

In Search of Sophia: Origins and Interpretations of the Gnostic Demiurge

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In the mythological texts of the Gnostics, there appears a figure who is characteristically the cosmic warden of humankind. He has created the earthly realm as a prison for the eternal spark in humans, and he is often portrayed as evil and arrogant, as well as a thief and rapist. As we will see, this figure is called the “Demiurge,” a name that refers to his textual origins. And though there are many variations on the Demiurge within the wide corpus of Gnostic mythology, there do appear to be enough similarities among them to examine this figure as a singular mythological symbol. This examination will necessarily focus on the Demiurge’s origin and context within the broad spectrum of culture and history, but it will also take into account his role within specific myths. Different religious theorists will also be used to suggest how the symbol of the Demiurge may have worked for the Gnostics themselves. It should become clear that though the Demiurge is solidly rooted in ancient culture, this symbol nonetheless has the ability to speak to the modern world through the many layers of his mythology.

Before attempting an account of the Demiurge, we first need an account of Gnosticism itself, so that we can put this singular mythic figure into a fuller context. “Gnosis” is a Greek word for “knowing,” that, like the English word, has two connotations. The first is that of propositional knowing, of knowing something to be true. Examples of this would be “I know that the sky is blue” or “I know that $2 + 2 = 4$.” The second connotation has to do with being acquainted with a thing: a knowledge *of*, as opposed to a knowledge *that*. An example of this would be “Jim knows Sue.” He is well acquainted with her and

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understands her well. This second connotation of *gnosis*, that of acquaintance, is the one that the Gnostics refer to when they claim to have *gnosis* of the true God (Layton 9).

Who were the Gnostics? Though we know there was a specific group in the second century CE who called themselves “Gnostikoi” or “Gnostics,” it must be understood that this group is not the sole referent of the word “Gnostic.” The term “Gnosticism” is really a modern, intellectual construction, a term created by scholars in order to discuss their amalgamation of a diverse set of ancient texts with many interweaving similarities. Since there is no ongoing Gnostic religious tradition, scholars are able to make such generalizations about the Gnosticism not through contemporary dogmatic axioms or a church preserved corpus of Gnostic works, but only through the discovery of ancient Gnostic manuscripts and through early Christian records. In fact, the Christian records were basically the only sources scholars had to draw from until the discovery of primary Gnostic documents in the 19th century. Because Gnosticism became a rival to early Christianity, and because Christian writers were writing about the religion from a removed perspective, the Christian sources cannot necessarily be held to be definitive. The primary sources, on the other hand, are thought to have been written by actual Gnostics, but they were recorded in a number of languages, including Aramaic, Coptic, Greek, and Chinese, and come from correspondingly varied geographic locations (Jonas 37-41). As a result of this diversity, attempting to give Gnosticism a specific point of origin is almost impossible. There is no single religious founder to point to, and many different groups which can all fall under the designation “Gnostic” appeared in many different places, independently of one another (Couliano 59; Filoramo xviii; Jonas 33). The term “Gnosticism,” then, is a construction that allows scholars to discuss generalized concepts and helps them to frame their field of research (Filoramo 142-3; Jonas 32). It is a term developed in modern times to refer to a wide range of overlapping texts, groups, and beliefs (Layton 8).

A common historical portrayal of Gnosticism is that it arose in and around the Greco-Roman, Hellenistic culture during the first two centuries of the Common Era. During this time period there was a kind of cultural unity, which allowed for the free exchange of thought

among the whole of the Hellenistic world. Judaism and Jewish philosophy, Babylonian astrology and magic, as well as a barrage of mystery cults and salvation religions, were all common aspects of the spiritual lives of many people. Yet a great deal of the intellectual exchange leading up to and during this time was being put into a classically Greek conceptual framework, which forced many of the religious systems to be described and practiced in non-native terms, forming new, distinctive religious interpretations (Jonas 4, 22, 25).

Another result of this large-scale exchange of ideas and belief structures was a loss of communal, culturally specific religious identities. People were not able to adhere to older forms of religious practice in a culture in which they were constantly being exposed to newer systems of belief addressed specifically to the individual. They began to discard the classical Greco-Roman gods to assert a newly found sense of personal spiritual authority. They turned to those religions that offered personal experience and a promise of personal union with the divine. They turned to the so-called “salvation” religions of which Gnosticism was a part (Filoramo xix, 23-4, 34-6).

But understanding Gnosticism’s formation as a salvation religion also means taking into account the influence of Christianity as a related movement. The question of whether or not Gnosticism formed as a direct reaction to and/or within Christianity is difficult to answer; Gnosticism’s specific origins are not clear. The early Christians considered Gnosticism to be directly related to their system of belief; they considered it to be a dangerous heresy. There are a great number of Gnostic texts that deal directly with the Christian mythology, but there are also many Gnostic texts devoid of any specifically Christian references. Scholars have correspondingly argued for a wide variety of origins for Gnosticism, including Christian, Judaic, and Egyptian. But, as Hans Jonas effectively points out, no theory of a specific origin can fully explain Gnosticism’s vast heritage, and no theory combining all the different possibilities in that heritage can explain the autonomous nature of each respective point of origin (Jonas 32-3, 41).

Similarly, given the large number of variations and idiosyncrasies within the Gnostic texts, it is difficult to give a perfectly concise yet all-encompassing Gnostic doctrine. Scholars have therefore compiled a kind of core set of traits that can be used to identify Gnosticism in

a very broad sense. Likewise, there is a generalized Gnostic mythology that is used as a starting point for comparisons between texts (Filoramo 144-5; Jonas 41-2).

In *A History of Gnosticism*, Giovanni Filoramo describes the core beliefs of Gnosticism as follows. There is a spark in humans which originated in the divine realm but has forgotten its origins. This spark is lost in the material, earthly realm and can only return to the divine via gnosis. This gnosis is the knowledge of (acquaintance with) the true reality and of the truly divine as opposed to the material. Gnosis is not attainable through reason or rational means but must be derived from personal experience or given from the divine source in the world, the Gnostic Savior (Filoramo 38-9).

In *The Gnostic Religion*, Hans Jonas explains what he calls the “basic myth” of Gnosticism. In this summarization, the true God, the source of all Being (sometimes called the “First Principle” or “Monad”) did not create the human cosmos. It was created by intermediate beings of heavenly origin, sometimes called “Archons.” In some myths there is a singular being that creates the cosmos, or creates it as the leader and creator of the Archons. This singular being is the Demiurge. The human universe is often depicted as a kind of prison for the divine spark with the individual person. The human body is created out of naturally corrupting Matter, and the physical world itself is a matrix full of desires, passions, and other material forces that cause the divine within humankind to forget its divine heritage. Gnostics desire to liberate their internal divine spark, to go beyond the matrix of the Archons and the Demiurge, and to return to the true God. And again, to do this, gnosis is required; they must have knowledge of or acquaintance with the true God to be liberated, and this knowledge is often delivered by the heavenly Savior (Jonas 42-5).

Gnosticism can thus be seen as a religion which emphasizes transcendence of the physical world. Its followers consider the nature of reality to be dualistic, with the true God being the epitome of the spiritual, and the earthly world being the epitome of the material. The creator(s) of the human world are the link between the two.

As there is no one defining Gnostic scripture, so too there is no one defining account of the Demiurge. It is possible to construct an “essential list” of qualities about the Demiurge, which includes its

identification with the Judeo-Christian God, expressions of its evilness, arrogance, ignorance, and masculinity, and its sinful birth from Sophia. But all of these qualities are absent in one text or another, as is the Demiurge himself in some Gnostic creation texts (Couliano 93-6). The only aspects that seem constant are that when the Demiurge is present in a tradition, he is the creator or “craftsman” of the material world and not the true source of spiritual being or of existence in general.

In early Gnostic texts, it is common for the Demiurge to be referred to with the name “Ialtaboath” or a variation thereof, essentially meaning “childish god” (Couliano 95). Referring to Ialtaboath as “demiurgos” (or in the English vernacular, “Demiurge”) appears to be a reference to Plato’s *Timaeus*, because in this philosophical treatise Plato writes of a being he refers to as the “demiurgos,” which is Greek for “craftsman” or “artisan.” This figure is described as being a creator-god who is responsible for the formation of the cosmos. He is the sole creator, but he is not all powerful, since he must work within the boundaries of the higher Forms, or metaphysical patterns (Peters 34). This inability to create perfection is also echoed in some of the Gnostic myths, where the Demiurge, attempting to create the cosmos in the perfect forms of the Aeons (the beings inhabiting the true spiritual realm) is unable due to his lack of *gnosis*.

Other more general parallels between Gnostic mythology and Platonism include the Platonic philosophy of the Cave, in which everyday reality is understood to be only “shadows” of the true reality. In Platonism, there is a strong dualistic conception of the human being (physical vs. spiritual), which is very prevalent in Gnosticism (Layton 18). Hence some have argued that Platonic philosophy served as the singular model for Gnosticism in general and for the Demiurge in particular (Layton 15-6). It is true that Plato was writing centuries before the Christian movement, which seems to be a chronological marker in Gnosticism’s development. But because the true origin of Gnostic thought is highly debated, and because Plato might have been influenced by a source common both to him and the Gnostics (see Couliano 119-120), it might be more correct to say that there was a direct link between Platonism and Gnosticism, without insisting on a causal relationship between the two.

The work of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, a Jewish theologian of the early first century CE, combined Platonism with aspects of the Hebrew Bible. Philo expounded upon Plato's concept of the "Logos" as the "intellect of God," through which the world was conceptualized and brought forth (Couliano 121-2). To help solve the problem of evil in a world created by a perfect being, Philo described a kind of intermediary being between the human realm and God, asserting that imperfection came not from God but instead from the being which emanated from Him. And this in itself marked a theological trend during this time. It became somewhat common to use intermediaries to explain the imperfection and evilness perceived in the world (Filoramo 25-6).

This emphasis on evil was part of what Filoramo describes as a cultural shift in the Hellenic consciousness, a turn to the demonic, evil aspects of the supernatural. This happened first in relation to spiritual geography. The cosmological model became that of concentric planetary spheres. The Earth became the "sublunar realm" and began to be conceptualized with the properties of the Underworld. As Filoramo poetically notes, the classical Greek Elysium began to rise and envelope the Earth. And as the Earth began to take on this negative connotation, it became inhabited by demonic forces; the spiritually neutral "daemons" began to be transformed into the evil "demons." Filoramo also proposes that this was partially due to the influx of new religions with strong morally dualistic components, later epitomized in the Christian attitude towards Satan and his demonic forces (Filoramo 22, 30-1).

Taken together, these cosmological currents, along with the thought of Plato and Philo, can explain certain general attributes of the symbol of the Demiurge: a mythic figure whose role is the creation of the Earth as an imperfect realm. But to get a more detailed picture, we need to examine specific instances of the Demiurge in mythological texts. The texts discussed here will be the Apocryphon of John and Ptolemy's version of the Gnostic myth, copied by St. Irenaeus of Lyon. These two texts come from two different schools of Gnostic thought and paint very different pictures of the Demiurge. The first text comes from what scholars call the "Sethian" school of Gnosticism, which loosely refers to those texts which focus on the mythic character Seth

as the Gnostic son of the Biblical Adam. The second text comes from the Valentinian school, which was founded by the Christian theologian Valentinus and was influenced heavily by the earlier Sethian texts (Layton 5, 8).

In comparing these two myths, I will focus on three aspects of the Demiurge that seem to be essential in understanding how he works as a symbol within the mythology as a whole. These are: 1) his origin and personal imagery; 2) the knowledge or gnosis he has of his existential situation; and 3) his attitude and relationship towards mankind.

The Apocryphon of John comes from one of the earliest Gnostic groups, who were active in the first two centuries CE. The text itself can be dated at the latest to 180 CE, since it is referred to in other works of this time. Though the author is unknown, the text has been called "...one of the most classic narrations of the Gnostic myth" (Layton 5, 8-9, 23-4).

In this myth the Demiurge is referred to primarily as "Ialtaboath." He is the offspring of the Aeon Sophia (Greek for "wisdom"). She gives birth to him after desiring to create something without the approval of the First Principle and without her male counterpart. At birth, Ialtaboath has the image of a snake with a lion's head, though later he is able to change shapes at will. He was born inside the realm of the Aeons, but left after his mother hid him out of shame (Layton 35).

For the most part, Ialtaboath never has acquaintance with (gnosis of) the realm of the Aeons and is especially ignorant of the First Principle. He does have knowledge of Sophia and steals divine power from her before he leaves for his own realm; it is the vague memory attached to this power that allows him to attempt to form his own realm in the perfect forms of the Aeons. His ignorance is further demonstrated when he declares to his created minions, the Archons, that he alone is God, and in a parallel to one of the Hebrew commandments, that they shall worship no God besides him. When the archetypal image of man is projected from the realm of the Aeons, Ialtaboath is confused and falsely believes it to be from his mother (Layton 36, 38-9).

The Demiurge's attitude towards man in the myth is characterized by jealousy and cruelty. Ialtaboath first becomes jealous of Adam,

the primordial man, after Ialtaboath creates Adam in the image of what was projected from the Aeonic realm. Aeonic “luminaries” in the form of Ialtaboath’s Archons trick him into breathing the power stolen from Sophia into the created man, and it is this power illuminated in man that is the cause of the jealousy. In response, Ialtaboath first throws Adam deep within the material realm, and when that is not enough, he places Adam in a material body and imprisons him within the Garden of Eden. In the garden, Ialtaboath rapes Eve after creating her from “the image of the afterthought,” which itself was in Adam’s body after he ate from the tree of the knowledge (gnosis) of good and evil. Later in the text Ialtaboath sends the great deluge of Noah to wipe out all of the Gnostics who have propagated within the world (Layton 42-9).

From this brief outline, we can draw certain conclusions about the Demiurge’s role in the myth. First, he is directly tied to the Judeo-Christian God, as many of the narratives make Biblical allusions and, in parts, has the setting of the Book of Genesis. Second, he is portrayed very negatively. He is a thief and a rapist, he is jealous and cruel, and he is profoundly ignorant. His name even confers the image of a “child god.” Taken together, these two aspects of the Demiurge suggest that the Apocryphon worked, at least in part, to undermine previously accepted notions of the Judeo-Christian deity Yahweh.

In contrast, the Valentinian Demiurge is portrayed much more positively. This does not come as much of a surprise, as Valentinus himself was a Christian theologian and an influential member of the early Christian church. In St. Irenaeus’ amalgamation of Ptolemy’s version of the Valentinian myth, this positive outlook towards Christianity is still very much apparent. And though the text itself was written by a non-Gnostic Christian in the 2nd century CE, it is still believed to represent Valentinian thought well (Layton 217, 276-8).

In this version of the myth, the Demiurge is actually referred to as “demiurgos.” He is not born, but is created by Achamoth (lower wisdom), the intelligence of Sophia who is left outside the Aeonic realm (in this myth referred to as the “Fullness”) when Sophia attempts to “comprehend the magnitude” of the First Principle. The Demiurge exists outside the Fullness with Achamoth, and he is depicted as an “angel” (Layton 283, 288, 290).

For the most part, the Demiurge retains his characteristic ignorance of his divine station. He is given the knowledge of how to create the material forms by Achamoth, but the Demiurge believes the knowledge to be innate within himself. He cannot perceive spiritual essences because he is not made from them, and therefore believes himself to be the only deity in the cosmos. But later, when the Gnostic Savior comes from the Fullness, he explains to the Demiurge the truth of his divine station and promises him the place of Achamoth right outside of the Fullness (Layton 292-4).

The attitude that the Demiurge has towards man in this myth is characterized by neutrality and, in some cases, love. He is not jealous of the divine spark in man because he cannot perceive it (since its essence is spiritual). The divine spark itself is secretly placed within the demiurgos by Achamoth, to be inadvertently placed within humans when they are created by the demiurgos. Interestingly, the demiurgos finds himself loving those humans with the spark of Achamoth inside them and places them in correspondingly high-ranking positions in the Christian church. The only instance in the text that illustrates any negativity on the part of the demiurgos is when he creates Satan and his demons. But these entities also appear to be necessary emanations from the natural development of the cosmos (Layton 292-6).

It is easy to see from this brief synopsis that the demiurge is portrayed much more positively in the Valentinian mythology than he is in the Sethian. He is not a malformed abomination, but a heavenly creation. He has a somewhat positive relation with humankind, though still retaining some of his ignorance. Again, this positive outlook seems to be a product of the integration the Valentinians had within the early Christian church. The Christian God, while still not the true God, is not portrayed as evil. In both narratives, though, the Demiurge not only performs a cosmological function, but also serves to articulate each group's respective attitude toward the Christian church.

So far we have shown the Demiurge to be related to the early Christian movement, to the religious and mythological trends of the first few centuries CE, and to the philosophical thought of Philo and Plato. All of these are cultural and social implications. What we have not yet examined is the way the Demiurge, as a symbol, may have functioned for the Gnostics on a religious and/or psychological level.

Though there can be no definitive answers to this question, we can shed some light on how the Demiurge may have worked for actual Gnostic practitioners by applying some important theories of religious symbolism to these Gnostic texts. For this purpose, the modern theologian Rudolf Otto and the psychologists Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung can provide relevant theoretical frameworks.

Rudolf Otto might not seem to be a promising choice for attempting to understand Gnostic thought. He was a Christian theologian who described what it is like to experience the transcendent, with special regard to the Judeo-Christian deity. A great deal of the references Otto makes in his work, *The Idea of the Holy*, focus explicitly on Yahweh; he has an entire chapter entitled “The Numinous in the Old Testament.” More specifically, Otto’s description of religious experience in terms of the “numinous” or “Holy” seems linked with traits of the Christian God that the Sethians, at least, used to characterize the Demiurge. For example, one of the stages in the experience of the numinous is characterized by what Otto calls the “tremendum.” This stage is characterized by profound dread, fear, weirdness, and the like. According to Otto, it is the part of the religious experience that is characterized by a sense of fascinated horror that comes about when one experiences the “wholly other,” the terror felt when one experiences something completely outside of oneself and one’s humanness. Otto further characterizes this feeling as the “fear of Yahweh,” the “wrath of Yahweh,” and even the “jealousy of Yahweh,” all of which are to be found in the Old Testament (Otto 13-18). Seemingly, the Sethians would be quick to point out that these traits of fear, wrath, jealousy, horror, and dread are exactly the tools used by the Demiurge to keep the divine sparks trapped within the material realm. If a person has these kinds of feelings on a religious level, then it would appear that the person is experiencing the false God.

But a closer reading of Otto reveals that he refers to a kind of religious experience very similar to that invoked in the Gnostic texts. This becomes evident early in Otto’s work when, in a strikingly Gnostic manner, he states:

There is only one way to help another to an understanding of

[the numinous]. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reach the point at which “the numinous” in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness...In other words [the experience of the numinous] cannot, strictly speaking be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes “of the spirit” must be awakened. (Otto 7)

This “guidance” to the experience of the numinous “through the ways of the mind” appears to be very similar to the gnosis described by the Gnostics. Otto is saying that to understand the numinous, one must experience it. It is not attainable through reason; it cannot be “taught.” Similarly, gnosis is not a propositional, rational knowledge, but a direct experience which itself leads to acquaintance with the divine.

Another strikingly Gnostic feature of the experience of the numinous comes in Otto’s discussion of what he terms “creature feeling.” This is the experience one has when he or she finds him or herself in the presence of the Holy and experiences him or herself as a “creature” before it. Otto contrasts this “creature feeling” with a feeling of “createdness.” “Creature feeling” can be typified as the acknowledgement of one’s own existence, fully realized and juxtaposed against another entity “wholly other” from itself, whereas “createdness” is a feeling related to origins. It is the feeling of being created by and emanating from something else. Otto claims that “createdness” is typically associated with the rationalization of the Christian God, and that “creature feeling” is part of the experience of the truly numinous. This might again appear different from the Gnostic experience, in that the Gnostics write of a part of God within the individual that returns to its entirety, whereas Otto writes of God as “wholly other” than the individual. But in writing about this specific experience, Otto discusses a dissolving of the Ego and a feeling of “dust and ashes against majesty” (Otto 21). In Gnostic terms, the “created” and material aspect of the person is wiped away, and all that is left is the divine spark returning to its source.

Hence it is possible to put the symbol of the Demiurge into Ottonian terminology. If the Demiurge can be seen to symbolize

those aspects that lead away from a recognition and experience of the numinous, then its presence in the Gnostic mythology might serve as a tool to access or to go beyond the rational aspects of religious dogma, such as the religious laws and moral fixations. Otto appears to emphasize this point when, in discussing the aforementioned “wrath of Yahweh,” he states that “[a]nyone who is accustomed to think of deity only by its rational attributes must see in this ‘wrath’ mere caprice and willful passion” (Otto 18). For Otto, experiencing the divine requires one to go beyond the necessarily limiting aspects of the rational, and for the Gnostics, the Demiurge may have acted as a kind of symbolic signpost to remind them of this.

Freud’s psychological theories about the formation of religions can provide a useful complement to Otto’s theological framework. For ease of focus, our application of Freudian theories to the Gnostic texts will confine itself to the Sethian account in the *Apocryphon of John*. This examination will also assume that the writers of the Gnostic texts were male. This assumption should not imply a definitive claim about the gender of these authors; nor is it intended to devalue the role of women in Gnosticism. But the assumption is needed to apply Freud’s work, because he and many of his theories are rooted in the masculine standpoint, and because Christianity has a masculine concept of its deity.

Freud points to two interrelated, psychological foundations for religion in general. The first is evident in his assertion that religion is “the obsessional neurosis of humanity” (Freud 43). Freud claims that societies go through developmental stages much like individuals do, starting with immature childhood and progressing to mature adulthood. Thus because the Oedipal complex is fundamental to the development of the individual man, it is also fundamental to the development of society, and to the development of religion in particular. Oedipal desires are so strong that in primordial times they led to the killing of the father and the raping of the mother. Because this was so traumatic and the instinctual imprint remained so vivid in mankind’s subconscious, the image of the Judeo-Christian God was unconsciously based around the image of the father, elevating him to a figure that must be obeyed and revered (Freud 22, 42-3).

The second foundation for religion, according to Freud, is to keep

society from destroying itself. Cultural laws are invested with the power of the elevated father image to give them force enough to keep the more “primal” members from disobeying them. Freud also argues that given enough education and reason, people would not need to see laws as invested with the prohibitive and restrictive force of the God/father image, but would instead understand that laws are merely cultural tools there to protect them (Freud 40-1).

Applied to Gnosticism, Freud’s theory has some very interesting implications. If the Christian God is seen to be the culturally projected image of the omnipotent father, then Sethian Gnosticism can be seen as a reversion back to the Oedipal complex on a cultural level. The first image of Ialtaboath in the *Apocryphon of John* is that of a snake with a lion’s head. In a Freudian interpretation, the snake is a very strong phallic symbol, with the lion representing an overabundance of power, emphasizing Ialtaboath’s masculinity. We have already seen that Ialtaboath is identified with the Judeo-Christian God Yahweh, and given an extremely negative connotation. On a mythological level, this signifies that the Sethians are attempting to take away the father’s power. They even name him Ialtaboath or “child god,” possibly in an attempt to emasculate or even castrate him. Furthermore, the divine sparks that the Sethian Gnostics contain within them are pieces of Sophia, who can be seen as an elevated mother figure. Ialtaboath stole these pieces and inadvertently gave them to the Gnostics. The Gnostics want to return the pieces to Sophia and to return to her realm. Symbolically, the Gnostics want to take the power that the father stole from the mother, the power of sexual intercourse, use it to surpass him (with their own lives which were given to them via intercourse), and return to the realm of the mother. Thus in a Freudian interpretation the Demiurge acts as a symbolic father used to express Oedipal tensions. (We might speculate that this need for a symbolic degradation of the God/father image might have arisen from the newly constructed Christianity. Perhaps Christianity took the Judaic Yahweh and revitalized him in a way that was not acceptable to part of the cultural consciousness. And historically, the God/father image won out, and like any stern father punished the disobedient heretics.)

Though it is possible to apply Freud’s psychological theories to Gnosticism and to the symbol of the Demiurge in particular, one of

Freud's colleagues, Carl Jung, actually studied Gnosticism and applied his own distinctive psychological theories to it. For Jung, religious experience is linked with psychic events, particularly those archetypes and mental processes arising from the unconscious mind. Very basically, he maintains that because these events are so fundamental to the human mind, yet are experienced as powerful foreign entities, the experience of them is felt as otherworldly and often as religious. These mental processes are personally experienced in dreams and visions, but they can also be projected into cultural media and so become religious in the social sense (Jung 34, 194, 196). And it was these processes that Jung believed the Gnostics knew about: "for the Gnostics...the psyche existed as a source for knowledge" (Jung 174). In this light, the Demiurge is part of a symbolic experience common to all of humankind.

Essentially there are two ways in which Jung claims that the symbol of the Demiurge operates on a psychic level. The first, and possibly most familiar, is that the situation the Demiurge finds himself in is analogous to the situation that the Ego finds itself in when it does not recognize that there are powers within the mind that are beyond its comprehension and control (Jung 189). The realm of the Aeons then, naturally, is a symbol for the unconscious; it is the source for those psychic powers outside the Ego's control. The anger and jealousy sometimes characteristic of the Demiurge is explained by Stephen Hoeller (a modern Gnostic and Jungian scholar) as symptomatic of the Ego's isolation. The Ego forcefully constructs an entire world of meaning and significance around itself, as does the Demiurge when he constructs the cosmos, and the Ego inflates its own significance within this world, symbolically declaring itself to be the only God. Those divine sparks present within the Demiurge, and later present within his created progeny, symbolize those pieces of wisdom that are present at all times within the psyche, and are always pointing back to the unconscious (Hoeller 148-9). Presumably these "sparks" also serve to enrage the inflated Ego, by threatening to usurp its dominion.

The second, and more complex, Jungian symbolic interpretation focuses on the Demiurge as part of a whole body of Gnostic symbols representing the "matrix and organizing principle of consciousness," the "universal ground of being," and the "source of origin." Jung

claims that the Demiurge is commonly surrounded by symbols of wholeness and therefore points to psychic wholeness. If the Demiurge is representative of the Ego and the Aeonic realm the unconscious, then their integration constitutes a kind of completion of the individual. Symbolically, this occurs in the Gnostic mythology when the Demiurge either gains knowledge of his situation, as he does in the Valentinian myth, or when he is surpassed by the Gnostics in the Sethian. The psyche becomes more whole when the unconscious elements of the mind are integrated and acknowledged by the Ego just as the cosmos is set right when the Gnostics return to the Fullness and the Demiurge is put in his rightful place. So on an even broader level than that of the isolated Ego, the Demiurge is one symbol "of a transcendental idea, which is so comprehensive and so difficult to visualize in itself that a great many different expressions are required to bring out its various aspects" (Jung 196-8). For Jung, the Demiurge part of a mythology which is primarily concerned with bringing about psychic health and wholeness for the individual.

When applied to Gnostic symbolism, the theories of Jung, Freud, and Otto provide theoretical structures through which the symbol of the Demiurge can be interpreted, but in applying these frameworks we must understand that none of them can give us definitive interpretations of the symbol of the Demiurge or its origins. Each theory has its own specific limitations. Otto provides us with a framework useful in attempting to understand a specific kind of religious experience which may be analogous to that of the Gnostics, but as we have seen, the disjunction between Otto and the Gnostics is that he is a modern Christian theologian, not an ancient Gnostic. His theories may provide a starting point for theorizing about Gnostic practitioners, but they again are not the thoughts and experiences of an ancient Gnostic. Also, in the broader perspective of comparative religious studies, Otto does not satisfy the desire for an explanation of religious phenomena that goes beyond the experience of the transcendent or Holy. He assumes that religious experiences can be explained through the intervention of divine powers, and that religion in general is not strictly a product of culture or of the psyche.

Freud, on the other hand, does provide an account of religious phenomena that takes into account certain social and psychological

forces. With his theories he illustrates strong, subconscious, biological drives which may appear to heavily influence humanity and its creations. Looking through the Freudian lens, we can attempt to see the libidic forces which may have influenced the Gnostics to create their religious symbolism. Because these forces are claimed by Freud to be so common and prevalent within all of humanity, it becomes easy to understand the Gnostics and their mythology as a singular instance of a universal phenomenon. The symbolism of the Demiurge is explained through natural, sexual drives, which are unconsciously played out and projected onto cultural media. But this power of explanation is also the limitation of Freud's theories, in that it reduces the Gnostic mythology into concepts which do not seem native at all to the Gnostics. One might even suppose that these a priori sexual motivations are just the kind of things that the Gnostics are trying to escape and would attribute to the Demiurge as means of their imprisonment. We can grant that while the sexual drives of the Gnostics were not the lone source of their mythology, those sexual drives may have had some degree of formative influence, just as Plato, Philo, and the other cultural trends may have had their own respective degrees of influence. And if we follow the Hermetic adage "So above as below," it is possible to reconcile the emphasis on sexual drives with the Gnostics' own beliefs. We can say that the Gnostics indeed might have seen the Demiurge and their struggle with him as analogous to struggles with their own fathers, and even with the cultural manifestation of the idea of the father, if we suppose that for the Gnostics this struggle, while biologically and psychically driven, was only so because of the nature of the Demiurge's world. That is, the mythology may have been a product of these drives, but the drives are only present because of the Demiurge.

Like Freud, Jung presents the reader with an interpretation of the Demiurge that is rooted in psychology, but unlike Freud's, Jung's interpretation focuses on the experiential dimension of the mythology. As a kind of middle ground between Freud and Otto, Jung attempts to catalogue and explain those forces which appear to be at work in the Gnostic mythology, bringing them to a level that we, as readers of a two thousand year-old mythology, can understand and relate to our own mental processes, while still attempting to maintain the integrity and unique nature of the mythology. Jung does not assume that the Gnostics were writing

about something that they did not know of (those latent sexual impulses), but neither does he assume that the sole referent of the Gnostic mythology is the transcendent or the divine. For Jung, the Gnostic writers were mapping something they had gained intimate knowledge of, which they called the cosmos and Jung calls the psyche.

Describing the Demiurge with terms such as “Ego” and “Oedipal complex” necessarily removes the him from his place within the mythology. When modern theorists are used to interpret the Demiurge, he is being interpreted in ways that are chronologically and culturally far removed from his origins, and in this there is always the danger of losing the essential nature of the Demiurge as understood by the ancient Gnostics. Were a Gnostic here today, he or she might say that the Demiurge indeed has nothing to do with the psyche, with biological drives, or with Christian-centered religious experiences. But the Gnostic might also say that the culture from which his or her mythology arose has nothing to do with the Demiurge’s essential qualities or with our part in his divine station, and that every scholarly attempt to “explain” the Demiurge in these terms is in turn a tool of the Demiurge himself, to keep us ignorant of his and our true nature. For the Gnostic, the Demiurge is, very literally, the creator of this material matrix in which we all, as humans, take an unwilling part. How to understand this claim is for every interpreter to decide. Hopefully the various theoretical interpretations and cultural history provided here can make the task of understanding the Demiurge and ourselves somewhat easier.

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