



FREEMASONRY AND ALCHEMY

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“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind a faithful servant. We have created a society that honours the servant and has forgotten the gift” - Albert Einstein

Chapter 1

Freemasonry and Science: The Illuministic Mystification

When inquiring into the nature of the relationship between science and Freemasonry and the reciprocal influence of one on the other, we reach the inevitable conclusion that Illuminism, along with the principals that inspired the movement, represents a common ground for both. Furthermore, the fact that eminent personalities of the scientific world – an expression of Illuministic culture – have for centuries been members of Freemasonry, has contributed towards creating the myth of a parallelism between Freemasonry and Illuminism.

It should first be underlined how the above association failed to produce a significant influence, and indeed Masonic rituals with their *esoteric-metaphysical* connotations passed through the climate of Illuminism practically intact in both essence and conception.

Thus, despite the initiation of numerous scientists into Freemasonry, I am of the opinion that no intrinsic relationship or ideological influence or link, other than the fact that both are inspired by a spirit of search and knowledge, has ever existed between modern science and Freemasonry.

The purported ideological proximity between Freemasonry and Illuminism—and the modern science it gave rise to—should not be taken

for granted. Indeed, as I recently wrote¹, I do not believe that Freemasonry developed as an expression of Illuministic thought and philosophy, but rather that it sprang from Neo-Platonic thought and is therefore far removed from the 18th century empiricism and rationalism, which are clearly incompatible with the transcendent and metaphysical beliefs of Freemasonry.

Nonetheless, the question remains as to whether the irrelevance of Freemasonry to Illuminism and its methods of studying reality likewise implies its extraneity to science in general, or whether there may be a common ground on which to integrate and harmonize the principles of traditional science derived from 18th century thought, and the philosophical principles of Freemasonry inspired by Neo-Platonism, in a new vision. A vision that transcends the contrast between reason and enlightenment and the dualism between spirit and matter.

However, an undeniable ideological link exists between Freemasonry and the so-called pre-science or *Alchemy*. Indeed, following centuries of domination by Illuministic reasoning, the link might be re-established by means of the *New Science*, or Post-modern Science, which increasingly attempts to extend the limitations and oppose the contradictions posed by the previous approach of experimental scientific evaluation through the use of specialist knowledge and strictly rational and logical-deductive cognitive processes.

In the *Exhortation* of the 3rd Degree during the ceremony of *Passing*, the Worshipful Master expresses the hope that the Fellow Craft will undertake future studies in the area of *Liberal Arts and Sciences* (previously in the 1st Degree *Exhortation* the Apprentice is asked to study Liberal Arts and Sciences), whilst a little later being told “...*you are now permitted to extend your researches into hidden mysteries of Nature and Science*”². In the *Exhortation* of the 3rd Degree the Fellow Craft is reminded that by “...*still guiding your progress by the principles of moral truth, you were led in the Second Degree to contemplate the intellectual faculty and to trace it from development, through the paths of heavenly science, even to the throne of God Himself.*”³

On initial analysis the two latter quotes would each seem to contradict the other; this is actually not quite the case.

¹ Fabio Venzi, *The Influence of Neoplatonic thought on Freemasonry*, Book Guild Publishing, Sussex, England, 2007.

² Emulation Ritual, pag.137.

³ Emulation Ritual, pag.175.

Indeed, in my opinion, the *Science* to which the ritual refers is not science as we know it today—a rational and empirical science founded on the method of experimentation. This science, springing from Illuministic thought, considered all *Esoteric Doctrines* applied to metaphysical studies, and consequently the initiatic societies associated with the latter, ridiculous manifestations of times long gone by.

The *Science* referred to in the ritual is rather what is known today as “*metascience*”, the *Alchemy* which was flourishing in Europe when Masonic rituals first came into being, albeit in a manner that differed somewhat from its original form. As we will observe subsequently, numerous eminent figures of the eighteenth century scientific revolution were collocated in the midst of *Alchemy* and *Modern Science*, halfway between the figure of the magician and that of the modern scientist.

Alchemy thus represented a border, a *grey area* between a *magical-metaphysical* and a *scientific-rationalist-empirical* method of evaluation. In spite of the lack of any degree of compatibility between the Illuminist-based modern experimental scientific methods and Freemasonry, conversely, numerous analogies are present between alchemical methods and Freemasonry.

Chapter 2

Freemasonry and Alchemy

On the establishment of Freemasonry in England at the end of the 17th century, the principles of modern science and the empirical-rationalist method had not yet spread throughout the society of the period. An ongoing situation of coexistence and contrast between the preceding magical-alchemical opinion and the new scientific interpretation was manifest. As mentioned previously, I am firmly persuaded that Masonic rituals on referring to the “*hidden mysteries of nature and science*” indicate a *metaphysical* knowledge which by dividing us from material things shall accompany us to the “*throne of God*”. This journey will be undertaken in the context of a symbiotic relationship with *Nature*, viewed as the focus of contemplation and source of knowledge, an approach better befitting the conception of an alchemist rather than that of a modern scientist.

Alchemy is a “form of knowledge” that tends towards the psychological and spiritual transformation of the individual through domination of the spiritual and creative energies which pervade nature and the human mind. The lapis or philosopher’s stone is a metaphor for the achieving of knowledge and understanding of the hermetic tradition by the Initiate. Thus, in the same way as Freemasonry, *Alchemy* proposes a pathway of spiritual elevation, a “*system*”, a “*method of perfection*” comprising a “practical” part, in which a deep-rooted knowledge of matter and its elements is required, and an initiatory path, metaphorically expressed in the myth of the transmutation of base metals into gold. It is an acknowledged fact that the allegories adopted by Freemasonry in the initiatic pathway are based on the tools employed by the builders of Medieval Cathedrals and on the metaphor of King Solomon’s Temple. Both *Alchemy* and Freemasonry however impart knowledge on how to *transmute* consciousness by accelerating evolution of the same, both being based on principles of hermetic thought with its metaphysical aim culminating in a union of the individual with the Universal. Naturally, the aim is purely *metaphysical*, the journey of the alchemist and the Freemason is a return of the Individual to the Divine Principle, a *reintegration* of the individual Self into the divine Self. This arduous pathway is certainly not for all men. It is accessible solely to a mind

devoid of superstructures, opinions, an uncorrupted and unconditioned mind.

While Masonic symbolism consists in giving form to a rough ashlar, Alchemy is based on the conception of achieving from an imperfect and impure material, a perfect matter capable of transferring the same perfection to other substances in the same way that a Freemason transmits his knowledge to others. Both the work of Alchemy and accomplishment of the Masonic ritual take place in the presence of the transcendent. Indeed, alchemical and Masonic pathways to knowledge are not the result of theoretical or experimental knowledge, but rather the outcome of a task, the *opus*, in which the spirit consciously returns to its material source to animate and transmute the same. Ultimately, the ‘*Mysteries*’ present in both the Masonic ritual and in Alchemical practices are aimed in particular at achieving a ‘*transmutation*’ of the individual who, through the experience of death and resurrection present in the initiation modifies his *ontological* status by progressing from a ‘*profane being*’ into an ‘*initiate*’. Before undertaking his tasks both the Alchemist and the Freemason are required to be absolutely pure and spiritually elevated, as the revelation of the mysteries of Alchemy and Freemasonry descends from on high and may only be perceived by the spiritually elevated. The affinities manifested in the esoteric approach of both *Alchemy* and *Freemasonry*, the pathway towards perfection they propose and the similarities displayed in their specific symbolism, remind us that both are fully representative of the Traditional school of thought. Accordingly, Mircea Eliade, an eminent scholar of the History of Religions, in his work *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy* states: “Being the Universe a hierophany and human life sacralised, work involved a liturgical value which still obscurely survives among rural population of present-day Europe. It is however above all our intention to underline the chance offered by archaic societies to man: the chance to become part of the Sacred by his own work as a Homo Faber, an author and manipulator of tools. Those primeval experiences were preserved and transferred through numerous generations thanks to the “secrets of the trade”; when global experience of the world was modified as a consequence of technical and cultural innovations following the establishment of urban civilization [i. e. following civilization itself, ethimologically speaking] and what we agreed to call History in the strong sense of this word, primeval

experiences related to a sacralised universe were periodically revived through initiations and trade rituals”.⁴

The number of analogies reported between the symbolism used in alchemy and Freemasonry is indeed considerable. The contrast between the "light" and the "shadows", the gradual passage from the darkness of night into the light of the sun, bearer of invigorating energy for *Alchemy* and knowledge for Freemasonry, heralds the liberation from the impurities of the body and mind. Likewise, the metaphor of the “journey” is one of the fundamental elements in both the alchemical and Masonic pathways. In an alchemical context it is repeatedly represented by the search for the Philosopher’s Stone, a journey of the soul throughout the planetary spheres. In Masonic rituals however, it portrays the journey undertaken by the wardens in search of the “hidden mysteries” following the murder of the architect Hiram Abif, and, to conclude, in the context of Templar Freemasonry, it is illustrated in the search for the Holy Grail. However, it is the allegory of the “ladder” to be encountered with a considerable frequency in Alchemical documents, in the Masonic symbolism, and in the Renaissance Neo-Platonism. In the alchemical system the ladder represents the gradual conquest of philosophical, mystical and esoteric elevation and acts as a link between the various levels of the “real” and as a metaphor for the Great Work. This theme of Gnostic and Neo-Platonic origin corresponds to the rise of the soul through the planetary spheres, an initiatory journey aimed at purifying the divine part hidden within man from all contact with matter.⁵ The ultimate aim is to be reunited with the One, to contemplate the same, as underlined by Ramon Llull in his *Treatise on the Fifth Essence* in which he maintains that the main task of alchemy is to lead man towards the contemplation of God. Likewise, a Masonic ritual states that the end of man’s pathway of knowledge is “*the throne of God.*”

After centuries of derision, *Alchemy* today continues to be considered a sort of “proto-chemistry”, taking its place in the history, or rather prehistory of science. However, *Alchemy* is all this and much more besides. In practical laboratory work, in theoretical ponderings and in symbolism, *Alchemy* encloses the same perspective of perfection as the Masonic “method”. At variance with *Modern Science* which is not

⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, Flammarion, Paris, 1977, pag.128

⁵ Matilde Battistini, *Astrologia, magia, alchimia*, Electa, pag.368.

concerned with spiritual matters, *Alchemy* and Freemasonry focus on the investigation of both the material and spiritual worlds. In the same way as the Masonic approach, the alchemical "method" converges on the search for a symbolic language capable of expressing this integration between the spiritual and the material, an “*esoteric*” language understandably differing from philosophical and scientific language as it is conveyed by means of images aimed at raising awareness in an intuitive rather than a rational manner.

Alchemy is the expression of a communion between mind and *Nature*, subject and object, in the lack of which no efficacious knowledge can be achieved, where *Nature* is construed not merely as the external reality perceived by our senses, or as the focus of specialist studies undertaken following the traditional approach of mechanical physics. Indeed, *Nature* is viewed by the Alchemist as the custodian of a divine spirit that animates and governs the elements, the structuring force of all reality, although invisible to the senses, at times however, proving achievable through work.

This same vision can be observed in the Masonic ritual in which, in the 3rd degree *Exhortation* the Master Mason – to whom the secrets of Nature and the principle of intellectual truth have been revealed – is invited to contemplate Nature: “*To your mind, thus modelled by virtue and science, Nature, however, presents one great and useful lesson more. She prepares you, by contemplation, for the closing hour of existence; and when by means of that contemplation she has conducted you through the intricate windings of this mortal life, she finally instructs you how to die*”.⁶ This evidently does not refer to the *mechanical* concept of Nature typical of modern science, but rather a vision that hosts the discerning universal spirit revealed to man through *inspiration-intuition-enlightenment*.

It is interesting to note how in the same way as Freemasonry, *Alchemy* proposes a distinction between the *operative* and the *speculative*. It was moreover debated whether one form descended directly from the other. Roger Bacon was the first scholar to report such a distinction, maintaining that Alchemy is like a two-sided coin: speculative, or rather which concerns the generation of inanimate things from the elements and all other inanimate things. But there is another alchemy, operative and practical, which teaches how to make the noble metals and colours and

⁶ Emulation Ritual, pag 175.

many other things."⁷.

Although renowned authors in the field of esoteric studies such as René Guénon maintained that alchemy was concerned solely with the inner part of the matter, on the contrary yet others (including Fulcanelli, Eugène Cansieliet and Mary Ann Atwood) advocated how the transformation of matter is fundamental to the alchemical process. Indeed, other authors besides, such as Herbert Silberer, a student of Sigmund Freud and a Freemason developed the theory of the spiritual or speculative nature of alchemical perfection, identifying the raw material of the *opus* with the conscience, and thus providing a highly suggestive psychoanalytic interpretation.

Who therefore actually inspired the inclusion of numerous references to the principles of Alchemy in the Masonic ritual? Certainly not the empirical scientists who, with their mechanical vision of the world and their experimental methodology, could hardly have produced a ritual infused with esoteric symbols and allusions to Alchemy. It was more likely the work of scientists who operated between the two worlds of alchemy and science, a few of which I shall now briefly mention.

Michael Maier, a Rosicrucian born in Germany in 1566, defined himself as a physician-philosopher. He was an academic and, for many years, physician to the Emperor Rudolf II. He believed that Alchemists, through their symbolic images, aspired to “reach the spirit through the senses”, using the singular capability of man to grasp “essential” things at an “intuitive” level, overlooking the faculty of dialectics. His work “*Atalanta Fugiens*”, published in 1618, contains a magnificent collection of Alchemical emblems and symbols. Indeed, symbols are viewed as the vehicles of knowledge, not by means of a logical-analytical process typical of modern science, but rather in line with a process of analogy and synthesis, intuition and imagination detached from rational thinking, in which meaning is not objective and unchangeable but is dependent on a process of interpretation of the subject. The *Tracing Board* in the Masonic ritual is used with the same intent, containing a symbolic synthesis of the degree in which the Freemason works which, through the use of symbolic images convey knowledge by means of intuition and suggestive imagination.

Atalanta Fugiens also included an esoteric text on the combination of

⁷ Roger Bacon, *Opus tertium in Opera quaedam hactenus inedita*, London 1859, pag 40.

Alchemy, rationality and religion that provided an important ethical model for the Royal Society.

Robert Fludd, physician and esotericist, shared the theories of his friend and colleague Maier. Fludd produced a monumental work in several volumes entitled *Utriusque Cosmi* in which the author – a follower of Paracelsus – undertook a study of man and his relations with the macrocosm, debating at length on the practice of medicine of the time which conveyed a magical interpretation to ill health, seeing it as the work of devils, with angels providing the cure. Fludd was both a scientist and esotericist, capable of dealing with scientific problems finding their solution through systematic experimentation, but likewise an alchemist, with his magical-religious vision of the world.

Another figure of fundamental importance is that of the alchemist, writer and Freemason *Elias Ashmole*. He attempted to distinguish between a “serious” *Alchemy*, frequently represented by academics whose interest was not of an economic nature but rather a true philosophical interest, and the *Alchemy of charlatans*. In his *Theatrum chemicum britannicum* he wrote: “*It is not less absurd and strange to see that some men ... cannot help but count authentic magicians in with conjurors, necromancers and witches..., who with arrogance violate the principles of magic, in the manner of pigs which burst into a lovely garden...and, after making a pact with the devil, take advantage of his help in their works, to counterfeit and corrupt the admirable knowledge of magicians, with whom there is a difference as large as that as between angels and demons*”.⁸

However, the true watershed between the two visions was undoubtedly represented by *Isaac Newton* who, together with the scientist *Robert Boyle* (both members of the Royal Society), was struck by the appeal of *Alchemy* just as *Illuminism* was about to enter the stage. Newton studied *Alchemy* not only from a theoretical point of view but also operationally, with an aim to achieve a better understanding of the “ways of divine action in the world.” He was seeking an original truth to integrate into the theories of the new physics in an attempt to avoid the risk feared likewise by the Neo-Platonists of Cambridge of an atheistic degradation in mechanism. In his numerous works devoted to *Alchemy* he wrote more on the above subject than on issues relating to physics, convinced that he was once again shedding light on knowledge originally in possession of the ancient Egyptians having been revealed by God Himself in ancient times,

⁸ Elias Ashmole, *Teatrum chemicum britannicum*, London, 1652, pag.443.

which was now being rediscovered; a typically “*hermetic*” vision. A conference held by *John Maynard Keynes* in 1942 at the Royal Society after having studied Newton’s secret papers for years was an historic event. Keynes presented a remarkably different image of Newton from that habitually proffered by scholars of the sciences for three centuries. Keynes asserted: “*Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians, the last great mind which looked out on the visible and intellectual world with the same eyes as those who began to build our intellectual inheritance rather less than 10,000 years ago.*”⁹ Thus, one of the greatest scientists of all humanity walked the line between rational thought and creative intuition, between logic and imagination. Indeed, in doing so and in line with the vision referred to herein he acted as a forerunner of the *New Science*. *Elias Ashmole, Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton* were all scientists and members of the *Royal Society* who continued to practice *Alchemy* side by side with the experimental methods applied by *Modern Science*.

Unfortunately however, the theory whereby the origins of Freemasonry were deep-rooted in Illuminism is hard to eradicate and is often based on well-established convictions that in truth are entirely groundless. One of these beliefs related to the fact that as the Royal Society had admitted members who undeniably supported the Illuminist school of thought, as a consequence the society represented an important workshop for that particular philosophy. However, to disprove this belief, it should be borne to mind that in addition to the abovementioned members, *Cudworth and More*, two of the most important representatives of the *Neoplatonists of Cambridge* were likewise members of the *Royal Society*, as proof of how pure empiricism was not the sole key issue addressed. It was *Henry More* himself who emphasized the distinction between *experimental* and *mechanical* philosophy, explaining that a failure to distinguish between the two was a sign of ignorance, particularly in view of the fact that experimental philosophy, professed by the Royal Society, yielded results that were “useful not only in everyday life, but also in the discovery of more sublime and truly metaphysical philosophies”. *Cudworth and More*, concerned by the possible materialistic and atheistic consequences of science, were opposed to the prevailing mechanical

⁹ J.M.Keynes, "Newton the Man", in Royal Society, Newton Tercentenary Celebration, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1947, pp.27-34.

philosophy in blatant contrast with the *spirit of nature*, an immaterial substance that “pervades the entire material universe, exercising a creative power, a vital principle responsible for the movement and cohesion of matter.”

On taking into account the considerable distance between *Modern Science* and the philosophy of nature of the Renaissance, it cannot be denied that the plastic concept of nature created by *Ralph Cudworth* in the second half of the 17th century represents the continuing expression of a philosophy of nature based on pre-modern theological-metaphysical suppositions in contrast with the mechanical rationalism of Cartesian physics and Hobbesian materialism. I am here referring to a “Philosophy of a plastic nature” with its organistic and vitalistic connotations subordinated to a spiritualistic theology linked to the interpretation of nature elaborated by Renaissance thinkers, and in particular by the religiously inspired philosophies such as Neo-Platonism.

In the light of the above premises, and referring once again to the ceremony of *Passing* to the 2nd Degree of the *Emulation* ritual which states: “As in the previous Degree you made yourself acquainted with the principles of Moral Truth and Virtue, you are now permitted to extend your researches into the hidden mysteries of Nature and science”, we can rightly confirm that those responsible for compiling our magnificent ritual were not indeed referring to the *Science* that had stemmed from the “*experimental*” method, the *Modern Science*, but rather to the method adopted by the Alchemist’s “*mystical chemistry*” which enhances a comprehension of the unity of the material principle of the world. That material principle encloses the vital spirit which works as a divine emanation. Indeed, it is not the material substances that perform wonders in *Alchemy*, but rather the alchemist’s ability to manipulate nature in its most intimate essence using those substances; implying the ability of man to grasp and understand the spirit through an accurate study of material.

The exhortation of the third degree affirms that the development of the intellectual faculty in the second degree takes place “through the paths of heavenly science even to the throne of God Himself.” Consequently, this science focusing on matter tends towards the discovery of the God who resides therein and arranges the matter into geometric perfection. In the process of discovery, matter and spirit are viewed as complementary and indissoluble.

The holistic vision of knowledge that has unfailingly inspired Alchemists and Freemasons is based on the need to overcome all forms of contrast and dichotomy. This dualism is symbolized in the Masonic lodge by the black and white flooring and in *Alchemy* by the formula “*solve et coagula*” used to identify the Philosopher’s Stone, where the division of the elements must necessarily be followed by their harmonic union.

This feeling of comprehensive understanding seems to be at the base of what could be defined a post-modern *New Science* which, after pushing against the limitations of modern science and its fragmentary, analytical knowledge, attempts to emerge based on a new foundation, which, as will be illustrated subsequently, is unexpectedly close to the alchemical-esoteric form of pre- or proto-science.

Chapter 3

The Modern Science

The modern scientific paradigm, the offspring of Illuminism, is developed through the application of instrumental-empirical methods, in a context of intellectual speculation in which all that surrounds us becomes a mere projection of the human intellect rather than a process in itself. The outside world, and *Nature* in particular, becomes the substrate for the creation of all inventions of reason, thus losing its natural connotation and its role as a vehicle of knowledge bestowed on man for the harmonic and empathic understanding of life.

Nowadays there is an increasingly pressing need to overcome the Illuminist rationalism and scientism generated by the Cartesian view whereby *Nature* is a machine devoid of life, inert, expressed externally to man and devoid of any form of divine or spiritual significance, vitality, intrinsic harmony. This de-divinization of the world, this contrast between spirit and matter would ultimately give rise to the modern cult of science, in the conviction that technical progress invariably corresponds to an inner evolution of man. Max Weber demonstrated how scientific rationalization had produced an irreversible “*disenchantment*” (Entzauberung) by secularising the old views of the world based on a mythological-religious origin, replacing these with an “*objective*” image.

In contrast to the philosophy advanced by Illuminism, Neo-Platonism – and in particular the principles upheld by the Cambridge Neoplatonists – neither desires nor attempts to dominate nature, but seeks to understand it from within. As emphasised by Ernst Cassirer, Neo-Platonic thought does not divide nature into individual elements or specific “forms” to be studied separately. In the place of this analytical method is a search and a need for universal synthesis..... Their philosophy of nature returns to the dynamic Pantheism of the Renaissance. It proposes a creative rather than a mechanic observation of Nature.”¹⁰

Moreover, More and Cudworth, two of the major representatives of the Cambridge Neoplatonists, maintained that the macrocosm reflected the microcosm and accordingly elaborated a cosmological theory taking into account the primacy of man over the world with a view to freedom. In

¹⁰ Ernst Cassirer, *Die Platonische Renaissance in England und die Schule von Cambridge*, “Studien der Bibliothek Warburg” XXIV Leipzig-Berlin, Teubner, 1932, pag 54.

Cudworth's *The true intellectual system of the Universe* the fundamental concept of the "freedom of mankind" first expressed by Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* is referred to. Man is not the victim of a foreign divorced mechanism but is the master and commander of his own destiny. Thus, the world is the mirror of mankind, reflected in a higher spiritual reality, not, as alleged by Hobbes, a blind mechanism.

The Masonic ritual affirms that the occult mysteries of Nature and Science are ascertained in the second degree. Nature, as the Exhortation of the Third Degree states: "...prepares you, by contemplation, for the closing hour of existence". It therefore teaches us to accept the natural cycle of life and death and re-unification with God. Time, in the Masonic vision, is cyclical rather than linear according to the theory of the eternal return and not in line with a scheme of indefinite progress, as proposed by the Illuminists.

Further on, the ritual exhorts us to "*Continue to listen to the voice of Nature, which bears witness that even in this perishable frame resides a vital and immortal principle*"¹¹. Therefore, the relationship with Nature is conceived as an "intimate" relationship, an association with the "elementary" in which the subject interacts with the object. Through the contemplation of *Nature* and the Divine principle revealed therein, after having acquired the *Moral Truth* and *Virtue* (as counselled in the 1st Degree) and *Intellectual Knowledge* through the study of the liberal arts (in the *2nd Degree*), a Freemason is ready to face an *Initiatic Death*. Intellect is conceived as a prodromic instrument of knowledge and thus on a lower level than true knowledge, which can be achieved only by means of *intuition*. Naturally, the "hidden mysteries," to which the ritual refers reveal the Mason's belief in something that exists beyond the field of the senses—the object of rational scientific investigation. I am in full agreement with Elémire Zolla regarding the fact that whoever enters into an initiatory society is already aware of the impossibility of achieving an explanation and understanding of everything through mere logic; he knows of the existence of a mystery and believes it can be grasped through intuitive knowledge, which – in its greatest form of expression – is enlightenment.

The "*Science*" of which the ritual speaks is therefore a science related to a

¹¹ Emulation Ritual, pag.183.

noetic, intuitive intelligence, an intelligence that allows man to understand the dimension of the sacred through *Nature* and thus reach the spirit through matter. This is the Spinozan vision of the existence of a sole essence that permeates all things, the Divine Spirit which is immanent in *Nature* and constitutes its geometric-structural order. There is no understanding to be had through mere reasoning, viewed as the ability to grasp the connection between objects and ideas, but only by means of intuitive knowledge.

However, as conveyed by the rituals used Masonic thought goes far beyond Spinoza's vision of a God immanent in *Nature* and the Pantheist vision. It acknowledges the existence of the Transcendent, of a *divine principle* that pervades *Nature* whilst reaching beyond the same to exceed the terrestrial dimension, beyond man and human concerns which constitute the beginning and end of the search. Contemplation of *Nature*, reflection of the Divine, as referred to in the 2nd Degree, is merely a means of reaching the *Truth* that resides "elsewhere", in the transcendent dimension reached only through comprehension of the demise of all things terrestrial and pertaining to one's own humanity, as imparted in the *Raising* to the 3rd Degree.

Cap.4 *The New Science*

On attempting to define in modern terms the Neoplatonic and Spinozan vision of the relationship between Man and Nature, and to describe the search for a unified knowledge, a principle that permeates Masonic thought, we could refer to a “*holistic vision*” of reality. According to this holistic view, man and nature are seen as part of the same harmonic, living and sentient organism, an expression of the spirit, rather than separate and independent parts of the same.

The traditional science of Cartesian and Illuministic derivation, the limits of which are increasingly evident, is becoming widely criticised. The undeniable merit of Illuminism was to free the researcher from the chains of theology and religious dogma dominant at the time, although throughout the centuries it has degraded into a dry materialism, insufficient both in methodology and results to explain many aspects of our existence. Today there is a new frontier of science represented by scientists and scholars from all over the world, at times collocated beyond the confines of the orthodox scientific community (the same community that condemned Galileo and Copernicus) which supports a new, no longer fragmented but unified knowledge. A knowledge frequently substantiated by scientific discoveries that challenge the certainties of orthodox scholars. In the field of *cognitive psychology* for example numerous experiments seem to confirm a correspondence with an ancient shared wisdom: reasoning or a rational process is a by-product of *intuition* which is a form of innate knowledge. In the field of medicine, there is no longer any doubt as to the interdependence of the mind and the body and the influence of the former in the development of illness, even serious illnesses such as tumours, rather than in the area of psychosomatic disorders. The human organism is increasingly seen as an inseparable unit of *mind-body-conscience*, capable of definitively overcoming the Cartesian division into *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.

The hermetic principle of the “as above so below” reproduced in Masonic Lodges by two globes representing the heavens and the earth is today represented in the so-called “*principle of isomorphism*” on the basis of which similarities between the *microcosm* and the *macrocosm* are sought. The application of the same conceptual models and corresponding

abstractions is therefore deemed feasible today. Man is therefore seen as a holographic unit enclosing the matrix of total information pertaining to the system of which he is part and with which there is a continuous exchange of information and energy. The same relationship seems to exist between organs, cells, and atoms. Thus, each and every part of creation seems to contain information on the whole, recalling the Platonic form of innate knowledge waiting only to be returned to the light.

This revolution was likely commenced by Albert Einstein who confirmed that “the cosmic religious sentiment is the strongest and noblest motivation of scientific research.” He was the first to attempt to propose, unsuccessfully, throughout his entire life, a *Theory of Whole* - a theory unifying all the laws of nature.

The indivisibility of science and conscience is indeed nowadays supported by contemporary scientists. To this regard the Nobel Prize winner, Eugene Wigner reported “consciousness is the primary reality...In the future physics will explain not only the phenomena observed, but also the process of observation”, whilst another Nobel Prize winner, Francis Crick, who discovered DNA, affirmed that “consciousness is the legitimate field of science.”

The matter observed and the conscience of the scientist who observes reality are thus united and subsequently investigated in a single context. The subject is therefore seemingly closely linked to the object.

In all *Initiatic Traditions*, of which Freemasonry is one, unity resides in the consciousness that constitutes the essence of the Divine.

The question posed increasingly by scientists, only seemingly of a philosophical nature, is whether the Universe would continue to exist if there were no-one to observe it. A negative answer would seem to be mandatory.

The main reason for this is following the discovery of *Quantum physics* and laboratory findings achieved in the early 1980s, it was first hypothesised that the existence of the Universe requires the presence of a conscious *sentient being* with a marked sense of awareness. Lacking an observer only the power of the Universe would exist, it would therefore seem that consciousness creates matter. The act of observation creates an interaction with the object being observed and modifies the same. This relevance of the subjectivity of the observer was anticipated by the Alchemists who saw in natural phenomena a continual exchange between the internal and the external. Such a discovery necessarily heralded a

change to the scientific paradigm: from the materialistic in which all is matter, implied as elementary particles which interact according to a *cause-effect* relationship to which man is completely extraneous, to a more *idealistic* paradigm in which awareness is the foundation of existence and matter responds to spirit. In *Alchemy*, the mercurial feminine principle explains the proteo-morphism of natural phenomena, their fluid mutations. Today, science affirms, on the basis of the so-called “*Bohr’s Principle of Complementarity*” that the elementary particles of matter, the *Quantum*, can be viewed both as particles and waves according to the way in which the phenomenon is observed. The Universe might not be the materialistic Newtonian cosmos made up of specific objects, visible and in motion along a defined trajectory, substantially static, but a dynamic universe constituted by “*waves of possibility*” or mere potentiality which becomes actuality and therefore material according to the awareness of the observer. In this vision of particular interest to the world of science man represents the centre and the sense of the Universe, exactly as hypothesised by Pico della Mirandola.

Another important experiment resulting in the establishing of the so-called “*Principle of Nonlocality*” put forward by the Nobel winning physicist Wolfgang Pauli, revealed that the elementary particles contained in an atom are in constant, instantaneous contact with each other, enabling each to ascertain its own position in relation to that of the others and in the universe without exchanging any form of signal whatsoever. In the view of scientists, the latter would tend to demonstrate how each particle is connected to the entire system and, therefore, how each part of the universe is interconnected by electromagnetic fields as though they were linked by a single intelligent form of energy. For the first time, science has been forced to hypothesise the existence of a dimension that *transcends* the dimension we inhabit, and is today obliged to resort to the *transcendent* to explain the phenomena it observes. This is largely due to the fact that the transcendent dimension, previously excluded from scientific research, would appear to influence the behaviour of matter.

The connection between the heavens and the earth, between the immanent and the transcendent, seen as a *continuum*, constitutes one of the key issues underlying Masonic ideas and principles. Indeed, the symbol of the *Triangle* represents the totality of the manifestation: it is heaven and earth, essence and substance. The *Starry Vault* forms the ceiling to the Masonic Lodge and the spiritual *Ladder* joins earth to the heavens.

The abovementioned underlines the need for a definitive transcending of the materialistic separatism of Illuminist-based traditional science which, in an attempt to provide a better understanding of the world, can no longer exclude human consciousness and the transcendent dimension of an intelligent energy, or mind of God, from which the sensitive world seemingly stems and is governed.

The *New Science* retrieves an ancient tradition of knowledge applied by the ancient Greek philosophers, the Neoplatonists, in mystic-religious tradition, and in initiatic societies. The *All-seeing Eye* inscribed within the luminous *Delta* in the form of a triangle is a frontal eye, neither right nor left; it is the third eye, the eye of the heart, of spontaneous, innate knowledge: the divine consciousness. This frontal eye sees all and discerns the unity in its multiplicity. This is the eye of the Great Architect of the Universe, but as illustrated by quantum physics, it could equally well represent the eye of the conscious observer who by observing attentively creates the world. And if the observer is a creator of worlds who, in the observation of his creation continuously recreates it, he is therefore God. The Freemason who at the end of his initiatic path learns to die, learns to rise above his own humanity, and, finally elevates himself to contemplate the principles and divine force, reflecting himself in the same.

The Freemason does not seek externally a demonstrable and universal truth, but pursues knowledge of himself through a unique and personal path towards the truth that resides in the divine principle.

However, no conflict is manifested as in the past, but rather a possible integration into the vision of a “*New Science*” focusing not on the reign of matter, but rather on that of consciousness, therefore evolving from an Illuminist towards a neo-humanistic form of science.

The dichotomy and contrast between spirit and matter, subject and object, between Self and All, Man and God, that has characterised modern scientific research must be transcended. The great antitheses represent an *elementary* stage of the learning process in which differences are fundamental in defining and understanding the sensitive world. But, as illustrated previously, research can no longer be undertaken merely in the sphere of the material dimension using strict rationalism alone as a tool, as if the spirit, creativity, imagination and intuition were not present to an equal degree in human experience.

The fall from Eden was determined by the discovery of good and evil,

implying an achievement of distinction, separation, duality in the unitarian consciousness of the spirit.

Thus, the “*coincidentia oppositorum*” is a Divine requisite, and buried in the ancient knowledge of initiatic societies is the truth waiting to be revealed by the new science as an original, innate attribute of the human soul.