

A Treatise on Cosmic Fire: A Theory of Everything

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Abstract

This article explores and evaluates Alice Bailey's esoteric cosmology presented in *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* as a mythic theory of everything, situating it alongside scientific quests for a single explanation of the universe, since in the words of esoteric scholar Olav Hammer, "one of the most striking characteristics of the Esoteric Tradition is precisely its use of contemporary science as a source of legitimacy."¹

Introduction

Esoteric cosmologies are elaborate, symbolic constructions of a transcendent reality, and theosophist Alice A. Bailey's presentation is no exception. Her central text, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* contains a synthesis of western esoteric motifs and eastern mystical notions in what amounts to a mythic theory of everything. Following a theosophical epistemology, Bailey draws on emerging insights from the new science of her day to embellish her cosmology, adding another metaphoric layer to an already complex view.

There has long existed a rapport between science and esotericism. Historian Francis Yates identifies a direct descent between Renaissance Hermeticism and modern science, and Australian science writer Margaret Wertheim speculates that it was Newton's fascination with alchemy that fed his acceptance of the notion of some mysterious energy emanating from celestial bodies, in turn leading to his scientific explanation of gravity.² The contemporary scientific milieu is not entirely averse to metaphysical ponderings either, expressed by science writer and physicist Paul Davies, a self-confessed Platonist, as follows:

Many scientists are religious and many of those who are not confess to a vague feeling that there is something beyond the surface

reality of daily experience, some meaning behind existence.³

Esoteric thought does not carry the hegemonic authority of either scientific or religious discourses, both of which occupy foreground positions in western society regarding their power to explain the universe. Scientists pursue explanations for, and models of, the workings of the natural world using the empirical method to produce provable or testable results. Newtonian physics provided the model of a clockwork universe, which was later challenged by discoveries of the chaos and complexities of nature, revealed at sub-atomic levels through quantum physics. In the time between the creation of these two vastly differing conceptions of nature emerged Darwin's theory of evolution, which seemed able to explain biological processes without any need for the God of Genesis as creator of the universe.

Bailey's theosophical predecessor Helena Blavatsky offered an esoteric alternative to counter Darwinian evolutionary theory, which embraced Neoplatonic emanationist theories of evolution, encompassing both the cosmos and humanity's spiritual progress out of (involution) and back to (evolution) the Source, and combining this with:

the Indian epical visualization of great cycles (of *kalpa* and *manvantara*) as the conceptual vehicle by which to view cosmo-

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history undergoing periodicity and constant renewal through time, yet presented her 'total vision' – her neo-Gnostic *mythos* included – in the guise of a synthetic teaching deriving from a far-distant Source in time.⁴

The source referred to in this quotation is the Book of Dzyan, a reputedly ancient text of Tibetan origin thought to be the oldest book in the world, the stanzas of which form the basis for Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky's entry into the evolutionary theory debate with her theosophical proposal might appear ludicrous in contrast to the serious weight of science and religion, yet in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly among free-thinkers of the upper classes, the Theosophical Society made a deep and lasting impression, with lodges founded throughout America, and in Britain, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and India.

Bailey wrote *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* in the light of an emerging new science; she sought to capture a sub-atomic view of esotericism, incorporating elements of quantum physics into her treatise.⁵ Bailey wrote the work as a thorough extrapolation of the Stanzas of Dzyan and a psychological key to *The Secret Doctrine*. It is doubtful she would ever have considered her treatise a mythic theory of everything.⁶

Mythic cosmologies are reflections of our desire to make sense of and explain the world around us. From indigenous Australian Dreamtime stories to Biblical Genesis, explanations of creation provide meaning and purpose to existence and evoke a sense of awe. Reading mythic stories engages the reader in a suspension of ordinary reality. For Joseph Campbell, "myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation."⁷ The potency of mythic cosmologies lies in the ideological function of their metaphors which influence the way the individual thinks and acts in the world.⁸ Like all mythic cosmologies, the ideological power in Bailey's presentation lies in its fulfillment of a psychological need for reassurance in the face of the unknown, providing a palliative for a sense of smallness and insignificance in the face of things that cannot be readily understood.

There is a marked difference between traditional creation myths and the esoteric cosmology of *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, not least the text's more than 1,200 pages of abstruse and instructive writing given, according to Alice Bailey, by the Master Djwhal Khul. The notion of myth with regard to this treatise should be understood as an explanation of the universe pertaining to a metaphysical realm beyond scientific laws of nature. It is scientists themselves who have argued in support of non-scientific or mythic theories of everything, and it is for this reason that the author has placed *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* in that frame.

Mythic cosmologies provide a contrast to those cosmologies found in contemporary science, which do not offer the same explanatory comforts:

These cosmological myths place us in the world and involve us with it. The cosmologies today —big bangs and black holes, antimatter and curved, ever-expanding space going nowhere—leave us in dread and senseless incomprehensibility. Random events, nothing truly necessary.⁹

All theories of everything seek a single overarching explanation for the universe and its order. Although lacking scientific precision, mythic cosmologies seek to unify all knowledge into one single explanation, justifying, in astrophysicist John Barrow's view, the treatment of them as theories of everything.¹⁰ The resulting complex labyrinth of information may seem detrimental to the myth when viewed scientifically; however, it is precisely this complexity, along with the extraordinary effort involved in gaining a full understanding of it, that might be esotericism's gift to humanity.

Bailey's cosmology is presented in this article in terms of a number of complex metaphoric concepts, each a partial explanation of the one reality. All of the concepts in Bailey's scheme are metaphoric in the sense that they are symbolic representations of aspects of metaphysics given in order to foster esoteric perception. Together these metaphoric concepts provide a theory of everything drawn together through arguments by analogy and correspondence. Every metaphoric concept relates to the evolution of

consciousness in terms of energy, matter, and form. Bailey places human consciousness and human evolution at the center of her cosmic reality, providing the reader with psychological reassurance alongside a heavy responsibility for the evolution of the entire system.¹¹

Built on mathematics, a scientific theory of everything is an algorithmic compression carrying explanatory and predictive power, the whole of nature explained through a single mathematical formula. Attempts have been termed Grand Unified Theories (GUTs), string theories, and supersymmetries.¹² Such theories attempt to explain the whole universe through a combination of as few mathematical symbols as possible.

Bailey's theory of everything does not rely on mathematics, although number is central to the formulation, based on an arithmetic progression of the Neoplatonic triune nature of the Source: the One becoming Three and thence Seven (a, b, c, a+b, a+c, b+c, a+b+c). While different in just about every respect, reliance on number is ground shared by esoteric and scientific pursuits of a unifying explanation of all aspects of existence.

To be worthy of consideration as a theory of everything, Bailey's cosmology needs to meet three criteria highlighted by physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne, demonstrating "comprehensiveness of explanation and overall coherence, including an adequate degree of consonance with human experience."¹³

Entry into Bailey's cosmology begins at the macrocosmic level with a teleological explanation of a controlling principle in the universe, "a Builder, or some Creative Mind...seeking to manifest through a demonstrable objective."¹⁴ This builder, or Absolute Reality, is the causal basis of the existence of our solar system. Inside our solar system, Absolute Being seeks to work out its purpose through manifestation by blending with its opposite pole of pre-existing intelligent substance, creating a sun, or light and objectivity. Bailey affirms the theosophical claim that primordial matter was conditioned in a previous solar system to form intelligent substance. The solar system itself is viewed as a manifestation of a solar Logos, one of a cosmic Hierarchy of being. The solar Logos is panentheistic,

both active and evolving, and is one of a trinity of logoi, each a conscious entity manifesting divine energy. In his summary of this depiction of reality, Robert Ellwood explains that:

Theosophy also emphasizes that this same triune Logos is reflected throughout the universe, wherever there is a "local" center of creativity recapitulating the cosmic.¹⁵

In Bailey's work, these three logoi refer to will, wisdom, and activity.¹⁶ The first logos to manifest is the third in her series, the Third Logos or Active Intelligence. During this earlier phase of creation all that pertained to evolution concerned matter itself. The current creation phase, our manifested solar system, pertains to the Second Logos of Love-Wisdom and the evolution of consciousness. The First Logos of Will remains unmanifested.

Within the context of a mythic theory of everything, Bailey's solar Logos may be regarded as the embodiment of an idea of purposive creation placed within an overarching metaphoric concept of a macrocosm, illustrative of more transcendent aspects of the cosmos, and positioning humanity as microcosmic in the process.

Bailey's design argument supports her proposition that there exists a divine Plan that unfolds through an emanationist evolutionary theory in which all entities involve out of and evolve back into Spirit. Bailey argues that involution culminates for humanity in the formation of the individual personality as a separated, selfishly motivated entity. A reorientation of awareness needs to occur if the divine Plan is to be fulfilled, one in which the individual begins to see herself as part of planetary consciousness. "The goal for the evolution of the atom is self-consciousness as exemplified in the human kingdom. The goal for the evolution of man is group consciousness, as exemplified by a planetary Logos. The goal for the planetary Logos is God consciousness, as exemplified by the solar Logos."¹⁷

Evolutionary purpose is a subjective path to unity. Bailey's divine Plan also contains a strong ethical aspect since it is through each individual human's developed ability to exercise conscious control over a selfishly polarized

mental, emotional and physical nature that the purpose of the solar Logos is achieved. In Bailey's view, evolution is a vast group experiment to make each human "atom" an intelligent co-operator, responsive to forces impinging on it externally, aware of both its own internal economy, and the latent forces and energies which it has to contribute.¹⁸ For Bailey, evolution leads to synthesis, integration, and the intelligent cooperation of the individual for the good of the whole. This process requires the control of the form or body within which the conscious entity (soul) dwells, so that the body becomes adapted to its needs.¹⁹

Bailey's combination of rational design and purpose provides an explanation of the significance of human consciousness. A design argument may be appreciated for its aesthetic acknowledgment of creation alone. Yet as Jacob Needleman notes, when design arguments deny purpose in our vast and intricate universe, humanity becomes crushed. When design is tied to purpose, man is both located and hailed since "a conscious universe is the only reality that can include human consciousness."²⁰

Concerns about the presence or absence of purpose in cosmic evolution affect our philosophy and worldview. For cosmologist Jesús Mosterín, it is because science can offer answers to such concerns that many of us value science so highly.²¹

Some scientists deeply question the meaning and purpose of creation, including evolutionary theories, often intrigued by their sense of an underlying mystery which they feel may be able to be unraveled by the pursuits of science itself. According to Paul Davies, humanity has been written into the laws of nature in a deep and meaningful way, and some meaningful resonance exists between the human mind and the underlying organization of the natural world. Scientists seek to demonstrate this relationship using their own methods of inquiry, yet many physicists drawn to cosmology find themselves in metaphysical terrain. It appears that Bailey's theory of everything might appeal to some scientists since her teleological purpose held within the mind of a conscious designer God converges with similar views held within the

scientific milieu, on the proviso that these scientists are able to regard notions of earlier solar systems and threefold logic entities as provisional ideas or symbols in an intriguing metaphysical reality.

Cosmic Laws

The reader may view Bailey's theory of everything metaphorically, pondering the metaphysical, ideological, and psychological implications of the teachings. However, the manner in which *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* is written does not promote the cosmology as metaphor. Rather, the cosmology is presented as a complex interrelatedness of an apparently factual metaphysical reality accessed subjectively, a presentation that slips with ease into absolute truth of an inner objective reality in the mind of the reader.

Bailey's treatise pertains to everything in the cosmos, from an individual atom of matter through to the entire universe, providing a detailed explanation of how all the various parts of this ordered whole relate to each other. One way Bailey ties her cosmology together is through the application of cosmic Laws, justified, "because their results are immutable, irresistible and their effects remain unchangeably the same, varying only according to the form as receiver."²²

Bailey argues that our current solar system is ruled by the Law of Attraction and Repulsion, the previous solar system by the Law of Economy, and the next the Law of Synthesis. In essence, these laws refer to the way that energy may be manipulated by any conscious entity, the terms economy, attraction, and synthesis taking on specialized meaning and significance with regard to motives that may lie behind human action. For Bailey, these are laws of nature, and they are irrefutable.

Bailey's commitment to the existence of cosmic entities is empowered through her quasi-scientific notion of laws of nature. In the scientific world, laws of nature are mathematical representations of the regularities and patterns found in nature. A law becomes such because, however tested, it always holds. Bailey's cosmic laws are far removed from laws such as

Newton's law of gravity, which offers an explanation of a single, albeit universal physical phenomenon and has its foundation in fact. The existence of the laws of nature forms a central part of a scientific worldview. The laws of the esotericist likewise explain to them the workings of the natural world. Yet, Bailey's esoteric laws cannot be verified using the scientific method, and a description of cosmological processes controlled through a set of laws that rule our solar system might appear a rigid contrivance.

Bailey's overarching laws of economy, attraction, and synthesis governing the whole of creation pertain to an ordered universe and carry ideological power, the reader's scientific-materialist worldview confronted with an apparent need to make an ontological commitment to Bailey's wholly unscientific claims in order to garner this esoterically informed way of knowing. Any assertion that these laws are tantamount to empirical fact would constitute an ideologically persuasive device since the cosmological edifice would then appear to be constructed on a foundation of absolute truth buttressed by a powerful quasi-scientific explanation, one that would challenge an interpretation of Bailey's work as a mythic theory of everything, a theory of everything far removed from traditional mythic creation stories. It should be noted that in the preface to the treatise, Djwhal Khul notes that all that is written "may, or may not, be correct, true and useful," a statement easily forgotten in the labyrinth of material.²³ Further, Bailey's cosmology shares with mythic theories of everything an acceptance that ordinary waking reality is not all there is to existence and it is possible to perceive a metaphysical reality. The keynote of the Bailey opus is that it offers the means, the training, to achieve such perception as a way of knowing.

Bailey's energy laws govern her whole cosmic scheme. Absolute Reality manifests through infinite possibility, or the energy of the cosmos, our solar system electrified by energy emanating from the cosmic mental plane via our solar Logos. The planetary Logoiic entities within our solar system are said to be cosmic beings who originated from elsewhere in the universe. All the energy within the solar system flows in and

out of this cosmic Hierarchy. The evolutionary goal involves the unimpeded flow of energy throughout the solar system in a particular and unspecified pattern.

The Chakras

One way Bailey depicts the energetic interrelatedness of the solar system is by drawing on the eastern mystical notion of the chakra or etheric center, a whirling concentration of energy. These energy centers exist in any etheric body or energy field, including that of the solar Logos. All bodies contain seven etheric centers that receive, absorb, and transmit energy from both inside and outside the etheric body.²⁴ The body of the solar Logos, the sun, contains seven chakras. Energy streams into and out of the chakras in an elaborate interplay.

The complexity continues. Each of the seven etheric centers within the body of the solar Logos represents a planetary scheme of one of the seven sacred planetary Logoi. The seven sacred planets are Vulcan, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, and Uranus. The planetary Logoi each have their own planetary scheme, and each scheme contains another seven etheric centers. Each of the energy balls in each of the seven planets comes under the direct influence of one of the seven solar centers. That's forty-nine streams of energy.

Each of the seven planetary centers is also a chain or field of evolution, and within each center or chain are seven globes, or mini-wheels. That is 343 chakras involved in an energetic interplay the reader is invited to visualize.

The Planes

Adding further complexity, each of these seven chains or planetary centers is also a plane of existence. The planes are central to Theosophy, representing the constitution of existence in hierarchical form, and formulations of the planes differ from source to source.²⁵ For Bailey, the first plane represents energized space, matter in its most transcendent form, a universal field of potential. Each descending plane is denser, through etheric, liquid, gaseous, the seventh pertaining to matter itself. These seven planes can be "regarded as seven vast

spheres, rotating *latitudinally* within the solar periphery.”²⁶

Just as each of the planetary centers contains seven mini-wheels, so each plane contains a further seven divisions, or sub-planes. The solar system itself is situated on the cosmic physical plane. Each of the cosmic physical sub-planes is one of the seven planes of our solar system, or the systemic planes. Each systemic plane also has seven sub-planes. The physical material earthly world of rocks and trees exists on the seventh systemic sub-plane, a sub-plane of a sub-plane on the cosmic physical plane. Evolution proceeds up the planes, and humanity occupies the bottom three planes of dense matter (physical), liquid (emotional or astral), and gaseous (mental).

Evident already in this mythic theory of everything is considerable complexity, a complexity that deepens the further into Bailey’s cosmology the reader travels. Even the numbering of the seven planes is contingent on the stance adopted, counted from the top down or the bottom up, the first plane also the seventh, the third becomes the fifth and the fifth the third, and so on.

The Deva Hierarchy

The planetary etheric centers become planes as attention shifts from energy interplay to the constitution of existence. A second interpretive shift occurs as each plane is also the material body of an angel or deva, bringing in a hylozoistic perspective. “We must remember that the devas are the qualities and attributes of matter, the active builders, who work consciously and unconsciously on the plane.”²⁷

The deva hierarchy is considered a parallel evolution of entities closely related to human and planetary progress, and it is through the devas

that hylozoism is explained and explored. As active builders, the deva hierarchy are “that which embodies thought, and that which gives it [thought] its separated energy.”²⁸ Bailey explains the deva hierarchy in considerable detail,

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providing the reader with a complex account of the intricate workings of devas of various kinds, and how the human individual may harness devas to do their bidding. It is through the deva hierarchy that Bailey conveys to the reader the potency and consequences of thought, since all thought triggers an automatic, unconscious response from devas.²⁹ All matter is alive and can therefore be manipulated or used by any superior conscious entity. In this

fashion, Bailey’s theory of everything is not only an explanation of creation and the inner structure of the universe, it is a presentation and evaluation of theurgy driven by a moral impetus, namely that humanity, and especially esotericists, should take great responsibility for thought and action.

The enormity of Bailey’s cosmological presentation augments this ethical imperative. It is already evident that the reader must engage in rigorous mental gymnastics to grasp just one of these depictions. The effort involved in combining four cosmological concepts (Logoi, chakras, planes, and devas) stretches the imagination, even when supplied with diagrams. Embracing the concepts fosters the realization that a different understanding of the cosmos is revealed depending on the stance taken, whether that is from the perspective of a planetary Logos, a solar Logos, a human being or a tiny atom, or whether under consideration is creation, energy, the constitution of existence, or the nature of hylozoism.

Each perspective draws on a different language and involves an entirely different presentation. And yet the chakras and the planes and the devas are one and the same. Understanding one of

these concepts involves a dis-engagement with ordinary conceptions and perceptions. To understand and link the concepts together is to cultivate an ability to shift around inside a metaphysical reality of great intricacy. How the individual observes reality is contingent on the conceptual outlook adopted, and this outlook itself may be stretched or expanded through the process of engagement with *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*. Perhaps this potential to expand awareness is an unintentional outcome resulting from the incorporation of many different ideas taken from eastern mysticism and western esotericism and placed into a single coherent explanation of the universe. Perhaps it is this bewildering experience itself, the constant shifting of understanding, that fosters an expansion of consciousness. This in and of itself appears of value to humanity at a time in human history when transcending limited points of view and empathizing with the views of others and the planet is of vital importance. When coupled with a moral imperative to take responsibility for thought and action, this effect reinforces the value of regarding Bailey's cosmology as a mythic theory of everything.

The Seven Rays

From Logoi as creation theory, energy and the chakras, the constitution of existence expressed through the planes, and hylozoism and thoughtforms portrayed through the deva hierarchy, the complexity continues further with the seven rays of light illumining the solar system:

The seven rays, regarded as the seven veiling forms of the Spirits, themselves spheroidal bands of colour, [rotate] *longitudinally*...forming a vast interlacing network. These two sets of spheres (planes and rays) form the totality of the solar system, and produce its form spheroidal.³⁰

The seven rays are not unique to Theosophy. They form a part of Hindu philosophy and appear in early western esoteric traditions, including Gnosticism. In Bailey's scheme, these seven rays of light cut vertically through the seven horizontal planes. The rays flow through the planetary Logoi, the chakras of the body of the solar Logos, influencing all manifestation

within the solar system, offering an explanation of purpose from a psychological perspective and following the one-to-seven arithmetic progression:

[The Three Major Rays of Aspect (of Divine Essence)]

Ray I Will or Power 1st Aspect

Ray II Love-Wisdom 2nd Aspect

Ray III Active Intelligence 3rd Aspect

[The Four Minor Rays of Attribute]

Ray IV Harmony through Conflict

Ray V Concrete Knowledge or Science

Ray VI Devotion or Abstract Idealism

Ray VII Ceremonial Magic or Order.³¹

Much is given concerning the rays elsewhere in Bailey's opus. Of significance regarding a theory of everything is humanity's association with the Fourth Ray of Harmony through Conflict. Humanity is situated in the lowest of the evolutionary lives held within the etheric body of our planetary Logos. Although humanity appears tiny in relation to Bailey's vast cosmic picture, it has an important role to play, embodied in the number four. Humanity is the fourth Creative Hierarchy, going through the fourth round of the fourth planetary chain, attempting to master the fourth systemic plane of intuition. The solar system, planetary scheme, earth chain, and physical planet Earth all relate to the number four.³² Through this numerical synchronicity humanity has the opportunity to evolve along the lines provided by the Fourth Ray of Harmony through Conflict.

Humanity's evolutionary potential affects the planetary Logos and the solar Logos who facilitate human evolution through energetic stimulation to advance Logoi evolution. The evolutionary purpose of the planetary Logos and the solar Logos play out through humanity which exists at the center of systemic evolution. Human struggle for harmony through conflict is central to the evolutionary development of the planetary Logos. As cells in the planetary body, humanity constitutes the sensory entities through which this Logos feels and experiences.³³ Humanity must develop dispassion and

non-attachment to form. Then, the planetary Logos and humanity as constituent parts can develop the intuition, or the ability to immediately grasp wholes without conscious reasoning. Humanity impedes this evolutionary course by giving in to desire and attachment to the material side of existence.

Positioning humanity on the Fourth Ray carries strong symbolic associations of esoteric significance. The astrological chart pivots on the four elements (earth, air, water, and fire) and the four directions (north, south, east, and west). The four arms on the cross of the crucifixion represent human suffering and sacrifice. As perennial philosopher Frithjof Schuon notes, the quaternity as a square represents a static equilibrium, and as a cross, the dynamic, radiating unfolding of potential.³⁴

The Three Fires

Humanity is the fulcrum of planetary evolution in Bailey's theory of everything, affecting the planetary and solar Logoi through its influence on all the atomic lives within the body of humanity and the planet. Creation and the energy of the universe are portrayed through the Logoi and their chakras, the constitution of existence is explained through the planes, hylozoism and thoughtforms are explored through the deva hierarchy, and the light of consciousness and purpose or teleology is explored through the rays. Bailey's theory of everything would be incomplete without an explanation of the dynamics of evolution. To explain how planetary evolution advances, Bailey utilizes the concept of fire, a hylozoistic expression of will or motive:

Fire internal, inherent and latent; fire radiatory and emanative; fire vivifying, stimulating and destroying; fire transmitted, reflected, and absorbed; fire, the basis of all life; fire, the essence of all existence; fire, the means of development, and the impulse behind all evolutionary process; fire, the builder, the preserver and the constructor; fire, the originator, the process and the goal; fire the purifier and the consumer... The wheel of fire turns and all within that wheel is subjected to the threefold flame, and eventually stands perfected.³⁵

Fire does not refer to the licking flames of an ignited log. Fire is that which brings dynamic vitality to the cosmos, explains advancement at the atomic level, and includes notions of electricity and magnetism. It is fire that ties Bailey's cosmology together into a theory of everything.

Scholars have noted how contemporaneous scientific discoveries are utilized by esoteric writers in metaphoric ways to explain the workings of the universe, a point worth remembering when evaluating esoteric perspectives to counter the assumption that the esotericist, and not the scientist, intuited an idea which then led to later scientific developments. Although either trajectory is possible, since the development of the intuition, via a deep engagement with esotericism amongst scientific theorists, must surely have contributed to their discoveries.

Professor of Western Esotericism Nicholas Goodricke-Clarke explains how Theosophy uses the science of electricity in combination with the theosophical idea of fire:

Magnetism and electricity emerged as the most tangible manifestation of the hidden presence of divine power in the world and its objects—as the concealed power that creates life, movement and warmth; that permeates the whole universe; that causes the attraction of opposite poles.³⁶

Bailey provides a threefold formulation of fire in the following tabulation:

The Three Fires

Fire by Friction, internal vitalizing fires, the objective solar system

The 3rd Aspect and Ray

Solar Fire, cosmic mental fire, animates mental body of solar Logos.

2nd Aspect and Ray

Electric Fire, Divine Flame, dominant characteristic of solar Logos.

1st Aspect and Ray.³⁷

In our solar system, the second Aspect, the Second Ray, and solar fire inform evolution via magnetic polarity:

Everything in the solar system is in a state of flux, as is everything in the universe, and the vital energy circulates, as the blood or the nervous energy of the body circulates, throughout the entire system... Under this type of solar activity, the ultimate good is attained by the method of interplay, interchange, and in mutual attraction and repulsion.³⁸

It is the Third Ray that supplies the basic vibration of the solar system, infusing matter with active intelligence, matter conditioned by fire by friction, manifesting as the internal fires of an atom. Fire by friction provides each atom with life or vitality and causes each atom to rotate. The spinning motion of the atom generates its latent heat, its spheroidal shape, and its internal coherence. This motion is a metaphoric concept of experience and experimentation.

All rotating spheres, including etheric bodies belonging to forms, display three types of activity sequentially, described by Bailey as inertia, mobility, and then rhythm.³⁹ Inertia refers to the slow activity of matter not in form:

It might be of value here to remind the student also that three things have to be recognised in all manifestation:

First, that the tangible objective exterior, negative, receptive, and occultly unorganised, is without form and usefulness *apart from the inner energy*.

Second, that the “true form” or the force-vehicle energises and produces the cohesion of that which is unorganised.

Third, that the “volatile essence,” or the spiritual essential Life, focuses itself in some one point within the “true form.”⁴⁰

Form is not synonymous with object and should be regarded as a living entity. Thoughts are also forms, or thoughtforms.⁴¹ From this point of view an entire kingdom in nature is an outward manifestation of a thoughtform of a macrocosmic entity.⁴²

The present solar system of forms comes under the Law of Attraction and Repulsion, and the second type of activity, mobility, manifests as experience, experimentation, and extreme

movement. When the spinning atom releases radiatory heat or prana, the internal life force of matter itself penetrates and circulates throughout the entire solar system.⁴³ Eventually this rotating motion leads to radiation. Eventually, a state of balance and stabilization is established, leading in time to the death or destruction of that form.⁴⁴

Solar fire is portrayed as an impulse emanating from outside an atom.⁴⁵ This fire moves in spirals, or orbits and cycles of periodic manifestation, and is termed spiral-cyclic motion.⁴⁶ Such motion refers to the magnetic attractive power of a greater entity drawing forth or pulling a smaller sphere into its own radius of influence. This influence stimulates an expansion of the realm of experience of the smaller sphere. Therefore, evolution in the solar system occurs through cycles and spirals. In this fashion, the evolution of consciousness reaches its goal, aided by the progressive forward motion of electric fire, or spiritual will relating to the First Aspect and Ray and displaying progressive forward motion.⁴⁷

A Treatise on Cosmic Fire draws on scientific concepts such as the atom, rotation and radiation, and the electrical reference of attraction and repulsion to provide a quasi-scientific explanation of how forms are made. The latent heat of the atom is potential energy in a state of inertia. This latent heat becomes active heat or kinetic energy through the stimulation of an external agent, the intention or will of Spirit. Active heat is the ability of the atom to radiate energy and become mobile. Mobility is direction or the intentional orientation of spiritual will. Eventually, entropy causes the atom to settle into a rhythm.

Evolution proceeds sequentially. An atomic sphere revolves around its own axis, aware of its own internal life. Slowly, the internal frictional fire increases in vibration as the atom becomes magnetically aware or conscious of the form of which it is a part, along with the other atoms within that form. The atom then becomes aware of its orbit around a greater center and this center’s magnetic pull, the result of solar fire. The action of solar fire increases in strength, the magnetic pull eventually becoming

so powerful that the essential positive life within the atom feels this force drawing it to itself. A change in polarity occurs, a change of focus, a reorientation away from the atom's own concerns, the positivity of the central atomic life and concomitant disregard for other spheres becoming negative in the face of the positive pull of the larger sphere, the atom succumbing to and falling in with the larger sphere's higher purpose. The atom responds, spiraling inward towards the life at the center, its spiraling progress energized by the spiral-cyclic motion of solar fire and the forward progressive motion of electric fire.

Evolution is not a smooth progression as matter follows its own line of least resistance, that of economy, self-preservation or basic necessity. Matter prefers to retain its own separation, each spinning sphere resisting or repelling attachment to another spinning sphere.⁴⁸ However, Spirit is naturally attracted to matter and it is through this attraction that Spirit enables matter to cohere.⁴⁹ It is spiritual will or electric fire that shapes matter into form,⁵⁰ transcending the impulse inherent in matter to differentiate rather than form a unity.⁵¹

Each sphere maintains separation through rotational spin, yet each sphere is also reliant on other spheres as a result of absorbing the radiation emanating from them:

Radiation is the outer effect produced by all forms in all kingdoms when their internal activity has reached such a stage of vibratory activity that the confining walls of the form no longer form a prison, but permit the escape of the subjective essence.⁵²

The tangible objective form does not create this radiation; it is the etheric body that organizes and energizes form. When the indwelling entity can no longer be contained by its etheric body, this entity is pulled by the force emanating from the enveloping greater existence. It is at this point that radiation occurs. All atoms become radioactive and release their inner potency by responding to a stronger magnetic center. This is the process that, energetically conceived through the metaphoric concept of fire, generates the evolution of consciousness.

The relationship and mutual dependence between each atom, unit or entity with all that comes within its sphere of influence involves the operation of the second systemic Law of Attraction and Repulsion. Attraction leads to coherence, repulsion to differentiation. While repulsion is used by the personality to preserve identity and individuality, it leads to the separation of one unit from another, posing an evolutionary challenge in the context of the goal of cohesion, merging, and synthesis. The basis of the evolutionary process involves the awakening of the atoms in the etheric centers in the body of a human being and, in a planetary Logos, which are then stimulated into positive activity through the pouring on these centers of positive force.

The Permanent Atom

The three fires are an elaborate and vivid way of explaining the evolution of consciousness, and yet so far, the fires only concern the spatial dimension. Bailey also uses her fire concept to explain how evolution advances through time, seeking to prove the notion of reincarnation through the use of another key metaphoric concept, the permanent atom. Permanent atoms explain how the fire of Spirit can influence the progression of each individual incarnation in a long chain of reincarnation. The life of each individual becomes part of a successive chain of lives of progress:

Each body or form wherein Spirit functions has, for its focal point on each plane, an atom composed of matter of the atomic subplane of each plane. This serves as a nucleus for the distribution of force, for the conservation of faculty, for the assimilation of experience and for the preservation of memory. These atoms are in direct connection with one or other of the three great rays in connection with the microcosm.⁵³

Permanent atoms are, therefore, a rarefied kind of matter, able to exist disincarnate, retaining key information gathered in the entities' life. As such, they relate to the third Aspect and frictional fire, remembering that evolution in the current solar system utilizes pre-existing intelligent matter conditioned in an earlier solar system. From the point of view of reincarnation,

the manner in which evolution occurs in our present solar system is depicted as the consciousness aspect, or the rays impacting on the matter aspect through permanent atoms in the following way. Each permanent atom contains a number of *spirillae*, or tiny whirling forces. “The spirillae therefore are but streams of force, or second aspect vitality which circulates geometrically within the circumscribing wall of substance.”⁵⁴ A permanent atom contains ten spirillae, four influenced by an individual’s personality ray, and the fifth and sixth by the soul ray. The four spirillae influenced by the personality ray are synthesized by the fifth spirilla. This results in there being seven spirillae, corresponding to the seven planes and rays. The fifth spirilla is also the third, from the perspective of the atomic pole, vibrating to five types of force. The role of the remaining spirillae is not given in the text.⁵⁵ The rays stimulate the spirillae into activity by first impacting the wall of the atom as an external force, affecting the atom’s rotary motion and vibration. Then the ray stimulates the atom’s inner fire, causing its light to shine brighter and brighter. Finally, the ray brings the spirillae into play, and evolution advances accordingly as more and more of these spirillae are activated. Through the permanent atom, Bailey is able to argue that each human being enters each incarnation with an amount of stored material leftover from past lives, the residue of their handling of the Law of Cause and Effect, or karma, “the law that governs the matter of the solar system.”⁵⁶

The evolution of consciousness involves the action of the seven rays, which collectively function as solar fire, on the frictional fires of atomic matter held within a pranically energized system. Just as an atom spins on its own axis, so the human unit, too, is mobile, busy gathering experiences and experimenting in life. Human beings also give off radiation in the form of heat and absorb warmth from the rays of the sun. A person may encounter something larger than herself that challenges her to expand her realm of experience. This could be anything from a book to a lover. In this fashion, Bailey’s concept of the three fires dovetails with basic human experience. The three fires tie in with the model of

the three Logoi of creation, forming a highly persuasive metaphysical argument.

Bailey harnesses a simple scientific notion to the basic Neoplatonic premise of a conscious deity causing the evolutionary path of all of life. The science of atoms, electricity, fire, and radiation are used to convey the actions of her three Logoi that lie behind all of existence. These metaphoric concepts may be regarded as literal truth that expands on a metaphysical absolute, that of a transcendent creator. Or they may be treated as evocative metaphors providing a remarkable way of describing the world and humanity’s role in it.

Bailey’s Mythic Theory of Everything and Contemporary Science

Bailey’s evolutionary theory of everything presents an interesting alternative to existing scientific theories. Two scientific models of evolution currently dominate the scientific milieu, each informed by an overarching explanatory metaphor: mechanistic versus organic. Mechanistic explanations are inspired by Newtonian physics, the metaphor of the machine continuing to inform scientists who gravitate towards a materialist outlook and deny the existence of non-physical entities. This view has gained weight through the rise of cognitive science and neurobiology.⁵⁷ Critics of the materialist view highlight its reductionism, humans reduced to machines with implications for free will and independence. Some critics argue the materialist view allows scientists to pursue investigations into the physical world with impunity, dominating nature without conscience, and relegating spiritual or transcendent ideas of soul and consciousness to the backwaters of myth.⁵⁸ As mathematician Rudy Rucker questions, “are people just complicated robots...or do we have souls?”⁵⁹ Yet even in a mechanistic model, scientists struggle to explain how “consciousness somehow ‘infuses’ the atoms and molecules that constitute physiological gray matter in the brain.”⁶⁰

Bailey’s theosophical offering attempts to resolve the Cartesian disjoint between mind and

matter through her network of metaphysical concepts, albeit in an unscientific manner. Esotericism regards consciousness as a form of energy acting on living matter, which is responsive to consciousness. From this angle, Bailey constructs a cosmology on quasi-materialist ground while embracing spirituality and transcendence, a cosmology that would most likely be laughed out of the laboratory. Yet even mechanistic scientists may wonder if they really have the ultimate explanation of reality.

Bailey's view coheres a little better with the organic model proposed by science, which draws on an understanding of complexity, holism, and the interrelatedness and interdependence of all life. Our planet in this model is a living body, a view not dissimilar to Bailey's hylozoism. Through regarding nature as a living organism, organic philosophy coheres with a belief in a higher purpose or teleology. Some scientists adopting an organic model argue the materialist view cannot explain inspiration, or intuition, which seem to have a source other than the human brain or mind, and suggests the possibility of ideas having an independent existence. The recognition that ideas may have a higher order existence, some pre-existing metaphysical reality not tied to our biological evolution, is hardly new. According to Paul Davies, the abstract way of knowing is of a higher order, beyond cultural perceptions and evolutionary necessity.⁶¹

For Bailey, abstract ideas and intuition have an independent existence. Her entire argument pivots on the union of intuition with mundane human biology in order for evolution to advance beyond its current stage.

Bailey's cosmology goes much further than scientific theories of evolution by relying on metaphysics. There are three general ways to approach evolution: cosmological evolution as portrayed in Blavatsky's The Secret Doctrine; the evolution of the natural world as depicted in Darwinian and neo-Darwinian; and the evolution of humanity or psychological evolution. In Bailey's model, these three aspects of evolution are intertwined.

Complexity theory provides an important layer to the organic model, affirming the interconnectedness and interdependence of whole systems.⁶² Some complexity theorists argue it is the force of mind constructing thoughts that causes the condensation of solid matter in form, out of the vast field of quantum material, a view not far removed from Bailey's argument.⁶³

The boundary between the mechanistic and organic models is fuzzy, blurred in part through acceptance or rejection of teleology, which may inform both mechanistic and organic models. Further, an organic model may adopt a materialist stance, arguing that higher-order complex systems such as consciousness emerge out of lower-order systems. As these competing paradigms continue to be debated within the scientific community, teleological approaches have become

overshadowed by neo-Darwinian explanations of the adaptation of living things, notably Richard Dawkins' "selfish gene." The re-assertion of the "intelligent design" hypothesis sets out to contest this materialist resurgence.

Theories of everything are influenced by the mechanistic/organic debate. Scientific quests for a single unifying theory able, through the reduction of all living and nonliving entities to "nothing but" their constituent atoms and molecules, to reduce purpose into a single mathematical formula, seem to favor mechanistic views. Bailey's theory of everything also reduces all matter to the atomic level, but instead of compressing her argument into an algorithmic point of contraction, her cosmology affirms the path of expansion, her explanatory metaphors embracing every possible aspect of existence; no matter what level or size, the same principles apply.

Scientific debates do not occur in a vacuum. Social implications inherent in neo-Darwinism, for example, may cause alarm among those ascribing to an inclusive ethic—survival of the fittest—slipping easily into the competitive individualism of the materialist-rationalist paradigm. Bailey’s cosmology provides a powerful argument against individualistic, competitive approaches to life, supplying an intricate map of cosmic interrelated interdependence at all levels, from atomic through to planetary. Although a danger of elitism remains, Bailey places a high value on abstract thought in arguing the next evolutionary step for humanity leads from the higher mind to intuition.

Is there a grand design or plan? There can be no doubt something as microscopic as DNA can have vast implications for a comparatively vast entity. As Paul Davies notes:

Somehow the microscopic one-dimensional strand of genetic information has to exercise a coordinating influence, both spatial and temporal, over the collective activity of billions of cells spread across what is, size for size, a vast region of three-dimensional space.⁶⁴

Scientists in the organic paradigm acknowledge the complex patterns of organization found in nature, chaotic systems displaying unpredictable regularities. Perhaps complexity science offers an opportunity for an esoteric revision of Bailey’s portrayal of energy and motion, and attraction and repulsion, a revision tied to the ultimate evolutionary goal of the spiritualization of matter through the intermediary of consciousness. Or does complexity theory threaten this cosmology, which is bound by a rigidly structured hierarchical chain of contingent beings, more in keeping with a Newtonian clockwork universe in which immutable law of nature determines the course of events?

The hylozoistic aspect of Bailey’s theory of everything unites all matter into one interrelated whole. Curiously, her explanatory trajectory seeks the unity valued by the mechanists through a metaphoric depiction of the diversity sought in the organic model. Moreover, Bailey’s cosmology is not science. The atom in her realm is a metaphor for all higher-order entities,

the reductionist tendencies of the mechanists sidestepped through the use of analogy and correspondence. This approach offers a two-way explanatory trajectory, from Spirit to matter and matter to Spirit, averting the unidirectional reductionism of the materialist paradigm.

It is easy to disregard Bailey’s mythic theory of everything from either of the dominant scientific perspectives. Bailey’s view is not scientific, lacking testable hypotheses and having no tangible grounding in objective reality. Yet some theoretical scientists dare to think differently. Physicist Frank Tipler builds an argument around the resurrection of Christ and the immortality of human consciousness made possible through the development of silicon-based life forms.⁶⁵ Physicist Michio Kaku imagines humanity evolving into a galactic civilization supported by scientific and technological innovation.⁶⁶

Those adhering to the scientific method may argue that Bailey’s esoteric theory of evolution is unable to contribute to a scientifically informed debate, yet should Bailey’s theory be rejected on the grounds that it cannot be substantiated, its metaphysical notions beyond scientific verification? Rather, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* may provide a rich way of knowing able to stimulate fresh ideas and alternative approaches to viewing science and reality.

Bailey’s model is anthropocentric, placing humanity at the fulcrum of the evolution of consciousness of the solar system. It is through consciousness that each human evolves and consequently impacts every cell in their own body, the whole of humanity and the planet. This view coheres with paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin who affirms that consciousness evolves through expansion in “a progressive realization of the universality of the things surrounding each of us.”⁶⁷

Bailey’s cosmology goes much further than scientific theories of evolution by relying on metaphysics. There are three general ways to approach evolution: cosmological evolution as portrayed in Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*; the evolution of the natural world as depicted in Darwinian and neo-Darwinian; and the evolution of humanity or psychological evolution. In

Bailey's model, these three aspects of evolution are intertwined. An explanation of the cosmos and the macrohistory of earth is covered by her reliance on Theosophy, but Bailey emphasizes the psycho-social evolution of humanity, an approach supported by the work of biophysical chemist Manfred Eigen, theologian and biochemist Arthur Peacocke and Teilhard de Chardin.⁶⁸

Peacocke argues that human evolution is psycho-social as consciousness evolves:

In human beings, part of the world has become conscious of itself and consciously and actively responds to its surroundings; in human life a new mode of interaction is introduced in the world.⁶⁹

Humanity responds to the environment through conscious choice, placing importance on matters of free will, motive, and goals. The psycho-social evolution in Teilhard de Chardin's model—which has influenced scientific thought in some quarters for various reasons, not least his own scientific credential—points to “Unity” rather than dispersal or plurality, and a development of self-knowledge “to the point of becoming conscious of our place and responsibility in relation to the universe.”⁷⁰ He argues that humanity is at a critical stage in psycho-social evolution and must now coordinate itself as a whole social system able to function so that each individual's wellbeing is granted, and achieved by recognizing the *noosphere*, a thought atmosphere enshrouding humanity through which psycho-social evolution proceeds. The *noosphere*, along with Teilhard de Chardin's *omega point* or point of ultimate unification, have attracted interest from scientists including cosmologist John Barrow and Frank Tipler, indicating an openness among some to metaphysical notions.

Interest in metaphysics among scientists is not hard to find. Physicist Fritjof Capra's popular *The Tao of Physics* explores the parallels between the worldviews of eastern mysticism and science. Capra affirms that mysticism “provides a consistent philosophical background to our modern scientific theories.”⁷¹

Capra is among a number of scientists who feel humanity should foreground ideas of cooperation, inclusivity, and interdependence, ideas in keeping with Bailey's cosmology. The simple assertion proposed by Bailey that evolution involves the ever-increasing expression of love-wisdom lacks scientific foundation, yet her model resonates with views expressed by Teilhard de Chardin, Sally Goerner, Fritjof Capra, Gary Zukav, and Vlad Dimitrov.⁷²

Impeding acceptance of Bailey's work arises in part through her assertion of quasi-laws of nature together with her re-deployment of scientific terms as concepts to explain the interconnectedness and purpose of creation. Perhaps this blending of scientific concepts with an idea of a metaphysical reality repels the orthodox scientific mind. Bailey uses scientific terminology, yet her scientific explanations are subsumed under the weight of her esoteric perspective. The use of concepts drawn from science is one example of a broader acquisitive drive in Bailey's work, as seen in her use of eastern mystical terms, and reflective perhaps, of an urge to synthesize the entirety of metaphysical thought. Indeed, this is the trajectory of a mythic theory of everything.

Bailey's theory of everything offers an example of the congruence between ecological interconnectedness and interdependence and metaphysical conceptualizations of the natural world. Above all, Bailey puts consciousness at the center of evolution, and her model carries the explanatory power and internal coherence necessary to provide a complete metaphysical picture foregrounding the human condition and embodying a strong moral intent.

Consciousness

In contrast to scientific theories of everything and explanations of creation and evolution, Bailey's cosmology is psychological in purpose. It does not set out to explain all in a single algorithm to demonstrate cleverness, to satisfy ambition and trump competitors, settle a debate, or prove the veracity of one paradigm over another. Instead, Bailey's cosmology offers a metaphysical theory of everything which blends

layers of meaning regarding material substance, energy, and consciousness in a coherent whole. In other words, her cosmology answers not only what might be, but also the how and why of existence, with the overarching aim of transforming consciousness.

In the human constitution, consciousness is a manifestation of the soul which resides in the causal body on the higher sub-planes of the mental plane. Consciousness, or awareness, expands via the magnetic attraction of the Second Ray of Love-Wisdom, corresponding to the spiral-cyclic motion of solar fire:

[It is] the development of consciousness, which is the gradual expansion of the realization of the Indweller [soul] in the form [personality], the apprehension by the Self [soul] of the relation of the form to Itself, and of its slow utilization and control. This persists until that Realisation includes the cell [the human unity], the group, and the totality of groups.⁷³

As consciousness expands, so does the sphere of influence of the soul. Consciousness starts out as narrow and separate, not interested in things beyond the self, and is influenced, at this stage, by the frictional fires of matter in form. These are the fires that stimulate rotational spin, the sphere repelling other spheres. Unresponsiveness, lack of movement, and limited radiation are indicative of this stage. Over time, consciousness grows, and as the human thinker becomes more and more aware, matter becomes energized and spiritualized, conditioned by consciousness to cohere rather than separate. In Bailey's model, mind refers to the entire ground on which consciousness functions. Consciousness itself operates as a camera lens, able to expand or contract in terms of breadth and depth of field. When consciousness expands, the mind and the brain are affected, new knowledge acquired, new neural pathways built.

Evolution is cyclic and governed by the Law of Karma. In each incarnation consciousness may expand a little more, and more is added to the causal body. Eventually, the soul gains control of the personality, karma is worked out, and the three permanent atoms are vitalized. Planetary and solar Logoi are engaged in the same process

of adjusting, aligning, energizing, gaining mastery over their own natures. The goal of the solar Logos is to unify the seven systemic sub-planes.

In Bailey's model, the soul is the Thinker using consciousness to control the faculty of intelligence, which, in combination with the physical brain, comprises the thinking mechanism. The soul and the personality, the sum-total of its mental, emotional and physical bodies, operate the same system, the personality to carry out its individual agenda in the three worlds of human endeavor, gaining knowledge through experience conferred by the senses. Consciousness operates the same system, serving the intentions of the soul. The soul's location on the higher sub-planes of the mental plane grants access to the fourth plane of intuition, and the central intent of the soul is to reorient consciousness towards the intuition, and, through the soul's own veil, to connect to Spirit on the second plane.

Vital to Bailey's cosmology from the perspective of the evolution of consciousness is the spiritual triad and its three permanent atoms. Adopting a one-to-seven descent of the planes, spirit-as-will is located as a permanent atom on the first sub-plane of the third plane, spirit-as-intuition is on the first sub-plane of the fourth plane, and spirit-as-mind is on the first sub-plane of the fifth or mental plane.

The task of the soul located in the causal body on the third sub-plane of the mental plane is to build a bridge between itself and the mental unit of the personality of the fourth sub-plane of the mental plane, and second, a bridge between itself and the permanent atom on the first sub-plane of the mental plane. The construction of the two elements of the Antahkarana allows the soul to function in both the objective world of extramental reality and the subjective inner world, drawing in spiritual will or purpose in the service of humanity and the planet. The process allows the soul to use the entire system to construct thoughtforms for the good of the whole.

The thinking mechanism and the awareness mechanism are distinct in quality, method, and epistemology. The mental body itself is also dual, comprising the lower, concrete mind and the higher, abstract mind. For Bailey, this is the

critical division and not the mind/brain dichotomy informing philosophical discourse.

For Bailey, the soul is a fact, representing that which allows humanity to attain its spiritual goal. Bailey follows Neoplatonism in viewing the soul as an active principle imposing the rational structure of intelligence on matter, matter which has also emanated from the soul.⁷⁴ The soul for Bailey is the mediator between matter and spirit. According to philosopher Jacob Needleman:

The *soul* is the name for that force or principle within human nature that can bind together all the intellectual, emotional and instinctual aspects of the human being through a mediating relationship to the highest principles of order and mind in the universe.⁷⁵

Bailey's claim that occult laws and the existence of the soul are real and true may paradoxically strengthen a metaphoric interpretation of Bailey's cosmic reality, even as the same truth claims serve to undermine any acceptance of this particular esoteric cosmology in a scientific milieu. Taking on the fundamental idea of the soul as having a true and real existence lends persuasive support to the entire interconnected edifice presented through chakras, planes, rays, devas, and fires, such interconnectedness being essential to any theory of everything, whether myth or fact. Bailey's commitment to explanatory laws provides a binding potency that attempts to reveal causality and an overarching purpose in her cosmology. Without an ontological commitment to "soul," the theory of everything collapses, lacking the means through which a transforming consciousness can be fulfilled.

Esoteric thought shares with Platonic and Neoplatonic formulations an ontological commitment to foundational truths. Yet esotericism, in addition, constructs an elaborate inner reality or imaginal world on these foundations, drawing the reader into an acceptance of the foundational ground on which these various metaphors-as-principles rest and imbuing explanatory power into each element.

Bracketing the matter of Bailey's theory of everything as truth, it may be that her model

contributes to an understanding of the human constitution.

Ethics and morality are contingent on particular understandings of human nature. Mind, brain, and consciousness and their divisions as categorical entities continues to be debated. Writing in 1965, Needleman explains the imprecise way consciousness is used:

The word is used these days in so many different ways that out of sheer impatience one is tempted to single out one or another aspect of consciousness as its primary characteristic.⁷⁶

Philosopher William Lyons acknowledges that the problem of mind continues to arouse interest and debate, with objectivist positivist views relying on a materialist perspective of mental states on the one hand, and subjectivist and dualist views relying on metaphysical explanations of the nature of the relationship between mind and body on the other and thus forced to find explanations of a causal link between consciousness and the brain. In his essay titled "The Stream of Consciousness," William James argues in favor of an introspective view of consciousness which he regards as a fundamental fact of human existence, a view in keeping with mysticism and esotericism. Yet introspective studies of mind reliant on Cartesian dualism were succeeded in the early twentieth century by objectivist, positivist approaches. As Lyons notes, consciousness is generally passed over in materialist explanations of mind, including Behaviorism, Identity Theory, and Functionalism, which favor physical brain states and operations as causal, or matter over mind.⁷⁷

Recent attempts to overcome the Cartesian mind/body split have come from a materialist perspective. According to American philosopher John Searle, the division between materialist and dualist explanations of mind is solved when consciousness (the essence of mind) is viewed as a biological phenomenon, one that involves inner subjective states and processes, but is contingent on and inseparable from the physical brain.⁷⁸ This view finds support in the concept of autopoiesis and Santiago Theory developed by biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, a theory drawing on Gregory

Bateson's conception that the process of cognition is identified with the process of life through complex biological systems.⁷⁹

Bailey bases her cosmological edifice on a dual-aspect monism, a term used by Polkinghorne to describe a reliance on the Neoplatonic premise that there exists one single reality, a reality in which two opposite poles, spirit and matter, constitute the foundations of the origins and evolution of life. For Bailey, "God is One" is the utterance of truth... Life in manifestation produces existence and being. It is the root cause, therefore, of duality."⁸⁰ Whereas dualists tend to view the physical and mental realms as completely separate and not able to be integrated, dual-aspect monism overcomes the disjoint between mind and matter.⁸¹

Monism attempts to explain everything in terms of one substance, potentially supporting both a materialist view in which the universe comprises nothing but matter, and an idealist view that believes the universe is nothing but consciousness. Dual-aspect monism not only heals the Cartesian dualist split between mind and matter, it allows Bailey's theory of everything to strike some concord with both mechanistic and organic theories of evolution, which may be informed by monist or dualist premises. At this level of abstraction, Bailey's work might find some sympathy, yet the moment the traditional scientist as reader sinks into the details of the cosmology without a suspension of disbelief, they will be drenched in the absurd and the untenable. For Bailey, the metaphysical problem of duality cannot be solved unless the reader is prepared to:

Recognize the possibility of two occult facts:

1. That the entire solar system embodies the consciousness of an Entity, who originates on planes entirely without the solar ring-pass-not.
2. That manifestation is periodical and that the Law of Rebirth is the method that evolution takes in dealing with man, a planetary Logos, and a solar Logos.⁸²

An acceptance of reincarnation and that humanity forms part of a larger conscious entity are

fundamental to Bailey's mythic theory of everything. In this scheme, humanity is inseparable from the natural world of living matter, and each incarnation is but a long chain of incarnations. Bailey's hylozoistic understanding of our universe in which all entities are essentially focal points of energy of varying complexity, function, and ability, has no problem with the notion that thought impacts matter. Besides, theurgy or esoteric practice is based on the premise that thoughts are alive, imbued with intention and able to fulfill some purpose.

In asserting the various categories of the human constitution as metaphysical facts, Bailey is able to build an entire explanatory system of interacting metaphoric concepts to stimulate evolutionary growth of consciousness. The explanation is self-justifying in a circular argument of causality that seeks no verification beyond itself. The approach has the presuppositional advantage of a top-down interactive system, in which Logoi, chakras, planes, devas, rays, fires, and permanent atoms become brute facts. Causality begins in Bailey's model with spirit, not matter. So, explanations from the perspective of matter are always informed by spirit. A diehard materialist-rationalist would be bolting for the exit door.

Bailey's mythic theory of everything carries a powerful ontological commitment to the separation of soul-as-consciousness and mind-brain. In order for Bailey's theory of everything to have truth value, these categories must objectively exist. But such objectivity is of no concern to Bailey, who affirms subjectivity as the pathway to reality and seeks only that the reader penetrates the world of appearances with a questioning mind.

Bailey's metaphysical truths are interwoven into a coherent whole with elaborate depictions of energy dynamics functioning metaphorically in a complex arrangement of analogy and correspondence—the three fires, for example, depicting the processes of expanding consciousness—and can be regarded by the reader as both foundational truth or as evocative imagery. An adoption of either view has the potential to transform consciousness to some degree if the reader is prepared for a fully immersive

experience, since walking through Bailey's labyrinthine treatise demands intense focused visualization and may foster the development of intuitive perception, drawing disparate ideas and theories together into larger wholes, seeking inclusive synthesis. This is instrumental in transforming consciousness. Objective proof of the truth of the teachings in a scientific fashion is of little interest for proposers of mythic theories of everything. A different purpose is served as Bailey encourages the reader to absorb the teachings into subjective awareness and, in so doing, direct the reader to pay attention to the inner life.

Conclusion

This exploration of Bailey's cosmology affirms its function as a mythic theory of everything, a cosmology that is comprehensive in scope and internally coherent, meeting two core criteria suggested by John Polkinghorne, and, for followers of the Ageless Wisdom at least, consonant with human experience, albeit in a highly abstract and abstruse fashion. All of the metaphysical elements—Logoi, chakras, planes, rays, devas, fires, permanent atoms—

are not given as objective facts verifiable through scientific experimentation. They are instead a series of lenses through which to understand an inner, hidden, subtle reality accessed subjectively, the edifice given in the hope it will foster an expansion of awareness, the development of intuition, and an understanding of a spiritual realm beyond ordinary comprehension. Science is constrained by its own methodology, yet many notable theoretical scientists brush up against the unknown and unknowable and some seek their own theories of everything. Perhaps the esoteric way of knowing, as demonstrated in *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, offers much more than a mythic theory of everything, one that may even contribute to a scientific way of knowing.

A summation of *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* cannot substitute for full immersion in its over 1,200 pages and this article offers just one way to view its contents.

* This article is based on a chapter in "The Texts of Alice A. Bailey: The Role of Esotericism in Transforming Consciousness", (Doctoral dissertation, WSU: 2006) by Dr Isobel Wightman (now Blackthorn).

¹ Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 203.

² See Francis Yates, *Giordano and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964); and M. Wertheim, *Pythagoras' Trousers: God, Physics and the Gender Wars* (Toronto: Random House, 1995).

³ Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 15.

⁴ Garry Trompf, "Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner and Guenon" in Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff (eds.), *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), 281.

⁵ The internal structure of her permanent atoms and the motion of the three fires comprising the core of *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* is discussed below.

⁶ For the purposes of this article, I put phenomenological brackets around the Tibetan, or Djwhal Khul, as the author of *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*.

⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 3.

⁸ William James, cited in J.J. McDermott (ed.), *The Writings of William James: A Comprehensive Edition* (New York: Random House, 1967), 237.

⁹ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code* (New York: Random House, 1996), 47.

¹⁰ John Barrow, *Theories of Everything: The Quest for Ultimate Explanation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 7.

¹¹ This resonates with the notion of vice regency, or God's representative, in Christianity.

¹² See Paul Davies, *Superforce: The Search for a Grand Unified Theory of Nature* (London: Heinemann, 1984); John Barrow, *Theories of Everything* op. cit.; and E. Lazlo, *The Whispering Pond: A Personal Guide to the Emerging Vision of Science* (Rockport: Element, 1996).

¹³ John Polkinghorne, "The Metaphysics of Divine Action," in Robert J. Russell, Nancy Murphy and Arthur R. Peacocke (eds.), *Chaos and Complexity: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action* (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory, 2000), 147.

14 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1951), 572.

15 Robert Ellwood, *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of the Wisdom of the Ages* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1986), 63.

16 Or atma (will), buddhi (wisdom), and manas (activity). These also relate to Shiva (the first Logos of will), Vishnu (the second Logos of wisdom), and Brahma (the third Logos of activity). As shown here Bailey draws on many Hindu terms following the theosophical current. She provides explanatory footnotes throughout *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* to show how her theosophy (and that of her predecessor Blavatsky) utilizes these terms.

17 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* op. cit., 7.

18 “Atom” is used by Bailey to refer to any unit in her system, from the atomic level through to solar Logos.

19 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* op. cit., 231.

20 Jacob Needleman, *A Sense of the Cosmos: The Encounter of Modern Science and Ancient Truth* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co, 1965), 18.

21 See Jesus Mosterin, “A Round-Trip Ticket from Philosophy to Cosmology,” in F.W. Meyerstein (ed.), *Foundations of Big Bang Cosmology* (Singapore: World Scientific, 1989).

22 Bailey, op. cit., 1182.

23 Bailey, *Ibid.*, x.

24 *Ibid.*, 77-133.

25 Ellwood, op. cit., 69.

26 Bailey, op. cit., 152.

27 *Ibid.*, 468.

28 *Ibid.*, 621.

29 The deva hierarchy explains the practice of magic, defined by Bailey as “the manipulation of the lesser lives by a greater life,” *Ibid.*, 638. According to Bailey, black magical practice involves the manipulation of the lesser deva builders, those pertaining to substance or form. The white magician harnesses the cooperation of the greater builders of the deva hierarchy who function on the higher planes in accordance with soul purpose, *Ibid.*, 984-986.

30 *Ibid.*, 152.

31 *Ibid.*, 5. Each of the three solar Logoi corresponds to one of the three major hylozoistic rays of Aspect. The solar Logos corresponds to the second Ray of Love-Wisdom. Primordial matter is conditioned by the Third Ray of Active Intelligence. The First Ray of Divine Will is yet to fully manifest as it relates to a future solar system, governed by the last of the Logoi.

32 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, op. cit., 362-3.

33 *Ibid.*, 355.

34 Fritjof Schuon, *Esotericism as Principle and as Way*, (Trans. W. Stoddart; Bedford: Perennial Books, 1981), 71.

35 Bailey, op. cit., 97.

36 Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, “The Divine Fire: H.P. Blavatsky and the Theology of Electricity” in *Theosophical History*, Vol IX (4), pp. 4-20, 2003, 4.

37 My own tabulation is derived from Bailey, op. cit., 4-5, and 42-43.

38 *Ibid.*, 1030.

39 *Ibid.*, 129.

40 *Ibid.*, 1061.

41 *Ibid.*, 560-1.

42 *Ibid.*, 564-6.

43 Bailey takes the eastern mystical term *Prana* and incorporates it into her cosmology. Prana, in the Hindu tradition, is central to the practice of Yoga. Prana is defined by Bailey, not as breath, which as she states is the more usual translation, but as the sum total of the cosmic energy in its etheric aspect. Prana is another way that Bailey portrays the interdependence of all existences, through its reception, distribution, and transmission via the seven energy centers of the etheric body. The etheric body is the mold of the physical body, comprising a web or network of fine interlacing channels forming a focal point for certain radiatory emanations which vivify and stimulate the rotary action of matter. It is through these centers that the internal fires, the fires of matter or the third Aspect, are focused and energy distributed. Prana vitalizes, nourishes, and bestows health and animal magnetism.

44 Bailey, op. cit., 157-9.

45 *Ibid.*, 1031.

46 *Ibid.*, 143.

47 *Ibid.*, 47.

48 *Ibid.*, 144.

49 *Ibid.*, 316.

50 *Ibid.*, 316.

51 *Ibid.*, 142.

52 *Ibid.*, 1060.

53 *Ibid.*, 69-70.

54 *Ibid.*, 527.

55 *Ibid.*, 531.

56 *Ibid.*, 274.

57 See Damien Broderick, *The Last Mortal Generation: How Science Will Alter Our Lives in the 21st Century* (Sydney: New Holland, 1999).

58 See Paul Davies and J.R. Brown, *The Ghost in the Atom: A Discussion of the Mysteries of Quantum Physics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); M. Wertheim, op. cit.;

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- and F. Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An exploration of the parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism* (London: Flamingo, 1999).
- ⁵⁹ Rudy Rucker, *Infinity and the Mind: The Science and Philosophy of the Infinite* (London: Penguin, 1997), 157.
- ⁶⁰ Ervin Laszlo, op. cit., 43.
- ⁶¹ See Davies, 1992, op. cit., 152-153.
- ⁶² See Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint* (London: Heinemann, 1987, and 1992), op. cit.; G. Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988); G. M. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); M. M. Waldrop, *Complexity: The Emerging Science and the Edge of Order and Chaos* (London: Penguin, 1992); B. Goertzel, *The Evolving Mind* (Langhorne: Gordon and Breach, 1993); and S.J. Goerner, *Chaos and the Evolving Ecological Universe* (Luxembourg: Gordon and Breach, 1994).
- ⁶³ Capra, op. cit., 143.
- ⁶⁴ Davies, 1987, op. cit., 105.
- ⁶⁵ See Frank J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead* (London: Macmillan, 1995).
- ⁶⁶ See Michio Kaku. *Visions: How Science will Revolutionize the 21st Century* (New York: Doubleday, 1997).
- ⁶⁷ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: Fontana, 1969), 17.
- ⁶⁸ See, Eigen, op. cit., Peacocke, op. cit., and Teilhard de Chardin, *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ Peacocke, op. cit., 91.
- ⁷⁰ Teilhard de Chardin, op. cit., 16.
- ⁷¹ Capra, op. cit., 9.
- ⁷² See Teilhard de Chardin, op. cit.; Goerner, op. cit.; Capra, op. cit.; G. Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001); and V. Dimitrov, *A New Kind of Social Science: Study of Self-organization of Human Dynamics* (Morrisville: Lulu Press, 2003).
- ⁷³ Bailey, op. cit., 295.
- ⁷⁴ See Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956); and G. MacGregor, "Christian Concepts of the Soul", in L.E. Sullivan (ed.), *Death, After-Life and the Soul* (London: MacMillan, 1987).
- ⁷⁵ Jacob Needleman, *Lost Christianity* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 221.
- ⁷⁶ Needleman, 1965, op. cit., p. 20.
- ⁷⁷ See William Lyons (ed.), *Modern Philosophy of Mind* (London: Everyman, 1995), and in the same volume, William. James, "The Stream of Consciousness", 3-23.
- ⁷⁸ See John Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (London: Phoenix, 2000).
- ⁷⁹ See Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Flamingo, 1997).
- ⁸⁰ Alice. A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic or The Way of the Disciple* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1991), 8.
- ⁸¹ Polkinghorne, op. cit., 154-155.
- ⁸² Bailey, 1951, op. cit., 238.