

The Womb of The Absolute: Gestational Ontology and the Physiological Grammar of Creation in *Vaidika Brahmanvidya*

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Abstract

This paper develops gestational ontology, an original framework for reading the physiological cosmology of Vaidika Brahmanvidya. It is an attempt to arrive at a systematic answer to the classical Vedantic problem of how an undifferentiated Brahman generates a differentiated cosmos without itself acting. Using the arguments from Bhagavad Gita, the Shatapatha Brahmana, the Nasadiya Sukta, and the Isha and Chandogya Upanishads, the paper argues that in these texts the governing method is neither allegory nor static microcosm-macrocosm correspondence but the deployment of embryogenesis as the operative grammar of cosmogony itself. Reading the Brahmana triad of Uktha, Pratishtha, and Sama against Peircean semiotics, the Agni-Soma dialectic against both Whiteheadian process philosophy and the modern discourse of "Vedic science," and the Yosha-Vrisha gender polarity against the tradition's own admission that androcentric cosmology cannot finally hold, this paper extends Vaidika Brahmanvidya's physiological hermeneutic into a comparative theoretical idiom and argues that its systematization of Krishna's sixteen kalas performs, in a physiological register, the same doxographic labor early modern Sanskrit intellectuals performed for Indian philosophy as a whole.

Keywords: Brahman, Vaidika Brahmanvidya, gestational ontology, Agni-Soma, Bhagavad Gita, mesocosm, Uktha-Pratishtha-Sama.

The Problem of an Inactive Creator

A longstanding problem within Advaita Vedanta concerns the relation between an immutable Brahman and the appearance of a differentiated, changing cosmos. If Brahman is nirguna, without qualities, without parts, and without motion, then the differentiated, changing, embodied cosmos that appears to arise from it poses an immediate problem: an unmoved, unchanging ground cannot, by definition, act, into or towards 'something created', and yet something must account for the appearance of a world in motion. Shankara's answer, that the world is vivarta, an apparent transformation superimposed on Brahman through the beginningless ignorance of Maya, resolves the logical difficulty by relocating causation into an epistemic error rather than a real event, but it purchases this resolution at a price: it leaves the actual texture of cosmogony, how the world comes to feel, breathe, and gestate as it does, essentially unaddressed. Classical Vedanta, in other words, secured Brahman's immutability by declining to describe the mechanics of appearance in any positive sense at all. The exemplification in these texts of the 'created' already being in the 'creator' such as the tree

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already being in the seed or the vessel already being in the clay, falls short of being able to explain the transitional process of the created from the creator.

A different and far less studied branch of Vedic exegesis took the opposite wager. *Vaidika Brahmanvidya*, as interpreted by Pandit Madhusudan Ojha and elaborated across his Gita Vijnana Upanishad is taken as the reference material for the traditional understanding of this wager on the conceptualisation of Brahmana. Through this a physiological-cosmological school of Vedic interpretation is developed, and a nuanced reading of the ritual and cosmogonic vocabulary of the Brahmana literature, Uktha, Pratishtha, Sama, Akshar and Kshar and Avyaya Purusha, Agni and Soma, is conceived which is not merely a poetic ornament layered over the Upanishadic absolute but a rigorous descriptive apparatus for exactly the mechanics Advaita left unaddressed. This paper works within that apparatus and extends it. Its central claim is that *Vaidika Brahmanvidya*'s recurring recourse to embryology, to semen and ovum, gestation and birth, is not illustrative metaphor laid over a prior metaphysical claim but the operative grammar by which that metaphysics becomes sayable at all. I call this reasoning gestational ontology, and I argue across the sections that follow that it supplies a genuine, underused solution to the problem of the inactive creator, a solution modern comparative religion and process philosophy have the vocabulary to appreciate even though they have not yet met it in this form.

Vaidika Brahmanvidya: Method and Extension

Ojha's interpretation reads the Brahmana and Upanishadic corpus as an integrated science of body and cosmos, treating the ritual categories of Uktha, Pratishtha, and Sama, and the triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra, as designations of physiological function as much as of ritual station, and its doctrine of Chatuspad Brahma, the four-footed Brahman comprising Paratpara, Avyaya, Akshara, and Pur, supplies the architecture within which the whole physiological cosmology unfolds. Where the better-known Vedanta of Bengal and Bombay engaged primarily with Advaita metaphysics and Western philosophical categories, the Jaipur school engaged primarily with the Brahmana and Samhita layer of the Veda, the ritual and cosmogonic material that classical Vedanta had largely bracketed in favor of the Upanishads. This has left Vaidika Brahmanvidya almost entirely outside Anglophone religious studies, despite its being one of the more ambitious attempts at total Vedic systematization produced in colonial and postcolonial India, and despite its holding real comparative interest for anyone working on embodiment, cosmogony, or the philosophy of creation.

This paper draws directly on that apparatus, its physiological reading of sacrifice, its insistence that the heart is the seat of Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra together, its treatment of

Agni-Soma exchange as the basic unit of cosmic process, and puts it into conversation with four bodies of comparative theory it has not previously encountered in print: Peircean semiotics, Whiteheadian process philosophy, the anthropology of mesocosmic correspondence associated with Michael Witzel, and the critical history of “Vedic science” apologetics associated with Meera Nanda. The aim is not exposition for its own sake but extension: to show that Vaidika Brahmanvidya’s physiological grammar, read through these comparative lenses, yields an original account of divine causation, gender, energy, and incarnation that neither classical Vedanta nor contemporary comparative religion has fully articulated on its own.

Toward A Gestational Ontology

Comparative religion possesses a vocabulary for structures of correspondence between body and cosmos. Michael Witzel’s elaboration of the term mesocosm, adapted from Robert Levy’s ethnography of Newar Kathmandu, describes the intermediate structure, ritual, architectural, or bodily, that mediates between microcosm and macrocosm in South Asian cosmological thought, and Witzel traces its Vedic instances through identifications of sun and eye, wind and breath, earth and body across the Samhitas and Brahmanas (Witzel 501–39). This vocabulary captures a great deal of Vaidika Brahmanvidya’s material at the level of content: sun as father, earth as mother, the body’s seven tissues mirrored in seven cosmic worlds. But it does not capture what is most distinctive about the tradition’s method, which is not merely that body and cosmos correspond, but that the temporal and epistemic structure of one bodily process, gestation, becomes the syntax through which cosmogony itself is narrated.

Classical microcosm-macrocosm reasoning, whether in the Purusha Sukta’s dismemberment of a cosmic body or the architectural homology of the Vastu Purusha Mandala, is fundamentally static: it maps a completed, visible body onto a completed, visible cosmos. Vaidika Brahmanvidya’s embryological material does something else. It models creation on a process invisible from without and only inferentially known even from within, unfolding in darkness prior to any determinate form, in which, as the tradition puts it, Prana begins to function before the union of semen and blood is complete, and the developing person passes through causal, subtle, and gross bodies in strict sequence before anything visible exists at all. The governing maxim of this hermeneutic, *Yatha Pinde Tatha Brahmande*, “as in the body so in the universe,” is conventionally read, when it is read at all, as static analogy. Read through the tradition’s own embryological material it becomes instead a claim about shared developmental sequence: the cosmos and the body do not merely resemble one another in their finished form, they undergo the same staged transformation from subtle to gross.

I want to call this reasoning gestational ontology, distinguishing it from mesocosmic homology on three grounds. First, where classical homology correlates static anatomical parts over the span of generations and across species for similarity of functions, read or extended in philosophy with similarity in cosmic parts, gestational ontology correlates process with process: it explains not what the cosmos is made of but how it comes to be, using the one human experience of coming-to-be available for internal modeling. Second, gestation is definitionally pre-visual. Unlike the sun-eye or fire-speech identifications that trade on the visibility of both terms, embryonic development is known only through inference, through darkness, through the pulse and the eventual cry, never through direct observation of the process itself, which is precisely the register Vaidika Brahmanidya assigns to the pre-creation state of Brahman: darkness, submersion, the ocean of water in which the seed of Brahma is said to pulsate “like a seed in the womb,” waiting, prior to any manifest body, for its hour. Third, gestational ontology answers the problem posed in section one, how an inactive, undifferentiated Brahman generates an active, differentiated universe without itself acting. The embryological model allows this tradition to say that development does not depend upon conscious agency on the part of the developing organism; growth proceeds through the periphery, through Maya and Prana, while the center remains inactive even as the forces of Maya perform every visible action around it. Gestation supplies a phenomenology of causality without agency, an image of change requiring no changer, because every reader already possesses direct bodily knowledge that gestation happens without the fetus doing anything to bring it about. But it is a more phenotypically right answer to Shankara's problem than vivarta because it is less the claim that appearance is not causation, than pointing to a process—in fact, one already embedded in the reader's own phenomenal register—that proves the statement true.

Etymology as Ontology: Brih, Bhr, and The Grammar of Expansion

Vaidika Brahmanidya's initial gesture is etymological, and it should be considered a philosophy, not folk linguistics. It does so as the tradition but derives the meaning of Brahman from two different roots: brih, signifying expansion and growth; and bhr, with the meanings of hold and nourish; and translates them in the spirit of Yaska's Nirukta, in which etymology is not a way of detailing its historical sources but rather a method of revealing its meaning, as *bibharti iti brahma*, “it is Brahman because it upholds,” and *bhriyate iti brahma*, “it is Brahman because it is upheld.” The double derivation isn't one for appearance. Dispersal would be growth without a container and; stasis would be a container without growth. This reading, Brahman is neither substance nor process, but the relation between substance and process which accounts for both—and which is both contained within and constituted by

both—the world having two different facts is not compared to being one; with this reading the difference is not.

Now here a truly novel opportunity presents itself which was not to my knowledge explored by any of the scholarships on the etymology of Vedantic in the context of a comparison. Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy names as its Category of the Ultimate a principle he calls creativity, the "universal of universals" by which the many become one and are increased by one, itself not an entity but the underlying activity presupposed by every entity's self-formation (Whitehead 21). Whitehead's creativity, like the Brahman of this etymology, is deliberately non-substantial: not a thing that creates but the bare fact of processual becoming that every actual thing instantiates and is instantiated by. The parallel should not be pressed into identity. Whitehead's system is explicitly pluralist, generating a society of actual occasions with no single underlying substance, whereas Vaidika Brahmanvidya remains committed to a monistic Brahman that is one beneath its expansions. But the structural resemblance, that both systems locate ultimacy not in a static being behind appearances but in a self-differentiating activity of growth that is simultaneously self-containment, suggests that the nirukta tradition, so often treated by Indologists as a curiosity of pre-modern philology, anticipates a properly process-metaphysical intuition that Western philosophy did not fully articulate until the twentieth century. Growth, on this reading, is impossible without a governing principle of expansion, since pure growth, unregulated, could equally describe a mechanical or entropic process; it is the specific coincidence of growth and containment, of brih and bhr in a single term, that yields creativity rather than mere accumulation, a Sanskrit anticipation of Whitehead's own insistence that creativity requires categoreal conditions of order to avoid collapsing into formless flux.

The Triadic Grammar of Establishment: Uktha, Pratishtha, Sama

Vaidika Brahmanvidya's second organizing structure is the Brahmana triad of Uktha, Pratishtha, and Sama, which the tradition reads as origination, ground, and pervasion respectively. Clay is Uktha of the pot because the pot comes from clay, and Pratishtha because the pot stands on clay, and, as it were, Sama, the commonality shared by any pot at all that ever has been. All three are, crucially, said to exist in all substances (at the same moment); no object is first Uktha then later, only then, Pratishtha.

The reading of this triad with Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of the sign is not intended to show that the two systems do the same kind of work, rather it is used here to help elucidate the kind of triad this is. According to Peircean semiosis, three signs must be in "irreducible relation" and are only definable through the other two, they being a sign and an object that is

being referred to. With a simultaneity that is a crucial disanalogy with Peirce's sign, which may change its meaning across successive interpretations, icon, symbol and index, the three terms of the Brahmana triad resist independent definition, leaving the simultaneity of their presentation in every object unqualified. The deeper disanalogy is this: If Peirce's triad regulates representation (that is, the relation between the sign and what is being represented to a mind), the Vaidika triad regulates genesis, that is, the relationship between substance and its coming-into-being and its continuance. Where Peirce asks how meaning is possible, this tradition asks how existence is possible, and answers that existence is irreducibly triadic: nothing merely is, everything simultaneously arises from, rests upon, and pervades as. This is a distinct philosophical claim, a triadic process ontology of substance structurally parallel to Peirce's triadic process semiotics of the sign, and its presence in a Brahmana-derived vocabulary most readers would associate exclusively with sacrificial ritual is evidence that Vaidika Brahmanvidya extracted from the technical apparatus of Vedic exegesis a genuinely general theory of how anything comes to exist and endure.

Embryogenesis as Cosmological Syntax

It is worth turning to the embryological material in detail, since the density of physiological argument here exceeds anything comparable in classical Puranic cosmogony. The tradition most prominently, in Garbha Upanishad and Aitareya Brahmana but not limited to, describes conception as a threefold union, of Brahma and Subrahma, corresponding to semen and blood, of a union effected by Matarishva, the wind that carries semen into blood, and of a third union in which the Vedic fire joins the conceived embryo, after which the cosmic person, Virat, is said to come immediately into the womb. Each union is mapped to a Cosmogonic event: the transformation of water into the ocean of milk, when the seed-giving father gives seed to it, the churning of fire from water with the wind and the emergence of Virat, the Cosmic person, from the two together.

It is important to note that this embryological language is not a metaphor that follows on the heels of a theological apprehension, such as in a preacher's use of a parable about seeds and the kingdom of God. It serves as a description at a level diagnostic, that is at a level where cosmological claims, at all, can be made specifiable. There is in each seed an account of causal, subtle and gross bodies, the causal body being its heart, the subtle body its kernel and the gross body being its shell like that of a mango. The three-part anatomy is applied without modification to the individual soul, to the sun, and to Brahman's own primordial state in the cosmic ocean where the imperishable one exists even while it is dissolving, without the capacity for anything to occur, and not in anything other but "in the form of vibration". The mango seed is not illustrating a prior claim about Brahman's latency; it supplies the only

vocabulary in which that latency can be stated at all, since ordinary metaphysical language, being, non-being, potential, actual, has no native way of naming a state that is neither inert matter nor active process but the specific third thing a dormant seed instantiates.

This is why the tradition's method amounts to a phenomenology of causality without agency. Embryogenesis is uniquely suited to this argumentative task among bodily processes because it is the one process every human being has undergone but none has witnessed from outside, and its outcome, a formed person, arrives without that person's experience of having built themselves. The tradition exploits this asymmetry in its doctrine of the four births (Chaturjanma): the delivery of the physical body after ten months is only the third birth, and a fourth birth, through ritual purification, is required before the person becomes, in any full sense, an agent capable of action. Three of the four births it describes happen before the person exists as an agent at all. Read cosmologically, this relocates the classical puzzle of how unchanging Brahman produces a changing world, debated inconclusively within Advaita for a millennium, from logical paradox into ordinary bodily experience, where every reader already accepts, without argument, that they came into being through a process they did not genially perform. Gestational ontology does not resolve the paradox of the unmoved mover who moves the world, it resolves the paradox by reminding the reader that on their own, each one of them is an unmoved mover which moves the world.

Gender at the Threshold: Yosha, Vrisha, and The Unmaking of Androcentric Cosmology

It is part of this embryology that a schematic gender metaphysics is organized around the two principles, Vrisha and Yosha; the first being the fiery, seminal, masculine principle, the second the receptive, watery, feminine principle known as Rayi, and just as it is expressed by the Shatapatha Brahmana in its compressed idiom, the polarity can be viewed and expressed in its fullness:

“dvayaṃ vā idaṃ na tṛtīyamasti |

ārdraṃ caiva śuṣkaṃ ca yacuṣkaṃ

tadāgneyaṃ yadārdraṃ tatsaumyamatha” - (Shatapatha Brahmana 1.6.3.23).

Which is literally translated as, “Twofold, verily, is this, there is no third: to wit, the moist and the dry; and what is dry, that relates to Agni; and what is moist, that relates to Soma” (Eggeling 1.6.3.23). At the level of doctrine this schema is unambiguously androcentric. Creation is repeatedly called male-dominated, and Purusha, in each of its three forms, is cast as masculine insofar as it is Retodha, the offerer of seed, while the feminine principle is repeatedly figured as vessel, field, and womb rather than agent. The tradition, which has been recorded all throughout the Brahmanical sacrificial literature, would reproduce the traditionally

masculine grammar and ritual of the sacrificer with the distinctive quality of reading at this level: regardless of whether the one who performs the rite is female or male, the sacrificer is masculine.

But the tradition does not stop there, and its own logic carries it to a position that sits uneasily with its official doctrine. Having asserted male dominance in the abstract structure of creation, its own exposition immediately qualifies the claim: creation is male-dominated only in the sense that its formal, cosmological Purusha is grammatically masculine, not in the sense that any sex holds superiority, since, as the tradition itself insists, “all creatures are male and female,” and human males possess no inherent superiority over human females on this account. The gendered principles are assumed to be constitutionally present in both bodies, though, and not just an anatomical one, man and woman are said to have them both; and, from the fleshly perspective—as opposed to the spiritual—while the man's body is made of Agni and the woman's of Soma, the tradition continues—this from the heart rather than the body—the man's Soma is given to him as his soul and the woman's Agni to her as her soul.

All of this is not incoherence but a structural trait to the gestating ontogenesis itself. The tradition's very structure requires it, as as soon as seed is laid within a body, receptivity is too. And because the masculine and feminine principles cannot be separated from one another, even though they may be characterized as origination and receiver, but are as much functions as properties of individual bodies; any full body, any full cosmos must manifest both these principles irrespective of any apparent sexual difference. ‘Male-dominated’ is merely a grammatical remainder, and indeed the moral here would be that not abstract nouns, but verbs, are masculine—literally it is about why Sanskrit gives gender to your abstract names for man (Purusha). This yields an androcentric grammar of the use of an androgynous ontology and corrects a common misinterpretation of the study of South Asian religion that traditions that depend on a Purusha-centered cosmogony are inherently the exclusive domain of the conservative male metaphysical commitments. Because it considers that the physiology of gestation ~ rather than its mere illustration ~ is a serious ontological model than the androcentrism that its inherited vocabulary claims, it is not surprising that Vaidika Brahnavidya cannot serve as such a model.

Agni, Soma, and The Rhetoric of Energy: A Critical Appraisal

The Agni-Soma relation (Agni-Ṣomatmakam Jagat) is presented throughout this tradition as mutual convertibility: Agni ascends and becomes Soma, Soma descends and becomes Agni, the two inseparable and coexistent, fire understood as a life force present even in latent, unburning form within substances like petrol and camphor. This invites an obvious modern

gloss, that the Agni-Soma dialectic anticipates the conservation and transformation of energy in modern physics, and modern expositors within this tradition have sometimes pressed the analogy further still, identifying the imperishable seed of Brahman with what popular science journalism calls the “God particle,” the Higgs boson.

This is part of a well-documented trajectory in contemporary Hindu apologia, in which the historical texts of Hindu ritual, cosmology, and the Vedic tradition of a scientific vocabulary are recounted as a prehistory of scientific assertions, as the historian of science Meera Nanda has described (Nanda 2–4, 197–211). The equation of Agni-Soma with the conservation of thermodynamic seems to be unsustainable, as neither a testable nor scientific energy is bequeathed in any way by the Brahmana tradition, and the tradition is a blend of physical, physiological and mythological registers, in which the word soma as well signifies both moon-light and semen, and also nectar and libation. But when it is used rhetorically, in a way more akin to the nature of the rhetorical argument itself, the analogy is doing real work within the brain and deserves it on its own. It signals that Vaidika Brahmanvidya understands itself to be in competition with modern physicalist cosmology for the same explanatory territory, the ultimate constituents of matter and their transformations, and it reaches for the vocabulary of energy conservation because the Agni-Soma dialectic genuinely is, within its own idiom, a theory of transformation without loss: what Agni expends, Soma restores, since the sacrificial fire is sustained only by the offering of Soma to the fire, and nothing is annihilated, only redistributed between manifest and latent form. The Agni-Soma dialectic and modern thermodynamics thus share a formal structure, conservation across transformation, without sharing a domain of application, and the more useful scholarly task is to appreciate the elegance of the Vedic scheme as ritual physiology and metaphysics in its own right, rather than either dismissing it as primitive confusion or inflating it into anticipatory physics, the interpretive discipline that popular “ancient science” literature so often declines to exercise.

Krishna, The Sixteen Kalas, And The Systematization Of Avatara

Vaidika Brahmanvidya’s most ambitious achievement is to fold this physiological cosmology into a theory of divine incarnation, organizing the sprawling, historically accreted Puranic avatara lists into a graduated schema of sixteen kalas, portions or arts, of which Krishna alone is said to possess the complete set, proceeding from the earliest cosmic forms, Adivaraha and Yajnavaraha, through the Vaihayas, Yogeshwara, and Prajapati manifestations, to the fully embodied Krishna of the Gita. Each of the sixteen kalas is explicitly called out as one of the sixteen arts—sixteenfold Brahman—life-force / breath, faith / conviction, space / ether, air, fire, water, earth, the sensory organs, mind, food / sustenance, energy / vitality, austerity / spiritual effort, sacred utterance / knowledge, action, worlds / realms, name / individuality.

Scholarship on Vaishnava avatara theology, notably Freda Matchett's study of the Bhagavata and Vishnu Puranas, has long observed that the classical tradition treats the avatara list itself as unstable, with different Puranas offering different enumerations and different criteria for what counts as a purna, or complete, incarnation as opposed to a partial one (Matchett 4–11, 148–54). What Vaidika Brahmanvidya accomplishes is a philosophical rather than merely doxographic resolution of that instability: rather than harmonizing the Puranic lists by weighing textual authority, as classical commentators typically did, it derives the ranking of avatars from its own physiological metaphysics, so that an incarnation's completeness becomes a function of how many of the sixteen kalas, themselves derived from the Akshar-Kshar-Avyaya Purusha schema, it manifests. This is structurally analogous to what Andrew Nicholson describes, in a different context, as the doxographic unification of Indian philosophical schools undertaken by early modern Sanskrit intellectuals seeking to render a heterogeneous inheritance internally consistent under a single interpretive key (Nicholson 2–5, 184–99). Vaidika Brahmanvidya performs the same unifying operation on avatara theology that Nicholson's doxographers performed on the six darshanas, but in a physiological register, so that Krishna's completeness as avatara becomes, formally, the same kind of completeness a fully developed embryo possesses relative to a partially formed one. Incarnation, on this reading, is gestation viewed from the divine side: what a human embryo becomes across nine months and four births, Krishna already is, eternally and without process, the avatara doctrine's own account of an agency that "does nothing, but being the basis of all, is the doer."

Conclusion: Gestational Ontology As A Category For Comparative Theology

This paper has argued that *Vaidika Brahmanvidya*'s physiological cosmology repays a far more exacting kind of comparative attention than it has so far received. Its governing method, which I have called gestational ontology, is neither classical microcosm-macrocosm correspondence nor modern apologetic borrowing from physics, but a distinct third thing: the deployment of embryogenesis as the operative syntax of cosmological explanation, one that dissolves the inherited Vedantic puzzle of agency and causation by relocating it into a bodily process every reader has already undergone without agentially performing it. Its triadic Brahmana categories articulate a genuine, if previously unarticulated, process ontology of substance worth comparing to Peircean semiotics on its own philosophical merits. Its gender metaphysics, ostensibly patriarchal, dismantles its own androcentrism from within once its embryological logic is followed to its conclusion. Its rhetoric of energy belongs to a documented and analyzable modern genre rather than to either ancient physics or mere confusion, and its systematization of avatara theology performs, in a physiological register, the same doxographic labor early modern Sanskrit intellectuals performed in a properly philosophical one.

What this suggests, beyond the argument of this paper, is that comparative religion needs a sharper category than currently exists for traditions of this kind, produced by Sanskrit-trained intellectuals working largely outside the university and outside the reformist Vedanta that has dominated Anglophone scholarship, traditions that take the ritual and cosmogonic vocabulary of the Brahmanas, rather than the more philosophically familiar Upanishads, as their primary material, and build from it closed, internally coherent, often physiologically explicit metaphysical systems. Vaidika Brahmanavidya is very likely not an isolated instance but one node within a wider and still largely untranslated body of Vaidika literature that comparative religion has not yet begun to catalogue, let alone read with the interpretive seriousness its internal sophistication warrants. A fuller mapping of that literature, and a sustained comparison of its embryological cosmology with the analogous traditions of Daoist inner alchemy and Kabbalistic doctrines of the primordial Adam Kadmon, both of which likewise stage cosmogony through the body's own hidden processes, would be the natural next step for the research this paper has only begun.

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