

Contested Knowledge II: Cosmotheism and Disenchantment

Code: RS8134. Credit points: 10

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MA Program, 1st Semester 2013-2014

Tuesdays 15.00-17.45

In this module we will explore the fundamental tension in Western culture between “enchanted” and “disenchanted” worldviews. Monotheistic religions are officially based upon a strict separation between God and the world (creator and creation), but in actual reality they have been strongly influenced by “pagan” perspectives according to which the divine is at home in the world and inseparable from it. Such “cosmotheistic” worldviews can be traced from antiquity to the present, and we will be analyzing some characteristic examples. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Protestant and Enlightenment polemicists joined forces with adherents of the new natural sciences in a renewed attack on cosmotheism: a process that, in the famous terms of Max Weber, has led to the “disenchantment of the world”. Nevertheless, cosmotheism survived the Enlightenment as an alternative to “the scientific worldview”, and remains a potent force in contemporary religion and culture. By focusing on the conflict between cosmotheism and disenchantment as a “deep structure” in Western culture, we will gain a new perspective on the interwovenness of religion, esotericism, philosophy, science, and even art.

Procedure

There are four requirements for successfully completing the course:

1. Presence and active participation

You are required to attend at least 80% of the seminar meetings, which means that a maximum of three meetings can be skipped. Failure to be present at more than three meetings results in a *judicium* “insufficient”. Active participation means that you have read the materials for each week and take part in the discussions. You will be asked questions about the texts, so be prepared!

2. Oral presentations

One or several primary or secondary sources are studied during each seminar meeting. Dependent on the number of participants, you are

required to take responsibility for at least one seminar presentation (instructions for seminar presentations, see below). If the number of participants is relatively small, you are required to accept more than one presentation. A grade is awarded for each presentation, which you will be able to find on blackboard within a week after the presentation. In case of more than one presentation, the highest grade counts. This grade counts for 40% of the final grade.

Please note: not turning up when you are scheduled for a presentation is taken very seriously, for it means that you are letting down all your fellow students and are in effect sabotaging the entire meeting. Therefore in cases of “no-show”, 1.0 will be subtracted from the final grade. Exceptions will be made only if you can demonstrate that the absence was due to force majeure (serious illness, deaths in the family etc.), and if the absence was reported as early as possible (by means of email via blackboard, or if necessary by telephone).

3. Written paper

You are required to write a paper (min. 10-max. 15 pp., 1.5 line spacing) on a subject of your choice, relevant to the theme of the course, and selected in consultation with the instructor. Instructions for writing a paper are available on the Blackboard page for this course. Take care! The paper will be evaluated on the basis of its contents, but the grade will be negatively influenced by failure to respect basic style requirements as indicated in the instructions (i.e. rules for use of footnotes, literature references in footnotes, and presentation of the bibliography).

A first version of the paper must be submitted as a Word document (attachment to w.j.hanegraaff@uva.nl), no later than 30 january 2012). Within four week (i.e. no later than 27 february 2012) the paper will be returned with critical comments and suggestions. The final revised version must be submitted within four more weeks (i.e. no later than march 23). If either the first or the final version of the paper is submitted too late, this results in a subtraction of 0.5 point for each week. The grade awarded to the paper counts for 60% of the final grade.

Instructions for Seminar Presentations

A good presentation takes between 15 and 20 minutes and contains the following elements:

- It provides some background information about the author. Please do not just copy his/her CV from the internet, but tell us in your own words who the author is and what s/he has been doing.
- The presentation makes clear what the text is about (or claims to be about) and why the author seems to have written it.

- It contains a short reminder of the structure and the contents of the text, presented in such a way that someone who has not read the text would be able to follow it. NB: The term “reminder” is used deliberately: your audience has already read the text, so please do not get into pointless summaries of what everybody already knows (“he says this, then he says that, in the next section he says that” etc.).
- It contains two or three well-chosen quotations that clarify the author’s intentions and his/her argument.
- It contains an element of critical evaluation (for example: What to make of this text? How convincing do you find the author? Are there gaps or weaknesses in the argument? Can you find counterarguments against his/her claims? And so on). Don’t be afraid to also indicate your personal opinion: what did you think of the text, did you like it, or disliked it, and why? Please note “criticism” does not mean that you necessary have to criticize the text, although you’re welcome to; it means that you show that you have read it with a critical mind.
- Use of Powerpoint is not mandatory, but very welcome. However: use it wisely. It is never a good idea to put long stretches of text on BB because it will distract your audience’s attention from what you are saying. Use text elements sparingly: not with the intention of providing information, but rather, with the intention of helping your audience follow the thread of the information provided in your spoken presentation. Likewise, images are welcome, but should be functional, not just recreational.

While all students following the course are expected to have read the texts under discussion, a good presenter (and recipient of a high grade) has taken the trouble of looking further. For example if the required reading consists of only a few sections of a longer chapter, the presenter will have read the entire chapter so as to be able to put the sections in context. He or she will also have taken the trouble to visit the library (the physical one: not just the internet!) and have a look at additional literature relevant to the text and the themes that are central in it. Therefore you need to plan your presentation well in advance.

Program

Week 36 1. Introduction: Disenchantment and Cosmotheism

[preparation: read the Files “Cont Knowl TEXTS” and “Full of Gods” that have been pasted on Blackboard, next to the Study Guide. Read these carefully, spend as much time on the short as the long ones, and think about them!]

Week 37 2. Monotheism and Cosmotheism

Jan Assmann, "The Mosaic Distinction: Israel, Egypt, and the Invention of Paganism", *Representations* 56 (1996), 48-67.

- *Corpus Hermeticum* XI (transl.: Clement Salaman, Dorine van Oyen & William D. Wharton, *The Way of Hermes: The Corpus Hermeticum*, Duckworth: London 1999, 52-58).
- *Asclepius* 22-41 (transl.: Clement Salaman, *Asclepius: The Perfect Discourse of Hermes Trismegistus*, Duckworth: London 2007, 75-98).

Week 38 3. Paganism in Byzantium I

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Pagan Who Came from the East: George Gemistos Plethon and Platonic Orientalism", in: Wouter J. Hanegraaff & Joyce Pijnenburg (eds.), *Hermes in the Academy: Ten Years' Study of Western Esotericism at the University of Amsterdam*, Amsterdam University Press 2009, 33-49.

Niketas Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*, Cambridge University Press 2011, 93-113, 163-190.

Week 39 4. Paganism in Byzantium II

Niketas Siniossoglou, *Radical Platonism in Byzantium: Illumination and Utopia in Gemistos Plethon*, Cambridge University Press 2011, 190-277.

Week 40 5. Emanation versus Creation

Giuseppe Micheli, "Jakob Thomasius (1622-1684): *Schediasma Historicum*," in: Francesco Botton, Luciano Malusa, Giuseppe Micheli, Giovanni Santinello & Ilario Tolomio (eds.), *Models of the History of Philosophy: From its Origins in the Renaissance to the "Historia Philosophica"*, Kluwer: Dordrecht 1993, 409-442.

- Theophilus of Antioch, *Apology to Autolytus* II.1-4, in: Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolytum* (Robert M. Grant, text & transl.), Clarendon Press: Oxford 1970.

Week 41 6. Occult Qualities

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "The Notion of 'Occult Sciences' in the Wake of the Enlightenment", in: Monika Neugebauer-Wölk, Renko Geffarth & Markus Meumann (eds.), *Aufklärung und Esoterik: Wege in die Moderne*, De Gruyter: Berlin / Boston 2013, 73-95.

- Marsilio Ficino, *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, Chs. I-III, XXVI, in: Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life* (Carol V. Kaske & John R. Clark, ed. & transl.), *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*: Binghamton 1989, 243-257, 385-393 (+ 427-434, 457-458).

Week 42 7. The Scientific Revolution

Stuart Clark, "Witchcraft and the Scientific Revolution," in: Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1997, 294-311.

- Balthasar Bekker, *The World Bewitch'd; or, An Examination of the Common Opinions concerning SPIRITS, their Nature, Power, Administration, and Operations, as also, The Effects Men are able to produce by their Communicaton* (translated from a French Copy), R. Baldwin 1695 [section: An Abridgment of the Whole Work; What hath been the design of the Author, and what is his Method]

Week 43 = NO CLASS =

Week 44 8. Animism and Disenchantment

Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom* (first ed. 1871), Harper & Brothers: New York 1958, vol. II, 1-14, 80-86, 441-447.

Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900-1939*, Ph.D. dissertation University of Amsterdam 2013, 10-80.

Week 45 9. Elementals

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge University Press 2012, 153-156, 222-230.

- *The Count of GABALIS: Or, The Extravagant Mysteries of the Cabalists, Exposed in Five Pleasant Discourses on the Secret Sciences*, Printed for B.M. Printer to the Cabalistical Society of the Sages, at the Sign of the Rosy-Crucian: London 1680, 19-101 [2nd & 3rd discourse]
- Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni*, Leipzig 1842, 212-231 [non-compulsory: 187-212 / 231-259]

Week 46 10. The Bible and the Body: Swedenborg and Oetinger

Inge Jonsson, "From Inorganic to Organic Nature," in: Jonsson, *Visionary Scientist: The Effects of Science and Philosophy on Swedenborg's Cosmology*, Swedenborg Foundation Publishers: West Chester 1991, 35-67.

Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Swedenborg, Oetinger, Kant: Three Perspectives on the Secrets of Heaven*, Swedenborg Foundation: West Chester 2007, 3-11, 67-85, 119-120, 130-134.

Week 47 11. = NO CLASS =

Week 48 12. Spiritualism

- Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Harmonial Philosophy*, 2nd ed., William Rider & Son: London 1923, 1-23.

R. Laurence Moore, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology, and American Culture*, Oxford University Press: New York 1977, 3-39.

Catherine L. Albanese, "On the Matter of Spirit: Andrew Jackson Davis and the Marriage of God and Nature", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60:1 (1992), 1-17.

Week 49. 13. Occultism

- H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, vol. I: Science, Theosophical University Press: Pasadena 1972, 206-252.

Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern*, Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore / London 2004, 132-161.

Week 50 14. Occulture

Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal*, The University of Chicago Press 2011, 121-172.

Egil Asprem, "Psychic Enchantments of the Educated Classes: The Paranormal and the Ambiguities of Disenchantment", in: Egil Asprem & Kennet Granholm (eds.), *Contemporary Esotericism*, Equinox: Sheffield 2013, 330-350.