

# To Call a World Tree

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ABSTRACT: I cast a circle of reasoning into which I call the participants of a pagan theology. I use Neoplatonic concepts to make these calls. I invite these participants through sacrificial offerings of arguments. My intention in ritual is to call into circle a Neoplatonic world tree, a tree which has counterparts in many paganisms. Since the cardinal elements play foundational roles in many paganisms, I call first to them. I call water, earth, air, light, and fire. Since Wicca was partly inspired by Neoplatonism, these elements have counterparts in Wiccan traditions. Out of these elements, I call the world tree. Out of this world tree, I call the god and the goddess. The god and the goddess in this circle have counterparts in many Wiccan versions of the god and the goddess.

## 1. Casting a Circle of Reasoning

It is both traditional and appropriate to begin philosophical work with an invocation to divine principles.<sup>i</sup> Beginning with the center, I therefore cast this *circle of reasoning*.<sup>ii</sup> Powers of the center, powers of here and now, by your strength I welcome all persons, of all identities, of all ancestries, to join together as equals in this reasoning. As together we cast our circle, we call upon the quarters, in the order of our Sun. Powers of the east, powers of the hand, show us what needs to be seen. Powers of the south, powers of the voice, give sound to what needs to be said. Powers of the west, powers of the eyes, let us see that which is shown. Powers of the north, powers of the ears, let us hear that which is spoken. As we cast this circle, we also call upon the vertical axis. Powers of the depths, powers of the past, we accept your energies. Powers of the heights, powers of the future, we strive towards the ideals shining like stars in your sky. *The circle is closed.* We are in ritual. The work of this philosophical paganism begins.

Our ritual intention is to call into our circle of reasoning some great *world tree*. The ancient pagan philosopher Plotinus depicted reality as a tree (*Enneads*, 3.3.7.10-24, 3.8.10.10-14). For the sake of focus, we will use some Plotinian texts to call a Neoplatonic world tree into our circle of reasoning. But we are not offering an interpretation of Plotinus; we are only using his texts as ritual tools. The *Enneads* (hereafter just E) serve only as our grimoire. For the sake of this ritual, we invite the Neoplatonic world tree to be *our* world tree. As we call the tree into circle, our call resonates with its *counterparts*. It has counterparts in ancient Norse cosmology (Andrén, 2014). It has many counterparts in ancient Mesoamerican cosmologies (Smith, 2005; Knowlton & Vail, 2010). It has counterparts in ancient and Medieval sacred trees (Cusack, 2011). It has counterparts in many contemporary paganisms. Ásatrú is a modern reconstruction of old Norse religion (Strmiska, 2000). So the world tree in Neoplatonism has a counterpart in the world tree of modern Ásatrú. For modern Druids, trees have enormous religious significance, and modern Druidry has its world trees.

Some Wiccans use world trees (Sabin, 2011: 16-7). Since Wicca was partly inspired by Neoplatonism, the Wiccan trees are close counterparts of our Neoplatonic tree.<sup>iii</sup> Finally, one of the great world trees is the evolutionary tree of life (Soltis & Soltis, 2019). By calling to our world tree, we also call to all the others.

Our world tree emerges from the union of elemental powers. We therefore call to the *cardinal elements*: Holy water, holy earth, holy air, holy fire, we invite you into the circle. We bid you hail, and welcome! Many pagans also call to a fifth element; within this circle, we call to light. Holy light, we invite you into the circle. We bid you hail, and welcome! These powers bound our circle and structure our reasoning. They are five entities in mutual communion. They can be symbolized by a *pentagram*, here taken to be a five-pointed star, pointing upwards, whose points lie on the circle. Along with the elements and our world tree, we will call into our circle of reasoning two demiurgic energies, namely, *the god* and *the goddess*. Demiurgic goddess, power of opening woven into all things, we invite you into the circle. Demiurgic god, power of closing woven into all things, we invite you into the circle. Since Wicca was partly inspired by Neoplatonism, these deities are close counterparts of many Wiccan versions of the god and the goddess. Of course, the elements and the demiurgic couple play roles in paganisms beyond Wicca. So our work in ritual reasoning spreads out, across many bridging counterpart relations, beyond the boundaries of any pagan sect.

To invite these things into our circle of reasoning, we make sacrificial offerings of concepts and arguments. Here we follow the advice of Porphyry (*On Abstinence*, 2.34-6). He says “we offer to the gods, more than anything else, the first-fruits of contemplation” (2.35). And he says “we should offer to the divinities the first-fruits of our conceptions of their transcendent excellence, giving them thanks for the contemplations which they impart to us” (2.34). Thus we follow the concept of sacrifice outlined by Sallustius (*On the Gods and the World*, secs. 14-15). For while the sacrifice does not change the things to which it is offered, it changes us. That which we summon does not come; on the contrary, by clearing our minds through careful thought, we open ourselves to that which has always already been manifest.

## **2. The Zero: Non-Being**

Philosophical paganism starts with an ultimate origin. It is conventional to say that Plotinian Neoplatonism begins with *the One*. Many Wiccans also start with an ultimate origin. They say this origin is the Wiccan ultimate deity.<sup>iv</sup> Some Wiccans identify the Wiccan ultimate deity with something like the One.<sup>v</sup> Nevertheless, three reasons compel us to start before the One. The first reason comes from arithmetic. The Neoplatonists were greatly inspired by Pythagorean mathematical metaphysics. Thus *The Theology of Arithmetic*, attributed to Iamblichus, does its theology by meditating on the numbers from one to ten. Of course, the Neoplatonists lacked the number zero; however, given their close attention to arithmetic, Inge (1918: 107-8) argues that if they had the zero, they would have started with it. But *the Zero* comes before the One.

The second reason comes from the way Plotinus talks about the One. He often says the One somehow precedes existence. It is before being. Since the One is the source of the existence of all beings, it cannot be any being: “in order that Being may be brought

about, the source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the original act of generation" (E 5.2.1.5-10).<sup>vi</sup> The One is emptiness: "It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from it" (E 5.2.1.5-10). The One can be understood only negatively: "this Absolute One is none of the things of which it is the Source. Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of it – it cannot be said to exist, nor to have any form" (E 3.8.10.28-30; see 5.5.6.9-15, 5.5.13.1-9). He writes: "Surely the One must be able to say of itself 'I possess Being?' But it does not possess Being" (E 6.7.38.10-15). According to Plotinus, the One does not exist; it is empty; it can only be referred to through negations. So his One looks like a Zero.

The third reason involves an argument from ultimacy: (1) If the ultimate origin is any being, then it is logically possible to ask why that being exists. More deeply, it is logically possible to wonder why there is something rather than nothing.<sup>vii</sup> (2) So, if the ultimate origin has being, then there exists some reason for its existence, a reason which is prior to that being. (3) Hence no being can be ultimate. (4) It is therefore not logically possible to begin with any being; on the contrary, it is logically necessary to begin with non-being. (5) But non-being corresponds to the Zero. If the Zero is ultimate, then it is not privative or parasitic on being. It is not a hole in being.

For these three reasons, it is plausible to say that the Plotinian One-before-being is really the Zero. By these three reasons, offered in sacrifice, we summon the Zero into our circle. To summon the Zero is to let the ground dissolve beneath our feet. The Zero *is* non-being. If it is logically necessary to begin with non-being, then being must emerge from non-being. Non-being only negates; but non-being has only itself to negate; thus non-being negates itself; by negating its own non-being, it makes being be (Peirce, 1965: 6.219; Heidegger, 1998; Nozick, 1981: 123).<sup>viii</sup> Why is there something rather than nothing? Because the nothing negates itself. Of course, if Carnap (1931) is right, then our call to the Zero fails. But his logical positivism fails on precisely the principle through which the Zero succeeds: self-application (Ayer & Copleston, 1949). So our ritual proceeds. The Zero is the ultimate deity in our circle of reasoning. The Zero in our circle is a counterpart of the ultimate deity in many Wiccan circles.

Plotinus sometimes places the One under and below all things. To be under and below all things is to serve as their source. Thus Plotinus portrays the One as the hidden spring from which all rivers flow (E 3.8.10.5-10). Like the ocean, the One is a deep abyss. He writes that the One is "fathomless depths of power" (E 6.9.6.10-15). But we say this One-below-being is the Zero. The Zero is the *abyss* of nothingness. Starhawk says her ultimate deity "floated in the abyss of the outer darkness" (1999: 41). One classical symbol for this abyss is *water*; hence the element of water symbolizes non-being. Like all elements, water is genderless; it is neither any god nor goddess. Figure 1 uses the symbol of ocean waves to depict the abyss of non-being. Here we pause in ritual to give thanks: water, we thank you for your self-negation.



**Figure 1.** The abyss of non-being.

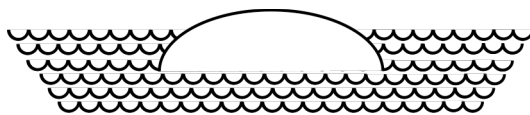
### 3. The One: Being-Itself

The Zero negates its own negativity. But the negative of the negative is the positive. The self-negation of non-being is *being*. However, just as non-being is not the absence of this or that being, so the being that emerges from its self-negation is not the presence of this or that being. It is not some being among beings. That which emerges from the self-negation of non-being is pure existence, it is pure *being-itself*.

There are two reasons to identify being-itself with the One. The first reason is that the One is the source of the existence of all the beings. Plotinus writes of the One “That which stands as the ultimate source of every thing is not a thing but is distinct from all things: it is not a member of the totality of beings, but the origin of their being.” (E 5.3.11.20-25; see 5.2.1.1-2). But being-itself is also such a source. And since there cannot be two such sources (E 5.4.1.15-17), being-itself is identical with the One. The second reason is that the One is the power of the abyss manifest as existence; it is that power which makes beings be. But the same holds for being-itself. If it were not for the self-negation of non-being, there would not be any beings. Hence the self-negation of non-being is that power which makes beings be. But that self-negation is being-itself; hence being-itself is that power which makes beings be. Again, since there cannot be two such powers, being-itself is identical with the One. By these two arguments, which we offer to the One in sacrifice, we call the One into our circle of reasoning.

The One is being-itself.<sup>ix</sup> If the One exists in the same way that beings exist, then the One is just one of the many beings; but the One is not one of the many beings; hence the One does not exist in the same way they exist; consequently, there are two ways to exist. We can refer to these two ways by saying that the One exists *ontologically*, while the beings exist *ontically*. The One is prior to all ontic distinctions among beings. It is prior to simplicity and complexity; it is prior to universality and particularity. Tillich famously identified being-itself with God (1951: 235-7). But Plotinus says the One is not God (E 6.9.6.13-14). Philosophical pagans, like almost all pagans, say there are gods but no God (York, 2009: 283). Being-itself is not God; the One is not God. Our deities are not little Gods – we are atheists. Nevertheless, reflection on Tillich has led many to argue that talk about being-itself is nonsensical (McLendon, 1960; Fenton, 1965). If they are right, then our call fails. We reply with reference to Quine (1948). We agree with Quine that to be is to be the value of a bound variable. If  $(\exists x)(\dots x \dots)$ , then  $x$  is some being among beings; but the existential quantifier itself refers to the One. The Quinean slogan defines the being of beings; it is an ontological statement about being-itself. It would be absurd to say that Quine’s statement is nonsense. So our ritual proceeds.

Being-itself emerges from the abyss of non-being like an island emerges from the sea. Hence the element of *earth* symbolizes being-itself. Since Wiccans often associate our Earth with some goddess, they may want to say that earth is female. However, at this point in ritual, no sexual distinctions have emerged, no reproductive work is being done. Like all elements, earth has no gender; hence earth is neither male nor female. Moreover, the elements are not deities; hence earth is neither god nor goddess. Figure 2 illustrates the emergence of being-itself like an island rising from the sea. Here again we pause in ritual to give thanks: earth, we thank you for blessing us with your support.



**Figure 2.** The island of being-itself.

#### **4. The Two: The Self-Consistency of Being-Itself**

Being-itself is the One; but the One generates *the Two*. To define the Two, we count from the Zero through the One. The Zero is non-being; non-being is self-inconsistency; but self-inconsistency negates itself. Self-inconsistency is purely negative self-relation. This self-relation negates itself. But the negative of the negative is the positive. The self-negation of non-being generates being-itself. Thus the Zero generates the One. And if non-being is self-inconsistency, then being-itself is self-consistency. Therefore, the self-relation of being-itself is self-consistency. This self-relation is the Two; it is the dyad. So the dyad is self-consistency. Far from being inert, this self-consistency inherits the power of the One. The power of the dyad *maximizes* self-consistency.

Consistency involves propositions. If the dyad does not generate all logically possible propositions, then there is no consistency. But if there is no consistency, then consistency is not maximized. The dyad therefore generates all those propositions. A similar argument entails that the dyad assigns truth to all analytic propositions and falsity to all contradictions. Likewise the dyad assigns truth-values in accordance with entailment. The dyad generates a system of logically well-organized propositions. Their meanings are interwoven by logical relations. Hence the system of these propositions resembles a *rhizome*, which is a network of interwoven roots. This *Rhizome* affirms that P if and only if P is true; it denies that P if and only if P is false. Since the Rhizome is a system of propositions, it resembles a mind. However, the Rhizome is not a mind; it does not think. It is just an eternal necessary logical structure. Of course, if there are no abstract objects, then our call fails. To those who reject abstract objects, we reply that our call depends only on the sacrificial offering of reasons. And there are reasons for abstract objects (Colyvan, 2001). So our ritual proceeds.

The dyad maximizes self-consistency. However, if only analytic propositions are true, then self-consistency is not maximized. For it is logically possible that there are propositions whose truths are not merely analytic. Since they are not merely analytically true, they have existential content. They congregate into theories of existence. The maximal self-consistent theory of existence defines the totality of logically possible beings. It defines *the world*. The basic propositions in the maximal self-consistent theory of existence are the axioms in the *science of being*. The science of being is unified by being-itself (E 3.9.2, 4.9.5). It is the development of the meaning of being-itself. For the Neoplatonists, the science of being is mathematical. The axiomatic propositions in the Rhizome resemble those of geometry (E 4.9.5.24-26, 6.3.16.20-23). Proclus used the Euclidean axiomatic method to write his *Elements of Theology*. Hence the Rhizome also affirms all the propositions in that mathematical axiom system than which none greater is logically possible. These axioms give rise to the beings. We do not rule out the possibility that this greatest axiom system is an endless series of axioms.

Modern mathematical philosophers have argued that the consistency of an axiom system suffices for its truth (Balaguer, 1998: 5-8). Thus Hilbert wrote to Frege that if some system of axioms is self-consistent, “then they are true and the things defined by the axioms exist” (in Frege, 1980: 39-40). Poincare wrote that “in mathematics the word exist . . . means free from contradiction” (1913: 454). Here philosophical pagans offer an argument: (1) This narrower axiom system is less inclusive than that wider axiom system if and only if the models of the narrower system are included in those of the wider system. (2) The greatest axiom system is both consistent and maximally inclusive. (3) If the greatest axiom system is false, then self-consistency is not maximized. (4) But the dyad maximizes self-consistency. (5) Therefore, the greatest axiom system is true. The models of this system include all other consistently definable models.

## 5. The Many: The Structure of Beings

Plotinus offers an exercise in which you visualize the world of forms (E 5.8.9.1-30). And visualization exercises are central in Wicca (Sabin, 2011: ch. 3). So we now pass through four visions. For Plotinus, vision reveals the forms, and the first forms are numbers (E 6.6.15). So the first science in the Rhizome is the science of number, which includes propositions (axioms) that generate the numbers.<sup>x</sup> The original numbers are the ordinals. They can be visualized as a ordered on a line.

The *first vision* reveals this line through three laws. The *initial law* states that there exists an initial number 0. The *successor law* states that every number  $n$  is surpassed by a minimally greater successor  $n+1$ . These laws generate the infinite progression 0, 1, 2, 3 and so on. The *limit law* states that every infinite progression of numbers is surpassed by a minimally greater limit number. This number line is the *axis mundi*. It is the vertical axis of being, rising from the earth into the sky. It rises up out of the ground of being like the trunk of a tree rises into the sky. The sky corresponds to the element of *air*. Like all elements, air is genderless. It is neither god nor goddess. We pause in ritual to give thanks: air, we thank you for blessing us with possibilities.

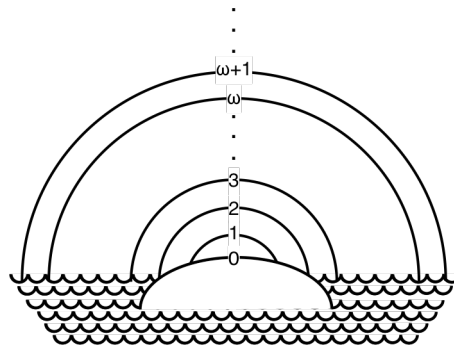
For Plotinus, the Divine Mind contains all possible forms (E 6.2.21.45-55). The numbers order the forms into ranks (E 2.9.13.3-6; see 5.4.1.1-5, etc.). A similar ranking of structures is found in modern set theory. Hints of modern set theory appear in ancient Neoplatonism. When Plotinus says that every many has its one (E 3.8.10.19-28, 5.6.3, 6.6.13, 6.9.1), he seems to be using a set-theoretic axiom. Parallels have been drawn between Plotinian and Cantorian infinity (Stamatellos & Mentzeniotis, 2008). Proclus appears to employ several set-theoretic axioms (Brumbaugh, 1982). To modernize the Plotinian forms, we use sets: the forms are set-theoretic structures. They emerge from the creative power of the dyad. If the dyad affirms some axiom that asserts the existence of some sets, then those sets all exist. Since the dyad maximizes self-consistency, it affirms that set theory than which none greater is consistent. Hence we affirm that the Rhizome contains the axioms of the logically unsurpassable set theory.

While many issues in set-theory remain unsettled, we can *provisionally* say that the greatest set theory is the Von Neumann – Gödel – Bernays (VGB) set theory with axioms for all consistently definable large cardinals (Drake, 1974; Kanamori, 2005). This theory also adds proper classes, collections that are too general to be sets. These proper classes

are not idle: they are the *transcendental* objects. But we focus on the sets. The dyad makes the VGB axioms true. Of course, since these axioms do not decide the truth-values of all propositions, the dyad independently assigns many other truth-values. However, if there does not exist exactly one way to maximize consistency, then our call fails. Hamkins (2012) argues for many mutually incompatible set theories. If he is right, our call fails. We hope there is exactly one well-defined membership relation. On this hope, our ritual proceeds. By affirming the VGB axioms, the dyad generates the greatest system of sets. This system is  $V$ .  $V$  is a (proper) class of sets.  $V$  is transcendental. It is arguable that all consistent theories have models in  $V$ . If that is correct, then all logically possible forms exist in  $V$ . Thus  $V$  is combinatorially complete.

The system  $V$  can be visualized as a connect-the-dots network in which the dots are sets and the connections are instances of membership. All the sets in the abstract world exist because the One generates the dyad; but the dyad generates the Rhizome; the Rhizome contains the axioms for sets; the dyadic drive to maximize self-consistency makes those axioms true; since the axioms are true, the sets exist. The One generates the Two; the Two generates the Many. Rank after rank of sets emerge over the earth. So the *second vision* reveals these ranks. It reveals them through three laws. The *initial law* states that the bottom rank  $V(0)$  of sets is just the empty set. The *successor law* states that every rank of sets  $V(n)$  is surpassed by a greater successor rank  $V(n+1)$ . The rank  $V(n+1)$  is the set of all the sets that can be formed from the sets in  $V(n)$ . The *limit law* states that every infinite progression of ranks is surpassed by a greater limit rank. Each limit rank is the set of all sets on all lower ranks. Since simpler sets enter into the composition of more complex sets, the membership arrows point upwards from simple to complex. More complex sets exist on higher ranks in the sky. This stratification of sets by complexity corresponds to the *great chain of being* (Lovejoy, 1936).

Plotinus had a geocentric cosmology. The universe was an onion with our Earth at its core and the fixed stars at its edge. The ranks of the great chain corresponded roughly to the spherical shells of this onion. Taking geocentric picture poetically, the shells around the earth are the ranks of forms rising ever higher into the sky. Some of these shells, indexed by numbers, are shown in Figure 3. So far, we called to water, earth, and air. But the watery abyss is dark; the earth is dark; and the sky is only night.



**Figure 3.** The sky over the earth and sea.

## 6. The Sun Illuminates the Earth

We have so far welcomed into our circle of reasoning the Zero, the One, and the Two. These were sufficient for all abstract objects. However, for a Platonist, there exists another principle, which we must invite into our circle. This principle is *the Good*. Plato used the *sun* to symbolize the Good (*Republic*, 507b-508c). Plotinus identified the Platonic One with the Platonic Good (E 2.9.1.1-10). So Plotinus used the sun to symbolize both the Good and the One (E 1.7.1.25-28, 5.3.12.40-45, 6.9.4.10-12, etc.). We will invite the Good into our circle through the third vision.

According to the *Timaeus* (28e-29b), our universe is the concrete instance of an abstract cosmic form. Modern Pythagoreans like Tegmark (2014) argue that our universe just is a mathematical structure. Hence some forms are *cosmic forms*. But if there are cosmic forms, and if all forms are set-theoretic structures, then all the cosmic forms are set-theoretic structures. And just as the concept of *number* entails no upper bound on the complexity of numbers, so the concept of *cosmic form* places no upper bound on the complexities of those forms. Above every rank in the set-theoretic hierarchy, there are absolutely infinitely many more (and more complex) cosmic forms.

Following Leibniz (*Theodicy*, secs. 414-7), say each cosmic form is a *book*. These books differ in their intrinsic values. Plotinus often talked about the intrinsic value of our universe and its form in terms of its beauty (E 2.3.18.1-10, 2.9.4.23-33, 3.2.11-18, etc.). So perhaps the intrinsic value of any book is its beauty. Or perhaps its intrinsic value is just its complexity. Leibniz proposed that the intrinsic value of any book is some product of its order with its variety (Rescher, 1979: 28-31). Following Kraay (2011: 365), let a *possible world* be any class of books. The totality of books is the *library*; the library is just the biggest possible world. Just as some books are better than others, some worlds are better than others. There exists exactly one world that contains the least valuable book and that is closed under all possible improvements of books. This world is the *treasury*. The *third vision* reveals the treasury through three laws.

The *initial law* states that the bottom rank of books in the treasury contains exactly the simplest cosmic form. This is the form of the empty universe; it is just the empty set. Now let a *successor* of any book be some minimally more valuable version of that book. A book is *improved* into its successors. The *successor law* states that every book is surpassed by at least one successor. Each successor rank in the treasury contains all the successors of all books on the previous rank. Now let the *limit* of any infinite progression of books be some book that is minimally more valuable than every book in that progression. A progression is improved into its limits. The *limit law* states that every progression of books is surpassed by at least one limit book.<sup>xi</sup> Each limit rank in the treasury contains all the limits of all progressions over all lesser ranks. The treasury itself is just the union of all of its ranks. The combinatorial completeness of set-theory entails that all the successor and limit ranks in the treasury contain books. Hence the treasury is an unsurpassable class of surpassable books.

It can be argued that the treasury is the best of all possible worlds. If any world does not contain the least valuable book, then it misses some value; so the best world contains the least valuable book. If any world fails to contain all improvements of all of its books (and progressions of books), then it misses some value; so the best world is closed under



improvement. If any book cannot be reached by improvement from the initial book, then it is defective in some way; but the best world does not add these *dark books*. The treasury is the only world which does not miss any value and which does not add any dark books. So the treasury is the best of all possible worlds. Of course, there does not exist any best of all possible books. Every book is surpassed by better books. How big is the treasury? It is arguable that the treasury is strictly smaller than the library. The combinatorial completeness of set-theory almost certainly implies that defective books exist. These dark books are in the library but not in the treasury.

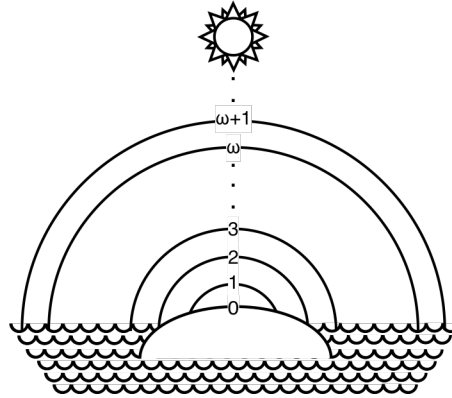
The books in the library are possible universes. A book is actual if and only if there exists some concrete universe which is a model of that book. And a world is actual if and only if every book in that world is actual. Exactly one possible world is actual. Every possible world is associated with an actualizer. Its actualizer is a proposition which asserts that every book in that world is actual. Consequently, a world is actual if and only if its actualizer is true. Assuming that the treasury is the best of all possible worlds, then its actualizer is the best of all possible propositions. We identify the Good with the best proposition. Of course, this means that the Good is not the One.

There are at least three reasons to reject the equation of the Good with the One. The first is that the basis for their equation is obscure (Jackson, 1967: 322; Mortley, 1975: 49; Gerson, 1994: 19-20). The second is that they play two different roles. The One is the source or beginning. The Good is the finality or end. For example, the people in the Myth of the Cave climb up the Divided Line towards the Good (*Republic*, 514a-520a). So the Good is the goal at which things aim as they climb the great chain of being. The third reason is that the Good is usually portrayed as an abstract object. But all abstract objects are beings among beings; they are brought into being by the One. So if the Good is an abstract object, then it is not the One. For these three reasons, we separate the One and the Good, placing the One at the bottom of the great chain as the earth and the Good at the top as the sun. The Good is a proposition. But is this proposition true?

To invite the Good to reveal its truth in our circle of reasoning, we make an offering of reasoning to it. We offer in sacrifice the *Agathonic Argument*. It goes like this: (1) There are some propositions. (2) The propositions are ordered by value. (3) The Good is the best proposition. (4) Propositions are either true or false. (5) Some propositions are true. (6) Any true proposition is better than any false proposition. (7) Assume for *reductio* that the Good is false. (8) If the Good is false, then any true proposition is better than it. (9) But then the Good is not the best proposition. (10) Since this is a contradiction, the Good is true. The Agathonic Argument is valid. Its premises are propositions in the Rhizome. Of course, if they are false, then our call fails. We hope its premises are axioms. On this hope, our ritual proceeds. Assuming these axioms, we affirm that the Good is true. Since the Good is true, every book in the treasury has a concrete model; it is instantiated by some physical universe. The Good entails that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds. But there is no best universe. Every universe is surpassed by an absolute infinity of better universes.

The sun is the element of light. Figure 4 shows the Good as the sun. Since Wiccans often associate our Sun with the god, they may want to say that light is male. However, at this point in ritual, no sexual distinctions have emerged, no sexed work is being done. Like all elements, light has no gender; hence light is neither male nor female. Moreover,

the elements are not deities; hence light is neither god nor goddess. Here we pause in ritual to give thanks: light, we thank you for showing yourself to us.



**Figure 4.** The sun over the sky and the island and the sea.

## 7. The Tree of Universes

Just as the sun *emanates* light, so the Good emanates light. This light shines out of the Good until it strikes something which reflects it back to the Good. For Plotinus, *matter* is the mirror in which the light of the Good is reflected (E 3.6-14, etc.). Of course, his matter is not modern physical matter. So we just say that a book reflects the light of the Good if and only if it is actualized. Its concreteness turns it into a mirror. For Plotinus, materiality was evil (E 1.8, etc.); on this point, we say he was wrong. Concreteness is a mark of *goodness*. All and only the books in the treasury reflect the light of the Good. The dark books do not reflect this light. The treasury itself is that structure in which the Good sees its reflection. Since the books in the treasury are ordered into ranks, they reflect the light of the Good back to the Good in an orderly way. This light rises through all the books in the treasury. It strikes the initial book first. This first light corresponds to the Plotinian sunrise of the Good (E 5.5.8.1-10). It is the rise of the sun over the earth. The light rises from each book to its successors. It rises from every progression to its limits. As this light rises, it *returns* to the Good.

The totality of illuminated books is the actual world. The actual world has the form of a great *world tree* (E 3.3.7.10-25, 3.8.10.10-20). The *fourth vision* reveals this world tree through three laws. These laws follow directly from the laws of the treasury and the truth of the Good. The *initial law* states that the root of the world tree is just the initial universe. The *successor law* states that every universe in the world tree is surpassed by at least one successor. Every pair consisting of a universe and one of its successors is a branch in the world tree. The *limit law* states that every progression in the world tree is surpassed by at least one limit. Every pair consisting of a universe in a progression and one of the limits of that progression is a branch in the world tree. So the world tree is a proper class of branches. Every universe in the world tree is a concrete instance of an abstract cosmic form. Since these cosmic forms exist in the abstract sky, their instances also exist in that sky. If the world tree is represented as the graph or diagram of its

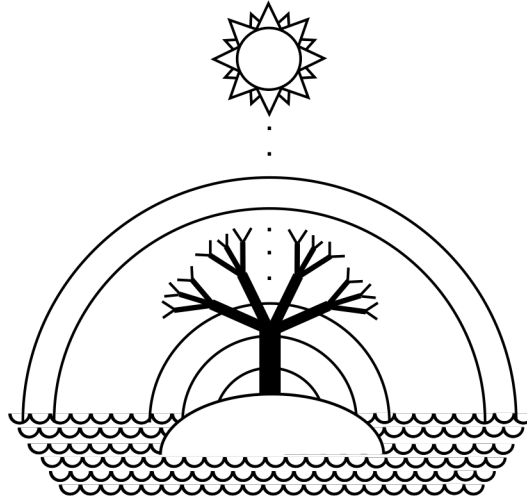
branches, then it rises endlessly into that sky. It rises from the earth to the sun; it rises from the One to the Good. Since the world tree exists if and only if the Good is true, the world tree is a concrete model of the Good. The world tree shines with the reflected light of the Good. It stands blazing in the darkness of the night.

Now we are ready to invite fire into our circle of reasoning. Our invitation is an offering of reasons. We sacrifice to it the *Argument for Surpassivity*. It goes like this: (1) Every universe surpasses itself in every way. (2) If every universe surpasses itself in every way, then every universe contains the power of self-surpassing. (3) Therefore, every universe contains the power of self-surpassing. (4) But if every universe contains this power, then this power exists. (5) So there exists a power of self-surpassing. Of course, this argument is easy to extend to progressions and limits.

Historical considerations justify the use of fire to symbolize the power which flows like sap through the veins of the world tree. The Stoics thought the universe was animated by a divine fire-energy (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 2.23-8). This fire-energy (the *pneuma*) produces every next universe in the Stoic cosmic cycle. Iamblichus often talks about a divine fire-energy which animates all things (*On the Mysteries* (M), 1.8-9, 1.12, 2.4, 3.20, 4.3, 5.11-12). He says a “divine creative force” drives all things to self-organize (M 1.8). He says “the divine fire which shines universally on its own initiative, self-summoned and self-energising, acts in the same way throughout all beings” (M 4.3). This fire is just the light of the Good made concrete by its presence in physical things. Since Wicca was partly inspired by Neoplatonism, this holy fire-energy has close counterparts in the energies that appear in Wicca as well as in other paganisms. It has counterparts in the ultimate energies posited by many cosmologies. For example, it has a counterpart in the Aztec concept of *teotl* (Maffie, 2014: ch. 1). We pause in ritual to give thanks: fire, we thank you for blessing us with your presence.

Holy water, abyss of non-being, you generate or manifest the earth. Holy earth, being-itself, you manifest the beings in the sky. Holy air, rank upon rank of forms, you received within yourself the light of the Good. Holy light, you struck the earth like a bolt of lightning. You kindled the fire of concreteness in the seed of existence. Out of the earth, the world tree rises towards the sun. It is the tree of universes. It rises up through the air, propelled by the primal energy of its sap. But primal energy is fire, so the world tree is a tree of ever-burning fire. Brought together, these symbols make the pagan image. Figure 5 shows this pagan image. The elements also gather into an upwards pentagram whose points lie on our circle of reasoning. So we pause again in ritual to give thanks: holy elements, thank you for showing yourselves to us.

To complete our pagan image, we add the *stars* in the sky. A star is any series of concrete things defined over the entire ordinal number line. Since the entire ordinal number line is a proper class, every star contains a proper class of things. Hence every star is a concrete transcendental object. Taken as a whole (and not as a diagram), the world tree is a star. It coincides with the sun. But every path of universes in the world tree also rises through all the ordinals. Hence it rises towards a star in the sky. To steal a phrase from Hartshorne (1965: 28-32, 135-6), every star is a *self-surpassing surpasser* of all (of all the things in its series). Every star is divine.



**Figure 5.** The pagan image.

## 8. The God and the Goddess

According to the reasoning so far, the world tree is defined by three laws. The *initial law* states that there exists exactly one initial universe. The One and the Good work together to produce the initial universe. The initial universe models the empty set, which lies at the bottom of the iterative hierarchy, on the surface of the earth. It lies on the surface of the earth like a seed or an ovum waiting to be fertilized. The power of the Good is the power of self-surpassing. This power in action resembles a bolt of lightning, which travels downwards from the sun, to strike the empty world on the surface of the earth. That lightning bolt fertilizes the empty world; it fertilizes the seed; it transforms the seed into the initial universe. This initial universe is simple. But the powers of the One and the Good are united in this initial universe. They are at work together in its logical interiority. Here then is the first and lowest node in the world tree.

The *successor law* ensures that every universe is surpassed in every possible way by some improved successors. The successor law has two parts. Its first part states that there is always at least one way to improve any universe. Each way to improve it defines the *abstract form* of some successor universe. The existence of at least one better successor form is ensured by the power of the One, which is the power of self-consistency. These abstract forms are the *better potentials* of the universe. So the first part of the successor law moves from the actuality of each universe to its better potentials. It moves from concrete actuality to abstract potentiality. The second part of the successor law asserts that every universe improves itself in every possible way. More precisely, for every universe, for every way to improve it, there exists some *successor universe* which is improved in that way. Since the ways to improve any universe are its potentials, and since its successor universes are actual, the second part moves from potentiality to actuality. Potentiality is resolved into actuality by the power of the Good, which is the power of self-surpassing. Hence the One and the Good interact. The two parts of the successor law work together to fill the world tree with successors.

The *limit law* ensures that every progression of universes is surpassed in every possible way by some improved limits. The limit law also has two parts. Its first part states that there is always at least one way to improve any progression. Each way to improve it defines the *abstract form* of some limit universe. The existence of at least one better limit form is ensured by the power of the One, which is the power of self-consistency. These abstract forms are the *better potentials* of the progression. So the first part of the limit law moves from the actuality of each progression to its better potentials. It moves from concrete actuality to abstract potentiality. The second part of the limit law states that every progression improves itself in every possible way. More precisely, for every progression, for every way to improve it, there exists some *limit universe* which is improved in that way. Since the ways to improve any progression are potentials, and since its limit universes are actual, this second part moves from potentiality to actuality. Here again potentiality is resolved into actuality by the power of the Good, which is the power of self-surpassing. Here again the One and the Good interact. They work together to fill the world tree with limit universes.

The powers of the One and the Good interact in all three laws. When they work in the world tree, they can be referred to as the *opening* and *closing* powers. The opening power is the *mutative power*. It moves from actuality to potentiality; it reveals the novel potentials of every thing. The closing power is the *selective power*. It moves from potentiality to actuality; it selects all and only the better potentials of every thing. By interacting, these two powers cause universes to beget universes. A similar picture of cosmic begetting was painted by the ancient Stoics (Dio Chrysostom, *SVF* 2.622; Hume, 1779: part 5; Hahn, 1977). They argued for a single series of universes. Each universe in the series is a self-replicating organism. It contains male and female generative powers, whose sexual interaction produces the next universe. They portrayed this cosmic procreation as the *hierogamy of Hera and Zeus* (Hahn, 1977: 61). At this point, some may be tempted to directly map the opening and closing powers onto the male and female sexes. This temptation should be resisted in favor of a closer analysis.<sup>xiii</sup>

The opening power goes from actuality to potentiality; it is the power of mutation. The closing power goes from potentiality to actuality; it is the power of selection. When male and female organisms reproduce, *both powers* are at work in each sex. Since they both work in each sex, it would be inaccurate to refer to one as male and the other as female. The powers work differentially in each sex. Since biological potentiality lies mainly in the female gametes, the opening power predominates in females; hence it is appropriate to refer to the opening power as a *gynomic power*. Since fertilization actualizes biological potentials, the closing power predominates in males; hence it is appropriate to refer to the closing power as an *andromic power*. It would be far too narrow to identify these powers with Zeus and Hera. They are demiurgic powers. Hence we refer to the andromic power only generically as *the god* and to the gynomic power only generically as *the goddess*. The god and the goddess in this circle have very close counterparts in many versions of the god and goddess in Wicca (Cunningham, 2004: 4-10; Sabin, 2011: ch. 7; Silver Elder, 2011: 18). Of course, the god and the goddess also play roles in paganisms beyond Wicca. The pairing of the god and the goddess has a counterpart in the Aztec concept of an *inamic* pair (Maffie, 2014: ch. 3).

The god and the goddess emerge in the world tree. Many Wiccans associate the goddess with our Earth and the god with our Sun. However, our Earth and Sun are not

elements; on the contrary, they are particular things in our universe. Hence they are merely concrete *icons* or *symbola* of the demiurgic powers active in all things. Additionally, it is important to stress that neither the god nor the goddess are theistic deities. They are not powerful bodiless rational agents (Swinburne, 1968: 199). They are not persons. Persons will only emerge in complex universes after long evolution. Once again, paganism is atheistic. The god and the goddess are natural demiurgic forces. The Stoics thought of deities as demiurgic forces (Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 2.71). Sallustius also thought of them as demiurgic forces (*On the Gods and the World*, sec. 6). They manifest themselves in every universe and in every thing in every universe. They manifest themselves in every organism. Because the god and goddess are now present in our circle of reasoning, we pause in ritual to give thanks: thank you, god and goddess, for showing yourselves to us. Through your love-making, your world-making, you populate the world tree. Along with all things, you bring us into being.

## 9. Opening the Circle of Reasoning

We have invited the god and the goddess, and they have come. Demiurgic god, demiurgic goddess, thank you for joining us. Stay if you can, go if you must. We bid you hail and farewell. We have invited our world tree, and it has come. Great world tree, thank you for joining us. Stay if you can, go if you must. We bid you hail and farewell. We have invited the elements into the circle of reasoning, and they too have come. Holy fire, holy light, holy air, holy earth, holy water, thank you for joining us. Stay if you can, go if you must. We bid you hail and farewell. Our work in ritual is done.

Beginning with the center, we therefore dissolve our circle of reasoning. As we dissolve this circle, we release the vertical axis. Powers of the heights and powers of the depths, hail and farewell. We release the quarters in the order contrary to our Sun. Powers of the north, powers of the west, powers of the south, powers of the east, hail and farewell. We stand together in the center, where we remain bound together as equals, with even greater virtue. *The circle is open.* Blessed be.

## Notes

<sup>i</sup>It is traditional. Plato opens the *Timaeus* with an invocation to a god (27b-d; see 48d-e). Iamblichus opens *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* with an invocation to the gods. Augustine opens *The City of God* by calling upon God; Anselm opens the *Proslogion* with a prayer. It is appropriate because analytic theology is a kind of devotion or reverence (Wood, 2014). But the reverence here is pagan.

<sup>ii</sup>The Latinx philosopher Gloria Anzaldúa casts a circle and calls the elements at the end of “Now let us shift...” (2002). But the end of that essay begins the shifting.

<sup>iii</sup>Wicca was founded in Britain in the mid twentieth century by Gerald Gardner. He was partly inspired by the Neoplatonic writings of Sallustius (Gardner, 1959: 171-4).

<sup>iv</sup>Following Gardner (1959: 17), many Wiccans refer to an ultimate deity. It is often characterized as an immanent energy, force, or power. See Buckland (1986: 19); Cunningham (2004: 9); Silver Elder (2011: 9, 18); Sabin (2011: 25-7, 42-3).

<sup>v</sup>Cunningham (2004: 123) starts with the One. Smith (2005: 18-20) starts with the One and progresses through the Two and the Many.

<sup>vi</sup>Plotinus quotes are checked against both Armstrong and McKenna translations. For readability, the McKenna translation is used unless otherwise noted.

<sup>vii</sup>Why is there something rather than nothing? Tillich says that in asking this “everything disappears in the abyss of possible non-being; even a god would disappear if he were not being-itself” (1951: 164). We replace “a god” with the One.

<sup>viii</sup>Peirce (1965) begins with nothingness (1.175, 6.33, 6.214, 6.215, 8.317). This nothingness is a powerful potentiality for being (6.217). This nothingness negates itself (6.219). He says “Thus the zero of bare possibility, by evolutionary logic, leapt into the unit of some quality” (6.220). The system of Platonic forms emerges from this self-negation (6.189-6.213). However, Peirce is obscure on many of these points.

<sup>ix</sup>Here the self-negation of non-being justifies the One. Plotinus gave a cosmological argument for the One (*Enneads*, 5.4.1; see Gerson, 1994: ch. 1). It resembles the Leibnizian Sufficient Reason Argument (Leibniz, 1697). These arguments use the structure of dependency to justify some radically independent entity. All the distinctions among beings (such as simple versus complex, contingent versus necessary) depend on this radically independent entity. All the distinctions among beings depend on some *ground* in which they are unified. That ground is being-itself.

<sup>x</sup>Although much of the Rhizome remains (symbolically) under the earth, much of it also extends up into the sky. An axiom which asserts some cardinal number can be thought of as existing on that same rank in the abstract sky.

<sup>xi</sup>As the books in the treasury rise into the transfinite, their improvements can become densely ordered. Standard mathematical techniques define this density.

<sup>xii</sup>Philosophical pagans do not wish to repeat the sexual essentialism found in Stoicism or other ancient paganisms. The Stoics thought of the male Zeus as active form; the female Hera was passive matter. We reject all essentializing tables of opposites. The god and the goddess are not a heteronormative binary couple.

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