The Influence of the Conceptual Development of Nature in Western Civilisation on the Perennial Philosophy

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Abstract

The inquiry on nature has long been the subject of philosophical exposition since the time of the Greeks. Nature was considered by them as inanimate and material, thus leading to the corruption of the understanding of being in relation to nature in the West. This gave rise to the disenchantment of nature through a secularising philosophical programme which appropriated key concepts divested from its truth to construct a secular worldview. This worldview is such that it rejected any form of non-empirical or metaphysical reality in nature. In response to this conflict in the West, there are those who take the position of a *perennialist* in reference to the *philosophia perennis* (literally "eternal wisdom"), who believe in the rediscovery of *the sense of the sacred* through revival of the "tradition" inherent in every religion of the pre-modern age. The perennial aspect is an eternal, universal and permanent

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underlying spiritual method that comprehends nature which was claimed to be derived from various religions and traditions. This paper is meant to illustrate the traces of secular framework in the perennial philosophy. The discussions are divided into two sections. The first section will look into the transference of meanings of nature by following the main problems that befit the West: the problems of order, God and finally man. The second section will situate the perennialists within the conceptual development of nature in Western civilisation by classifying and comparing particular characteristics of the proponents of the perennial philosophy with others that used the same name to appropriate them in the postmodern movement to reclaim the meaning of nature. The latter section also offers a brief overview of their concept of genuine cosmologies in every tradition as a means to revive the sense of the sacred.

Keywords
Disenchantment, re-enchantment, nature, cosmology, tradition, sacred, secularisation, philosophy, order, god, man, perennial philosophy.

Introduction

The inquiry on nature has long been the subject of philosophical exposition since the time of the Greeks. The term "inquiry" is used to highlight their quest for understanding what lies beneath the answer to the order of creation or the cosmos; to which the term "cosmology" is used to depict the study of order in creation. *Nature*, however, was initially a concept of reality that was created by the Greeks to make sense of existence.[1] This inquiry into the concept of nature began as an inquest to uncover the very core of existence. It leads

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1.   Further elaborations on this will be made in the next section.

to other questions such as the idea of change, development, the purpose of creation and the authority of knowledge. Past philosophers, like Thales all the way to Kant, had sought such questions in their quest to understand life in both the physical and metaphysical world.

Robin Collingwood (1889–1943) observed that throughout Western civilisation, the concept of nature had undergone a change of perspective regarding what reality consists of which he referred as the *cosmological movement*. The cosmological movement can be categorised into three phases, namely: 1) Greek: nature is conceived as a living organism, it moves, it is alive and intelligent, continual, and undergoes an all-pervading change; 2) Renaissance: nature as a mechanical and a by-product of an independent autonomous activity of the mind. It is an unchangeable substance or matter; 3) Modern: nature as an inert matter, ever-changing, non-permanent, and evolving.[2] When the transitions of the cosmological understanding of nature are followed closely, the notions underlining the foundations of reality—to which the term "nature" was used—soon evolve to be considered as an arbitrary concept in the present post-modern period such that it has disparaged it from any meanings.

Ultimately, the philosophical foundation of nature considered by the Greeks is both inanimate and material despite the spiritual nuances existing in their cosmology.[3] One problem that Christianity faced in understanding nature can be traced from its conflict[4] between *ratio* and *intellectus* in the authority of providing truth in its encounter with the sophisticated concept

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2. Robin. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; repr.), 3.

3. Gerrard Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 17–18. Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, Powell Lectures on Philosophy at Indiana University (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 4.

4. Fredrick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy Volume 2: Medieval Philosophy* (New York: Image Book, 1st edition 1962, this edition 1993), 13–15; Theodor Gomperz, *Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. Laurie Magnus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905).

of nature presented by the Greeks. This internal conflict within Christianity concerning nature gave birth to secularisation as a philosophical programme.[5] *Secularisation* as expressed by Harvey Cox, is "the losing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed worldviews, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols".[6] However, Cox argues that the principles of secularisation can be traced back from the biblical faith taught in Christianity and suggests that secularisation is to be accepted as a natural progression. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931−), on the other hand, denies this simplistic claim of natural progression and wrote an impressive account[7] on the effects of secularisation to the way we view the world through its three integral components: the disenchantment of *nature*, desacralisation of politics and the deconsecration of values. He says that it is through the *disenchantment of nature*[8]

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5. There are, on the other hand, those who argue that secularisation started from urbanisation and industrialisation, for example, Gordon Graham's *Re-enchantment of the World: Arts versus Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30–9.

6. Harvey Cox quoted from Cornelis Van Peursen in *Secular City* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 2.

7. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993), 22.

8. The term *disenchantment of nature* was popularised by Max Weber as a sociological condition inspired by Friedrich Von Schiller's 'flight of gods' which can be seen in his poetry, *The Gods of Greeks:*

> …What luminous imagination
> Wrapped Truth in Fiction's airy fold,
> Then life's blood flowed throughout creation,
> And, wavelike, o'er its limits rolled.
> In Nature then a nobler merit
> Man recognized with grateful love,
> *And all things felt the hallowed spirit,*
> *Whose charm betrayed the Gods above…*

Heinrich Düntzer, *Life of Schiller: Poetical Works of Friedrich Von Schiller* trans. Percy E. Pinkerton ed. Nathan Haskell Dole (Boston: The Aldine Publishing Company, 1910), 156. Despite the initial sociological intended meaning of *disenchantment of nature* by Weber, Jeffrey E. Green of Harvard University wrote an influential essay on the "Two Meanings

which brings chaos to the Western civilisation and gradually to others.[9] The effect of the disenchantment of nature is further explained by al-Attas in *Islam and Secularism* as follows:

> …reduction of nature to a mere object of utility having only a functional significance and value for scientific and technical management of man; and in the latter case, in the reduction of man of his transcendent nature as spirit emphasizing his humanity and physical being, his secular knowledge and power and freedom, which led to his deification, and so to his reliance upon his own rational efforts of enquiry into his origins and final destiny, and upon his own knowledge thus acquired which he now *sets up as the criterion for judging the truth or falsehood*[italics mine] of his own assertions.[10]

Al-Attas emphasises that the process of *disenchantment of nature* gradually leads to the corruption of the understanding of being in relation to nature when all spiritual elements—that were considered as the source of creation—are divested from nature and consequently of being. Thus, al-Attas explains that this creates a perpetual state of doubt and inner tension as a result of contradiction of values in one's self and one's source of being. It is at this point where the internal conflict[11] of

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of Disenchantment: Sociological Condition vs. Philosophical Act—Reassessing Max Weber's Thesis of the Disenchantment of the World," *Journal Philosophy and Theology* 17, no. 1 & 2 (1956). In the article, he elucidates the other unseen philosophical significance of *disenchantment of nature* as an activity, a way of thinking and a style of ethical discourse that creeps into the process of disenchantment which develops itself into secularisation, rationalisation and the crisis of meaning. An action that Weber pronounced as something that modern man must reconcile with, making disenchantment as something that should be practised due to the "inescapable condition of our historical conditions." Max Weber, *From Max Weber, Essays in Sociology* trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

9. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 32.

10. Ibid., 38.

11. This will be elaborated further on page 26 onwards.

Christianity which shapes the Western culture and civilisation occurred. Western civilisation in this regard is not meant to be understood geographically, instead, it should be seen as part of the effusion of Western philosophy and life. Al-Attas has rightly defined the "Western civilization" as:

> …the civilization that has evolved out of the *historical fusion of cultures, philosophies, values and aspirations of ancient Greece and Rome* [Italics mine]; their amalgamation with Judaism and Christianity, and their further development and formation by the Latin, Germanic, Celtic and Nordic peoples. From ancient Greece is derived the philosophical and epistemological elements and the foundations of education and of the ethics and aesthetics; from Rome the elements of law and statecraft and government, from Judaism and Christianity the elements of religious faith; and from Latin, Germanic, Celtic and Nordic peoples their independent and national spirit and traditional values, and the development and advancement of the natural and physical sciences and technology which they, together with the Slavic peoples, have made very significant contributions to Western civilization in the sphere of knowledge and the inculcation of the rational and scientific spirit, but the knowledge and the rational and scientific spirit have been recast and remoulded to fit the crucible Western culture so that they have become fused and amalgamated with all the other elements that form the character and personality of Western civilization.[12]

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12. Ibid., 134. The notion or aspect of civilisation may differ from history books written by contemporary scholars that view civilisation as a human construction like in Peter N. Stearns's *Western Civilization in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Stearns mentions that "Civilizations are usually defined by some combination of distinctive features in politics, society, and culture," 37. They view the definition of civilisation as an all-encompassing structure built upon refinements of societal life of law, order, justice and authority on religious teachings that pre-supposes a "manner of acting" and situate a "state of being." The former perspective looks at civilisation in its physical and external aspect, whereas the latter on metaphysical and internal.

Nevertheless, other earlier civilisations have contributed to the spirit of Western civilisation other than the Greeks, namely the Egyptians. However, it was the Greek civilisation that largely influenced the present Western civilisation with its *historical fusion of cultures, philosophies, values and aspiration*.[13] In view of this, it is the very engagement of the Greek's philosophical and epistemological elements that seeks to escape the clutches of the gods and goddesses of Graeco-Roman tradition which characterise the West.

In response to the all-pervading conflict in the West of secularisation and its effects on contemporary societies, there are those who seek to solve the problem through various attempts at confronting the modern account of reality through their conception of nature using principles imbedded in traditional teachings without understanding the fundamental tenets of the secularising effects of their thinking framework. This paper seeks to show how the conceptual development of nature in the West has a fundamental significance on the thinking framework of those who take the position of a *perennialist* in reference to the *philosophia perennis* (literally,

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13. Adi Setia elaborates and challenges the well-known assumptions of the originality of sources in Greek science. He proves that the sources of Greek science as opposed to Greek philosophy have its roots from their encounter with the Egyptian civilisation's scientific tradition; such as architecture, astronomy, mathematics and medicine. One can ascribe the Egyptians the originality in their sciences rather than their philosophical endeavours due to the fact that the Egyptian civilisation carries a more "factual" or "direct" nature in transmitting its sciences, thus more difficult to refute. Whereas the Greeks leaned more towards a "conceptual" or "abstruse" way, hence were open to a more "subjective" interpretations. This perhaps further explains why there exists a *problem of order* in the Greek philosophers, whose sciences have been a series of appropriation and adaptations from a bigger civilisation that influenced them in the way they view the physical world. The order of cosmos presented by the Egyptian astronomy and mathematical methods proved the existence of an order, but for the Greeks, holding on to their gods that are prone to chaos made it difficult to comprehend the orderly universe. Adi Setia Md Dom, "The Genesis of Greek Science in 'The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man,'" *Al-Shajarah: Journal of The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (ISTAC) 4, no. 2 (1999): 127.

"eternal wisdom"), who believe in the revival of the *sense of the sacred*; to see nature as a fusion between *form* and *substance* that sets in a dual reality of *esoterism* and *exoterism*.[14] Frithjof Schuon (1907–1998) was one of the proponents of this theory. René Guénon (1886–1952), Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933–) and Titus Burckhardt (1908–1984) are among the names associated with contemporary works in support of this similar framework of *perennialism*.[15]

Therefore, the first section of this article will elaborate on the process of the *disenchantment of nature*. This is to give a historical overview of how these phases contribute to a perennialist view of *nature*—that *nature* is considered as an object of manifestation which acts as a symbol that points to one truth and that man's discernment of it can be diverse according to his "modes and degrees or receptivity and intellectual needs."[16] Such a deliberation is also important so as to have a clear idea of the effects of secularisation through the cosmological movements from the Greeks all the way through to what has resulted in the current postmodern view of nature.

Consequently, we will look at the attempts of re-discovering the re-enchantment aspect of nature by those affected by the disenchantment; one of those attempts which

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14. One example of the response against the rampant disenchantment of nature in the West can be seen in the concern shown by Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (Ontario: Mandala Books, 1976). Moreover, the most recent inculcation of the perennial solution to re-enchant nature is by a perennial physicist, Wolfgang Smith, who attempted to tie the perennial philosophy to the quantum theory, see *The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology: Contemporary Science in Light of Tradition* (Oakton: Foundation for Traditional Studies, 2003), reprinted in 2013 as *Ancient Wisdom and Modern Misconceptions: A Critique of Contemporary Scientism* (Washington: Angelico Press, 2013).

15. The perennialists are generally associated with the term *traditionist* due to the popularity of the idea of *tradition* that Guénon and his friends contested within the Western milieu. Among the other perennialists who do not subscribe to Islam are Huston Smith, T. S. Eliot, Marco Pallis, Henri Corbin, William Chittick, John Hick and Lord Northbourne to name a few.

16. Frithjof Schuon, "Understanding and Believing," *The Sword of Gnosis: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Tradition and Symbolism*, ed. by Jacob Needleman in The Penguin Metaphysical Library (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books Inc., 1974), 402.

then leads them into *perennialism*. The integral factor that leads to the disenchantment of nature can be divided into three problems which befit the West since the classical age: the *problem of Order* (*cosmos*), the *problem of God* and the *problem of Man*. These three key elements became the fundamental discussions of perennialists to propose the solution of the need to restore the *sense of the sacred*. The proposal came not only from Schuon, but also from later followers such as Nasr, Burckhardt, and others.[17]

The latter section is an attempt to classify a particular perennial philosophy compared with other similarly-termed philosophy to appropriate it in the postmodern movement in understanding the nuances involved as well as to analyse the perennial conception of nature through its notions of cosmologies within traditions.

The Conceptual Development of Nature in Western Civilisation

The Disenchantment of Nature

The Greek philosophers' inquiry over nature was a pursuit to explain how the order of things was established; it is the search for the "universal substance."[18] In order to trace the

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17. Books by Seyyed Hossein Nasr: *Man and Nature* (Il: Kazi Publications, 1968) and *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); as well as by Titus Burckhardt, "Cosmology and Modern Science," *Sword of Gnosis*.

18. Naddaf, *Greek Nature*, 1. Miller divided the pre-Socratic philosophers into three groups on the account of how they view the "universal substance" or *physis*. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes and Heraclitus believe that the underlying substance is physical in nature or of sensible substance, therefore reduced nature of all things to be made of water, indeterminate substance, air, earth-water and fire respectively. On the other hand, a more abstract conception of reality which captures the *physis* of things comes from the works of Pythagoras who thinks everything is essentially *numbers*, and Parmenides, whose conviction that the underlying substance must have been outside of the sensible world. Hence, it is a *being* that is one and immutable. In the meantime, the third group sought to identify nature as a plurality

original understanding of the meaning of this "substance", one must understand that during the pre-Socratic time, nature came from the term that bore a heavy social and cultural connotation which they termed as *physis*, φύσις. *Physis* carries in it cosmogonic myths that were considered as the grand narrative of how something real came to existence. The pre-Socratics' view of nature produced rationalisation from their imagination in the shape of cosmogonic myths that featured affairs of the gods and goddesses with all its tragedies and dramas which stemmed from the socio-political aspect of human experiences:

> Thus, in order to explain how the present [pre-Socratic] social order came into being, the cosmogonic myth must necessarily begin with the birth of the world (a cosmogony), then recount the birth of mankind (an anthropogony), and finally relate the birth of society (a sociogony or politogony). For ancient peoples, society comes into existence without a real past in the sense it only reflects the result of a series of events that took place in *illo tempore* [that-ideal-time], that is, before the "chronological" time of the people who narrate the myth.[19]

The term *physis* of the pre-Socratics is not merely a static concept that suggests it being only a cause, or a progression, or an effect, but rather, it is inclusive of all three.[20] Hence, *physis* is rightly defined together as the origin, the process and the result

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of substances. Empedocles says it is made of four main elements, fire-water-air-earth; Anaxagoras says all things are of infinitely divisible particles which he calls *seeds* dominated by *mind*; Leucippus and Democritus both think that everything arises mechanically, therefore, it is a coagulation of irreducible substance called *atom*. Ed. L. Miller, *Questions that Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Boston: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1987), 58–60.

19. Naddaf, *Greek Nature*, 4.
20. Four interpretations of *physis* (1) primordial matter; (2) process; (3) primordial matter and process; (4) origin, process and result. Ibid., 3–4.

that refer to the understanding of the origin and growth of the universe from beginning to the end.[21] Later on, despite the gradual progress on reason as the source of knowledge amongst the Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, the concept of *physis* was nevertheless still used and was not neglected as it gave a window to present a new conception of the world where the mystical explanations or causes of the origins of the world replaced with a more rational and natural ones.[22] Nevertheless, Copleston argued that the pre-Socratic Greeks should rightly be called cosmologists rather than philosophers:

> Since they were concerned with the *ultimate* nature of the world, their theories rank as philosophical; but since they had not yet formed any clear distinction between *spirit* and *matter*, [Italics mine] and since their question was largely prompted by the fact of material change, their answer was couched for the most part in terms and concepts taken from matter. They found the ultimate "stuff" of the universe to be some kind of matter—naturally enough—whether the water of Thales, the Indeterminate of Anaximander, the air of Anaximenes, the fire of or the atoms of Leucippus, and so a large part of their subject-matter would be claimed by physical scientists of today as belonging to their province.[23]

In fact, according to Gilson, despite their efforts to find the one "universal order," free from the machinations of gods and goddesses, the Greeks found it difficult to accept this "universal order" to be ascribed to or as a proof of the notion of a one true God. This is due to the heavy participation

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21. *The Greek-English Lexicon* compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968) defines φύσις as the origin, the natural form or constitution of a person or thing as the result of growth and the regular order of nature, 1964–5.
22. Naddaf, *Greek Nature*, 64.
23. Frederick Copleston, *History of Philosophy Volume 1: Greece and Rome* (New York: Image Books, 1st Edition 1962, this edition 1993), 78.

of their gods in the ordering of their daily lives.[24] It is part of the *problem of Order* experienced by the Greeks. When the Greeks sought for a "universal substance" as the fundamental element of the *cosmos*, it was initially out of their admiration towards nature in which they sought to find "explanatory connections between the things of the world"[25] which were carefully separated by their gods.[26] Therefore, when Thales or Anaximenes for example, proposed a universal substance to be of water and air respectively, it did not correspond with their pluralistic conception of god at that time. Instead, it only ran parallel, never to meet in rational terms.[27] The "universal substance" could never be regarded as gods since the substance was considered as material, singular and uniform; while their conception of gods was considered as spiritual, multiple and pluralistic. Perhaps this conflicted division between truth and reality by the early thinkers among the Greeks was later adopted by the Christian theologians as an alibi to validate the claim of their monotheistic Christian God that clarified the logical inconsistency of the Greeks.[28] Gibbon mentions that one of the

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24. Gilson outlined this phenomenon on how the Greeks encountered with contradictions in their conception of nature as opposed to their gods. The former conception seems to be representing a sort of unity in the creation of this world, whereas the latter of plurality. Gilson, 13. This is what Copleston mentioned as the *Problem of One and the Many* suffered by the Greeks. Copleston, *History of Philosophy* 1, 77.

25. Andrea Falcon, *Aristotle and the Science of Nature: Unity without Uniformity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1. Andrea Falcon investigated the way Aristotle presented his inquiry over nature and later on his attempts to form an organised science to investigate the world, a single science—the natural sciences.

26. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 40, 100.

27. Gilson commented that the pluralistic concept of god at that time was the result from a mythical method, whereas the material explanation of *physis* was the result from a rational method. Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 4.

28. Harvey Cox related this situation to the analysis of the characteristic of cities, he quoted from a French historian, "Fustel de Coulanges believes that what was missing from the Greek and Roman "cities" was the universal God of Christianity...," Fustel de Coulanges goes on, "…was not the domestic religion of any family, the national religion of any city or of a race. It belonged neither to a caste nor to a corporation. From its first appearance, it called to itself the whole human race." *Secular City*, 12.

secondary causes of the progress of Christian religion among the Romans was the weakness of the Polytheistic argument as follows:

> They [Polytheists] were abandoned, almost without control, to the natural workings of a superstitious fancy. The accidental circumstances of their life and situation determined the object as well as the degree of their devotion; and as long as their adoration was successively prostituted to a thousand deities, it was scarcely possible that their hearts could be susceptible of a very sincere or lively passion for any of them.[29]

Despite the fact that Christianity had vanquished the gods of the Greeks, the coming of Christianity in the West did not rejuvenate the intellectual atmosphere. Instead, it brought it to a halt, and developed a culture that pronounced heresies at every small step one took when attempting to explain about the religion. They developed an inquisitive culture that led to new discoveries in science that shook certain theological values which then saw an official confrontation between reason and revelation,[30] characteristically referred to as the Dark Ages (between the 6th–14th Century), a period when Christianity's experience with the *problem of God* was at its peak; it had a tendency of adopting a very firm principle of "blind faith in the absolute truth of Christian Revelation."[31] There were attempts to relate reason and revelation through the forming of principles of *faith* in the early days of Christianity as seen in the works of Augustine and others such as Anselm (1036–

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29. Henry Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol.1 in The Great Books of Western World (Illinois: University of Chicago: 1952; 3rd Printing 1990), 200.

30. Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, the Richards Lectures in The University of Virginia (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939).

31. Gilson quoted Paul concerning the attitude of Christians at that time towards philosophy, "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy, and vain deceit; according to the tradition of men…and not according to Christ." (Col. 2: 8), Ibid., 4, 9.

1086), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Bonaventura (1221–1274), Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), and up to Vincenzo Gioberti (1801–1852).[32]

The Christian theologians necessarily required an adaptation of philosophical skills of the Greek philosophers to come to their aid and shed more light on how to understand the problematic nature of God. With regard to this, there occurred three groups that were called the Tertullian, Augustinian and Latin Averroes (or Thomist) families in the Christian tradition.[33] In the beginning, the Tertullians considered that it was sufficient to have faith without rational understanding, assenting to what was revealed by God even if it was absurd—an epitome of *credo quia absurdum* ("I believe because it is absurd").[34] On the other hand, the Augustinians preferred to place rational understanding after the act of believing, prompting them with *credo ut intelligam* ("I believe so that I may understand"). For the Thomists however, they denied such ways of rationalising, and would instead propose a more cognitive approach to *faith*, which was through the commentaries of Aristotelian philosophy by Averroes that influenced Aquinas.[35]

In the meantime, while Christianity was caught between its own "absurd" credo in the Dark Ages, intellectual progress of scientific works by Muslims continued to grow in the southern part of Europe. It was not until 900 years later did we see a total amalgamation of the Graeco-Roman tradition with Christianity through the cultivation and translations of Greek works by Muslim scholars which benefitted the

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32. Ibid., 22.
33. See in detail in Gilson, *Reason and Revelation*.
34. A famous paraphrase by Tertullian's (133–240) *prosuscredibileest, quiaineptumest* (it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd).
35. On the contrary, Averroes formulated his idea of "faith" to his belief *(īmān)* to Allah. Due to that, the Thomistic claim to have had incorporated reason with revelation to explain the truth and reality of God was still a failure; therefore, the proof of Christianity being a fully revealed religion is still questionable.

Christian theologians.[36] The most influential are the works of Avicenna (*Ibn Sīna*, 980–1037) and Averroes (*Ibn Rushd*, 1126–1198).[37] They commented on Aristotle's thesis of causality and popularised the Neo-Platonic philosophy through their intellectual scientific commentaries. Both were responsible for the rise of scholasticism in the Christian tradition through the works and influence of Thomas Aquinas.[38] Scholasticism gave a significant contribution to the West as it encouraged rational and scientific attitudes in dealing with theological matters. Through Aquinas, the Christians later adopted the Aristotelian

36. For more accounts on the history of Arabic translations, Dimitri Gutas's *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ʿAbbasid Society (2nd–4th/5th–10thc.)*, *Arabic Thought and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996); for a recent and extensive work on Islamic history of scientific traditions, refer to Alparslan Açıkgenç, *Islamic Scientific Tradition in History* (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2014).

37. Averroes made a commentary on Avicenna's idea of "accidentality of existence" by saying that existence is merely an accident, and hence, every essence can be understood without knowing the existence. Izutsu made known that the explanation of the reality of essence and existence made by Averroes towards Avicenna had been largely misinterpreted. Izutsu elucidates the misunderstanding by illustrating an example of how the accidentality of existence occurs in Avicenna's mind. "We constantly use in our daily conversation propositions whose subject is a noun and whose predicate is an adjective: for example: "The flower is white," "This table is brown" etc. On the same model we can easily transform an existential proposition like: "The table is" or "The table exists" into "The table is existent". Thus transformed, "existence" is just an adjective denoting a quality of the table. And the proposition "The table is brown," for in both cases the subject is a noun denoting a substance called "table," while the predicate is an adjective indicating grammatically a poverty or accident of the substance. It is on this level only, that Avicenna speaks of existence being an "accident" of essence. Otherwise expressed, it is at the level of logical or grammatical analysis of reality that it makes sense to maintain the accidentality of existence." Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Reality of Existence* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), 3.

38. Thomas Aquinas was very much influenced by Averroes to the extent that he was classified in a group called Latin Averroes. Following through from the misinterpretation of Averroes on the accidentality of existence of Avicenna, Aquinas later on developed the discourse of essence and existence to further explain the existence of God. He was responsible for the separation of *essence* and *existence* in creatures which later on led to a problematic epistemology in understanding the existence of God in the West. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 9–10.

philosophy with a Parmenidean epistemological framework. It is a framework that separates objects of knowledge attained by sense perception as "an illusion" with existence in reality. This concludes that since God's existence is the "only" real Being, He cannot be fathomed by man. This results in an impossibility for man to make sense of God.[39]

> …[O]ne problem at any rate connected with man as the knowing subject was raised in Pre-Socratic philosophy, that of the relation between sense-experience and reason. Thus Parmenides, starting with the notion of the One, and finding himself unable to explain *coming-to-be* and *passing-away* [italics mine]—which are given in sense-experience—set aside the evidence of the sense as illusion, and proclaimed the sole validity of reason which alone is able to attain the Real and Abiding. But the problem was not treated in any full or adequate manner, and when Parmenides denied the validity of sense-perception, he did so because of a metaphysical doctrine or assumption, rather than from any prolonged consideration of the nature of sense-perception and the nature of non-sensuous thought.[40]

As Christianity expanded in the West, the dispute between *ratio* and *intellectus* can be rigorously seen during the scholastic period where Aquinas tried hard to distinguish from Augustine's *intellectus* which later caused the birth of positivistic and materialistic methodology in acquiring knowledge, denunciating anything incomprehensible via one's reason, for example, of the existence of God. The rise of extreme rationalism placed man in a state of being left to wonder alone in the universe, only able to grasp his surroundings with his

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39. Ibid., 9.
40. Copleston, *History of Philosophy 1*, 79. On the accounts of the *problem of the One and Many*, Parmenides held firm in his belief of the universal substance to be one and immutable, he denied the existence of change, motion and multiplicity by saying it is all just an illusion of the senses.

effort through science and technology. This was the beginning of the problem of modern man (*problem of Man*) in Western philosophical investigations.

The post-Socratic period witnessed a turn in Greek philosophy when "natural phenomenon" was conceived under the cause and effect framework. This framework was championed by Aristotle who purported that causality is moved by a Primal power or Being of which the material, formal, efficient, and final cause were considered. The Aristotelian idea of the *Prime Mover* carried the *disenchantment* of nature programme further by explaining nature in a mechanistic manner to which God was displaced from their cosmology. The Greeks understood the spiritual significance of the order in nature as purely mystical, devoid of reason, overwhelmed by myths and filled with unfounded proofs of creation. This led Christianity to experience a "religio-philosophical confrontation" with the Greek cosmology because the previous mystical explanations or causes of the origins of the world were then replaced with reason and natural proof through speculations and doubt. Such a state can be best described as the fate of Christianity's *naturalistic rationalism*[41] by which they viewed the world.[42] By *naturalistic,* it meant that nature was explained and defined according to what was inherent in itself that the human mind can appreciate. Nature at that stage was to be regarded as a mere appreciation in and of itself,

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41. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 33–4.
42. Al-Attas captures this perfectly as follows:

> Elements of Greek cosmology which stressed the paramount role of the intelligence as the prime means by which man is able to interpret the spiritual significance of nature were then still prevalent, and this obviously led to a confrontation with Christian theology which had come under the sway of naturalistic rationalism. The outcome of this religio-philosophical confrontation was that Christian theology began to suppress the role of intelligence, and hence also the knowledge of spiritual truth….

Ibid., 34.

a self-sustaining or self-containing system that reason could understand. The self-sustaining conception expounded by Aristotle was important in the making of an organised body of science called the natural sciences which sought to investigate the unified causes of things.

The mechanistic conception of causality as an epistemological overview of the world continued to grow through the scientific programme of Galileo (1564–1642)[43] and Newton (1642–1727). Galileo regarded nature as something that is non-self-creative and has a cause other than itself and Newton formulated a natural philosophy through the Galilean cosmology called the "experimental philosophy" in which "the only kind of time is relative time, the only kind of space is relative space, and the only kind of motion is relative motion".[44] It presumes that nature exists on its own, independent, external, not created and eternally existing. This isolation of things can be said as an act of systematically separating its significance from not only of mythical or magical values, but most of all devoid of the dependency of a Creator. *Rationalism*, on the other hand, suggests the idea that man can know and define truth without the help of God and merely through the discovery of the 'laws of nature' in the Aristotelian framework of causality.

The search for the "universal substance" was then pursued religiously to a great extent. In addition to that, it brought together the epistemological method that was present in the Greek tradition. The West was at the state where they experienced dualism in both the *problem of Order* (that could

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43. During the time of Galileo, nature was reduced to matter outside the mind and nature was studied according to its physical aspects which were dependent upon Galileo's formulation of the *physical*. "The notion of *physical* does not translate into an a priori definite set of properties (as Galileo suggested) but it expresses that reality—all reality has to undergo a *common explanatory framework*" [Italics mine]. Ricardo Manzotti, "Galileo Rebunked: A Neutral Foundation for Nature," *Teoria: Rethinking Nature—Burning Issues*, ed. Flavia Moncori, 2014/1, 58. Thus, everything has to share the same fundamental principle that the modern scientists may agree to call *physical*.

44. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 103–8.

be seen in their philosophy) and the *problem of God* (in their theology) that resulted in an attempt to reconcile the god of Christianity with the "universal substance", both of which characteristically failed to reconcile due to the fact that the original idea of a "universal substance" was regarded by the Greeks as non-personal but "things". As what Gilson suggests:

> To understand this is also to reach the deeply hidden source of Greek mythology, and therefore of Greek religion. The Greek gods are the crude but telling expression of this absolute conviction that since man is somebody and not merely something, the ultimate explanation for what happens to him should rest with somebody, and not merely with something.[45]

The present age that celebrates scientific discoveries and empiricism is the result of this dehellenisation of Christian dogma and the demythologisation of Christian scripture from as early as the 16th Century.[46] Rationalism has undermined the blind belief in the contingency of created things and its connection with the Divine; nature eventually—in the words of Christian worldview—became "profane" and separated from what is "sacred". Consequently, the *disenchantment of nature* led to new and different ways of how the world is viewed or how reality is conceived. Science has stepped in to replace the inherent tendency of explaining the universe with its precise structure of physical nature under the framework of causality.

> In opposition to these teleological methods, the new theory of nature insisted on explanations through efficient causes, which meant explaining all change and process by the action of material things already existing at the commencement of the change. The assumption that change must be explained in this way is already a conscious principle in the philosophers of the sixteenth century.[47]

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45. Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 22–3.
46. Ibid., 8.
47. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 94.

Nature was then being relegated to a process which involved *change*. The 16th century thinkers regarded *change* as a function of a structure, and therefore insisted on a mathematical qualitative measurement of such a change. As observed by Kuhn, the structure of defining nature was perceived as a shifting of paradigm due to the deconstruction and the reconstruction of definitions within a positivistic framework whereby scientific discoveries based on empirical experiments provide and answer the meaning of life.[48] Nature therefore, has lost its enchantment, divesting itself from spiritual elements—the immanent and transcendent aspect of God from the created world—where God is regarded as a clock maker, who having created His masterpiece, would later leave it to its own intrinsic mechanical activities inherent in it to unfold. Collingwood states:

> Instead of being an organism, the natural world is a machine in the literal and proper sense of the word, an arrangement of bodily parts designed and put together and set going for a definite purpose by an intelligence. Yet for the Greeks, such an intelligence was nature's own; for the Renaissance thinkers, it was the intelligence of something other than nature: the divine creator and ruler of nature. This distinction is the key to all main differences between Greek and Renaissance natural science.[49]

Collingwood observes that such transitions that occur in the appreciation of nature from the Greek cosmology as initially organic. It then developed further as a mechanistic cosmos in the 16th to 18th century, a period known as Renaissance. The mechanistic view of nature led to a separation of the intellect from things that were transcendent. It was referred

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48. Thomas Kuhn, "The Structure of Scientific Revolution," 2nd edition enlarged, *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1970).
49. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, 5.

to as the "mind" whose preoccupation was with nature which then led to the final process of *disenchantment of nature*, namely the *problem of Man*. Hence, Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* "I think therefore I am," acknowledges one's existence only through one's intelligence that is automatically isolated from nature. Nature as an object is no longer part of or more specifically the focus of the search, instead man as the subject is placed on the pedestal, finding meaning on his own and man becomes the measure of truth and reality.

Towards the end of the 17th century, there was a clash between rational thinking that took pride in the exhaustive usage of the mind to know things and the empirical epistemology of materialism. The premise was that everything was made of matter, which in itself could not exist in the mind, leading to the impossibility for one to know anything for certain. Both ideologies had created a distress in the West enough to discourage further philosophical investigations, since there was no longer any connection between mind and matter. This distress can be seen in Kant's (1724–1804) critique of the possibility to *any future metaphysics*[50] that upholds man's intellectual ability to know by holding on to the attitude that man should "dare to be wise!", *sapere aude*; a motto used as a basis for the Enlightenment movement in the 17th to 18th century. Kant's criticism to both ideologies influenced the post-Enlightenment Man of his psychological anxiety of uncertainty in the modern age. The solution to the mind-matter dualism proposed by some, is for man to have the *courage to be*.[51]

On the other hand, alongside this sudden courage that man had acquired through dependency on reason alone, the evolutionary movement in post-19th century had given man

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50. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, the Paul Carus translation, extensively revised by James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988, 7th printing).

51. Paul Tillich, *Courage to be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

"independence" and strived to reach to a state of maturity.[52] The theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1809–1882) in his *Origin of Species* (1859) affected all three ontological, epistemological and axiological state of nature for it provided the very idea of what was meant by change, progress and development. From the 19th century to the present, the cosmological movement have then adopted Darwinian's theory which sees the cosmos as consisting of an ever-changing and evolving matter. Consequential to the aspiration towards "maturity" and the detachment of man from other source of power—a total dependence on one's reason alone—came the cry of agony that "God is dead!"[53] This phase epitomised the *disenchantment of nature* and created anguish and discomfort in the Western man as he began to realise that he was left to his own devices. The proclamation of the death of God marked the mourning period in the 20th and 21st century, where the rising consciousness for new spirituality took place as a reaction of Western man towards this discomfort.

Attempts of Re-enchantment of Nature

Max Weber initiated the discussion in 1917 of the occurrence of the disenchantment of nature in which it was highlighted as:

> [T]he loss of the overarching meanings, animistic connections, magical expectations, and spiritual explanations that had characterized the traditional world, as a result of the ongoing "modern" processes of rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization.[54]

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52. Ibid., 82–3.
53. Friedrich Nietzsche (1884–1900) in his book, *The Gay Science* which was published in 1882, later died after years of mental breakdown.
54. Michael Saler, "Modernity and Enchantment: A Historiographic Review," *American Historical Review* III, no. 3 (June 2006): 695. Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129–56.

The Influence of the Conceptual Development of Nature

Such a philosophical discussion of "disenchantment" among Western thinkers shows signs that they were moving to another phase of re-evaluating their way of thinking. Hence, the effort of re-enchanting nature in the early 20th century in the West was received with mixed emotions. Some would accuse those who participated in it to be exhibiting nostalgic and melancholic symptoms of the anti-modern man, having "fascination with spiritualism and the occult, a vogue for non-Western religions and art, and a turn to aestheticism, neo-paganism, and celebrations of the irrational will."[55] They would go on to relate such symptoms to the coming of the body of thought called "Traditionalism." The solution or steps of re-enchantment by both the *traditionalists* and *traditionists* was by reclaiming the teachings of past traditions. The difference between the two is that the former's reactive solution was to reject and discard the modern in order to embrace the traditional values and practices, whereas the latter sought to bring back the "eternal" and the "universal" wisdom within a tradition. Tradition was considered as it was sacred and supra-human, and aimed at emphasising the transcendent aspect of a human vocation into the modern context, in the case of Schuon, through the *perennial philosophy*.[56]

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55. Saler, *Modernity and Enchantment*, 696–7. Saler listed works done that tried to explain this effect as a "Social Turn," such as by Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (1965; repr. New York: Routledge, 2004); Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2004); Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York; Basic Books, 2002); Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France between the Wars* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).

56. Both the former and the latter approaches to traditionalism are incorrect as they differ subtly in the realm of meanings of what is meant by *values* and *eternal* respectively. The difference between *traditionism* and *traditionalism* is made distinct by Guénon. He regarded the former to be akin to his concept of *Inverse Initiation* towards modernity. *Inverse initiation* is defined by him as an action that changes the way one looks at things into a more traditional aspect rather than modern. *Traditionalism*, on the other hand, is in contrast with the former such that it undergoes an *Opposite/Counter initiation*; it is when one simply counters or reacts to modernity and lands into mere anti-modern

Indeed, it is advantageous to note the characteristics of what entails a movement to be classified as undertaking a re-enchantment of nature. To "re-enchant" is to seek spiritual satisfaction and reformation that gives a total explanation of the *problems of Order, God* and *Man*. The final aim of re-enchantment is to regain spiritual significance in life while is disenchantment aims to create the opposite, that is, achieving a secular life. The response to rediscover the enchanting aspect of nature that occurs among groups in the West is likely due to the fact that they are all affected by the spiritual void of the secular West. The realisation of the problems in the West as they have experienced can be said to be a reaction towards the discomforting agitation of meaningless life—that at the

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discourse. Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*, ed. James R. Wetmore, trans. Arthur Osborne and Richard C. Nicholson, Marco Pallis (Hillsdale, New York: Sophia Perennis, 2001), translated from *La crise du monde moderne* (1927), 28–32. However, there is another definition of *tradition* outside of both the modern and postmodern framework, to which it is termed the *correctly traditional*. *Correctly Traditional* is taken from the definition by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud in which he expressed his worry with the haphazard usage of the term *tradition* in this age. He eludes:

> I emphasize *correctly traditional* because, in my opinion, there is an incorrectly traditional outlook, espoused by an increasingly popular group of scholars and writers based mostly in Western academia, who refer a lot to the teachings of a few great Sufis but colour them with certain pluralistic ideology not acceptable to Islam as understood and practiced by the greatest authorities within the *Ahlul Sunnah wal Jamā'ah*. This incorrectly traditional position argues, for example, that since God is Most Merciful and Just, everything that originates from Him is likewise theologically true and morally good in equal measure. Hence, all religions are essentially the same at the transcendental level, and those Muslims who affirm what has been correctly established from Islamic theological, ethical, and legal perspectives are labelled as exclusivists, radicals, bigots, and others.

In Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "Fethullah Gulen's Educational Philosophy and Methods: A Preliminary Outline," *Fethullah Gulen Chair*, (2011). http://www.fethullahgulenchair.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=952:fethullahgulens-educational-philosophy-and-methods-a-preliminary-outline&catid=96:news&Itemid=288 (accessed on 14 June 2013).

final stage of its process, man is left in a state of helpless and hopeless pursuit of happiness by compromising the idea of a tragic life.

In discussing re-enchantment and disenchantment, it does not mean that it only occurred in between chronological events of historical development of scientific progress. Instead, it was primarily a process that involved interactions between different cosmologies in different traditions.[57] Ultimately, the root of the inception can be found by investigating one's interpretation of Reality and how this Reality represents a cosmos. The question that should be posed to them is how does one measure total re-enchantment and disenchantment? When two different cosmologies meet, what determines the triumph of one over the other? Is it about the strength of the argument or the validity of the truth? Such questions are especially relevant to be posed to those who claim to have found the truth in their concept of "spirituality." Certainly, the concept of spirituality must be further examined in the course of one's pursuit to give a spiritual significance to nature. At present it is evident, especially in the West, that there are even those who claim to accept spirituality but not religion.[58] The article titled "Spirituality without Spirits" defines being

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57. Titus Burckhardt, Schuon's childhood friend and common advocate of the perennial philosophy is one of those who devoted a large portion of his writings in traditional cosmology which he calls the *Cosmologia Perennis* which he first introduced in his article in French, "The Cosmological Perspective" in 1948 which later on was added in *The Essential Titus Burckhardt: Reflections on Sacred Art, Faiths and Civilizations* ed. William Stoddart (Indiana: World Wisdom, 2003).

58. A survey was conducted by the Pew Research Center in America to determine the statistics of those who claim to be spiritual but not religious, one in five Americans are said to feel that religion is dispensable but not their spirituality. See "Religion and the Unaffiliated," *Pew Research Center: Religion and Public Life*, 9th October 2012, accessed on 10 April 2015, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/; Even so, there have been numerous writings to argue the illogical and intangibility of this phenomenon, see Rabbi David Wolpe, "The Limitations of Being 'Spiritual but Not Religious," *Time: Viewpoint*, 21 March 2013, accessed on 10 April 2015, http://ideas.time.com/2013/03/21/viewpoint-the-problem-with-being-spiritual-but-not-religious/.

"spiritual" as a "growth in self-understanding, caring about others, becoming more of a global citizen and accepting others of different faiths."[59] The definition resonates with the effect of postmodernist values on individuals and society at large in understanding unity and the purpose of diversity of which the perennialists are not excluded. Nevertheless, there are also those who render *spiritual experiences* similar to *religious experiences*. Rafudeen brought forward another disparity among the spiritual reformers that these experiences have been disputed among the scholars to be of two different parties, the *contextualists* and the *essentialists*. Both *contextualists* and *essentialists* are nevertheless vague in their definition of what it means to be "spiritual" or "religious". A *contextualist* would say that the doctrinal, social and other environmental factors determine the experience and that religious experience is inextricably bound to the context in which it emerges, whereas an *essentialist* would say that there is a core mystical experience irrespective of religious traditions.[60]

The conscious and unconscious inculcation of Hellenism into Christianity did not restore nature's rights, but instead it was the beginning of a crisis of meaning in man with regard to his fate and surroundings. Clearly, therefore, the *problem of Order* and the *problem of God* have given birth to modernism in the West; the *problem of Man*, on the other hand, facilitates the coming of post-modernism.

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59. David Mills "Spirituality without Spirits," *First Things*, 28th May 2010, http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2010/05/spirituality-without-spirits, accessed on 12 August 2015.

60. The Contextualists are figures like Steven Katz, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism," *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), and Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experiences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); The Essentialists are William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences* (New York: Longmans,1902), Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* trans. J.W. Harvey (New York: OUP, 1923; 2nd edn., 1950; reprint, New York, 1970), first published in German in 1917 as *Das Heilige*), Walter Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960). Here, Rafudeen's thesis seeks to find the possible common ground between both groups through perennial philosophy, see M. Auwais Rafudeen's "Frithjof Schuon and the Problem of Mystical Experience" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, 1999).

The Influence of the Conceptual Development of Nature

What shapes the understanding of Western man regarding their origin is influenced by the Christian teachings in which man is believed to have "descended" or "fallen" from Heaven. This fall of man is considered as the consequence of their inherited sin and the "profane" world as the punishment. The "profane" and "sacred" dichotomy of how the world is viewed resulted from a *dualistic*[61] understanding which then shapes the characteristics of modernity. Man doubted his own ability to know, and this led to the *problem of Man*. All three major problems of the Western man throughout his philosophical investigations formed a reaction that is best termed as "postmodernism"—a systematic rejection of the temporal attitude of the past (modernity).[62] The modern man's ability to know has proven itself to be limited when Kant summarises the impossibility of knowing the *noumena* using man's reason which then brings to an existential problem, a confusion of what is true and in existence. For to the modern man, true and real are considered as two different aspects and never to be united as one. Truth is reduced to a mere play thing of the mind and reality is only valid according to empirical evidences. The postmodernists have taken this challenge to revive the relevance of the theological domain and struggle in the pursuit

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61. *Dualistic* is to mean the tendency to separate and levelling things to be equal as in relation with dualism. Consequently, there are four elements of Westernisation: Dualism, Secularism Humanism, and Tragedy. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC) 5, no. 1 (1998): 309–10.

62. There are many who have attempted to define what "postmodern" is but its very nature is arbitrary since it subscribes to the philosophy that "everything changes except change itself." Therefore, the precise definition and examination of what postmodernism is can be seen in Ferid Muhic's article "Postmodern Theory and Its Two Major Self-Deceptions" in *al-Shajarah: Journal of The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization* (ISTAC) 5, no. 1 (2000). He mentioned that "... [P]ostmodernism is a kind of critique, even a more or less systematic rejection, of the basic postulates and methodology of modernity understood as a philosophical, ideological and cultural attitude", 7. For more explanation of postmodernism from the point of view of a perennialist, refer to Huston Smith, *Beyond the Postmodern Mind: The Place of Meaning in a Global Civilisation* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, Quest Books, 3rd Edition, 2003).

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of finding *truth* by rejecting the rationalistic and empirical champions of modernity and replacing it with a spiritual approach using spiritual experiences as their metaphysics.

Man is faced with the dilemma of handling personal spiritual experiences in a secular community that necessarily rejects any means of scientific explanations or proofs to it and the postmodern spirit seeks to find a solution to this. However, due to the unstable character of modern philosophy, and compounded by the postmodernist' dependency of their identity to it, this posits a gap that encouraged the birth of occultic impositions to perceive the spiritual experiences through the combining of scientific and technological knowledge with human spiritual experiences which they categorised as *alternative realities*:

> The conventional world view of the modern West is primarily defined by science. And modern science, on the surface of it, does not have a place for encounters with spirits, for souls that leave the body or reincarnate or for mental powers that are not subject to the limitations of the body's muscles and senses. The mainstream world view could accommodate visitors from other planets, provided they got here via technology rather than magic; and even strange creatures living in lakes or forests would be acceptable, if they turned out to be biological entities of some sort. But even these possibilities are not currently accepted, for lack of convincing evidence. Experiences implying that any of these things might be true do not fit the picture of reality, as currently presented by the spokesperson of science.[63]

The above reaction then resulted in the "New Age" movements;[64] bearing in mind that the emergence of these

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63. Leonard George, *Alternative Realities: The Paranormal, The Mystic and The Transcendent in Human Experience* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), x.

64. There are many "New Age" movements or religions that are springing from the Western Civilisation that are strange to the point of absurdity. For example, one of the many extremes through their fascination of

groups were not merely a product of society's reaction to anti-modernism, but also of a sophisticated "ultra-modernism."[65] The movements appeared in the West when the period of domination of "demythologization" of nature, and parallel to it, witnessed the birth of the revival of spiritual methods, which then developed different mythological themes such as extra-terrestrial beings and such.[66] There are also those who ventured to return the significance of spirituality in nature by going back to tradition. Certainly in the age of post-modernism, there are other "New Age" notions of what *tradition* is as mentioned earlier. Despite the misconception of the perennialists[67] with regard to *tradition*, one of their major contributions are their substantial refutations[68] against, and

science and technology is the new age religion called 'Scientology' founded by Ron Hubbard, see his book on *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (New York: Hermitage House, 1950). Other works leaning to this side of escapism can be seen in Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1974), Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Berkeley: Shambhala Publications, 1975) and others.

65. Muhic, *Postmodern Theory*, 7.
66. John A. Saliba, *Understanding New Religious Movements* (Michigan: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1995), 9. Saliba is one of the well-known practicing Christians in the West who rejects the new age movements. His other works are on *Christian Responses to the New Age Movement: A Critical Assessment* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1999) In it, he mentions the relevance of this discourse when one can see the label "New Age" is already being dropped from bookstore shelves and substituted by a more respectable, though certainly misleading, designation, namely "Metaphysics," viii.
67. See Mark Sedgwick in his extensive work, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004) to which he explained the historical, socio-political origins of the idea of Traditionalism in light of the perennial philosophy in the West.
68. René Guénon, *The Reign of Quantity and Signs of Time*, trans. Lord Northbourne (Hillsdale, New York: Sophia Perennis, 1953). 177–275. Other works by Guénon in between the popular notion of re-enchantment are *Le Théosophisme; Histoire d'une Pseudo-Religion* (*Theosophy: History of a Pseudo-Religion*), (Les Éditions Traditionelles, 1921); *Le Erreur Spirite* (*The Spiritist Fallacy*) (Les Éditions Traditionelles, 1923); *Orient et Occident* (East and West) (Luzaç, 1924); *La Crise du Monde Moderne* (*The Crisis of Modern World*) (Les Éditions Traditionelles, 1927). Aymard and Laude commented that despite the fact that Guénon may have

clear distinctions towards the other groups that are referred to as the pseudo-spiritualists or pseudo-traditionalist (e.g. the Occultists, Theosophists and others).[69] Traditionism, which later on became known as Perennialism due to its "eternal" and "universal" characteristics, came from the ideas of René Guénon and Schuon himself as will be mentioned later.[70] The two most influential figures in the perennial school have been known to make numerous refutations and criticisms on the effects of modernity and the religious turn in the Western civilisation.[71] Their claim is that "genuine cosmologies" exist in every *tradition*—that is, a concept that nature is a unique Being that reflects its diverse and indefinite various aspects, creating multiple visions of the cosmos, but, at the same time, are equally valid and legitimate.[72] Schuon especially liked to use the subject-object perspective to explain this diversity within a unity by saying that there is *diversity of the knowing subjects* as there is also *diversity of aspects in the object to be known*, where the subjects here are referred to as man and object as

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been the victim of the occultic movement, and some of his writings have been a "reflexes tainted by the occultism in his youth," Schuon nevertheless appreciated Guénon's work on the basis that Guénon had demonstrated great courage to have crossed the clutches of occultism, 160, 60n.

69. Schuon especially attempted to highlight the misconceptions of those who inadequately categorised certain communities focusing on their spiritual experiences and associate them into groups—such as "occultism," "syncretism," "Gnosticism," "intellectualism" and "esoterism"—as merely unfounded and heretical. He argued that all these are in essence valid but in form are not. The essence is their emphasis on the concern with the unseen and an inward method of salvation, a recognition of the single Truth contained in humanity, and an acknowledgement of the use of symbolism in abstracting the essence from its form. *Logic and Transcendence*, trans. Peter N. Townsend (London: Perennial Books Ltd, 1984), 1–6.

70. See the divisions of this group as outlined on page 50.

71. Guénon laid down one of the most extensive and brilliant critiques of his time against modernity and the West by explicating the definition of *Tradition* in the perennial sense in majority of his earliest works. Through the establishment of the meaning of *Tradition* via *sophia perennis* (literally eternal wisdom),

72. Burckhardt, "Cosmology and Modern Science," 122.

nature or reality.[73] The next section will explain the different types of perennialists based on their objectives and also a brief overview of their claim of the *genuine cosmologies in every tradition*.

The Perennial Philosophy

As stated, the perennialists proposed a solution to bring back the *sense of the sacred* in every tradition through the awareness of its cosmology that is equally valid with others.

> [E]very initiative taken with a view to harmony between the different cultures and for the defence of spiritual values is good, if it has its basis a recognition of the great principial truths and consequently also a recognition of *tradition* or of the *traditions*[Italics mine].[74]

One of their solutions to the problems or their detection of the main problem of the West can be seen in their usage of the concept of *tradition*—a concept that challenges the metaphysical reality of belief. René Guénon in his *Reign of Quantity and Signs of Time* explained the situation posited in the West in which a separation exists between metaphysical and physical perspective on nature. Guénon contributed substantially to the Western world by highlighting that the problem with modernity is its arrival to a quantitative mechanistic view of nature rather than qualitative and sacred nature. However, the idea of *sacred* and *profane* is in itself problematic as it poses a dualism in the existing states of Reality. Despite the numerous repetitive denial made by Guénon in his writings on the nature

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73. Schuon, "No Activity without Truth" in *Sword of Gnosis*, 32. Schuon explains that "The diversity of religions, far from proving the falseness of all the doctrines concerning the supernatural, shows on the contrary the supraformal character of revelation and the formal character of ordinary human understanding; the essence of revelation—or enlightenment—is one, but human nature requires diversity. Dogmas or other symbols may contradict one another externally, but they concur internally," Ibid., 33.

74. Ibid., 39.

of this duality between *sacred* and *profane* to be "unreal for there is no such thing as a totally sacred or totally profane object; what it is is a sacred and profane *way of looking* [Italics mine] at things,"[75] the glaring distinctions made to explain reality lead to a deconsecration of the meanings to what reality represents.

However, the idea of perennial philosophy has not, as often misconstrued, been solely constructed by Guénon and Schuon. The history of the birth of *perennial philosophy* is a subject of study in itself.[76] Due to the indefinite and ambiguous nature of the perennial philosophy, there are many interpretations of religion, tradition and spiritual experiences that result from this philosophy; this can also be seen in contemporary discourse on religious pluralism.[77] For the purpose of this study, it is best to avoid generalising them as belonging to one group referred as religious pluralists, hence we narrow the distinction to distinguish their main arguments.[78]

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75. Ibid., 12–3.
76. The term used to be a Christian theological tradition by a Vatican librarian, Agosto Stueco (1497–1548) in his book *De Perenni Philosophia* (1540) to reveal absolute truth of Christianity, also known as *prisca theological*. It was later adapted by Liebniz (1646–1716) in a non-theological subject to complete his theory of the monads. It is nevertheless widely known today through the works of Aldous Huxley called *Perennial Philosophy* (1945).
77. Namely the works of John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan, 1980), *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); William Cantwell Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth* (New York: Scribner, 1967), *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) and *Towards a World Theology* (London: McMillan, 1981). To read the most recent refutation against religious pluralism, see Khalif Muammar A. Harris, *Islam dan Pluralisme Agama* (Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Advanced Studies in Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS), 2013).
78. The word "pluralism" has also many connotations such that it can be argued if what it means is a result of a postmodern psychological pursuit to find "plurality of truth of equal validity in the plurality and diversity of religions", then one can say that the perennialists are essentially pluralists. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995; repr., Skudai, Johor: UTM Press, 2014), 9.

Classification of the usage of Philosophia Perennis

There are striking differences between the perennialists and the religious pluralists. The perennialists support the idea of an *eternal*, *permanent* and *universal* wisdom and the *unity of truth* embedded in traditions at the transcendent level, while the religious pluralists mainly support the pluralistic synthesis of ideas from the many religions based on a simplistic liberal and secular aim. Aslan classifies the differences between a perennialist and a religious pluralist by saying that the former uses a traditional and sacred approach whereas the latter uses a liberal approach.[79] Despite this, both can be said to have sprung from the stream of secularism. Shah-Kazemi wrote in his work, *The Other in the Light of the One*, about the tendency for a religious pluralist to deconstruct and reduce diversity to attain unity, whereas the perennialists aim to celebrate diversity to achieve unity at the transcendent level.[80] This is due to the religious pluralist's understanding that the problem of plurality lies in the "cognitive responses" while the perennialists dwell on the level of transcendence.[81]

Furthermore, the connotations or interpretations the term *perennis* consist of are three important characteristics that shape the objectives of a perennial vision: it is the *eternal*, *permanent* and *universal*. The focus of this section is to elucidate the range of meanings in order to clarify the divisions among the perennialists themselves. *Eternal* means the consistency of the thing's essence to sustain itself neither from a beginning nor an end. *Permanency*, on the other hand, renders a sort

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79. Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosphy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Curzon-London & Japan Society, 1994) and Khalif Muammar, *Atas Nama Kebenaran: Tanggapan Kritis Terhadap Wacana Islam Liberal* (Bangi: Institut Alam dan Tamadun Melayu, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2009).

80. Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2006), 249–251.

81. For more discussions on the logic of both arguments, see Mortimer Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth: An Essay in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Collier Books, 1990).

of fixed and unchangeable essence throughout space and time. While *universality* denotes a prescribed common essence inherent in beings which makes it generally applicable to those related to it. In this case, *philosophia*, or *Sophia*—wisdom—is the said essence in perennial philosophy. That being said, there are many 'schools of thought' (for the lack of a better word) that style themselves as advocates of the *philosophia perennis*. There are five objectives that can be abstracted from those who use the term *philosophia perennis* based on their understanding of the meaning *perennis* (to achieve the *eternal, permanence*, and *universal* wisdom). They are those who want:

1. To answer the problem of placing the *notion of truth* to the various traditions or religions present today;[82]
2. To justify one's religion (especially coming from the Neo-Platonists and Thomists[83] in Christianity and the Neo-Vedantists) as something that is eternally embedded in every other tradition or religion;
3. To replace the status quo of other religions and acknowledge a new doctrine that seeks to reach the ultimate truth through spiritual experiences to reach transcendence;
4. To have a *common language* in the comparative study of religions;
5. To construct a *universal spirituality* in overcoming the spiritual void in the modern age.

All of the afore-mentioned objectives differ in the most subtle way to the extent that they differentiate from one perennialist to another among the advocates of the so-

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82. Most of those can be seen in the later followers of Schuon who live with the pressure of diversity of traditions in the West and seek to reconcile them all in pursuit of creating tolerance such as Huston Smith, James Cutsinger, Harry Oldmeadow, and Jacob Needleman.
83. The *philosophia perennis* is generally studied by students of Scholastic Philosophy as the philosophy of history in philosophical thought. Copleston, *History of Philosophy* 1, 2–8.

called Perennial Philosophy; not including the individual representatives from Schuon's teachings who towards the end of their lives were sanctioned by him.[84] This study will attempt to classify the afore-mentioned objectives into three groups that subscribe to certain aspects of *perennis* in their attempt to achieve the ultimate wisdom according to the definition of *perennis*: eternal, permanent, and universal. The first three objectives (a), (b) and (c) can be classified to form two groups as well as (d) and (e) to form the third.

The Permanent and The Universal

The first group was influenced by the Christian idea of a *permanent* and *universal* wisdom inherent in all religions provided that this universality is interpreted as the "wisdom of Christ in all religions."[85] Copleston (1907–1994) said that in the 1940s–1950s, the term *philosophia perennis* became associated with the thought and content of the proposed solution of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).[86] This association was

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84. Sharifah Hajar binti Syed Ahmad's unpublished Master's dissertation at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Islam, Science and Civilisation (CASIS), "Frithjof Schuon's Concept and Method of Interpreting Nature" (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), 2016),18.

85. For works relating to this, refer to W. Schmidt-Biggemann, *Philosophia Perennis: Historical Outlines of Western Spirituality in Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern Thought* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2004). Schmidt-Biggeman gave an overview of how the Greek polytheistic nuances were adopted into Christianity during the Renaissance period and influenced Christian theology (and philosophy) this later on leads to the idea of the need of a continuity of biblical wisdom, in other words, an alibi to safeguard the tradition, xviii; K. F Reinhardt, *A Realistic Philosophy: The Perennial Principles of Thought and Action in a Changing World*, ed. Joseph Husslein, Science and Culture Series (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1944). Franscis J. Klauder, *A Philosophy Rooted in Love: The Dominant Themes in the Perennial Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994).

86. Copleston mentions the Thomistic Perennial Philosophy in which the Thomistic standpoint to him is the *philosophia perennis*. It is a standpoint that does not just adhere to a closed system but a system that develops itself through modern philosophy of Christianity's source of knowledge. Copleston, *History of Philosophy* 1, 7.

primarily recognised by the Catholic Church to a point that it was inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical—the *Aeterni Patris* in 1879—to be dealt as a movement that sought a return from the many problems and challenges of the modern age, to the principles of the *philosophia perennis*.[87] The Thomists saw that the central idea of *perennial* in a philosophy aimed at compensating the contradiction in the practice of philosophical movements, following an attempt to integrate religious and aesthetic ideas of Christianity in the Middle Ages with Greek philosophy through the works of Plotinus (203–269).[88]

Thomas Aquinas was known to have successfully reconciled theology and philosophy in Christianity to the extent that his works are considered as the official "Christian Philosophy."[89] Theology was classified as the absolute and total truth from revelation. Philosophy, on the other hand, was regarded as a wisdom that surpassed all differences while retaining its universals. For this reason, in order to compensate the contradiction of an "established" philosophy resulting from dialectic differences, the idea of *philosophia perennis* gives a sense of permanency in the Christian dogma and universality in its wisdom. The permanent and universal wisdom is then proposed as a solution for Christian Philosophy's search for the universals.[90] This shows that the idea of *philosophia perennis*,

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87. The heading of this document was stated as: "*On the Restoration in Catholic Schools of Christian Philosophy According to the Mind of the Angelic Doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas*," Etienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962), 175; Though Pope Leo XIII did not specifically mention the term *philosophia perennis*, Reinhardt made a relation that the connotation of Thomistic philosophy is in line with the idea of *philosophia perennis*. Reinhardt, *Realistic Philosophy*, 17–18.

88. Reinhardt claims that the perennial philosophy had existed since the days of Plato and Aristotle all the way to Plotinus and Augustine, which then was refined by Thomas Aquinas. Reinhardt, *Realistic Philosophy*, 17, 21.

89. Etienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer, Etienne Gilson Series (Toronto: Pontifical Insititute of Medieval Studies, 2002),9; *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962), 175–199.

90. Copleston, being a devoted Catholic, agrees with Aquinas's distinction

has not, as is often misconstrued, been solely associated with Frithjof Schuon.

Reinhardt in his work, *A Realistic Philosophy*, mentions the milieu[91] in the 1950s of well-known figures in the Neo-Thomistic school—among them were Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), who was "perhaps the most profound contemporary interpreter of the eternal philosophy,"[92] and Etienne Gilson (1884–1978), whose works dealt with aspects and problems of the perennial tradition—which had been active in promoting the Thomistic version of perennial philosophy. Interestingly, Maritain had been a personal friend and a patron of René Guénon during his years at *Institut Catholique* (Catholic Institute).[93] The institute severed its relation with Guénon

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between *true* (revealed) religion and *true* philosophy. He says that the former is true in its totality and the latter "… may be true in its lines and principles without reaching the completion at any given moment". Copleston, *History of Philosophy* 1, 4. This shows that what Copleston meant by philosophia perennis ascribed to Thomist is dynamic and non-static, it is presented in a form without a body of principles and applications. This distinction can mean that the said Thomistic concept of *philosophia perennis* sets an epistemological limitation through confined sources of knowledge under the teachings of Christianity.

91. "While in France the return of leading philosophers to the "philosophia perennis" was most remarkable, the clashes between the anti-metaphysical positivism of Auguste Comte's disciples and the new defenders of metaphysics in that country were most violent." Reinhardt, *Realistic Philosophy*, 23.

92. See Jacques Maritain's work in *An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. E.I. Watkin (New York: Sheed and Ward Inc, 1947; repr., 12th), 11 and *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner, 1952), 50. Etienne Gilson's writings in his books *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education* (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ. Press, 1948), 46 and The Unity of Philosophical Experience (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1937), 318. Other than the 'religious philosophical' interpretations by Plotinus and St. Augustine, the perennial philosophy of Neo-Thomist continued from the work of Agosto Stueco (1540) who first used the term *philosophia perennis* in his book, *De Perenni Philosophia* that aimed at appropriating the ancient philosophy with Christianity. Reinhardt, *Realistic Philosophy*, 19–20.

93. An institute that breaks out from the state-owned Sorbonne due to conflicting ideological and political matters. The years between 1915–1921 were when Guénon regularly attended and delivered lectures on Hinduism at the institute where he was generally viewed as a fellow

because of a worrying development of Guénon's thought that was regarded as "radically irreconcilable"[94] with the Catholic faith. From this, we can deduce that the two schools of thought of the "permanent and universal philosophy" of the Thomistic and the "eternal and universal philosophy" expounded by both Guénon and Schuon were clearly distinct from each other.

The Universal

The schools of thought that were established based on the last two objectives (d) and (e) were for those who either innocently or informally adopted the perennial concept. They were distinct from the others by their emphasis on the *universal* aspect in answering the problems present in the comparative study of religion. They could be regarded as an unintentional advocate, or more commonly seen as the milder form of those who subscribed to the *perennial* concept and dogmatically incorporated such philosophy in their works. An example can be seen in Toshihiko Izutsu's (1914–1993) work, *Sufism and Taoism* where he used the term "perennial philosophy" as his methodology in comparing the two traditions. Izutsu's use of the word *perennial philosophy* represents the epitome of the above case. A clear proof that Izutsu did not fully subscribe to the perennial philosophy as did Guénon or Schuon is when he declared that his basis of using perennial philosophy is to have a mutual understanding of religious experiences at the philosophical level in a meta-historical dialogue. The *universal* context of perennial is that of which Izutsu tried to achieve the

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anti-secularist and anti-materialist who used terminologies and ideas of non-Christian origin to describe spiritual realities. At that time, these workings were lightly taken as works of harmless comparative religion, nothing could prepare them for the Traditional doctrine that Guénon brought forth later in his official works. For more accounts on the separation of the Catholics and René Guénon, see Sedgwick, *Against*, 29–30.

94. Gabriel V. Asfar, "Rene Guénon: A Chapter of French Symbolist Thought in the Twentieth-Century" (Ph.D., Princeton University, 1972), 187–88.

common language between the religions or traditions of the Far East.[95] He did not go beyond this definition of *perennial* in his writings as accused by some.[96]

The Eternal and The Universal

The second group accommodates those who believe that the *eternal* and *universal* wisdom inherent in all religions is equally valid without exclusive provisions from any religious organisation. They understood *eternal* wisdom as based on the concept of *tradition* as expounded by René Guénon. *Tradition* to Guénon is something sacred, that is supra-human, which aims to emphasise the transcendent aspect of a human vocation. Although there are still divisions among themselves (like the Traditionists Guénonians and the non-Guénonians, that is, those who followed Schuon), it is nevertheless safe to say that this particular group has similar belief of the "eternal wisdom in all religions." They appreciate all religions and traditions that centre upon the Existence, the Oneness and the Transcendence-Immanence of God.

Schuon brought to his order a distinction in his adoption of the term, *religio perennis*,[97] in contrast to Guénon's *philosophia perennis* or *tradition*.[98] He defined *religio* to mean the intrinsic reality that binds the earthly to heavenly and *traditio* to be the extrinsic reality, that is, the legal, scriptural, and ritual elements

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95. Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophy Concepts* (California: University of California Press, 1983), 469, 471.

96. Anis Malik Thoha in his "Izutsu's Approach to the Comparative Study of Religions: An Assessment of His Sufism and Taoism" in *Japanese Contribution to Islamic Studies: The Legacy of Toshihiko Izutsu Interpreted* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press and Japan Foundation, 2010) claims that Izutsu advocates the same perennial philosophy as Schuon and Guénon.

97. Schuon, "Religio Perennis," *Light on the Ancient Worlds: A New Translation with Selected Letters* ed., Deborah Casey, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 120, 2n.

98. The concept of *Tradition* with a big T is synonymous with the concept of *philosophia perennis*. Harry Oldmeadow, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy, The Perennial Philosophy Series* (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom, 2010), 70.

handed down to men.[99] This particular *tradition*, which is then, the *universal* aspect of the group's concept of perennial is related to *orthodoxy*. Schuon defined *orthodoxy* as non-total conformity to a certain system but a doctrine that consists of a certain set of principles that formally homogenised the essence of truth and authentic in its spiritual perspective. The set of principles also governs the intelligence universally.[100] Furthermore, Schuon preferred the term *religio perennis* instead of *philosophia perennis* because the heavy connotation that *philosophy* established today is solely based on reason. He then deduced that *philosophia* only constitutes a mental elaboration of what is suggested as right and wrong rather than wisdom. To make it clear, *religio perennis* to him is the essence of all religions, all forms of worship and every system of morality, a universal "metareligion" with a metaphysical discernment and a methodological support—a plurality of forms with a common essence.[101] Schuon's conception of this perennial philosophy has brought his most adamant follower, Seyyed Hossein Nasr about the idea of bringing the *sense of the sacred* into the discourse of fighting against modernity and saving Islamic traditions in the prevailing trying times.[102] Schuon's metaphysical framework was used by Nasr as a foundation of understanding Islam which is problematic because it suggests the advocation that

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99. Schuon, "Religion Perennis," *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, 120, 2n; idem., "The Supreme Commandment," *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, 2nd Ed. (Bedfont, Middlesex, Pates Minor: Perennial Books Ltd, 1990),157, 164n.

100. Idem., "Orthodoxy and Intellectuality," *Stations of Wisdom* 3rd printing (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom,1995), 1.

101. "Religion—*religio*—is what "binds" us to Heaven; the modes or forms may vary, but the principle remains invariable. All religions comprise a doctrine and a method; the method includes the ritual, moral and social elements, and the doctrine and dogmatic elements, without there always being a clear separation between the two orders." Idem., *Light on the Ancient Worlds: A New Translation with Selected Letters* ed. Deborah Casey (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), 127, 129.

102. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Lahore: Suhail Academy Lahore, 1999); idem., *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Surrey: Curzon Press Ltd., 2005).

all religions are the same at the transcendent level. Further elaboration on these concepts as proposed by Schuon will be explained in the last section.

We can deduce from the exposition of the history of ideas of *philosophia perennis* that the philosophy was an attempt to renovate and adopt the Christian concept of spirituality, or the lack of it. Through secularisation, Christianity lost its sense of spirituality, which can be seen in its religious duties or dogmas.[103] For instance, this is evident in celibacy in priesthood, a practice considered as the highest form of submission to God in Christianity. However, the practice is in reality non-spiritual, as it can also be seen as a form of punishment.[104] It is an act of suffering that came from the advent of the Church and the Christian ontology which later understood man as being born with sin, hence the need to be divested from "profane" worldly desires in order for him to attain salvation.[105] Schuon agreed that such an innovation proposed by the Church was a dangerous practice but he nevertheless still believed in the anthropogony of the fallen man.[106] The Church also produced innovations within the teachings of Christianity such as the distinction made between profanity and sacred creations that resulted in a dualistic view. The distinction was made in order

103. Although Christianity itself initially did not consciously invite secularism into its teachings but it was due to the westernisation of Christianity, which is the misapplication of Greek philosophy in Western theology and metaphysics. The beginning of westernisation of Christianity can be marked on the occasion when Christianity, being one of the great religions of the world to be the only one to have shifted its centre of origin from Jerusalem to Rome. See al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 20, 22.

104. Punishment in a sense that men are deprived of this world and longing to the heavens where they supposedly belong. For contemporary debates on this, see the works of K. Armstrong, *Through the Narrow Gate* (Glasgow: Flamingo, 1997) and *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb out of Darkness* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2004).

105. For more accounts on contemporary debate on decline of spirituality in Christianity, see al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 1–15.

106. Frithjof Schuon, *Christianity/Islam: Essays on Esoteric Ecumenicism, A New Translation with Selected Letters*, ed., James S. Cutsinger, (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 2008), 30, 34, 74n.

to find salvation through the embracing of the sacred and the rejecting of the profane. This distinction was also an attempt to identify what it means to submit themselves to God, a God in Christian worldview that could only be fathomed through *a leap of faith*.[107] This apparent lack of spirituality in Christianity may explain why Sufism and Vedantism seemed appealing to both Schuon and Guénon as the two founders of the perennial philosophy of the eternal and universal kind. The failure of Christianity to provide them with 'inner peace' and the fatal influence of the Thomistic *philosophia perennis* to Guénon consequently led Schuon to arrive at a certain conception of *nature*.

The Perennial Conception of Nature through Cosmology

Frithjof Schuon's utmost concern in refuting modernity and its sciences is centred upon the ignorance and the rejection of the "cosmogonic supra-sensible" degrees of reality, which he termed as *Onto-cosmology*.[108] *Onto-cosmology* seeks to explain a causality that covers the many layers of reality. For him, in order for man to view Reality in all its modes, man must acquire a sense of the sacred that recognises the layers of reality. He sees the "onto-cosmology" as a valid framework that is beyond laws and matter to view the metaphysical principles of nature. Onto-cosmology is an all-encompassing cosmology that transcends time and space. Consequently, the ambiguity that occurs within the investigation to understand nature in the Western civilisation as elaborated in the previous sections

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107. Since secularisation separates *intellect* and *ratio* from the mental activity, rationality is no longer available for them to make sense of God (through a separation between Its essence and existence), the only means of fathomising is to resort to human will as the basis of *faith*, and that is *love*. Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 34.

108. Frithjof Schuon, "The Onto-Cosmological Chain," *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, The Library of Traditional Wisdom (Bloomington, Ind.: World Wisdom Books, 2002), 61–4.

has led Schuon to deduce that the effect of disenchantment of nature is due to their ignorance of the presence of a cosmology that is beyond the laws of forms and matter.[109] The need for the usage of "onto" in cosmology functions as an emphasis that dispels the said ambiguity. According to the outlined principles of "onto-cosmology,"[110] we can infer that the requirements or conditions of a cosmology for it to be considered as one of the modes of an all-encompassing "onto-cosmology" is when it recognises the 1) *Existence of a Creator*, the 2) *Oneness of this Creator* and the 3) *Transcendent and Immanent Creator*. In other words, in order for man to view reality in all its modes, man must acquire a *sense of the sacred* that recognises the layers of reality which begin with the above three conditions that portray the ineffable God. Schuon was suggesting that the doctrine of Trinity as constructed by Christianity was essentially a systematic construction in theology to describe the ineffable God.[111] One example of this incorporation or inspiration from the Trinity is his notion of the *hierarchical ternary* (Principle-Essence, Principle-Persons, Principle-Demiurge) as a symbolic way to describe Reality: "…God is not only Essence, but comprises "modes" or "degrees," or in heological language, "Persons;" the term "Essence" consequently does not designate the whole divine Reality, otherwise the Trinity would not be God."[112]

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109. Idem., *From Divine to the Human: Survey of Metaphysics and Epistemology, A New Translation with Selected Letters* trans., by Mark Perry and Jean-Pierre Lafouge, Ed. by Patrick Laude (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2013), 65.

110. Chapter 4 in Syed Ahmad, *Concept of Nature*.

111. However, Christianity that we know today has deviated from the unity of God into trinity due to the amalgamation of Christian theology with Greek philosophy. The transition from plurality of gods that exists with nature, to The One and only God that created nature was nevertheless devoid of any rational proof; it instead creates a problematic understanding of the Christian God and made Christianity intellectually handicapped.

112. Idem., *From Divine to the Human*, 139.

To Schuon, the birth of the universe (cosmogenesis) cannot occur without the existence of the succession of the Principle-Essence according to the *hierarchical ternary* of creation in which he relates this succession with the birth of the gods (theogenesis) that is represented by the concept of *Logos* through the process of *hypostasis*.[113] A *hypostasis* is the degree of the presence of the Absolute within the communication accompanying cosmic manifestation. Therefore, the *ternary hierarchy* is represented by Schuon as the hypostasis of the Principle into the Principle-Essence, Principle-Person, and Principle-Demiurge.[114]These distinctions, said Schuon, are said to be confused by the monotheists when referencing to God and erred in claiming truth to their religion. Schuon said that the monotheists reduced God only to His Reality as the Principle-Person, a said Reality that was different from every other religion. Moreover, this explains the conclusion made by Schuon that his theory of the transcendent unity of religions is at the level of the recognition of God in His Transcendence Reality as the Principle-Essence, the place where things originate.[115] Schuon insisted that the differences that subsist between different cosmological values in a given tradition are due to the fact that the Hypostatic Faces of the Principle

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113. *Hypostases* (plural); *hypostasis* (singular). The concept of hypostasis was introduced by Plotinus in Neoplatonic philosophy to explain the process of diminution of being. It stands for the meaning of the movements of essences or natures of the transcendent God into beings and was incorporated into Christianity to explain the relationship of the Father to the Son. Ernst Wilhelm Benz, *Christianity, Encyclopaedia Britannica-Macropaedia: Knowledge in Depth*, Volume 4 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1993, 15th Edition), 485.

114. At the level of the Principle-Essence lies the universal possibility of creation; at the Principle-Person lies the archetypes of every creation; and at the Principle-Demiurge lies the transmission of archetypes to creation. To Schuon, the birth of the universe (cosmogenesis) cannot occur without the existence of the succession of the Principle-Essence to creation in which he relates with the concept of theogenesis represented by the hypostasis process.

115. Frithjof Schuon, "Concerning an Onto Cosmological Ambiguity," *To Have a Centre, The Library of Traditional Wisdom* (Bloomington Ind.: World Wisdom Books, 1990), 101–7.

varies according to the different needs of the existing human receptacles. This factor is said to determine the cosmological construction of every religion. A cosmological construction relies on an interpretation of the incommensurability of the inherent relation between the supreme Principle (*Ātmā*) and its cosmic manifestations (*Māyā*). In other words, both will never have a coincidence where they will be equal to each other. The cosmos as imagined by Schuon was then created within the intersection points which are referred to as the "Principle manifested" or "manifestation of the Principle"; the Principle includes itself by its existence in the manifestation. Schuon compensated the incommensurability of the relation with the notion of the "relatively absolute" or "absolutely infinite" of Being; it is when the Principle *prefigured* itself into Being which is necessarily infinite in relation to cosmic manifestation and is termed as the "absolute infinite". Being is considered as finite when there is a determination of the many "personal God" in each tradition and is considered infinite when viewed from the human intellect as the subjective observer.[116] Therefore, this resulted in an understanding that there exists a variety in ways of viewing the cosmos due to its relative aspect to which Schuon highlighted that each is valid on its own terms, owing to each being absolute at the same time. The *hypostatic* trait supports his suggestion of the "relative absolute" in a way that *hypostasis* being the degrees of presence of the Absolute within the communication of cosmic manifestation. This more or less explains the existence of many cosmologies and that to Schuon, there are similarities in its underlying symbolic meanings.

Although Schuon accepted the tenets concerning reality came from the teachings of various religions and traditions, he nevertheless argued that it is absurd to say only one cosmology in a given religion or tradition justifiably describes the ultimate and total truth of Reality. The existence of diverse

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116. Idem, "Manifestation of the Divine Principle," *Stations of Wisdom*, 71.

cosmologies coming from different religions and traditions has been the very concern for Schuon, to which he proposed an explanation of the possibility of an inclusive reality as opposed to an exclusive one. Reality relatively means to Schuon as the underlying principle of things that are revealed over the course of time through various traditions. Schuon constantly referred to the ontological Reality of things which can only be described by an all-encompassing "onto-cosmology" which binds every cosmology that abides to a given principle. This all-encompassing "onto-cosmology" can be said to transcend space and time and can be sensed due to its universal and eternal character.[117]

However, we know that there exist many cosmologies even within a particular tradition, let alone the many cosmologies among other traditions;[118] how then did Schuon decide which cosmology fit the requirement of being under the canopy of this "onto-cosmology?" This section thus begins by dividing and distinguishing the common elements that Schuon used to

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117. The eternal and universal aspect of perennis is what transcends space and time. "Perennis" here denotes the universal and non-formal eternal aspect of traditional cosmologies that is under the purview of the "onto-cosmology" which shines through the multifarious traditional sciences of the cosmos—the eternal *sophia* (wisdom) of pure intellect; it "discerns" and "separates" the Real from the Illusory. Titus Burckhardt, an avid admirer of the perennial philosophy and also a childhood friend of Schuon devoted his life to the study of the universal truth in the realms of metaphysics and cosmology had coined the term *cosmologia perennis* in Titus Burckhardt, "Cosmologia Perennis", *Mirror of the Intellect*, trans. William Stoddart (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 17. Burckhardt says: "All true cosmological knowledge is founded on the qualitative aspects of things—that is to say, on "forms" in so far as these are marks of their essence. By this fact, cosmology is at the same time direct and speculative, for it grasps the quality of things in a direct way, without calling them in question, and at the same time it disengages them from their particular attachments in order to consider them at their different levels of manifestations. The universe thus reveals its internal unity and shows at the same time a rainbow-hued variety of aspects and dimensions." Titus Burckhardt, "Cosmology and Modern Science," *Sword of Gnosis*, 130.

118. *Traditions* here is used compared to religion to stress the range of diversity of cosmologies that is accepted by Schuon. It, nevertheless, refers to religions as well.

justify how he differentiated the *cosmologies within a tradition* and the *cosmologies among other traditions*.

Cosmologies within a Tradition

The one concept that Schuon used to distinguish between the cosmologies within a tradition is the concept of *orthodoxy*.[119] *Orthodoxy* was defined by Schuon as a doctrine participated by a certain set of principles that formally homogenised the essence of truth and it is authentic in its spiritual perspective which then governs the intelligence universally.[120] In explicating the idea of *orthodoxy* and its relation to the various traditions to which he believed ensure regularity to the metaphysical principles, a particular tradition is said to be *orthodox* when it is regarded within the distinction between *form* and *substance*. The former is the said aspects of dogmatism while the latter of the Truth itself. To him, dogmatism only arises due to the inability to comprehend, or it is the result of confusion of the idea of Truth in pursuit of representing it into a conceptual form (i.e. religious dogma). The term "dogmatism" "represents an idea considered in conformity with a theoristic tendency of looking at ideas and has even become characteristic of the religious point of view as such."[121] These dogmas are only limited to forms until one reaches certain understanding of the inherent truth; and that to Schuon, the Truth can never be absolute unless it is formless.[122] To him, deep down within every

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119. The concept of *Orthodoxy* originated in the Christian tradition where the word *doxa* (means "belief") which marks a set of creed that points to the original, uninnovated message of Christ. The problematic situation of originality and authenticity that Christianity encounters in their tradition makes it inevitable for the concept to be adopted in that worldview. It is nevertheless not the case for other religions.

120. Schuon, "Orthodoxy and Intelligence," *Stations of Wisdom*, 1.

121. Idem, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 2nd print (Wheaton: Quest Book, Theosophical Pub. House, 2005), 2.

122. Thus, comes the belief in the *transcendent unity of religions* through *scienta sacra* (sacred science) as their epistemological basis in acquiring knowledge in the form of tradition. *Scientia sacra* denotes the supreme

tradition exists a "religious dogma" and that there is inherent truth represented by the traditions of these religions which are only understood by a selected few, the esoterists.[123] To Schuon, the inherent truth which to him is a reflection of Tradition is what he defined as the *religio perennis*.[124]

The criterion of *orthodoxy* is that it should abide by the current phase of the "cyclic rhythm" where all the manifestations of principle perspectives have passed its cycle, hence freezing it from receiving any form of revelation. Schuon regarded time not as a uniform abstraction, but instead of experiencing—a cyclic rhythm[125] that alters values—according to every phase of its development.[126] A Universe that is forever in cyclic motion means it is eternal, and since the world is also illusory, the combination of eternal and illusory suggests a lack of any form of certainty or measurement of truth. The eternal

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science of Ultimate Reality or metaphysics. Sacred science is the science of a sacred nature of the manifested and cosmic order but rooted in that supreme science and deriving from it. "All traditional civilizations possessed both a *scientia sacra* which is like the sun and sacred science which is like the rays emanating from the sun, whether these sciences were articulated and formulated in writing or not." Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Reply to Ibrahim Kalin," *The Philosophy of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn, Randall E. Auxier, and Lucian W. Stone, The Library of Living Philosophers Vol. XXVIII (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 2001), 464.

123. Esoterists here is to mean those who were given the ability to reach the absolute Truth.

124. To make it clear, *religio perennis* to him is the essence of all religions, all forms of worship and every system of morality. Whereas *philosophia perennis* is the essence of all dogmas and all wisdom. The former is considered by Schuon as higher than the latter.

125. Schuon compared this to the Semites and Christian's God with the Hindu cosmology which he regarded as not necessarily bound to create. He saw them as it was in their nature to be more towards the humanist understanding of the universe rather than a metaphysician which viewed the universe as only consisting of one cycle. Nevertheless, the nature of this one cycle was still an acceptable point of view to Schuon because it was part of the exoteric understanding. Idem., "Creation as a Divine Quality," *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, 47.

126. Idem, "No Activity without Truth," *Sword of Gnosis*, 33. More elaboration on Schuon's understanding of the cosmic cycle and for the elements of the cycle, refer to Syed Ahmad, *Concept of Nature*, 75–6.

and illusory Universe posits a Reality that seizes any possibility of achieving change, progress, and development. Hence, it is a direction not bounded by any sense of purpose.

Further, to achieve a level of orthodoxy, the tradition that is only based on the impression of Reality through the Intellect—which is not given by God from Revelation—takes time to mature, or to use Schuon's term, to achieve "crystallization." The impression of Reality in each religion is the said Principle-Person and Principle-Demiurge that turned His Gaze towards man through the dual character of *Logos* which enables Being to act hypostatically by the Gaze of the *uncreated*. The Being casts Himself towards a particular religion based on the sentiments of men which results in a unique perception of each religion's personalised God.[127] This explains the reason why Schuon considered nature to be a valid source of truth as it is in the position to become the manifestation. It is valid to be worshipped if it is thought as the means to God like the ones that can be found in the North American Lakota. He justified this by saying that one should not confuse between the "materiality" from the symbolised forms but instead to look at the essence that is ontological. Schuon said that the Divine Substance is the backdrop of all manifestations and that is why there is existence.[128] Schuon's example gives the fundamental

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127. It can be seen that this way of achieving truth is only possible through the means of human intellect; due to the imaginative aspect of the intellect, it is prone to high risk of admitting error in judgement. Contrary to Schuon, it is undeniable that there will be similarities or common features in different cosmologies due to this fact but for truth to be designated to a religion, it does not have to go through this long process of maturity, its authenticity is achieved through the fact that its truth was given by God through Revelation. In other words, the former can also be said to be only based on revelation, and not given. It is indubitable also that the former way of constructing truth is inherently systematic and scientific due to the nature of its trial and error research, but truth coming from Revelation starts with certainty and knowledge and the possibility of going astray is confined by its perimeters, not by the volatile nature of the human imagination.

128. Schuon understood "existence" through his interpretation of Hinduism, it is the manifestations of the cosmos through a transfiguration of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* where the latter is acting like the destructive and transformative effect, not annihilation (*fānā'*).

act of worshipping a Deity through sacramental images in a Hindu doctrine should not be considered as the image as a form itself. Instead it should be viewed beyond the form and worships the essence of that sacred attribute prefigured in the Deity. In the same vein, he defended the North American Indians by stating that their worshipping of the sun should not deter the distinction of the sun as a form and the sun as the essence. Instead, it should be regarded as a symbol of the "Father" or "Ancestor" who is invisible and dwells in it.[129]

Despite Schuon's claim for inclusivity of various religions and traditions, he and other perennialists were nevertheless aware of the many "new" religions—such as Mormonism, Bahaism, and the Ahmadism of Qadiani—all of which also claim legitimacy of their truths. However, the perennialists stress that these "new" religions are to be rejected. This distinction constitutes what Schuon referred to as *heterodoxy*, a belief outside of the principles of orthodoxy and is divided into two aspects, the extrinsic and intrinsic. *Extrinsic heterodoxy* can be said to be those of all forms of religious exoterism in relation to other religions, it is when a cosmology manifests the different manner of "spiritual archetypes" of the Principle and each cosmology is regarded as partially or relatively true. *Intrinsic heterodoxy* is when it contradicts the very nature of things as stated in the "onto-cosmology" which is not founded in the Absolute.[130] The difference between both can be found in their objective reality; it either conforms to it or its reality is subjected to illusion. The former can be said to be the legitimate cosmologies on its own but in relation to others, it is considered as an extrinsic heresy; the latter is an absolute false and heretic understanding of reality in relation to the Absolute. Schuon agreed with Guénon on the concept of both orthodoxy and heterodoxy by relating it with the Vedantic

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129. Frithjof Schuon, *The Eye of the Heart: Metaphysics, Cosmology, Spiritual Life* (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1997), xiv.
130. Schuon, "Orthodoxy and Intelligence," *Stations of Wisdom*, 4–5; Christianity/Islam, 25.
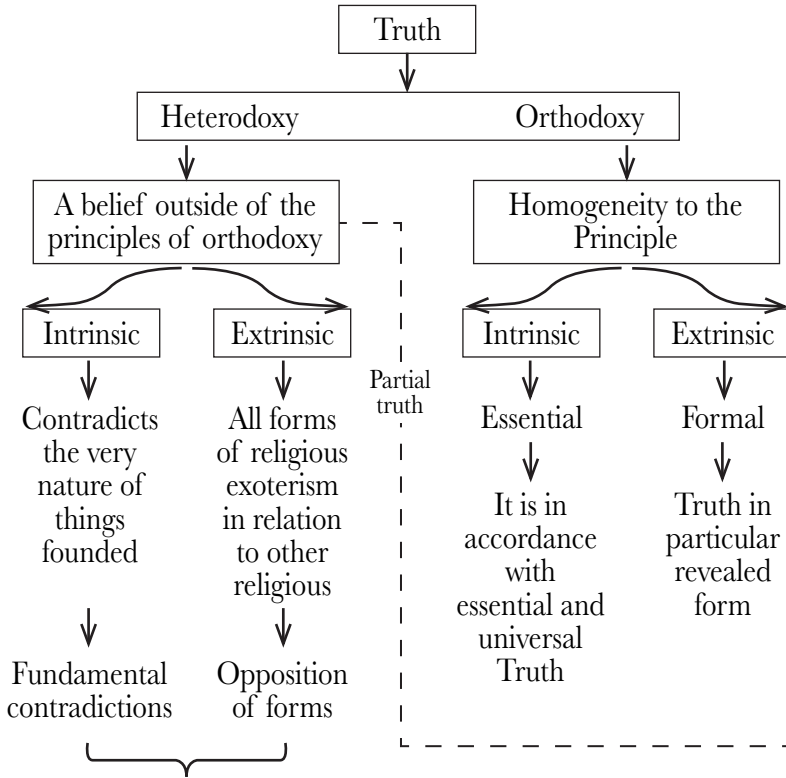
doctrine. Consequently, Schuon also divided orthodoxy into its intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. The former aspect denotes the accordance of its principle with the essential and universal truth; the latter however, is formal where it is only true in the particular revealed form. Guénon first made this clarification of orthodoxy and heterodoxy to be used outside of the religious mode in his *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedanta*.[131] He defined *Veda* to be a single purely metaphysical doctrine that is sacred through its relation to the Principle, and traditional through its integrality. Thus, to be *orthodox* is to be in agreement of the *Veda*, while to be *heterodox* is when it is in contradiction to *Veda*. This is to explain the many points of views (*darshanas*) within the Hindu tradition. The diverse metaphysical and cosmological doctrines of India are not, says Guénon, "...strictly speaking, different doctrines, but are only developments of a single doctrine according to different point of views and in various but by no means incompatible directions."[132]

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131. Guénon, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta* trans. Richard C. Nicholson (Hillsdale, New York: Sophia Perennis, 2nd impression 2004) translated from *L'homme et son devenir selon le Vedānta* (1925).
132. Ibid., 8–9.

Figure 1: Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and Expressions of Truth

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                        ┌──────────┐
                        │  Truth   │
                        └────┬─────┘
                             ↓
        ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │   Heterodoxy            Orthodoxy       │
        └──┬──────────────────────────────┬───────┘
           ↓                              ↓
  ┌──────────────────┐          ┌──────────────────┐
  │ A belief outside │          │ Homogeneity to   │
  │ of the           │ ─ ─ ─    │ the Principle    │
  │ principles of    │      │   │                  │
  │ orthodoxy        │      │   │                  │
  └──────────────────┘      │   └──────────────────┘
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Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Partial truth	Intrinsic	Extrinsic
Contradicts the very nature of things founded	All forms of religious exoterism in relation to other religious		Essential	Formal
Fundamental contradictions	Opposition of forms		It is in accordance with essential and universal Truth	Truth in particular revealed form

Causes:
  1. Lack of intelligence
  2. Lack of information
  3. Lack of virtue

In the end, both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects circle around the distinction Schuon made between *form* and *substance*. The many cosmologies are first evaluated in terms of their *forms* in virtue of their common belief and affirmation in

the three conditions of "onto-cosmology." Secondly, they are evaluated in terms of their substance, specifically how well it conforms to the Divine Substance. To Schuon, the distinction between form and substance depends on the anthropological circumstances of the human receptacle. Moreover, there exists a uniform element that is not detached from the very substance as envisaged in the principles of onto-cosmology within a particular cosmology—which acts as the *form*—to which Schuon referred as the *spiritual archetype*; the *substance*, on the other hand, is the one that generates spiritual possibilities derived from the archetype.[133] The many cosmologies within a religious tradition can be said to be mere manifestations of the *spiritual archetype*; Schuon asserts that every religion a *priori* that manifests an archetype and any archetype can manifest itself a *posteriori* to any religion. He clarifies that the different cosmologies perceived within a tradition are products of the many dimensions of archetype in lieu of the reception of the human receptacles, for example, the religious archetype for the Germanic soul is a religion that is simpler and more inward, a popular type. Schuon believed that this diversity of sentiments inhibiting the human soul is the one demanding diversity which created sects within a tradition. For example, the coming of Protestantism is to fill and cater for the said needs of the Germanic soul, which results into simplifying the religion to appropriate practices.[134] Schuon saw no problem in allowing the diversity to correspond to possibilities of theological points of view which is considered as merely an extrinsic heresy; that is, as long as it inherits the same ontological point of view. In cosmological language, the many cosmological points of view to Schuon are creative acts of human receptacles in accordance with the "onto-cosmological" principles. He nevertheless disagreed with the human production of religious doctrines that is disconnected with the Divine. How then did Schuon determine what is the correct distinction in correspondence

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133. Schuon, *Christianity/Islam*, 23.
134. Ibid., 24–5.

to the diversities coming from human receptacles and from human productions? The following section will be an attempt to answer this question by putting forth the possible concepts used by Schuon for such interpretations.

Cosmologies among Other Traditions

The need for an "onto-cosmology" to Schuon is to describe the similarities through its universal and eternal trait from existing cosmologies of different traditions. For Schuon, in order to extract this universal and eternal trait in different traditions, he used the concept that surpasses the formal tradition which he learned from Guénon on the concept of *Tradition*. A compressed definition of Tradition as expounded by Guénon can be said to be a set of rituals, customs, values and principles of the ancient wisdom that affirms a primordial truth, inherited and accepted positively by all walks of life from diverse religious background of East to West throughout the ages. This definition nevertheless does not illustrate the many levels of meanings of *Tradition* as first put forth by Guénon. The concept can be divided into three levels of meaning,[135] the highest is when it is at the transcendent level and is referred as *Tradition* with a capital "T", it is a sacred substance that affirms the primordial Truth; a formless and immutable Truth, complete on its own. Truth in this regard with a capital "T" denotes truth at the level of transcendence, hence, it is complete. But to Schuon, once it is manifested through revelation, the formless Truth will have to be transmitted into the world of forms, hence, there is a hypostatic polarisation of the immutable Principle. It was *prefigured* into diversities of expressions of Truth, to which it is incomplete on its own. This brings to the second level of meaning of *tradition* as an adjective when it is considered in its formal state. It is a set of rituals, customs, principals and values as presented in the

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135. Harry Oldmeadow has extensively categorised the levels of meanings of *tradition* in his book, *Frithjof Schuon and the Perennial Philosophy*, 73.

sacred Scriptures, symbols and rites. Thirdly, *tradition* as a verb is the polarisation and hypostatic effect of the Principle-Essence, a transmission of every aspect of that is said to be eternal and universal. It is when the "*Truth as it finds expression*, [Italics mine] through the medium of a divine Revelation, in the myths, rituals, symbols, doctrines, iconographies and other forms of different primal and religious civilizations."[136] Revelation as meant by Schuon is the means of salvation and is equivalent to the Buddhist concept of *upāya*, the heavenly mirage of the manifestation of the Absolute, *Māyā*.[137] Hence, it is "supernatural"; but Schuon alluded that it is not contrary to nature, and is ultimately the "natural supernatural". Indeed, this means that it is neither impossible for a group of people in some parts of the world at a given period of time to claim to have received "revelation" by mere contemplation over nature; such a definition of revelation will justify Schuon's claim to the validity of other traditions and will place them at an equal level with other religions that have received direct revelation.[138]

 Tradition at its highest level of meaning is synonymous to the concept of *philosophia perennis*. However, as mentioned earlier, Schuon's preference to use *religio perennis* rather than *philosophia perennis* can be seen as a distinction on how he looked at the meaning of tradition as compared to Guénon. He distinguished the meaning of *religio* to be the intrinsic reality that binds the earthly to heavenly and, *traditio* to be the extrinsic reality that is the legal, scriptural and ritual elements handed down to men.[139] According to Schuon, *Tradition* as

136. Ibid., 72.
137. Frithjof Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*, The Library of Perennial Philosophy (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2005).
138. Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, 25; Idem., *Spiritual Perspectives and Human* Facts trans. P. N. Townsend (Bedfont, Middlesex, Pates Manor: Perennial Books Limited, 1969), 117–8.
139. "*Religio* is what "binds" man to Heaven and engages his whole being; as for the word *traditio*, it is related to a more outward and sometimes fragmentary reality, besides suggesting a retrospective outlook; a new-born religion "binds" men to Heaven from the moment of its first revelation, but it does not become a "tradition"— or have

expounded by Guénon is merely a medium for collective correspondences of the above elements handed down to man which is still determined by the spatio-temporal setting and does not surpass the formal aspect of reality. It merely presents expressions of Truth. Therefore, he considered any religion that expresses these eternal and universal traits—be it intrinsic or extrinsic—to be expressions of Truth, mirroring parts of the total Truth. For one to be truly pure and authentic in claims of total Truth that is both universal and eternal, one must surpass the formal setting and reach for the substance of the inner content of religions. Thus, to Schuon, the intrinsic binding of Heaven and Earth which *religio* encapsulates and surpasses the extrinsic transmission of wisdom in a tradition is the *sophia*.

Thus, the above statements can be related to Aymard-Laude's concerns on the necessary components of Schuon's exposition regarding spiritual paths. Aymard-Laude pointed out the necessary components that make up Schuon's spiritual paths into three: *Revelation, Religion* and *Tradition*.[140] These three components are depicted as a "vertical" implication of the order of reality in reverse. Revelation as outlined above, is the message brought down from the transcendent realm to communicate to man concerning the means of salvation. Religion, on the other hand, was implied as the product of human subjectivity in correspondence with the perceived revelation. *Tradition*, however, is the practical aspect transmitted and shaped in accordance with the "subjective supernatural element" which is the human intellect that seeks to reach salvation. Since the point of continuity of both Revelation and Tradition is at the level of Intellect. It can thus be concluded that what primarily consists in a religion to Schuon is the combination of both, the rites and means of salvation.

"traditions"— until two or three generations later. "Schuon, "Religio Perennis," *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, 120, 2n; Schuon, "The Supreme Commandment", *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, 2nd Ed. (Bedfont, Middlesex, Pates Minor: Perennial Books Ltd, 1990), 157, 164n.

140. Jean-Baptiste Aymard and Patrick Laude, *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings*, *SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 85.

Despite his construction of an "onto-cosmology" and his suggestion of the validity in the notion of *transcendent unity of religion*, Schuon nevertheless argued on the absurdity of creating a "single universal religion" (or which can be said as an *onto-religion*). He thought it was impossible as he believed that in terms of *source*, revelations had stopped at the time of Prophet Muhammad. In terms of the *content*, differences of religions have united its esoterisms at a transcendental level. Uniting exoterically, on the other hand, will be redundant because the very concept of religion is division. In terms of the *context*, the concept of time in the perennialist framework is cyclic (*yuga*). Hence, values are never a uniform abstraction but altered according to the phase of development.[141]

The above statement seems to contradict the very attempt to define "onto-cosmology" in the first place. The question to Schuon is that is it possible for someone to "create" a cosmology that is above cultural and religious aspects which is universal and eternal? This shows that Schuon rejected the idea of an "onto-religion" because to create one means to create a form.[142] Schuon's famous saying with regard to religion is

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141. "The diversity of religions, far from proving the falseness of all the doctrines concerning the supernatural, shows on the contrary, the supraformal character of revelation and the formal character of ordinary human understanding; the essence of revelation—or enlightenment—is one, but human nature requires diversity. Dogmas or other symbols may contradict one another externally, but they concur internally. However, it is easy to foresee the following objection: Even if it be admitted that there is a providential and inescapable cause underlying the diversity of religions and even their exoteric incompatibility in certain cases, ought we not then to try to get beyond these differences by creating a single universal religion? To this, it must be answered first that these differences have at *all times been transcended in the various esotericisms* and, second that a religion is not something one can create for the asking. Every attempt of this kind would be an error and a failure, and this is all the more certain inasmuch as the age of the great revelations had closed centuries ago." Schuon, "No Activity without Truth," *Sword of Gnosis*, 33.

142. But according to his separation between *form* and *substance*, form should not and cannot exist by itself without abiding to the substance. If he says the onto-cosmology denotes the essence of the substance and that it exists without forms, the only way a substance can exist on its own is when it is the Divine Substance.

that "Every religion has a *form* and a *substance*."[143] The concept of *form* coupled with the concept of *substance* is a separation of the nature of things to which he distinguished it as *form* being the manifestation of "ideas" or archetypes. Hence in this context, it is the many symbols expressed or experienced in a given culture or religion, whereas the *substance* is the archetype and the essential meaning that entails the symbolism.[144] With this, Schuon relied heavily on the symbolic epistemology of all religious traditions and regarded it as the many modes of manifestations of the one absolute meaning that is essential and true, hence, the claim for equal validity of cosmologies among other traditions.

As mentioned earlier, Nasr, being a follower of Schuon's work in perennial philosophy, wrote numerous works such as *Man and Nature, Religion and the Order of Nature*, *The Need for a Sacred Science, Knowledge and the Sacred* that attempt to synthesise the many cosmologies among existing traditions in order to demonstrate Schuon's claim for the existence of similarities in every tradition at the transcendent level according to the conditions of the "onto-cosmology," In the second section of *Religion and the Order of Nature* in particular, Nasr elaborates on the supposed undisclosed reality beneath the surface of all religious traditions such as the primal or indigenous religions, the Shamanisms, the North American traditions, the Egyptian, the Far Eastern traditions, the Indo-Iranian religions, European religions, and the Abrahamic religions, each of which has the capacity to realise its natural quest for order in nature which leads to a certain cosmology.[145] For example, Nasr implicitly pointed out that the Greeks also had the tendency to orbit around the idea of *Existence of a Creator*, the *Oneness of this Creator* and the *Transcendent and Immanent Creator* in their concept of *Moira* (Fate or Destiny) as the principle of the universe that antecedes the gods. He added that the conventional

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143. Schuon, *Form and Substance in the Religions*, 14.
144. Schuon, *From Divine to the Human*, 51.
145. Nasr, *Order of Nature*, 51.

understanding of the will of the gods legislated by Zeus as the source of nature was in actuality later introduced in the Greek religions which then replaced the authority of *Moira*. According to the myths, the gods eventually abandoned the world due to their well-known dispute among themselves for power. Furthermore, the consequences of this abandonment and lack of trust in the cosmology where the irresponsible gods ruled the world have led to the development of Anaximander's alternatives to natural cause as opposed to the gods.[146] From this example, we can see how a perennial scholar like Nasr has taken a given cosmology as being redirected to fit into the conditions of "onto-cosmology" in order to verify its existence.

Conclusion

The conceptual development and the transference of meanings of nature from the beginning of the Greek's inquiry, until it reached the current situation that brought the existence of a perennial view, is an example of the effect of secularisation. It has been shown that just as when philosophy was at its apex during the time of the Greeks, the theological understanding was at its highest mysterious level. Knowledge of the cosmos, God, and man, was subject to change and never autonomous. For this matter, it could not function as a strong theoretical framework that would give a valid answer to the ultimate meaning of Reality. It was unfortunate how nature, as a concept, was being literally dissected to every prospective possibility in defining its principles and to make sense of its existence.

In discussing nature in the post-modern time, the challenges of having a clear view of what it is and how it has come to be in the ontological, epistemological and axiological condition of human life can be seen as a perplexing effect of the corruption of knowledge. The corruption was said to be

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146. Ibid., 52.

the product of the internal and external conflicts of the West. As presented in this study, the internal conflict of the West gave a lasting effect on humanity as it gave birth to secularisation as a philosophical programme that tends to separate between truth and reality. Nevertheless, on the subject of nature, the meaning of it has undergone many phases throughout history to which man has created destructions on all three levels of the natural kingdoms: the animal, the vegetal and the mineral. We can see that the beginning of the disorder in the physical world lies in the very disenchantment of nature. The effect of secularisation is briefly explained in this paper and how it then generates a pluralistic—or in this matter, perennialistic—view of nature. The perennialists' approach to this situation is to re-enchant the way one views nature by bringing back the sense of the sacred and it is a problematic disposition as it promotes an extreme deconsecration of values on existence, leaving one to equate truth to everything sacred from the perennial definition.