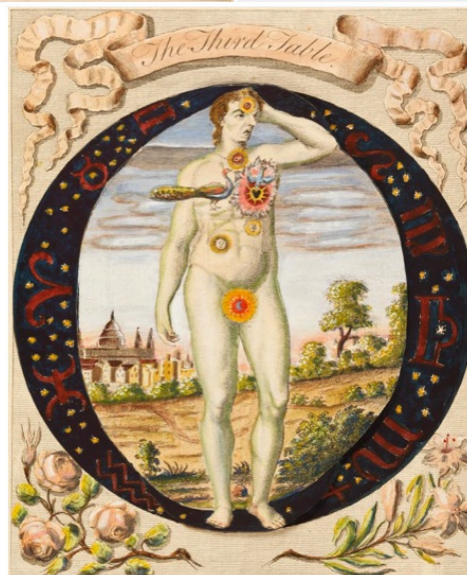


An illustration of
the deep principles of
Jacob Behmen

by

William Law



▪

An illustration of the deep principles of Jacob Behmen by William Law

An illustration of the deep principles of Jacob Behmen in figures

The major William Blake exhibition shown in the Tate Gallery in London in the winter of 2000 and in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in the spring of 2001 included a section on 'Chambers of the Imagination', showing some of the major influences on the visionary poet. One of the items presented in the 'Chambers of Imagination' were three tables visualising the cosmogony of the German theosopher Jacob Böhme (1575-1624). William Blake was an ardent admirer of Böhme and called him a 'divinely inspired man'.

The tables were included in William Law's four volume edition of Jacob Böhme's works (1764-1781). As an artist, Blake greatly valued the Tables which you are about to see: the great Michelangelo himself, he observed, could not 'have done better'. The tables illustrating the 'deep principles of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher', as they were announced in Law's edition of Jacob Böhme, were originally devised by Dionysius Andreas Freher (1649-1728), a follower of Böhme. Freher also provided explanations to these figures, which were also included in Law's edition. The theosophical 'pop-up' tables are astonishingly complex works of art, opening up to reveal deeper layers of meaning.

Freher's three tables attempt to visualise Böhme's complex cosmogony. From his earliest work, *Aurora*, to his last, unfinished work, *177 Theosophic Questions*, Böhme tried to give expression to his radical views on the nature of God, the spiritual and the material world and the relationship between God and man. Böhme believed there were three principles, or modes of God's being. The first principle is God in the aspect of his dark wrath: a dark fire which is the source of life. The second principle is the kindling of light, the birth of the Son, the divine love inspired by the presence of light. The third principle is the manifestation of these earlier two in the material world, or nature.

In Böhme's cosmogony, God created the material world and especially man so that his divine love might have an object and manifest itself. Man in his primal state is immortal, androgynous and above the influence of the planetary spheres; through the Fall he becomes mortal and subject to the planets, but he is able to redeem himself by becoming aware of what and who he is. In his lapsed state, man is ruled by the astral mind, by reason and by the senses, none of which on their own are able to direct man to the light of God. The zodiac and the planets, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus, the sun and the moon, figure largely in all three tables, influencing man in the material world.

Sources:

Kevin Fischer, *Converse in the spirit. William Blake, Jacob Böhme and the creative spirit*, Cranbury NJ 2004, p. 26

Paola Meyer, *Jena romanticism and its appropriation of Jakob Böhme*, 1999, pp. 20-21

Andrew Weeks, *Böhme, an intellectual biography of the seventeenth-century philosopher and mystic*, 1991, pp. 72-73

An illustration of the deep principles of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher

I An explanation of the tables

The following three tables represent man in his three states of being. The first table shows him before the Fall, when he is still pure, in control and glorious. The second table shows him after the Fall, impure and lost. The third table shows him rising from the Fall, on the way to regeneration, sanctified and ready for his ultimate perfection.

Each of these tables represents man in body, soul and spirit. These three constituent parts will be much more conspicuous in the second and third tables than they can be in the first.

Table 1

The three tables are adorned below left and right with flowers. The first table, representing prelapsarian man, shows a lily on the left and a thistle on the right, standing for divine grace and worldly will respectively. The thistle points forward to man in his fallen state.

1 The first table when closed presents four different things, while a fifth, though it does not yet appear, is already intimated.

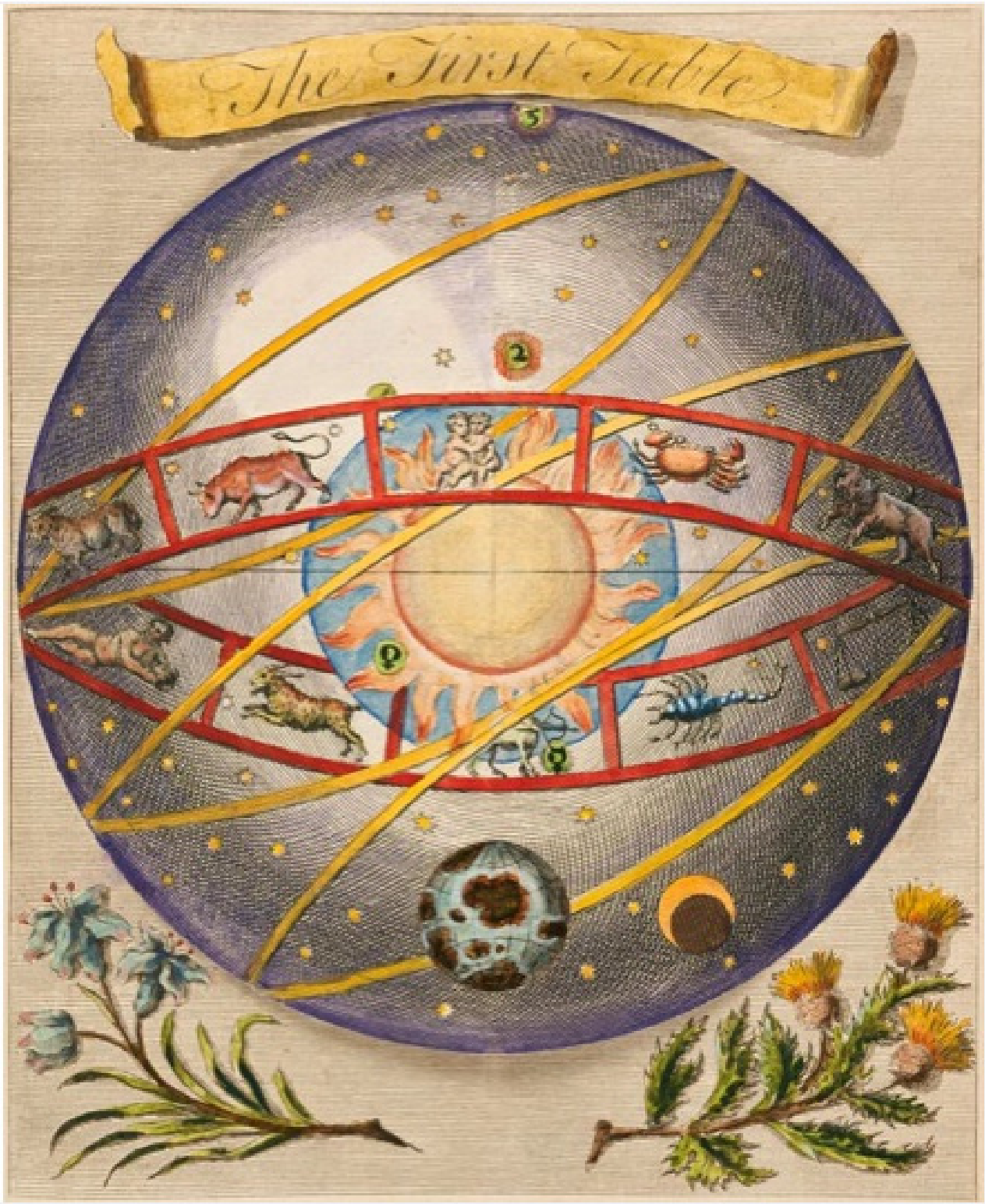
2a The zodiac as it were encloses the whole created firmament, and represents the third principle, or the material world, specifically man in his fallen state.

2b The terrestrial globe not only refers to the earth, but also to the earthliness of man, which obscures his formerly glorious spirit of light.

2c The spiraling line circles from the zodiac through the terrestrial globe and through the circumvolutions of time into eternity, until it finds its end in the origin of all beings.

2d The cross in the centre is the most significant of all symbols in this table, as it is essential to man. It is through the cross that he will be purified, renewed and restored to his first state of being.

2e Man in his first state is not to be found in this representation of the third principle or the material world. He is not subjected to the zodiac.



3 (1) When the table is opened up, we see the spiral line turning in deeper through seven veils or stages. Above the symbol of Saturn, the most outward planet, cold, sharp and dry.



4 (2) When the second veil is lifted we see man in his primal state, in paradise. The symbol of Saturn is joined by the symbol of the Moon, the planet nearest to the earth, ruling the earthly waters.



5 (3) When the third veil is lifted, we see man carrying the sceptre of dominion. The symbol of Saturn is replaced by that of Jupiter, the soother or softener and a source of the water of life.



6 (4) When the fourth veil is lifted, all four rivers arising out of the Garden of Eden are visible. The symbol of the Moon is replaced by the symbol of Mercury, the agent of the perceptive spirit.



7 (5) When the fifth veil is lifted, the symbol of Jupiter is replaced by the symbol of Mars, the planet which rages and storms and strikes up fire.



8 (6) When the sixth veil is lifted, the symbol of Mercury is replaced by the symbol of Venus, 'the most blessed planet and the igniter of life'.



9 (7) When the seventh veil is lifted, the symbol of Mars is replaced by the symbol of the Sun, the star which is the heart of all six earlier forms or planets.



10 Man is now fully revealed as he was created in the image of God. This first figure of man carries on his breast the symbol of the Sun, the centre of light and life.



11 The second figure of man has three circles on each side, which are connected. The three circles on his back, the astral mind (below), reason (middle) and the senses (above), relate to man's temporal nature.



12 The three circles on his front are related to eternal nature, especially to the second eternal principle, the divine love inspired by the presence of light.



13 The spiraling line turns in deeper and deeper, reaching first the Fire, which refers to God's strength and omnipotence, viz. the spiritual creature-life (*The works of Jacob Behmen*, vol. 4, p. 171).



14 The spiral next reaches the Tincture, the centre and cause of life, the body of which is divine substantiality (*The works of Jacob Behmen*, vol. 4, p. 172).



15 The spiral now reaches the Majesty, the eternal sun, God, who is the Eternal One (*The works of Jacob Behmen*, vol. 4, p. 165).



16 The spiral finally reaches the Ternary, God in three persons, the paradisaical substantiality (*The works of Jacob Behmen*, vol. 4, p. 175).



17 The spiral comes to rest in the incomprehensible point inscribed with the tetragrammaton, the Nothing and All. Every being takes its original in the divine power (*The works of Jacob Behmen*, vol. 4, p. 175).



Table 2

The three tables are each adorned below left and right with flowers. The second table, representing man in his fallen state, shows thorns on the left and thistles on the right, standing for the trials and hardships of the material world into which he has fallen.

1a The second table shows the condition of man in his lapsed state with respect to first, his earthly visible body, second, his invisible astral body and third, his immortal soul and eternal spirit.

1b The first image shows man's earthly visible body. Man's loins are covered now that he is no longer in his earlier androgynous state of perfection.

1c The despairing gesture of his hands and the expression on his face betray man's shock at his fallen state. The coiling serpent on the ground is the agent of man's Fall.

1d Even the banderole with the words 'The Second Table' is torn, as a typographical expression of his confusion and despair.



2a The second image shows how the principal organs of man's body are connected with the seven planets and the four elements, indicating he is now under the dominion of the planets.



2b The planets ruling the several parts of the body are: Saturn (brainpan); Jupiter (brain); Sun (heart); Mars (gall); Venus (kidneys); Mercury (bladder); Moon (genitals). (These organs are not traditionally associated with the seven planets).

2c The four elements governing the several parts of the body are: Fire (heart); Water (liver); Earth (lungs); Air (bladder). (These organs are not traditionally associated with the four elements).

2d The whole harmonious structure of man's body depends upon the planets, and concurs with them, to make up the stupendous analogy between macrocosm and microcosm.



3a The third image shows man's invisible, astral body and astral spirit. All things created have a twofold body and spirit, elemental (drawn from the four elements) and astral (drawn from the heavens).

3b The astral body is represented by the peacock, the symbol of pride and the most appropriate emblem of man's inner condition after the Fall.



4a The fourth image shows man's immortal soul, which has no regard to his eternal spirit.



4b The former characters of the seven planets inscribed on his body represent the completely darkened condition of man's immortal soul.

4c The four elements of hell are inscribed on man's body: Pride (brain); Avarice (mouth); Envy (breast); Wrath (belly) and set down in his dark soul.

4d A serpent coils around man's heart, inscribed with the word self-love, usurping the true and proper place of the light.

4e Placed below the serpent is the region of fire, belonging to man's eternal soul. Fire overcomes the darkness and contrariety of nature, and as such already points to redemption.



5 The fifth image shows the two regions of fire and light which lie hidden and obscured in man, to signify that his eternal spirit should dwell above his immortal soul.



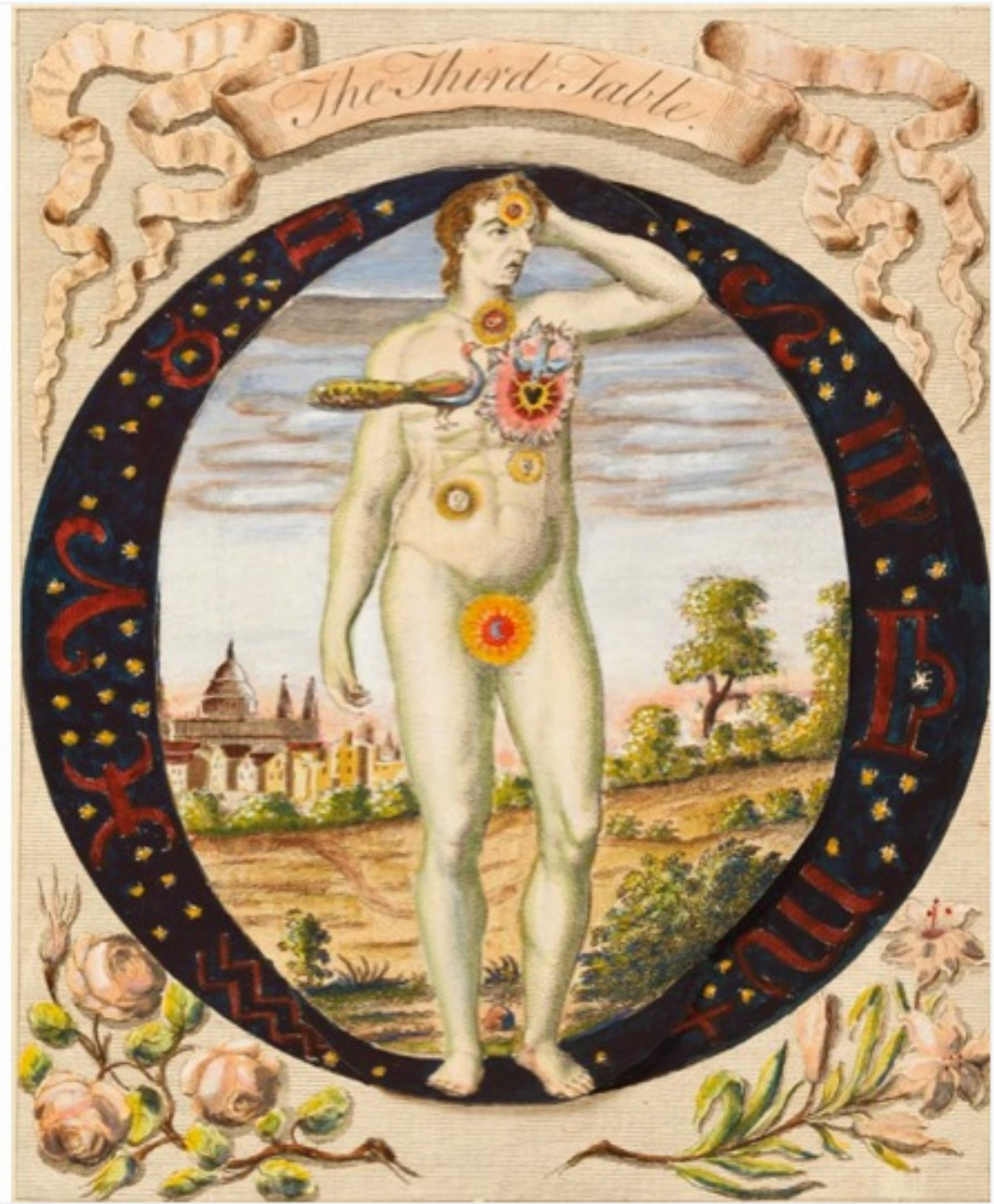
Table 3

The three tables are adorned below left and right with flowers. The third table, representing the regenerate man, shows a rose on the left and a lily on the right, signifying 'the blooming spring of the paradisaical new-birth in man' (*The Signature of All Things*, ch. 7).

1a The third table shows the full restoration of what was broken by the Fall

The first image shows man in his regenerate state, with his three essential parts: spirit, soul and body.

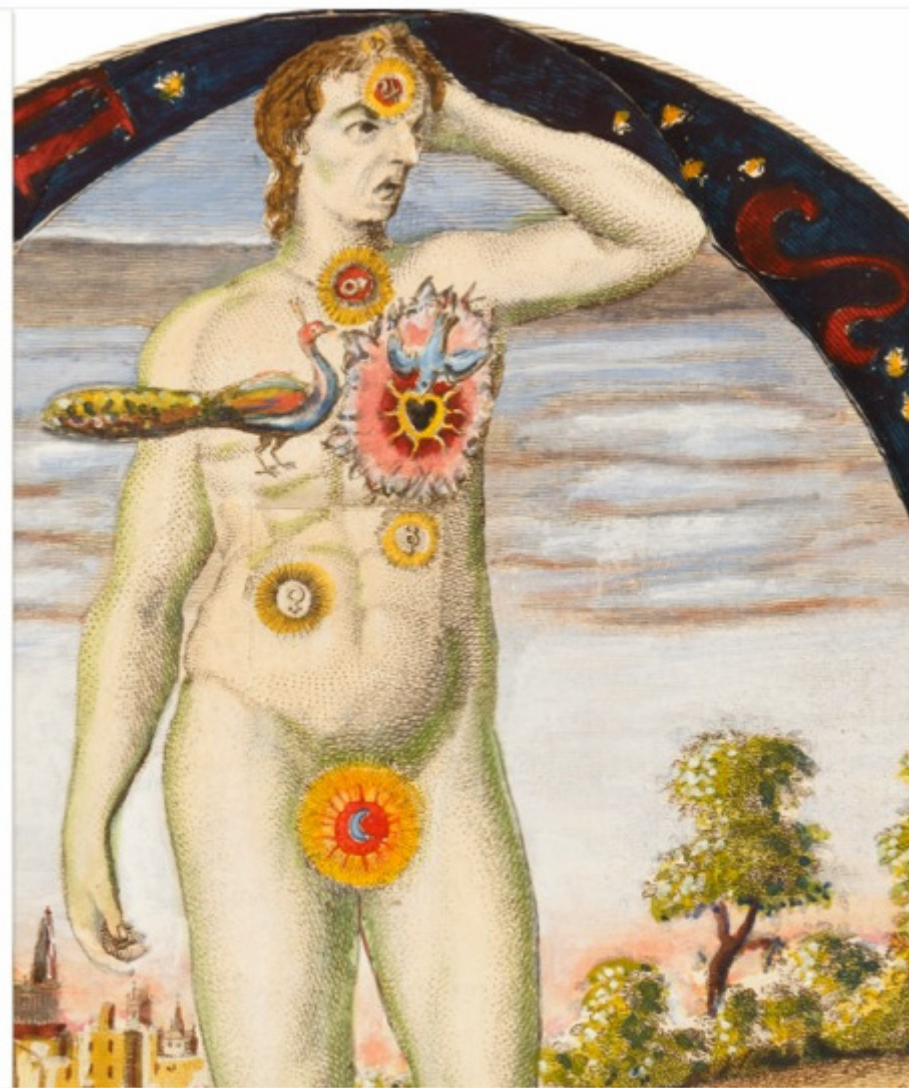
1b Man's regeneration begins with the illumination of his heart, analogous to the first day of Creation, when God said: 'Let there be light'.



1c The author of the light is the same spirit who moved upon the dark face of the waters, here represented in the shape of the dove.

1d The light is not yet that of the sun, but serves to dissolve the former darkness enveloping man's heart.

1e The bestial nature of man dwelling in his astral part is again expressed by the peacock, though its posture is different than before. Dejected, it looks with astonishment at the new-risen light.



2 The serpent previously encompassing man's heart is dashed by the light into a dark abyss. Though not yet broken or bruised, it is expelled from the place of man's heart.



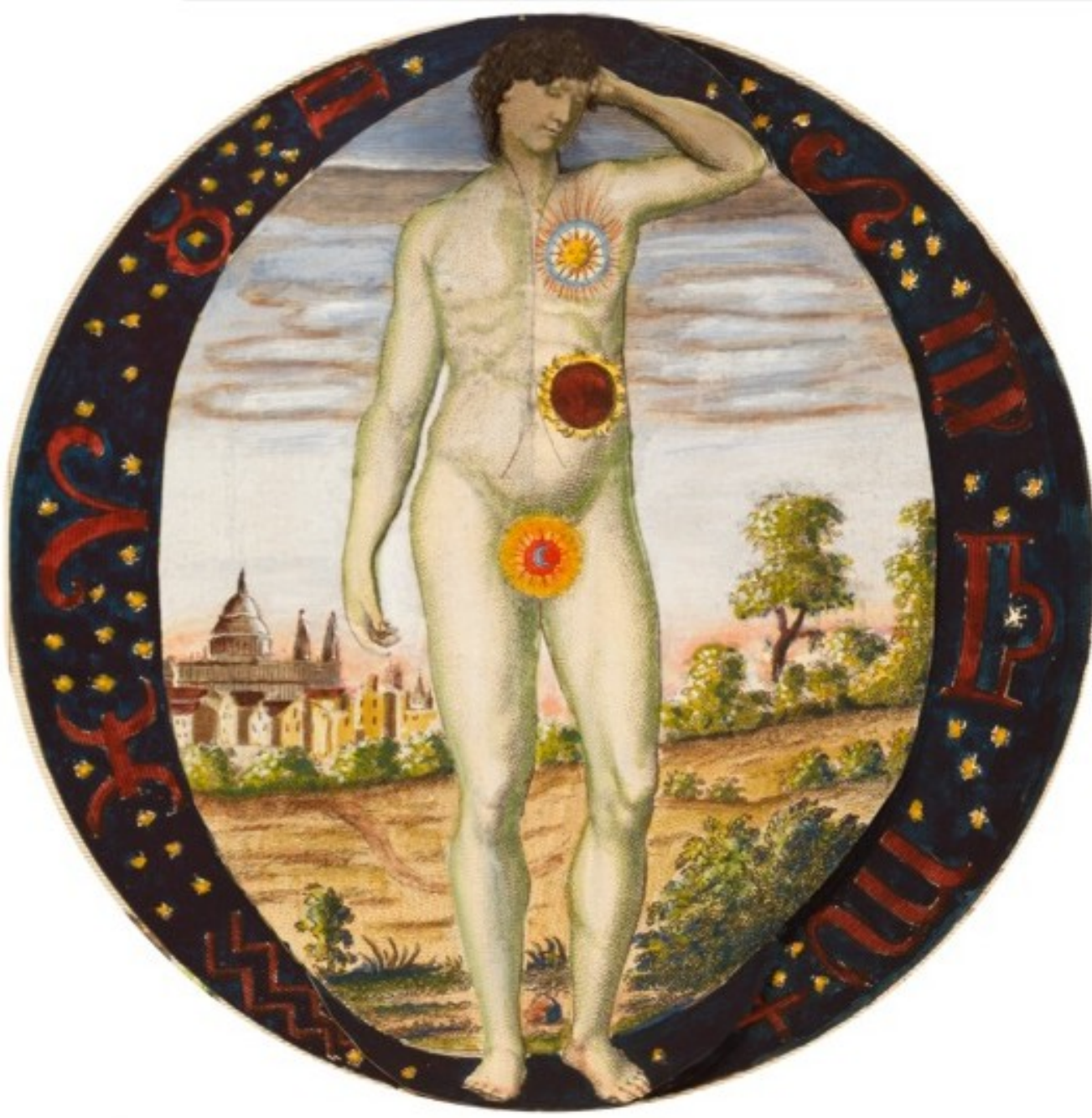
3a The second image shows the increase and progress of the regeneration taking place in man's spirit, soul and body.

3b First of all, the sun has now risen in man's heart, signifying a constant and enduring illumination of man's eternal soul.

3c The beams proceeding from the sun enlighten man's understanding with regard to spiritual inward and natural outward things, of which he was ignorant before.

3d The quality of the fire is different, its flames are lively. The interior part is not so darkened as it was before, but the darkness appears broken and intermixed with light.

3e Two semicircles have appeared, the one on the right is more delicate, representing the world of light, the other one on the left is coarser, representing the world of darkness.



4 The third image reveals that all the while, man's astral mind is still looking towards Time, not Eternity. The enemy within its own dark abyss is still lurking to ensnare and assault the soul.



5a The fourth image shows the dark globe full of horrid monsters, hidden within man's feet. It is the same place into which the serpent was cast into.

5b The serpent's power is symbolised by the flames arising as from a furnace, to assault the immortal soul of man.

5c As long as man carries within him a bestial nature, the serpent will attempt to assail him, symbolised by the rising infectious curls of smoke, which are made up of the four elements of hell.

5d The starry constellations predominant in man's astral mind are most vulnerable, susceptible as they are to the contemplation of objects in the outward world.

5e The most dangerous manifestation of the serpent is when it disguises itself as a bright cloud of glory and infects man's astral mind, soul and spirit.



6a The fifth image shows the perfection and consummation of the work of regeneration. Man is again placed in a paradiscal setting.

6b Only the finer semicircle now remains, which is full of light.

6c The fire now burns constantly in free and open flames, pure and without any mixture of darkness.

6d The light now casts forth its glorious beams into the fire, shining upon and illuminating it through and through.

6e The two triangles of fire and water stand within each other, which, when combined, make up a perfect hexagon, the nearest figure to that which is the most perfect of all, viz. a circle.

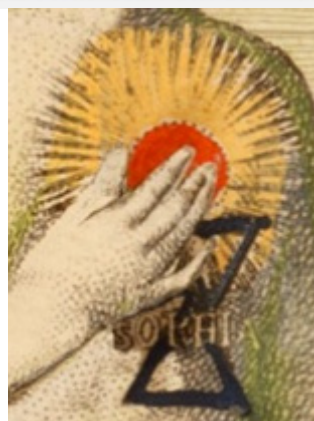
6f The peacock, the symbol of pride, is now utterly dejected, staring at its black ugly feet, while its head is touched by a few beams of the great celestial sun.



7a With the peacock lifted, the part which was subject to the darkness of bestial nature, is now full of light, the semicircle of darkness having already disappeared.

7b The figure is now crowned by SOPHIA, whose name is written across the two triangles, standing for LOVE and HUMILITY, the two qualities which are the very essence of the eternal SOPHIA.

7c The third table, in sum, represents the full eternal accomplishment of man's perfection in its three essential parts, body, soul and spirit.



Met dank aan:

Cisca van Heertum
Multimediation
The Ritman Library Team



© 2011 Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica