

Dion Fortune's *The Cosmic Doctrine* and the Evolution of Personality

by
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That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, in the accomplishment of the Miracle of One Thing.

– *The Emerald Tablet*

Dion Fortune is a highly-esteemed esoteric writer whom a psychic told me about 10 years ago, because she felt I would resonate with Fortune's writings. I had never heard of her before, probably because she was British and wrote most of her books in the 1920s and 30s. Her most famous work is probably *The Mystical Qabalah*, a book well-known to anyone studies that esoteric system; she has also written a number of other books on occult studies and magic, as well as novels (e.g., *The Secrets of Dr. Taverner*, based on her relationship with her first teacher, Theodore Moriarty).

Born Violet Firth (1890 – 1946), Dion Fortune changed her name to reflect her hermetic vocation. She studied psychology and was a member of the Theosophical Society early in life. She was initiated in 1919 into the London branch of the Temple of the Alpha and Omega, but later started her own order, Fraternity of the Inner Light *(which later became the The Society of the Inner Light).

The Cosmic Doctrine is one of her most unusual books, because it is a work that she says was essentially channeled, not written. And indeed, it is written in a style that—while direct—is highly unusual. Ideas are introduced in a way that often seems strange or initially hard to grasp, but are then repeated in a fashion that allows the reader to eventually build up a sense of what they are about, provided that the reader is willing to take the time to focus on their meaning. Even so, the content is so deep that it is the kind of book that can be read repeatedly and, upon each reading, will yield up fresh insights.

In my most recent reading, I noticed some ideas that are directly “on point” for the way we conceptualize and work with the enneagram, especially the way we think of the dual concepts of personality and individuality. There are also mentions of sacred geometry, nine-sided figures, and the important role of the numbers 3 and 9 that make this work useful for those who study the enneagram.

Basically, *The Cosmic Doctrine* is nothing less than a top-down description of life—how it begins, how it evolves, and some of the obstacles that can arise along the way. The article below is divided into two sections, the first of which describes key tenets of the book and the second of which contains my observations of how we could use this material in our enneagram work.

Part I: Key Tenets

Probably the most important thing to realize when reading the following is that the descriptions, as the book notes, are symbolic, not literal. The evolutionary process described is impossible to entirely convey to the logical mind, but can be evoked through the use of the geometric imagery utilized by the author. Note: in a few places, I've added commentary in [square brackets] in order to clarify certain difficult concepts.

The first thing stressed is the threefold nature of manifest life, which arises out of three basic structures or impulses: the Ring Cosmos, Ring Chaos, and Ring-Pass-Not. All life starts with the Unmanifest, which is the source of everything in manifestation.

The first manifestation was a movement in space. When space moves, there are two forces at work: a force that creates the movement (that “desires movement”) and a force that opposes it (that “desires inertia”).

The force that creates movement becomes the “Ring Cosmos”; the force that creates inertia becomes the “Ring Chaos.”

The Ring Cosmos forms first, and actually creates the stresses that cause the formation of the opposing Ring Chaos, which is larger, and spins at 90° to the Ring Cosmos. The third formation is the Ring-Pass-Not, which is larger yet; it is formed as the result of the “attraction” of the Ring Chaos, which induces a “secondary spin in the Ring Chaos, which forms the Ring-Pass-Not.” The Ring-Pass-Not therefore partakes of the nature of the Ring Cosmos and defines the parameters of the universe (Fig. 1). (Note: the two inner spinning rings also, like the Ring-Pass-Not, form spheres; so what we ultimately end up with is a sphere within a sphere within a sphere.)

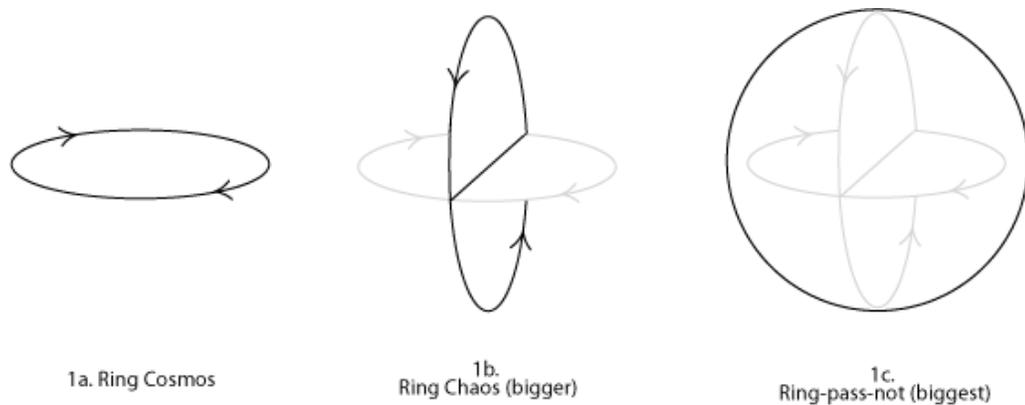


Fig 1. Threefold nature of the Cosmos

Good, Evil, and Evolution

Characteristics of the Ring Cosmos: turns toward the center of the sphere it encircles; extends the center; solidifies by contraction (and if unchecked would make the universe static); builds up; associated with “good,” life, light, Spirit, God, Being, the future, evolution.

Characteristics of the Ring Chaos: belongs not to the universe it encircles but to outer space; turns towards outer space, not the center; expands the circumference; seeks to return to the Unmanifest (and if unchecked would reduce the universe to nothingness); diffuses; associated with “evil,” darkness, Matter, the Devil, Not Being, the past, dissolution.

Characteristics of the Ring-Pass-Not: the force of the Ring-Pass-Not contains the two inner rings, holding the balance between the two above forces, to prevent either from “going to extremes.”

Under this cosmology, good and evil are simply two positions defined relative to one another, both of which are necessary for the existence of a cosmos. The Ring Cosmos builds up; the Ring Chaos tears down—either if left unchecked will imbalance the Cosmos. Together with the Ring-Pass-Not, they are the building blocks of everything in manifestation:

These first three rings are the “primaries” of the Cosmos—the first Trinity. That is why the Supreme Being is always conceived of as a Trinity; and [why] Three is the fundamental number (p. 26).

Another key point is cosmology that the initial impulse is evolutionary and that its boundary conditions arise out of that same evolutionary impulse. The force that acts in opposition to evolution, while necessary for evolution to occur, is said to belong, not to the cosmos, but to the Unmanifest space out of which the cosmos arises.

As a result, the Cosmos partakes of the nature of the Ring Cosmos, which means it is fundamentally oriented toward Being, Spirit, and Light. However, it is the interaction between the two opposing rings (Cosmos and Chaos) that produces stability (p. 32).

The next few chapters focus on other basic principles involved in the formation of the Cosmos, one of which is the development of seven planes of consciousness, each of which is associated with a number and geometric form. The first or innermost plane is associated with the number three and a triangular figure; three is said to be “the number of manifestation” (p. 82); the seventh or outermost plane is associated with the number 9 and a nine-sided geometric form (pp. 38, 50, 83, 89, 191). The most intriguing statement occurs on p. 89: “Nine is the number of the Cosmos which called...[our] universe into being (Fig. 2).

Throughout the book, the importance of geometry as the basis for the Cosmos is stressed (see, e.g., pp. 25, 39, 83). On p. 47, it is also conveyed that everything in the Cosmos is sentient (because they all “react and register the reaction,” which means that they are all “capable of development,” even the three primary Rings (p. 47). This means that everything that ever was or is currently in manifestation is capable of evolving—that literally nothing in existence lacks this capability.

Formation of our Universe

The Cosmic Doctrine discusses the evolutionary processes involved in all types of evolution, from that of atoms to complex organisms, focusing particularly on the development of Great Organisms or Entities (later referred to a *Logoi*, the plural of *Logos*). They differ in size and weight (p. 44) and therefore in where they reside on the planes. The Great Entities on the seventh plane are known as Solar Systems (a sun and its surrounding planets). So the 7th plane is where we find all solar systems, including our own (pp. 46, 52) (Fig. 2).

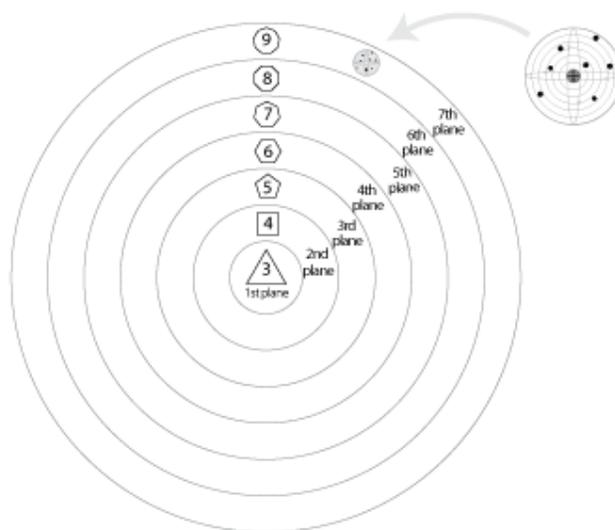


Fig 2. The geometry of the planes

The Numbers of our solar system are said to be three, seven, and 12: three for the three rings, seven for the seven types of matter, and 12 for the twelve rays of influence (that correspond in astrology to the twelve houses of the zodiac; see Chapters 3 and 4 for details about the rays).

The Great Entity is an evolving organism that eventually creates a thought-form universe. But as it is passing through the early phases of its evolution, gathers unto itself elements (“atoms”) of each of the seven Cosmic planes, out of which it forms its body (p. 65). When the Great Entity completes all phases of its evolution, it begins to reflect on its own nature. Its reflections are subjective and therefore psychological in nature.

At this point, the Great Entity is fully conscious; it can evolve no further. Its consciousness of the Cosmos, being entirely habituated, is subconscious. *[This refers to the idea that acts which become habituated eventually become completely automatized, because that which we know completely, becomes so much a part of us that it is no longer part of conscious awareness—like driving, writing, or using utensils.]*

The only thing that the Great Entity can be conscious of, at this point, is itself. So like the lesser Cosmic Entities (which are likened to the cells in its body), it considers its own nature:

“Here then, is a novel sensation, and it dwells upon it... ‘And God made man in His own Likeness.’ A (physical) universe is a concept in the mind of a Great Entity. It is created by the self-contemplation of a Great Entity” (p. 63).

So the universe created by the Great Entity (aka the *Logos*) is a mental projection composed of the images that mirror the self-concepts of actual atoms of the Cosmos. But because it is based on reflection, it is not a replica of the Cosmos, but its exact mirror image (Fig. 3).

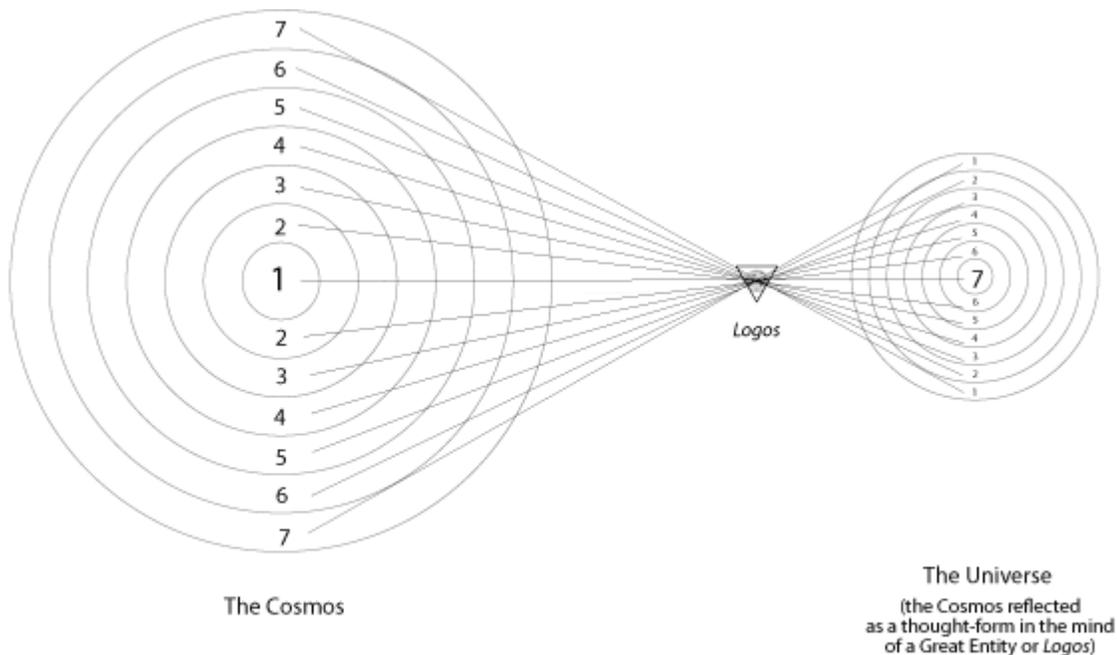


Fig 3. The planes of the universe reversed by reflection of the Great Entity

To create its self-image, the *Logos* reflects the image exactly. But because it is not consciously aware of itself on the atomic level (much as we are not aware of ourselves on a cellular level), to create this self-image, it must rely on the self-images generated by the individual atoms it has attracted and which have become part of its body. These already exist, because they are created upon the completion of an Entity's evolution, and less complex Entities complete their evolution faster than the *Logos*. However, they are not in relationship to one another until the *Logos* arranges them, via reflection, into a cohesive whole.

The *Logos* is thus "dependent upon the atomic concepts for the creation of the necessary atomic images" (p. 65). What this means is that the *Logos* (what we could think of as God) is not the actual creator of each of the atomic images (thought-forms) within its universe, but is rather the *organizer* of those images. By organizing the separate images into a cohesive whole (a universe), the *Logos* enables them to come into relationship with one another, which facilitates their evolution. But note that the actual originator of each concept in a thought form-based universe is the corresponding atom within the Cosmos which gives rise to it.

The Role of Personality in Evolution

No two Entities are exactly the same, because each differs not only in basic constitution but in its environmental influences. The Individuality (aka Higher Self or basic constitution)—whether of a Great Entity or human being—is that aspect of an individual that has reached complete equilibrium in prior evolution and is therefore unchanging (referred to as "a set of stereotyped reaction capacities," p. 74). The Personality (the reactions to environmental stimuli), however, has not yet reached a state of stasis, but is still evolving; thus, "that which is Personality today will be part of the Individuality tomorrow" (p. 74).

[Although it is not explicitly stated, it is my perception that the term "Individuality" is meant to describe the fully-evolved and therefore static condition of the atom/Entity within the Cosmos, and that "Personality" is meant to describe the evolving and therefore dynamic state of the reflected atom/Entity within the thought-form universe.]

It is important to note that because the thought-form universe is a purely mental creation, it is entirely subjective in nature (which would mean that Personality has no objective existence). However, the author points out that "as soon as consciousness has focused it [the Personality] as a thought form, it is created and exists on its own account" (p. 74).

Personality especially involves the development of Mind, because it is Mind that aspect of consciousness that allows for "freedom of individual action" (p. 106). The first instance of free will comes about when the first entities on the mental wave of evolution, the "Lords of Mind," must wait for the evolutionary wave that precedes them to progress. (The Lords of Mind are of an inherently speedier evolution, because mental operations are so quick.) They wait because the "evolutionary channel is [temporarily] closed, [so they] make play among themselves" (p. 100).

It is this playful interaction that facilitates differentiation, which leads to individualization, because "individualized experience is the basis of personality" (p. 101). So it is actually the evolutionary delay that causes the evolving entity to "elaborate" itself: "Elaboration means differentiation, and differentiation means Personality" (p. 103).

As a result of this evolutionary development, the "freedom of individual action" is "enormously developed" both for the Lords of Mind and for all the entities with whom they interact. And their influence is considerable, "owing to the fact that they have achieved individualization" (p. 109). When humanity develops in a later wave of evolution, the Lords of Mind are the higher influences that deal with individuals on an individual basis (p. 112).

All evolving Entities move from Personality to Individuality by transcending the limitations of each of the seven planes, by means of better understanding our relationship to the Cosmos: "For do

we once but see our predestined fate in relationship to the Cosmic law, we have mastered our fate” (p. 158). [It is noted that this process of moving up the planes involves a transition at each step, which is seen as a death from the lower level, but as a birth from the higher] (p. 160).

“The Personality is what it is by the Law of Limitation. The Individuality is what it is by virtue by the Law of the Nature of the Cosmos” (p. 158). So Personality initially facilitates evolution to the point where it is possible to begin to transcend the limitations of the thought-form universe, which makes possible its unification with the Individuality.

[An earlier reference to the “Cosmic Personality” suggests that evolution never results in a loss of individuality, but simply in its transformation to a higher level, such that the initial Personality, by virtue of becoming One with Its Creator (the Cosmic atom that gave rise to it) becomes the Cosmic Personality. There is also discussion suggesting that this evolution of consciousness is freeing not only to the Entity that evolves, but to the Cosmic atom that is its “parent,” such that the merging of the two allows the Cosmic atom to further evolve in a way that was not otherwise possible; see pp. 94, 178.]

The Nature of Evolution

As the universe becomes more and more elaborated, the Great Entity (also known as the *Logos*) is increasingly limited by the laws of its own creation, but continues to manifest that creation (the universe) until the point of maximum density/complexity has been reached, at which point it seeks to escape the bondage of the forms thus created.

“When a form of life has attained its utmost complexity of material organization, unification begins...This marks the transition through the nadir of the evolutionary arc” (p. 180). After that point, the path toward oneness involves the transformation of the forms into the symbols they were meant to embody, the synthesis of symbols into principles and thence ideals, “and the realization of the ideals by Cosmic consciousness” (p. 185).

If, however, an entity which has not yet reached the nadir (turning point) attempts to pursue the path of unification, this will constitute not an evolutionary completion, but a devolutionary return back along the path already taken. The result is not a return to unity but the eventually dissolution of organized consciousness.

“The aim of evolution is to make all things One...Love makes One—therefore, it is truly said, God is Love...Whosoever loves, however dim may be his concept of Love, is manifesting a Unification, and unification is the goal of evolution.”

“Whosoever expresses Love brings Spirit, which is One, into manifestation. To be loving is to be Good.”

“Whosoever expresses hate brings separateness into manifestation. To be separate is to be dead.”

“Therefore, chose Love and live.”

Part II: Commentary

The Cosmic Doctrine is a humbling book, not just because it is abstruse but because of the energy it embodies. (If you think the summary is difficult reading, just try the original.) The last three paragraphs above are the last three paragraphs in the book, which I have quoted verbatim. Before looking at the particulars involved in spiritual evolution, perhaps it is best to begin with the end, to realize that however complex our discussions about the nature of evolution, in the end, it all comes down to one thing: “Choose love and live.”

However, it can also be useful to look at the particulars, so that we can better understand the process of evolution. There are at least two good reasons for this: one, to avoid unnecessary problems (i.e., to know the difference between evolution and devolution, so we can move with the

current of evolution instead of against it) and, two, to accelerate our evolution by understanding the principles of Cosmic Law—what works, what doesn't, and why.

As anyone familiar with the book is aware, there is a massive amount of material left out of my summary, because to attempt to cover every point would be highly impractical; anyone who is interested in delving deeper should read it for him- or herself. (And be warned, it will probably take many readings to glean more than a glimmering of understanding, as I have certainly found out.)

My interest in sharing these ideas in the *EM* stems from my understanding of the enneagram as a system that describes the evolutionary path. There are five points that seem relevant in that regard.

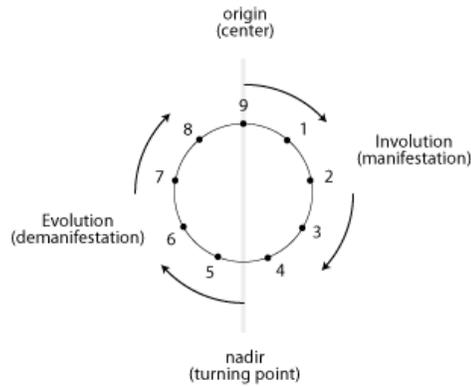
Point 1: There are Absolute Principles that govern life. This may seem obvious, but the very title of the book—*The Cosmic Doctrine*—reveals an important truth that is all too often forgotten in modern life: the truth that there is such a thing as Cosmic Law (that there are certain absolutes in life which underlie all of manifestation).

Religious traditionalists have, of course, always believed in absolutes. But in modern culture, even the idea of absolutes can make people uncomfortable, although there are certain absolutes (like gravity or other laws of physics) upon which we are happy to rely. This account reveals key tenets that govern the nature of life and evolution (only the most important of which I have discussed here; there is much more on cosmic law presented in the original source). It reveals the difference between evolving in a way that is in accordance with Cosmic Law versus evolving in a way that is not—and what is likely to happen when we violate these Laws, either deliberately or out of ignorance.

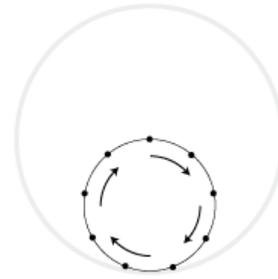
Point 2: The same numbers central to the enneagram are central to evolution of our universe. The first time I read *The Cosmic Doctrine*, I couldn't help but notice how central the numbers 3 and 9 were in its descriptions of human evolution on this planet—and how of the seven planes of Cosmic consciousness, it is the 7th and highest plane that is associated with the geometry of ninefold-ness. Similarly, the first plane—the one containing the Three Rings—is associated with the number 3, which is the foundation of all manifestation. When we look at the same idea in the reflected universe (the thought-form creation of the Great Entity or God), the 7th plane becomes the 1st, which places the ninefold figure in the center of the thought-form universe that is evolving.

I leave it to the more mathematically-inclined to puzzle out exactly what such correspondences signify; nonetheless *The Cosmic Doctrine* presents a picture of evolution that is consistent with the idea that the enneagram has much to teach us about the nature of human evolution.

Point 3: The evolutionary cycle described in *The Cosmic Doctrine* can be mapped onto the enneagram. *The Cosmic Doctrine* is particularly relevant for enneagram study for a number of reasons, one of which is that the enneagram itself can be described as a structure describing the evolutionary arc, where the first half of the enneagram circle represents the first half of the evolutionary process. Points 1 – 4 show the involution of spirit into matter (the creation of the universe); Points 5 – 8 shows the evolution of matter back to spirit (the return to the center from which manifestation begins). The top of the circle (Point 9) represents the place where the unmanifest comes into manifestation; it is the place we begin and the place to which we return at the end of the evolutionary arc. The bottom represents the nadir or turning point, where maximum complexity/density has been reached—so it is the starting point of the return journey (Fig. 4).



4a. Breakdown of evolutionary phases



4b. The evolutionary cycle in the universe of the *Logos*

Fig 4. The evolutionary cycle on the enneagram

This is more or less the same point I made in my most recent book, *Archetypes of the Enneagram* (Chapter 7), where I link the nine personality types to the involutionary/evolutionary activities taking place at each point on the circle. Although I was not specifically thinking of the evolutionary model described in *The Cosmic Doctrine* when devising the model in the book, it's easy to see the parallels between the two.

Point 4: Personality becomes the basis for Individuality. There is great emphasis in *The Cosmic Doctrine* on the value of both personality and individuality. It posits a universe in which entities are conceived as nascent individualities whose differentiation is effected via the development of Personality, which eventually “dies” (i.e., becomes part of) the Individuality during the latter stages of evolution (see pp. 160 – 166). However, until that point, the personality is the vehicle by which differentiation takes place and only becomes superfluous once its work is completed. (And it can be argued that it never really disappears but simply becomes transformed into its Cosmic counterpart.)

Obviously, the evolutionary arc described in *The Cosmic Doctrine* is a radical departure from the idea that Personality represents an impediment to evolution (an idea I have, following Ken Wilber, characterized as retro-romantic; see *EM*, Sept. 2010). I present this alternative model in hopes of demonstrating that evolution occurs by way of developing—not discarding—individual differences (and also demonstrating that this idea has considerable support from diverse sources). Jung, of course, was also a champion of Personality for the same reasons as the author of *The Cosmic Doctrine*: because Personality helps us differentiate until it begins to have outlived its purpose, at which point the evolving soul gradually begins to identify with the greater vehicle (the Individuality) and to let go of the lesser vehicle (the Personality). But this does not occur until the fifth step of a seven step process (each step representing a transition up one of the seven planes we traverse during the evolutionary phase of our journey; see pp.163 – 166).

This is not to say that Individuality does not matter. As evolution progresses, the transition from the Personality to Individuality does matter, because—as *The Cosmic Doctrine* points out—otherwise our increasing mastery of the mind, emotions, and body will be directed not by higher (spiritual) forces of the Individuality, but by the combined motives of the conscious mind and the subconscious (Fig. 5; see also discussion on p. 127).

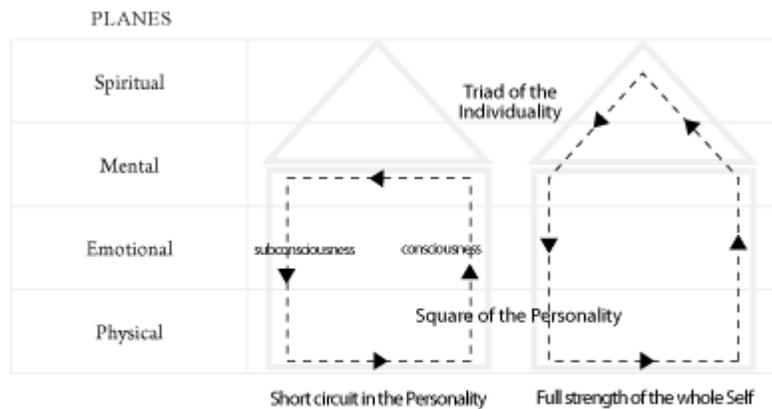


Fig 5. Evolution of the Personality

Point 5: The importance of timing in the evolutionary process cannot be overstated. There is a time for creating a universe (manifestation) and a time for withdrawing from the same (unification). Just so, there is a time for developing the Personality (involution) and a time for refining the Personality, so that it may contribute something to the Individuality (evolution).

As *The Cosmic Doctrine* makes quite clear, evolution is a one-way process, at least in the overall sense. We can't go backward, we can only go forward (p.101). At least that is how it works if we're in alignment with Cosmic Law. However, it is possible (if not advisable) to devolve, either because we seek freedom/power without responsibility (p. 178) or (perhaps out of fear of power-seeking), we shrink back from progressing, either dallying too long in our present state or regressing to an earlier stage of development, to a state of less differentiation (p. 101). Either way, we fail to continue along the arc of evolution.

Once we are past the nadir (halfway point or place of maximum complexity in our involutory development), the shortest route back is "up" the evolutionary arc. But before we reach the nadir, the shortest route back is back the way we came, not forward. So one of the challenges of evolution is to continue forward (p. 132), whether this means moving deeper into involution (i.e., deeper into the manifestation or material phase of life) or evolution (moving from involvement with life to evolving towards Spirit). If we try to move beyond the involutory phase before the time is right, we will like devolve, not evolve; likewise, if we refuse to move into the evolutionary phase, we will also devolve. An example of the former situation would be someone who, believing that spirituality is good and material life is inferior to spirituality, tries too hard to be a "spiritual person" prior to the time in life when they would reflect a natural progression towards Spirit. An example of the latter situation would be someone who, out of fear or lack of confidence, does not fulfill their evolutionary potential, instead hanging back (or taking on only those tasks that he can easily accomplish, such that he always succeeds, but seldom challenges himself in new ways).

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In enneagram work, there are two widespread beliefs that are relevant to the teachings in *The Cosmic Doctrine*. One is that spiritual evolution is preferable to a materialistically-oriented life; the other is that personality is an impediment to spirituality. But the teachings of *The Cosmic Doctrine* portray involution (the world of manifestation) and evolution (the return to Oneness) as two halves of one whole, each having a valid purpose at a certain phase in development. Even more

significantly, they portray Personality as the vehicle that supports evolution by facilitating the process of differentiation, whereby we move from a less differentiated (unevolved) state of consciousness to a highly differentiated (highly refined) state of consciousness.

During involution, the Personality develops; during evolution, it begins to “die”—i.e., to give way to the Individuality. *The Cosmic Doctrine* speaks of seven deaths, one for each plane of consciousness. So the the move from Personality to Individuality is both a natural and gradual process, not a sudden leap.

So there is a point at which the desire to be free of Personality becomes paramount, *but this point is not reached until almost the end of the entire cycle of evolution*. Until then, personality continues to serve a useful purpose. Thus, there are two conclusions we may draw based on *The Cosmic Doctrine*.

First, that prematurely renouncing Personality is not helpful to evolution, because it’s like shooting ourselves in the foot. So if we wonder why the “type structure” of the personality seems like it is so robust, and persists in the face of all attempts to eradicate it, this is why: because it has to be robust until the point when it is no longer needed. And unless you are at a quite advanced state of spiritual evolution, it is unlikely that your personality is as yet superfluous. I know that mine isn’t!

Second, when Personality “dies,” it does not give way to some sort of non-individualized, undifferentiated state; it becomes integrated into the Individuality, a process that sounds very much like the way that, in multiple personality disorder, splinter personalities eventually become part of a single unified personality. The Higher Self thus retains its individuality—and in fact can be defined as the essence of Individuality. So if we want to understand the nature of the Higher Self, we can start by studying the Personality Self—and by determining how to work with the latter in a way that facilitates its ability to transition to a higher state.

It is also helpful to understand that the Higher Self or Individuality is not separate from the Cosmos, simply because it retains its independent identity, but is on the contrary fully integrated into the Cosmos—an integration made possible by the completion of its evolutionary cycle—such that it is simultaneously an autonomous whole and a member of the greater Unity of the Cosmos. And when it has attained this point in its evolution, it does not stop, but continues to evolve, becoming over time a Great Entity like the *Logos* and is able to create its own universe (p. 95).

This process continues until “the Cosmos becomes so mighty in its force it has generated that it bursts the Ring-Pass-Not, and the Great Organisms rush forth into the Unmanifest, and by their swirling motion, gather space around them, and, in turn, build new Cosmoi. Such is the history of a Cosmic evolution” (p. 47) (Fig. 6).

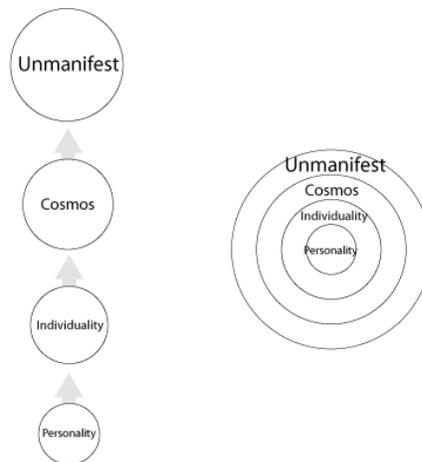


Fig. 6. The move up the evolutionary arc

What an awe-inspiring description of evolution. It really puts our ideas about things like enlightenment or self-realization into perspective, allowing us to realize that we will never reach some sort of ultimate destination where we cease growing. It turns out that evolution really *is* about the journey, because the journey never ends.

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One last thing I noticed about *The Cosmic Doctrine* is its emphasis on sacred geometry; anyone who reads it will come away with the sense that everything in life is about geometry: how everything relates to everything else and how those relationships can all be described in terms of forces, angles, and dynamic movement. As a result, I was motivated to find a way to combine nine-sided geometric figures in a way that allowed them to be in relationship to one another. Unlike a lot of geometries—like triangles, squares, circles, and hexagons—enneagons cannot be combined by placing one next to one another, a property they share with pentagons and heptagons (seven-sided figures). I was delighted to finally come up with the figure below, in which a series of enneagons surround a 12-sided star (see the reference above to 12 as another prominent number in the evolution of our universe.*)

