precisely to this end that we must turn our gaze to the enduring forces that drive the modern Western vision in deeply profound ways, Christianity and the occult which arose beside it, which persist as operative paradigms, subtly or overtly structuring our epistemic horizons, moral imaginaries, and teleological anticipations, often without explicit recognition. These twin streams, one eschatologically oriented toward divine consummation and moral-eschatological vigilance, the other esoterically oriented toward hidden knowledge and transformative mastery, continue to interweave in the fabric of contemporary society, furnishing the very lenses through which we interpret freedom, dread, and the imperative to create.

2 The Christian Influence

The modern Western American world can be explained through the lenses of Christianity and the occult, let's examine Christianity in the following first. Christianity has profoundly defined the West with an emphasis on truth, while claiming to be univocal and static, is actually a dynamic interpretive horizon, refracted through the manifold and often divergent flavors of Christian thought. From Thomistic rationalism to Reformed predestinarianism, from mystical quietism to evangelical literalism. This interpretive pluralism, inaugurated and intensified by the Protestant Reformation, has engendered an ethos of economic and moral stringency simply to survive. All other routes become but more fodder for un-fixable schisms and growing violence. Aimed at societal control and

stability, as Max Weber classically observed in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber, 1905/2002), the Calvinist doctrine of a worldly "calling" (Beruf) and the ascetic discipline of labor transformed economic activity into a moral imperative. Which then became a channeling of worldly success as a sign of divine election while fostering capital accumulation through frugality, diligence, and deferred gratification. Yet this very rigor exacts a price: stagnation in adaptive flexibility, sluggish response to cultural or technological flux, a fixation on supposed purity, seeing the economy as the ultimate end, and, at times, violent resistance to change when perceived as threats to doctrinal or moral order. Theologies, arising through hermeneutic contestation rather than apodictic demonstration, remains devoid of definitive objectivity or exhaustive knowability; it functions instead as the central axis around which Christianity's influence pivots, perpetually negotiating between supposed revelation and metaphysical reasoning, scripture and tradition. This epistemic stance (its dogmatic forms, epistemic closure) fuels an intriguing economic trajectory: God is more and more construed as favoring those who steward and command resources, even to the point of expansion and dominion over others, a conviction deeply embedded in mainstream American Christianity, especially among evangelicals. Financial advisors such as Dave Ramsey exemplify this alignment, articulating wealth accumulation as consonant with divine blessing when pursued through disciplined stewardship is in accordance with biblical principles as the primary goal for a person of faith (Ramsey, 1997). As well as the idea that Christians should be in the drivers-seat of the economic engine through wealth accumulation. Though Ramsey distances himself from overt prosperity theology by emphasizing personal responsibility over magical confession, his framework resonates with the broader prosperity gospel movement, which posits that faith, positive speech, and sacrificial giving material abundance as an expression of God's covenantal will (Bowler, 2013). Concurrently, Christianity manifests an emphasis on moral and protective thinking, rooted in a profound fear of polluting purity, an anxiety that views external influences as contaminants capable of eroding the sanctity of the covenant community. While a certain protective instinct is cross-cultural and arguably necessary for communal coherence, mainstream evangelical support for policies framed

around purity and protectionism often appears in advocacy for restrictive immigration measures (seen as safeguarding cultural and national identity from perceived dilution), stringent anti-abortion legislation (frequently without robust post-birth support structures), and opposition to LGBTQ+ rights (while maintaining no such vigor for other offences such as gluttony, which may be tied to material wealth as a sign of blessing), all cast as defenses of familial and societal holiness (Pew Research Center, 2025; PRRI, 2025). White evangelicals, in particular, exhibit higher levels of concern over border security and cultural change, frequently interpreting demographic shifts through lenses of threat and moral contamination (Pew Research Center, 2024). This mirrors broader patterns of religious protectionism worldwide, wherein fundamentalist movements, across traditions, prioritize doctrinal purity over pluralism, erecting boundaries against external "contamination" to preserve the integrity of the sacred in-group (Almond et al., 2003). The Christian influence extends beyond these domains. With thought widely fixated on eschatology, end times, and apocalyptic events that herald perfection through Christ's triumphant return, implying that true stewardship of non-monetary world is irrelevant. Apocholiptic ideology mearly touts that no matter how bad we could make things, we will be saved in the end from our mistakes. Modern American Christianity orients itself toward a teleological horizon: the pursuit of economic stability, expansion, and dominion as stewardship, moral purity drawn from variegated and at times conflicting scriptural sources as univocal, a fervent sense of righteousness grounded in possession of "truth," and an expectant posture of eschatological salvation that anticipates divine intervention amid impending doom. In this configuration, the present order is provisional, a theater of testing and preparation wherein economic diligence and moral vigilance serve as signs of alignment with the coming kingdom, even as they risk calcifying into defensive postures that resist the very transformations the eschaton could promises. In this interplay of interpretive truth-seeking, ascetic discipline, protective purity, and apocalyptic hope, Christianity thus reveals itself not merely as a doctrinal archive but as a living ontology that shapes the American social imaginary, rendering stability sacred, change suspect, expansion and protection as vital, the future dreaded, and the end desired.

3 The Hidden Side of Things

If Christianity is broadly construed as plainly visable truths, the occult, simply construed, entails the pursuit of hidden truths, that which eludes immediate apprehension and resides beyond the veil of ordinary perception, often manifesting as an esoteric quest for truths concealed from the profane gaze. This pursuit, far from being a marginal aberration, permeates every corner of the world across epochs and cultures, interpretable as a perennial aspiration to transcend the confines of established religion and orthodoxy, emphasizing dominion over unseen forces, the unveiling of concealed verities, and the cultivation of esoteric wisdom that bridges the mundane and the transcendent. Such endeavors reflect the drive toward gnosis, a term denoting intimate, experiential knowledge of the divine or cosmic order, as articulated in various hermetic traditions where the occult serves as a counterpoint to exoteric doctrines, fostering a dialectical tension between revelation and secrecy (Hanegraaff, 2012). This dynamic is vividly illustrated in the Pythagorean cult, an archaic secretive society that blended mathematical mysticism with ascetic ritualistic prohibitions, such as the infamous abstention from beans, symbolizing a taboo against consuming what was believed to harbor souls or disrupt spiritual purity, while venerating numbers as divine essences that govern the cosmos and embody cosmic harmony (Burkert, 1972; O'Meara, 1989). The Pythagoreans, under the aegis of their eponymous founder, a figure shrouded in legend who purportedly possessed miraculous abilities like bilocation and communication with animals, operated as a proto-occult fraternity, wherein numerology intertwined with metempsychosis (the transmigration of souls), positing that mathematical principles underpin both the physical universe and the soul's eternal journey (Kingsley, 1995). Their doctrines, transmitted orally to avoid profanation, influenced subsequent esoteric lineages, underscoring the occult's role in preserving arcane knowledge amid societal flux. Enlightenment thinkers like Isaac Newton and Francis Bacon harbored clear occult interests, some inspired by the Pythagoreans cults, integrating esoteric pursuits into their ostensibly rational inquiries. Newton, the paragon of mechanistic science, delved profoundly into alchemy, seeking the philosopher's

stone and elixir of life, and biblical prophecy, interpreting apocalyptic texts to discern hidden patterns in nature and scripture, viewing the universe as a divine cryptogram to be deciphered through hermetic principles (Westfall, 1980; Dobbs, 1975). His alchemical manuscripts, exceeding a million words, reveal a synthesis of empirical experimentation with occult symbology, positing gravity and other forces as manifestations of divine will operating through invisible agencies (Manuel, 1963). Similarly, Bacon explored natural magic as a means to harness unseen forces for empirical ends, advocating a reformed science that drew upon hermetic traditions to manipulate nature's occult qualities, thereby laying groundwork for the Royal Society while embedding esoteric methodologies in the Baconian method (Rossi, 1968; Eamon, 1994). In America, a child of the Enlightenment's influence, occultism has indelibly shaped society through the Freemasons and other secret societies, embedding esoteric symbols, such as the all-seeing eye and pyramidal motifs, and principles into foundational institutions, from the Great Seal of the United States to architectural designs in Washington, D.C., thereby influencing revolutionary leaders like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin and fostering enduring networks of fraternal influence (Hieronimus, 2005; Bullock, 1996). Freemasonry, with its roots in operative masonry transmuted into speculative occultism, incorporated rituals derived from Rosicrucian and hermetic lore, promoting moral allegory through degrees of initiation that mirror alchemical transformation, while simultaneously attracting accusations of clandestine political machinations (Jacob, 1981). One might be tempted to envision occultism solely as cloaked figures convening in nocturnal rites, evoking archetypal images of arcane ceremonies; yet this caricature belies its pervasive integration into societal structures, where secret societies like the Freemasons have historically facilitated intellectual exchange and reform, even as they navigated perceptions of elitist opacity (Stevenson, 1988). This ties into the notion that modern science and mathematics constitute a new form of modern occultism, juxtaposed against the often rigid, spiritually constrained thinking of American religions, wherein empirical inquiry unveils hidden laws of the universe, akin to alchemical transmutation and the Renaissance pursuit of natural magic (Asprem, 2012; Morrisson, 2007). The Scientific Revolution, far from eradicating occult

qualities, reframed them within mechanistic paradigms, as evidenced by Newton's hermetic influences on gravitational theory and the persistence of esoteric undercurrents in quantum mechanics, where indeterminacy and entanglement evoke ancient mystical interconnections (Waddell, 2018; Moller, 2024). Indeed, the mathematical origins of occult practices trace back to ancient civilizations, such as the Lo Shu magic square in Chinese esotericism, which informed numerological systems that prefigured modern computational algorithms (Ellis, 2007; Melvin-Koushki, 2017).

Occultism is frequently portrayed as dangerous and destructive, emblematic of power-hungry dominators who exploit arcane knowledge for domination; in modernity, this archetype extends to think tanks, corrupt politicians, and shadowy elites, where mathematics and algorithms, harnessing predictive analytics and data divination, serve to exert control, supplanting traditional religious institutions as arbiters of guidance and fate (Asprem, 2014). Yet, counterbalancing this peril, the search for hidden truths in occultism can also prove profoundly empowering and useful, as exemplified in the Lesser Key of Solomon, a grimoire attributing to King Solomon the arcane arts of commanding demonic entities to constructive ends, such as constructing the Temple, without succumbing to their corrupting influence, achieved through binding rituals invoking divine authority and sigils of power (Mathers, 1904; Peterson, 2001). In this vein, modern scientists and inventors emerge as contemporary occult practitioners, wielding esoteric knowledge, manifest in breakthroughs like quantum computing or genetic engineering, to reshape reality for mass benefit, echoing Solomonic mastery over the unseen without falling into its uses for nefarious purposes (Neal, 1999).

The occult stands as a potent force for change and discovery, catalyzing paradigm shifts from Renaissance hermeticism to postmodern esotericism. The aims of the occult are more difficult to discern than that of larger religions. Being ultimately guided by the individual seeker, whether alone or in small groups. The individual intentions and actions carve a path to whether it is harnessed toward enlightenment and societal progress, or malevolence, perpetuating exploitation and discord (Hanegraaff, 1996).

4 ***What We Make***

The only adequate response to the ultimate dilemma of our supposed existence is to act according to what we think we know. Any alternative demands access to knowledge beyond our epistemic domain, knowledge that remains ultimately inaccessible. Consider, for analogy: can an amoeba formulate the ideas of Kant’s categorical imperative and test them for logical soundness? Given what we understand of amoebas, the question is absurd and unanswerable. Our own situation mirrors this: we cannot definitively prove even our deepest beliefs and postulates against some absolute, external standard. Yet we do live, and we do act. In this way, we are all, whether shaped by Christian eschatological expectation or by the occult’s quest for hidden mastery, acting out our convictions and testing them against the world and one another. Void of any sure connection to ultimate reality, we simply enact what we think. Taken collectively, over time, we can discern what works and what does not, not by proving ideas true in some objective, transcendent sense, but by upholding them as sufficiently true within the bounds of our limited understanding.

This approach is more akin to a virtue epistemology or a pragmatic ethic than to dogmatic certainty: intellectual and practical excellences (whether the moral stringency of evangelical stewardship, the protective purity of apocalyptic vigilance, or the empowering discovery of esoteric knowledge) guide us to form beliefs and pursue actions that reliably yield meaningful outcomes in lived experience. We remain confined within the epistemological “third wall” encircling us. Even in an extreme hypothetical, where we grasp the relations of our universe so thoroughly as to create whole universes at will and travel between them, the best we could attain would still be trapped within our own experiential horizon, subject to the same epistemic limitations. No vantage point escapes the box entirely.

Yet herein lies the profound continuity with the influences we have traced: Christianity and occultism permeate our society in subtle, pervasive ways, their archetypal ideas, eschatological hope and moral rectitude on one hand, esoteric unveiling and transformative mastery on the other, continuing to inform the undercurrents of modern culture,

from economic paradigms to scientific inquiry, often without explicit acknowledgment. By cultivating awareness of these forces, we gain clarity in understanding the paradoxes of contemporary times: the tension between communal stability and individualistic innovation, between redemptive optimism and perilous ambition, politics and wars, etc. Such recognition not only illuminates the historical roots of our present dilemmas but also empowers us to judiciously utilize their useful facets, harnessing Christianity's ethical communalism and the occult's creative ingenuity, toward novel imaginings, synthesizing them into emergent visions that transcend their original confines. Both traditions, in their distinct ways, affirm that thought wedded to dedicated action manifests worlds. In light of the unprecedented freedom we now wield, freedom wrested from nature's former dominion through medicine, technology, and inquiry, our task is not passive contemplation but resolute enactment. What we think, when pursued with integrity and tested in the crucible of collective striving, becomes reality. Thus, the curtain having fallen, the stage belongs to us. What shall we make?

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