

Adam McLean's Study Course on reading alchemical texts



Lesson 6 : How to read cosmological alchemy.

When we begin to read through the mass of alchemical texts, we will become aware that a major part of this dense literature is devoted to explorations of cosmological ideas. Some alchemists were exploring in their works the problems of how the world came into being and its structure. If we want to create an analogy between the alchemists and people today, it is entirely wrong to bracket them with esotericists, magicians, or depth psychologists. Instead alchemists should be paralleled in our age more with fundamental physicists. The alchemists of a previous age were really in the forefront of exploring ideas about the nature of the world. Their cosmological theories might seem outdated and erroneous to us today, but for their time they were at the leading edge of philosophical thought about matter. If such ideas had existed in their time they would delight in speculating about the big-bang, m-branes, folded dimensions of space and such things. Many of the ideas they worked with were as speculative and leading edge, in terms of their own age, as that of our physicists today.

So we must read such works not merely as a restatement of old traditions, but in many cases as an exploration of an alchemical view of how the world was created and its inner structure. Of course these alchemical ideas were embedded in pre-existent and dominant Biblical ideas about cosmology. Alchemists were often original thinkers but their philosophical background was, like everyone at that time, rooted in Biblical and Christian ideas.

Let us just look at an alchemical poem 'Of the Division of Chaos' by the physician, astrologer, magician and alchemist, Simon Forman (1552-1611) which is in the Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Ashmole 240.

*Into darkness then did descend the spirit of God,
Upon the watery chaos, whereon he made his abode.
Which darkness then was on the face of the deep,
In which rested the Chaos, and in it all things asleep.
Rude, unformed, without shape, form or any good,
Out of which God created all things as it stood.
But first he commanded a light to appear,
That all might be seen, that before was hid.
And God saw that the light was good and clear,
And the darkness and light he did then divide,
Calling the one day, and the other night,
For darkness [to] obscure (and day for shining bright).
And a firmament then God did let make,*

*To sever the waters above from those below;
And divided the Earth from the waters also,
Wherein greatly his power he did show.
Then out of this Chaos, the four elements were made:
Heat and cold, moist and dry, in like wise,
Which are the beginning of all creatures wide,
That under the globe of Luna do abide.
The quintessence (that some men it call)
Was taken out of the Chaos before the four elements all:
Which is the first being, as we may descry,
And uncorruptible, whereof was made the sky,
And celestial bodies all, which do never die.*

This is just the opening section. I will include the rest of the work in the supplementary material at the end of this lesson and you can study this as an exercise. We find here what initially appears as a conventional restatement of the Biblical idea of the Creation, but within a few lines Forman is leading us into an alchemical envisaging of this idea. In such alchemical cosmologies we often find the use of the term 'Chaos' as a kind of prima matter upon which the divine presence worked in order to bring his Creation into being.

Robert Fludd, writing about cosmology in his great two volume tome on the 'History of the Macrocosm and the Microcosm', summarises some of the views of the ancient Greek philosophers on the primal material of Creation.

CHAPTER FOUR

A description of the Primal Matter, or raw material of the Maker of All.

The matter, or subject, in the middle of which the great creator of the Macrocosm laid out his construction, is the Philosophical Hyle, that physicists have called the absolutely primal matter: though there is nothing commoner than it, there is nothing that is less understood. Two of the ancient philosophers in particular have zealously studied and investigated it; of whom the first, namely Thales (with whom Heraclitus and Hesiod agree), after long study and much burning of the midnight oil, firmly stated that Water was the primal matter of Nature, and gave a good reason For his opinion. For, said he, water is the seed and food of all natural things. Both Pagans and the writers of Holy Scripture seem to approve of this notion, for the former have for this reason deified Neptune, Oceanus and Thetis, while the latter, among whom I mention that godly priest of philosophy, Moses, have called this matter Abyss and Water, and the Second Epistle of Peter, Ch. 3, has pointed out to us that "...the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water, and in the water". Anaxagoras was another who scrutinised this material carefully, and after much extraordinary labour studying it, he was of the opinion that the primal matter of the world was an unfinished, undigested mass, called Chaos; the poet of the Metamorphoses (Ovid) seems to agree with him. Other philosophers have written otherwise about this material; for Anaximander decided that the primal matter was infinite beginnings, Anaximenes infinite air, Diogenes that it was air composed of divine reason, Plato an invisible and shapeless phantom, Zeno the Stoic a fiery substance turned into water by air, the Epicureans atoms,

Empedocles the four elements ; almost all of them have written vaguely and uncertainly, disagreeing among themselves, because the structure of this mystery is hidden and concealed, doubtless known in its true essence to God alone; but they have been prompt to make a probable mental picture of it, and explain it further in their books, something that even Plato seems to approve of well enough in his Timaeus, when he describes this matter as "something perceptible without using the senses, and scarcely to be believed by an impure reason" ; from these words it is clear that awareness of this subject is like a dream, or pure imagination.

Another perhaps unfamiliar term we see used here is ‘hyle’. This is from a Greek word originally meaning ‘wood’, but in philosophical writings it had the meaning of the first matter of the universe.

The short poem by Thomas Robinson ‘Concerning the stone of the philosophers’ from Ashmole’s *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* deals in a conventional way with the biblical Genesis story and its parallels in alchemy. I give a quite detailed analysis of the poem, to demonstrate how one can read the meaning out of this type of alchemical material, without imposing meaning from outside, that is, reading meaning into a text from modern sources.

*The Heavens, the Earth, and all that is in them ,
Were in six days perfected from the abyss:
From the one sprung four; from four a second one;
This last a grit; that first the Corner Stone.
Without the First the Last may not be had;
Yet to the First the Last is too too bad.
When the Heavens were separated from the Earth,
Were not the Heavens with Earth first cohobated:
And when the Heavens, and the Earth and all were not;
Were only the Heavens created; and Earth forgot?
No: the Heavens and Earth sprung all from one at the beginning:
Then who can say if the Heavens, or Earth is worst?
Is not the Earth the Mother of them all?
And what are the Heavens, but Earth’s essential?
Although they have in Heaven no Earthly residence,
Yet in the Earth does rest their Heavenly influence:
If the Earth were not, what were the other Three?
If the Heavens were not, what on the Earth could be?
Thus as they came, so shall they pass together;
But unto Man not know from whence, or whither.
And for the time of Earth’s Heaven purifying,
Six thousand years they live, and have their dying:
Then all shall rest eternal and divine,
And by the Beauty of the Godhead shine.
I swear there is no other truth but this
Of that great Stone; which many seek and miss.*

The author wants us to see that the heavens and earth and all things were perfected out of the

abyss in the biblical six days of creation. “Perfected” not “created”. This idea of being perfected carries with it the idea of a process a kind of alchemical perfecting. From the one thing sprang four separate qualities or elements and these united at the end into another unity. The first one thing was the corner stone, this is the idea of Christ being the corner stone of the temple, and the final unity is seen as a grit or small grain, the highly concentrated essence that is the philosophers’ stone. Without the first stone (the corner stone) the second (or philosophers’ stone) could not be made. Yet compared with the first stone the philosophers stone is as nothing. Robinson then asks us two related questions. If the earth was at the beginning and the heavens separated from the earth were they not at first cooked together ? If before there were earth and heaven, was there only the heavens? By the impossibility of answering these questions our author is sure that they were both made together simultaneously at the beginning. Again he questions us, as the whether the heavens or the earth were the worse, the least perfect. For is the Earth not the mother of all things, and yet the heavens are the essence of the earth. Although in heaven there is no earthy place, yet the heavenly influences rest in the earth. If the earth did not exist, then could the other three elements be, and if the heavens had not come into being, could anything exist on the earth? It is obvious to our author, that just as heaven and earth came into being together, they will pass away together. But it is not given to mankind to know from whence they came or where they will go at the end. And the time needed for this purifying of the earth and its heaven, is the Biblical six thousand years from beginning to end. Thus our world is in the middle of a purification, like a great alchemical work. After this work is completed everything shall rest in eternity with the divine, and will shine with the beauty of the Godhead, like the transmuted gold at the end of the alchemical work. To Robinson, this is the great truth, that the philosophers’ stone, which many seek and fail to find, is the end product of God’s creation. Our world is itself the alchemical vessel and the material seeking to become the philosopher’s stone.

A different example of a cosmological work is found in Franz Kieser’s *Cabala Chymica*, 1606, a translation into English of which is found in a manuscript in the British Library (MS. Sloane 3639). In this the alchemist seems to be internally envisaging the Creation as an alchemical vision. He is kind enough to provide us with a key to his vision.

The Natural round Physick or Philosophy of the Alchymical Cabalistical Vision

The Sun and Moon with all the firmament appeared first, they stood still, a colour indeed they had, but gave no light. Beneath them also there appeared the globe of the Earth having a colour. In whose centre there was a little globe of a most white, shining colour, like snow. While I beheld all these, there was made a most horrible thunder with a great noise and fiery flash, which much affrighted me. A great cloud came also, which going away, a star was seen above the Sun, Moon, and firmament, whose shining was so bright, I could not fix my eyes upon it, with its redness it exceeded the redness of the Sun. As soon as ever this star appeared the whole firmament with the Sun and Moon began to run their race, and dance. In the meantime the said star darted fiery rays from above, through the exterior firmament. Of which sometimes more sometimes fewer, some also but by halves were carried upon the globe, but the little globe received the smallest part of these rays. Those rays whose halves only, entered the globe, moved the waters, that they might flow and fish might be seen in them. The other rays made the great globe begin to live, and bring forth all sorts of trees and fruits, on which also animals and men did walk. But the part of the rays, which entered into the small globe, so moved it, that it begun to boil like water in a pot, and disperse out of itself

a white clear and pure vapour in the form of a star even unto the root of the trees, and herbs. Then out of this globe or white, shining star, there began, but yet slowly enough to grow all sorts of trees, and herbs, and tended towards the circumference of the globe, and when they almost attained to it, behold two white, stony mountains arose and were opened out of each end of the globe. In the mean time I saw the herbs and trees continually go forward in their growth, that the mountain at length bore flowers of all sorts and colours, which again were shut and changed into red, yellow, green and white knots. The knots of the mountain on the right hand were small and transparent, but those of the left greater but not transparent. In the meantime the superior and greater star sent continually more rays by the benefit of which more herbs and trees always grew. At last a voice was heard crying out thus clearly and aloud: Blessed be God who created this star; This shall be called always the Star of Wisdom and the eternal Light.

The Explication of the Vision

The great globe is the Earth, out of which grow all sorts of fruit, through which the waters pass to moisten it. In the middle is that which in respect of common water, I call corporeal, of which I not long since told you that it was the field, out of which all minerals had their rise, and take their seed from heaven or the firmament, as you see, for the heaven is extended above the Earth, which with its luminaries in their course surrounds the Earth, and affords the seasons, times of the years, and of the days. But that you think the star, we speak of to be God, therein you grievously mistake. For it is a divine creature, endowed with so great a virtue, that all which are in heaven as well as on Earth draw their original from it.

This star which you behold and by whose power Heaven and Earth are moved, is not properly a star, but by reason of the weakness of human nature, it is so delineated for you, which no corporeal creature can with corporeal eyes behold, nor comprehend: for it is nothing else but an invisible and eternal fire the next to God, and placed above all heavens. It is, I say, the force, power, form, life, virtue and preservation of all things in heaven, upon and in the Earth, a perpetual motion, not Nature, but the Lord of Nature, who commands Nature and all her powers, and in fine is all in all. But that it is called the Star of Wisdom and an eternal Light, this is the reason, because it is Light in itself, and borrows nothing from others, but rather communicates to them a virtue, and because the foundation of wisdom is hid therein, words are wanting to me to express the virtue and the power that do lie hid in it, which although I could perform, yet an impossibility hinders you from attaining it. For as it is impossible for ones mind to pierce to the bottom of the secrets of God and omnipotence, so neither is it possible for you or other men to enquire into this virtue. Yet this is not to be so understood, as if this virtue of this light were equal to God, for he rules over it, because it arises from him, and in it God has shown his omnipotence, that we might have a knowledge of his works.

Another work takes this idea of the Creation beyond the merely abstract and theoretical and instead sees this within an alchemical experiment. This is included in an interesting work entitled, *Manna from Heaven*, dating to the 17th century. In this section of the work the reader is encouraged to perform a experiment which demonstrates before ones eyes, the alchemical creation.

Take common rainwater, a good amount, at least ten quarts, keep it well sealed in glasses for at least ten days, and it will deposit matter and feces at the bottom. Pour off the clear liquid and put it in a wooden vessel that is made round like a ball, cut it off in the middle and fill the vessel a third full, and set it in the sun at noon in a secret or secluded spot.

When that is done, take a drop of the consecrated red wine, and let it fall into the water, and you will immediately see a fog and thick darkness on top of the water, such as had also been at the first Creation. Now pour in two drops and you will see the light coming forth from the darkness. Thereupon, pour in every half of each quarter hour first three, then four, then five, then six drops, and then no more, and you will see with your own eyes one thing after another on top of the water, how God created all things in six days, and how that came to pass, and such secrets as are not to be revealed and which I also do not have the power to reveal. Fall upon your knees before you undertake this operation. Let your eyes be the judge; for thus the world was created. Let everything stand thus, and it will disappear a half hour before it began.

By this you will clearly see the secrets of God, which are now hidden from you as from a child. You will understand what Moses wrote about Creation. You will see what kind of body Adam and Eve had before and after the Fall, what the snake was, what the tree, and what kind of fruit they ate, where and what Paradise is, and in what bodies the just will resurrect - not in this one that we have received from Adam but in that which we receive through the Holy Ghost, namely, such a one as our Savior brought from Heaven.

We have now looked at a number of example of cosmological alchemy. We will find when we read more examples that they usually present a reworking of the biblical creation story in an alchemical context. As we have seen they often see the generation of the cosmos as emerging out of some prima materia, thus paralleling the creation of the world with the alchemical process taking place in their flasks using a similar prime matter. In this sense these alchemists saw their work as replicating, in a small way, the actual creation of the world.

We holde by Moses doctrine that GOD in the beginning made of nothing a Chaos, or Deepe, or Waters, if wee please so to call it. From the which Chaos, Deepe, or waters, animated with the Spirits of God, God as the great workemaister and Creator, separated first of all Light from Darknesse, and this Aetheriall Heauen, which wee beholde, as a fifth Essence, or most pure Spirite, or most simple spirituall body. Then hee diuided Waters, from Waters; that is to say, the more subtill, Aiery, and Mercuriall liquor, from the more Thicke, Clammy, and Oyely, or Sulphurous liquor. After that, he extracted and brought forth the Sulphur, that is to say, the more grosse Waters, from the drye parte, which out of the separation standeth like salte, and as yet standeth by it selfe apart. . . . This was the worke of God, that hee might separate the Pure from the Impure: that is to say, that he might reduce the more pure and Ethereal Mercury, the more pure and inextinguible Sulphur, the more pure, and more fixed salte, into shyning and inextinguible Starres and Lights, into a Christalline and Dyamantine substance, or most simple Bodie, which is called Heauen, the highest, and fourth formall Element. . .

Joseph Duchesne, *Ad veritatem Hermeticae medicinae*, 1604.

For the exercises please read through these extracts and try and identify ideas that are original to the writer and those which are alchemical restatements of the established Biblical cosmological conceptions.

EXERCISE 1

*Into darkness then did descend the spirit of God,
Upon the watery chaos, whereon he made his abode.
Which darkness then was on the face of the deep,
In which rested the Chaos, and in it all things asleep.
Rude, unformed, without shape, form or any good,
Out of which God created all things as it stood.
But first he commanded a light to appear,
That all might be seen, that before was hid.
And God saw that the light was good and clear,
And the darkness and light he did then divide,
Calling the one day, and the other night,
For darkness [to] obscure (and day for shining bright).
And a firmament then God did let make,
To sever the waters above from those below;
And divided the Earth from the waters also,
Wherein greatly his power he did show.
Then out of this Chaos, the four elements were made:
Heat and cold, moist and dry, in like wise,
Which are the beginning of all creatures wide,
That under the globe of Luna do abide.
The quintessence (that some men it call)
Was taken out of the Chaos before the four elements all:
Which is the first being, as we may descry,
And uncorruptible, whereof was made the sky,
And celestial bodies all, which do never die.*

*So that of Hyle, nor Chaos, nor quintessence high,
Is there any generation to multiply,
In species or kinde here in Earth below,
Of creatures abiding under the sky,
But the four elements do make influence,
By their special power into all things below;
And into every specific thing do put quintessence,
To reap such seed thereof: as men do sow,
But of themselves. As they are simple and pure in kind,
In every species together conjoined we do them find,
Creating Sulphur, Salt, and Argent vive -
The inward bodies of things that make them thrive.*

*Whose gross bodies to destroy, if we them have,
We must not spare thereof to deprave.*

*Next after this, four elements pure, simple and clear,
That is, hot and cold, moist and also dry,
Are assigned to work on four bodies gross,
The last substance of the Chaos, and of the highest the dross.
Earth, water, air and fire, therein to show their might,
And therein to make generation and bring forms to light;
In every one severally, out creatures to bring,
Which is the beginning and generation of all things.
For heat is assigned to the fire, which doth burn;
Moisture to the air, which doth corrupt and round turn;
Dryness to the earth, the mother of each thing;
And coldness to the water, from whence all do spring.
Heat and moisture are active to generation;
Cold and dryness are passive, in and to each thing;
Fire and air, active by elementation;
Water and earth, passive to generation.
For in dryness of the earth and in water clear.
All things are engendered, before they appear.
According to the conjunction of the four elements,
In each of their subjects severally,
Are engendered and brought forth every creature,
Living or being under the Moon's sky.
The earth is fixed, durable for ever to abide;
The air continually moveth from place to place beside,
And is the life of the fire which purges all;
And the water (for coldness) destructive, men call.
But when they are commixed, one with another,
Not simple, but compound in their elemental qualities,
Then work they in kind by diversities,
More or less as they are commixed by degrees.*

*If these four elements do work in the fire,
To engender and bring forth some creature,
As the Salamander, ever living therein,
You must conceive well of his commixtion,
Which is by Nature and elements tempered so well,
That he delights as gold in the fire to dwell.
For to the creatures of the fire and his region,
The fire is always most natural.
For that in their commixture it is most predominate,
Which maketh them the more able the fire to endure,
By reason of much heat and dryness in their temperature.
The water to the fire is most enemy.*

*Therefore, keep fire in water, and moisten that which is dry,
And it will perish and die, and soon putrefy.
For as the fire is hot of himself, and of the earth dry,
So the water is cold and moist of the sky,
Which causes creatures of the fire to die and putrefy.
For cold doth destroy and moist doth putrefy,
Except you know this, study not philosophy.*

*Likewise, the creatures that in the air do live,
Of the airy substance are most compact.
The other elements which do under drive,
As water, earth and fire, of which they are facte (made).
Yet in the air they most delight, and of it do feed,
And in their contrary full ill do they speed.
For it is omne oppositum under the sky,
Which is the only cause all creatures do die.
For in their simile all things do rejoice,
And of their simile they all ways make choice.*

*And creatures engendered in the waters cold and moist,
Are sluggish and heavy, are given to much rest,
And feed of such things as that Element doth hold.
For their bodies are gross and of a moist mould,
As fishes, frogs and herbs: milk, butter and cheese,
To feed so grossly, they are nothing greasy.*

Simon Forman (1552-1611) 'Of the Division of Chaos' (MS Ashmole 240 in the Bodleian Library Oxford).

EXERCISE 2

And like as the Almighty creator by the creation of the heaven has delineated Himself in the celestial world, and that in like manner by two other luminaries has produced the image of its creator, so also has God depicted himself in the inferior Elemental world; which rude world even as the upper world originally sprang forth in a circular form through the word 'Fiat'. And that these might in all things conform themselves to the superior worlds, the rude Elemental world has copied or pictured out itself into two little worlds, and produced its like...

...From one God, the Archetype, sprung forth in the heavens his luminaries, which do infuse into the rest of the stars their light and brightness and do also promote the same unto their predestination. Heaven then is an exact image of God, and the two luminaries were produced and created after the similitude of the image of the Divine Majesty. And that I may evidence that the nethermost is even as the uppermost, know that even God Almighty after the same manner has represented Himself first of all here in this elemental world inasmuch as He created the world in a round form, and as it were a seal of His perfection and eternity, which would again by virtue of the command, increase and multiply, has brought forth two little worlds which bear the symbol of the creator. For no creature, considering it in a higher and lower degree, is without a character of its author, and in the same manner it agrees with that form from which it was derived. Now the one is a lunar, female and nocturnal governess, but the other is masculine solar and a ruler of the day. Both these were created, not after the similitude of God but after the image, namely, the similitude of the world....

... The cold Earth first delineated itself in a cold waterish mineral, which by modern fools is held to be a metal. But I say here that the same cannot be metallic but mineral, and this mineral, according to the disposition of the mine or quality of the matrix, is lunar. For this birth wherein the great world has copied forth itself, is a producer of silver even as is Saturn. For the half moon above and beneath attests her proper predestination. This material lunar little world containing in herself running mercury, which flows from there as a little stream by the side of the diameter. The small streams and the water is characterized by the philosophers like little streams by a diametrical line. The sign of water denotes mercury which is the primordial water of metals, that has taken in the whole body. And although the same is outwardly adorned with a beautiful red yet it is endowed with very little solar sulphur. Therefore the matter is Lunar, phlegmatic and likened to a Queen, who notwithstanding her monthly red flux, must continue in her sex until the appointed time.

This is the first born daughter of the world who is concealed in the hollowness and clefts of rocks, and by peculiar accident was divided from the breasts of her mother. The Great World, notwithstanding she had brought forth this daughter, still remained great with child, and brought to light a solar masculine birth, which is to be reckoned as an hermaphroditic and double nature, forasmuch as from and out of it both sexes, namely the Moon and the Sun, may be born. This birth is likewise that first requisite entity of Moon and Sun, in which the restauration of all Minerals, Vegetables and Animals is perfectly comprehended.

Johannes de Monte-Snyder *Metamorphosis Planetarum*, Amsterdam 1663.

EXERCISE 3

In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth. This Moses said at the beginning of Genesis. Whereupon the Jew Aristobolus and some Ethnic philosophers, willing to show that Pythagoras and Plato had read the books of Moses, and from thence drawn the greatest part of their most secret philosophy, alleged that which Moses should have said, that the heaven and the earth were created first. Plato in his Timaeus said that God first assembled Fire and Earth, to build an universe thereof. These Philosophers presupposing that the world consisted (as indeed it does) of the four Elements, which are as well in heaven, and yet higher, as in the earth, and lower, but in a diverse manner.

The two highest, Air and Fire, being comprised under the name of Heaven and of the Ethereal Region. For the word aether comes from the verb “to shine” and “to enflame”, the two proprieties of these elements. And under the word Earth, the two lower, Earth and Water, incorporated into one globe. But although Moses set Heaven before Earth; (and observe here that in all Genesis he touches at nothing but things sensible, but not of intelligible things, which are a point apart) for concerning this, there is no good agreement between Jews and Christians. Saint Chrystostom his first Homily. “Observe a little with what dignity the Divine Nature comes to shine in his manner of proceeding to the creation of things. For God contrary to artists in building his edifice, stretched out first the heavens round about, afterwards planted the earth below.”

He wrought first at the head, and afterwards came to the foundation. But it is the Hebrews custom, that when they speak most of a thing, they ordinarily put the last in order, which they pretend to touch first. And the same is here practised, where Heaven is alleged before Earth, which he comes to descry immediately after...

...Moreover the four Elements (whereof all is made) consists of four qualities, Hot and Dry, Cold and Moist; two of them are bound up in each of them: Earth, that is to say, Cold and Dry, the Water, Cold and Moist; the Air, Moist and Hot; the Fire, Hot and Dry: whence it comes to join with the earth; for the Elements are circular, as Hermes would have it; each being engirded with two others, with whom it agrees in one of their qualities; which is thereunto appropriate: as Earth betwixt Fire and Water, participates with the Fire in dryness, and with Water in coldness; and so of the rest.

Man then, who is the Image of the great World, and from this is called the Microcosm, or little World, as the World which is made after the resemblance of his Archetype, is called the Great Man, being composed of four Elements, shall have also its heaven and its earth. The soul and understanding are its heaven, the body and sensuality are its earth. So that to know the heaven and earth of Man, is to have true and entire knowledge of all the Universe, and of the Nature of things.

Blaise de Vigenere *A Treatise on Fire and Salt*, 1618.

EXERCISE 4

He saw the first simple and created Matter of All Things, namely, Viscous Water continued in an oval form, hanging in a place wrapped in, or circled about by the Spirit of God.

This mass, how soever great it was, was immovably cold and dark, void and empty. But the efflux or influence of the Universal Agent, was infused into the Divine Word, "Let it be made". Whereby Hyle, the First Matter, did live and was moved. First, the Ens of the most Pure Hyle being the Eternal Soul of the Waters, we may truly call it in regard of the best, the chief good of the Oval Globe, and the most thick dregs or faeces, did part away from this. Whereof the other part did encompass about the Chaos, and in the travail, or bringing to birth of the rest of the Matter, (the Firmament being not yet made) did sever for Light. I did judge it to be of Divine Clearness, by reason of the perfection of the most beautiful Light and Ineffable Glory of the Blessed. On the contrary, the Infernal part, and the damned faeces of the First Matter abominably dark and horrid, that neither could the famous Light penetrate them, nor could the eye without being smitten with terror observe or perform its office in beholding them.

These being separated, the rest of the Hyle were divided into three, namely, into the more thick, the middle, and the most subtle. The more thick did precipitate downwards. The more subtle did fly upwards. The middle and greatest did remain in its own seat, for the subtle and superior there was a further mansion house for, and in the higher there was an habitation appointed for the Water.

The more thick substance, being made heavy with the middle Waters, did yet rest in the bottom. But further motion and separation did cause such a defluxion of the middle waters, that the crass and thick being rendered conspicuous did consist in the middle of the middle waters. Which was scarce done but innumerable forms of herbs and shrubs and trees did come forth in a little while after, obtaining their due magnitude, virtues, fruits and seeds.

Out of the most pure (Hyle) First Matter of the Superiour Water, were made the two Greater Lights and many of the Lesser Lights which incomparably radiating, the Inferior and more crass thick Water did make Aquam Sicam (the dry Water-Earth).

The middle did yield several living creatures, delighting in fair weather and green places. The greatest, as also four-footed beasts, did increase the number of Animals. Lastly, the whole World, the whole triga [triplicity] of Waters, all the threefold Waters did abound with virtue and life.

At length the particular living creature, Man, that was first made, did exist out of the best juice of the three Waters (nevertheless wanting motion) into whose head, through his nostrils the chief Creator did breathe into him some of that splendid and Eternal Water which before I called the Soul of the Waters.

So Man, the most noble of creatures, being formed out of the best fatness of the Superior and Inferior Hyle, as began his life, wherefore also he being full of glory and power did take his place between the Superior and Inferior Hyle, that so he might be nourished and served from both.

But part also of the splendid and Eternal Water (which I forgot to insert before) did go into the Holy Spirits, Angels, God's perpetual Ministers. Last of all, the Spirit of God did infuse into a certain obscure and humid cave the Attractive Force, the virtue of a superior cave for a conclusion of His Works. By virtue of this there was a Body begotten in the Whole, like unto the first and unseparated matter, partly for the glory and commodity of Man, and partly for the

perpetuating the memory of the ended Creation.

I did behold it, and went thereto and took a particle of it, and being very eager did try it, and beheld the very self-same operations; the motion of separation compelling, were returned again, or wrought over again. There returned again the Water of Light and Darkness, the Superior Water, the Middle, and the Inferior Water, in which (after I had purged them from darkness) I had neglected the light (impossible to be again joined, because of its exceeding subtlety) and did reduce the three separated Waters into one Dry Water, and did behold with my eyes the new regenerated and clarified World, being assured that that great blessing or power and glory given by God to Man, to be chiefly demonstrated out of this cave.

I did admire the place and the thing placed in it, being amazed that it stood forth evident to the sight of fools, which wise men everywhere seek. I hope shortly to make it clear that this is the true simple and undoubted Principle of Nature; and the Nullity of the Doctrine of the Elements.

I shall leave no stone unturned to satisfy all the searchers into my true and unheard of philosophy, as well theoretically as practically but chiefly to satisfy the searchers into my practical Physica.

Through the Grace of God therefore I say that the whole Universe does descend out of one only simple and created Principle, namely, out of Viscous Water, which Universal Principle being separated by Divine Motion yields myriads of forms, the chief of which are either, the more subtle, or more crass and thick, otherwise Air and Earth. The most subtle, and the most crass, namely, the Light and Darkness, I suspend willingly for another treatise.

From a work *Te ipsum Corporaliter* in Ms Sloane 633 in the British Library.