

Alchemy and the Imagination (Part 6)

Hermes Negatively Polarised (2): (Hermes and the Post-modern Maladies of the Subject)

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My PhD project (undertaken in the mid-to-late 90s) involved tracing a particular malady through various eras stretching back to the ancient world. The malady had many names—depending upon the era in which it was encountered—but its main subjectively reported symptoms stayed relatively constant across two thousand years. The malady was known to the Romans as ‘taedium vitae’ and to the early church fathers of Christendom as ‘acedia’ (sometimes as ‘tristitia’). To the humoral physicians and alchemists of the late medieval and early modern periods it was known as ‘saturnine’ or ‘black melancholy’, also as ‘the spleen’ and ‘the hypp’. During these eras it also became associated with the ‘nigredo’ phase of what we might term ‘spiritual alchemy’ and, in the popular imagination, with the symptomology of the so-called ‘English malady’.

Later, during the Romantic period, it was referred to as ‘chronic ennui’ and by way of variations on that terminology it appeared in dozens of literary and philosophical texts. The sociologists of the modern era also rehashed the ancient list of symptoms when they discussed phenomena such as ‘disenchantment’, ‘alienation’, ‘anomie’ and so on. Existentialist philosophers and writers also discussed the problem, though again, a plethora of terms featured: ‘the sickness unto death’ (Kierkegaard), ‘nausea’ (Sartre), ‘the plague’ (Camus), etc. The symptoms also appear in modern psychiatric diagnostic manuals, most obviously in relation to mood disorders like ‘depression’ and ‘bipolar disorder’, but also in relation to a range of other self-destructive and addictive conditions.

Given my study mostly focused on how the same symptoms were explained by specific systems of thought I did not attempt to interpret post-modern manifestations of the malady in terms of ancient polytheistic approaches to mental illness. In part this was because chronic ennui/boredom didn’t begin to appear in literature, philosophy etc. as a condition until the time of the Roman Empire—Seneca, Lucretius and Petronius give us the first genuine descriptions. By this time classical polytheism was in decay—eventually to be replaced by Christianity in the West and Islam among the Arabs.

This series of articles has been concerned with the figure of Hermes; specifically with his many mutations and manifestations (including ‘intensifications’) across the past 3,500 years. I want to suggest, however, that an archetypal understanding of the specific ways in which the chronic ennui cycle has manifested in our postmodern era might throw some light on both the kind of subjective maladies epidemic in our era *and* the more intimate aspects of the Hermesian ‘intensification’ Western nations have been experiencing since the end of WWII.

As with the previous article on postmodern manifestations of the Hermes principle the Jungian terms ‘inflation’ (i.e. of an archetype) and ‘negative polarisation’ are relevant. I want to suggest here that aspects of Hermes’ social and cultural ‘inflation’ or ‘negative polarisation’ (see previous articles in this series) can be transmitted to vulnerable individuals such that they develop illnesses/maladies that are, in some respects, unique to our era.

In discussing these maladies, however, I’d like to simultaneously reassess certain arguments I developed in the late 1990s regarding the unique symptoms associated with post-modern forms of chronic ennui. From the perspective of archetypal psychology, ‘chronic ennui’ can be seen as the malady *par excellence* of social and cultural postmodernism. Following Hillman and others we can say that symptom constellations emerge when particular archetypal energies are ‘denied’ or ‘repressed’ (i.e. are not acknowledged, addressed or celebrated). Some of the specific

maladies associated with Hermes negatively polarised may thus be related to our failure to come to terms with Hermesian energies in Western civilisation during the Promethean age (the Industrial age through to 1945). It is obvious enough also, that a failure to acknowledge a phenomenon inevitably makes us ignorant—perhaps even dangerously so—of the phenomenon’s negative aspects. As with everything associated with the Hermes archetype—a complex and multidimensional archetype to say the least—a comprehensive understanding of the current ‘intensification’ is currently unavailable. As a consequence, and in true Hermesian fashion, we shall proceed with caution, aware of the trickster dimension to the archetype as well as its proclivity for conveying intuitive epiphanies at the speed of light. Scientific, that is to say rational, epiphanies are presided over by Apollo and Prometheus in the Western tradition. Historically such epiphanies appear to have been delivered in a more orderly (less chaotic) and less intuitive way than those attributed to Hermes-Mercury.

In an article published in edition 116 of the Canadian journal *The Antigone Review* the main aspects of the ‘ennui cycle’ as understood historically are described.

At the deepest level the idea signified a cycle of subjective discontent, a cycle that - at least at the symptom level - progressed perpetually through three distinct phases: (1) A stage of anxious boredom, of nameless objectless anxiety, which was accompanied by fantasies of release from that anxiety. This propelled the sufferer into another stage (2) characterised by bursts of frantic activity designed to defeat or flee from the inner feelings of discontent characteristic of the earlier stage. This activity had as its goal the denial of negative feelings or the overthrowing of them by various more or less repetitive habits. This flurry of activity gave way to (3) a stage of psychospiritual numbness that allowed a person to feel temporarily free from the anxieties and impulsive acting out typical of the previous periods. We may see this third stage as a state of non-being similar to that experienced by the heroin or smack addict, the sex addict, the gambler, the food addict, or the drugged patient in a psychiatric ward etc. It preceded a gradual return to Stage 1.

In the same essay various uniquely post-modern developments to the ancient descriptions of the ‘chronic ennui cycle’ were listed:

- The fragmentation of subjective experience (sometimes described in terms near-schizophrenic symptomologies) exacerbated by ‘derealisation’ of the social world due to its increasingly mediated and globalised characteristics.
- An epidemic of ‘unhealthy narcissism’ related to the kind of social developments described by Christopher Lasch in *The Culture of Narcissism* and *The Minimal Self*.¹
- An inability to feel anything strongly (sometimes termed *aboulie*) and a consequent quest for ‘feeling’ conducted via exotic diversions, empty spectacle, extreme experiences, etc.
- An epidemic of anxiety and depressive disorders (including bipolar disorders) leading to what Elizabeth Wurtzel termed ‘Prozac Nation’, alternatively to the notion that we live in ‘an Age of Anxiety’.²

¹See *The Culture of Narcissism* (1982) and *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (1985).

- Hyper-addictions of various descriptions proliferate and are normalised in the mainstream media (Such addictions are typically designed to numb the suffering associated with the depressive, anxious, etc. stages of the new version of the malady).
- The appearance in general culture of the so-called ‘psychopath archetype’. Though generally feared this archetype may nevertheless be admired in some circles due to his/her anti-hero status.

I want to discuss some of these postmodern additions to the ancient ‘ennui cycle’ in relation to a number of social, cultural or technological developments unique to the post-modern period (as discussed in previous articles). As already demonstrated, many of these trends can be related to contemporary mutations of the Hermes archetype or energy:

- A plethora of late-Information Age technological developments – e.g. ebooks, the internet, satellite communications technologies, pay-TV, mobile phones, etc. If ‘the medium is the message’ the message, whatever it is, increasingly saturates all areas of social life.
- The development of ravel technologies that make the world smaller and mediate our embodied experiences of relationships, self-identity and group identity.
- The phenomenon of Post-WWII consumerism morphing into ‘credit card consumerism’.
- Neo-liberal attempts (in many ways successful) to commodify and privatise almost all areas of personal and social life after the fall of the Soviet Union (we have entered the so-called ‘hyper-capitalist stage’ of culture).
- Increased bureaucratisation of many areas of life due to information age developments and a shift in many Western nations toward ‘service industries’.
- General cynicism regarding utopian understandings of the Sexual Revolution—leading, in some respects, to the wholesale commodification of sexuality in the mass media and online.
- The success of cultural postmodernism leads to a widespread denial of stable notions of identity (which is dismissed as ‘essentialism’).
- The same development leads to ‘moral relativism’ (i.e. criticism of universal truth claims) as an approach to ethics among cultural elites in many westernised nations.

If these phenomena represent an unacknowledged intensification in our era of ancient energies associated with Hermes we might be able to make connections between these trends and the new maladies of the subject. How might such phenomena contribute to ‘epidemics’ of particular maladies? How, also, might they be related to contemporary mutations of the ‘chronic ennui cycle’?

I want to suggest, to begin with, that ‘chronic ennui’ in post-modern form is directly related to both social and individual manifestations of what I previously termed ‘credit-card consumerism’. The tendency to attempt to repress a range of (often unfulfilled) psycho-spiritual needs by instead fixating on material needs (as per Maslow’s hierarchy) has been strong in the post-WWII era. The need to acquire and

² *Prozac Nation*, 1995.

then quickly discard endless ‘shiny objects’ is an inherently Hermesian phenomenon—though arguably in negative aspect. Hermes, as God of trade, economics etc., traditionally buys and sells or barter objects in a zone—a symbolic *interstitium*—between tribes/cultures/nations. As Brown notes in *Hermes the Thief*, however, Hermes often has only passing attachment to the objects he sells. They represent a means to another end altogether—connections/trade, for the sake of connections/trade. The Marxist insight (first articulated in the *Paris Manuscripts* of 1844) that capitalism represents an attempt to subject all elements of both our personal and social worlds to market forces (resulting, as Marx described it, in various forms of alienation/estrangement specific to capitalist societies) can thus be read, from the perspective of archetypal psychology, as a kind of prophesy concerning our current Hermesian ‘inflation’.

The neo-liberal economic ideology of the postmodern period (as espoused most vehemently by Von Hayek and Friedman and implemented most effectively by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan) clearly announces a negative inflation of the aspects of the Hermes archetype associated with micro and macroeconomic first principles. In terms of ‘maladies of the subject’ we can borrow Fromm’s notion of the ‘marketing personality’ to describe the kinds of neurotic imbalances that occur when this model of subjectivity is enforced on masses of people via a range of social institutions. Surface and façade (‘the charm of Hermes’), predominates, instead of authentic depth—the self is easily objectified and turned into a ‘relationship product’ among tens of millions of other products. In an age where Hermes is negatively polarised, however, all such products are eventually discarded and replaced by new ones.

The modern workplace, with its addiction to notions of endless ‘labour market flexibility’, enacts a nightmarish imperative belonging to this aspect of the ‘inflation’. Nowhere else is ‘relationship’ more clearly articulated in terms of economic valuations. Workers are routinely dehumanised. They are seen, in fact, as a barely tolerated ‘organic factors of production’ and are called upon to perpetually reinvent themselves as if it is their duty to compete with inanimate factors of production (particularly computers and machines). The mania for numbers, statistics, etc. typical of any God of trade and commerce also helps reduce living human beings to balance sheet negatives—‘costs’, ‘liabilities’, etc. There are signs that workers, perhaps having become savvy as to the cut-throat nature of the modern ‘labour market’, are themselves becoming ‘vocationally promiscuous’. It is common for Gen X and Gen Y employees to move from employer to employer as a strategy for climbing the corporate ladder. As stated by Neville (i.e. his comments regarding Hermes inflated in the modern workplace—see the previous article in this series) ‘everyone is on the way to somewhere else’. Long-term service, loyalty, commitment, devotion etc. to a workplace is discouraged—former vocational ‘virtues’ are increasingly seen as ‘vices’.

The modern Western mania for travel/tourism as a means to ‘escape’ mundane existence can also be understood from an archetypal perspective in terms of delusional fantasies associated with the general inflation of the ‘traveller God’. Most modern tourists and travellers seek to purchase their own world (reality) only slightly transformed when they travel—like Hermes ‘their feet never *really* touch the ground’ (Nevill adapted) when they ‘travel’. The association with the chronic ennui cycle is obvious enough and is often stated explicitly in the literature on ennui and travel (modern and ancient).

More worryingly, however, large segments of our global elite have migrated to the Hermesian ideal of ‘relationship at a distance’ (or ‘relationship on the move’). The ‘jet-setter’ life is sold as everyone’s ideal life—in consumerist culture and the mass media ‘success’ is increasingly measured in terms of one’s capacity to engage in relationships wherein the cherished other (lover, parent, child, friend, sibling, etc.) lives many thousands of kilometres away—‘relationship at a distance’. There are signs that this is an unhealthy ideal giving rise to a range of uniquely postmodern pathologies—in particular the ‘fragmentation of subjectivity’, ‘derealisation’ (our sense of reality being eroded by too many other realities) and ‘unhealthy narcissism’.

Lasch’s descriptions of ‘unhealthy narcissism’ (i.e. ‘obsession with self’, but also, more worryingly, in the postmodern period the need to hold together tenuous notions of self), as well as his argument that it has become epidemic in westernised cultures due to children routinely experiencing severe identity disruptions early in life, is thought provoking. If consumerism (as both personal and social phenomena) is, in part, dependent upon identity disruptions experienced very early in life (specifically at the ‘oral stage [Freud]) then we have to look more closely at the link between the current epidemic of ‘unhealthy narcissism’ (i.e. our culture-wide individualism run amuck) and the growing phenomenon of ‘relationships at a distance.’ Neo-liberal ideology with its ethic of radical economic individualism begins to look like a pathological outgrowth of these developments. ‘Relationship at a distance’ (increasingly mediated by, you guessed it, Hermesian communications technologies, e.g. Skype, phones, email, etc.) does not satisfy the need for embodied presence, either among children (for their parents), lovers (for the jet-setting beloved) or older people (for the presence of their adult children and grand-children). Such relationships thus involve a degree of psychological ‘trauma’. Given the current Hermes inflation, however, this trauma usually goes unacknowledged, even as other more explicit forms of traumatising, e.g. capital punishment and other forms of parental aggression and embodied abuse, true to the non-violent nature of the Hermes archetype, become illegal/outlawed (and rightly so!).

More worryingly, these Hermesian traits have also infiltrated the ways in which we conceptualise relationships. The methods by which we begin, maintain and terminate relationships are now heavily infiltrated by Hermesian technologies and ways of thinking. Social media sites like RSVP, Facebook and LinkedIn promote the notion of global relational networks (and are backed, of course, by Hermesian technologies like the internet) and cater to (but in the process transform) specific relationship needs—in respect to the above list: the need for a mate, the need to maintain contact with friends and family, and the need to build a ‘vocational relational network’, etc.. The human nervous system, however, can only cope with so many friendships (relationships) so these highly mediated ‘cyber friendships’ and ‘connections’ frequently lack genuine depth. We dump (‘unfriend’) people at speed and long-term connections are increasingly eschewed or conducted at a distance. Nevertheless, people become addicted to obsessively accumulating friends/connections etc. and feel anxious and depressed when their online friendship statistics fall below par. We are also being conditioned to feel anxious about being excluded from these cyber-networks and are told that we risk being seen as dated and behind the times if we fail to participate.

Interestingly, the traveller god’s somewhat promiscuous, *laissez faire* attitude toward sexuality and love relationships also manifests in the new online (or mediated) environment. Hermesian ‘sexual mores’ are increasingly presented to the public as forms of personal ‘liberation’, ‘freedom’ etc.. The oldest extant versions of the

Hermes mythos describe a voyeuristic element to the archetype but also a robust sexual earthiness that, when compared to the prudery and schizophrenia of patriarchal monotheistic sexuality, looks relatively healthy. What the archetype inevitably lacks, however, is 'deep connectivity' and 'romance'. The traveller God eschews romance because romance may lead to long-term attachment. If you are always on the way to somewhere else 'attachment' can easily become an irritating burden.

In the archetype's current negatively polarised manifestation, the 'sex' and 'freedom/liberation' aspect (which began with Freud and, forgive the pun, climaxed with the 'sexual revolution') easily mutates into mere sexual objectification, defined in terms of, paradoxically, 'disembodied' fantasy and compulsive acting out (e.g. 'sex addition'). In this form we note close parallels to postmodernist descriptions of the chronic ennui cycle. The pornographic obsessions of millions of web-users is all of a piece with this development. Addicted to commodified (and highly mediated) sexual images detached from 'emotional substance' it is possible that excessive indulgence (a form of escape or diversion) may help embed the chronic ennui cycle deep in the addict's nervous system by routinely splitting emotional connectivity from the physical aspects of the sex impulse. Huysmans (in *Against Nature*) and other 19th century decadents and aesthetes first described the consequences of this split—a compulsive desire for sexual extremes ('sexual spectacles') that ultimately exhausts the afflicted person sometimes destroying any possibility of relational integrity with a 'real' other. Depressive disorders are a possible outcome for some individuals trapped in this version of the ennui cycle.

The body-image disorders so prevalent in the modern age (especially among young women but also, increasingly, among young men) may also be related to our rejection of long-term relationships; our discouraging notions of a relatively stable self; and, in the area of love and sexuality, our negative assessment of monogamy. Here again the Hermesian technologies play a part in spreading these maladies since the model of the 'perfect' body/exterior (the 'deep interior' being more or less irrelevant to the God of travellers and trade) is everywhere apparent on the web, on television, in magazines etc. Bombarded by these commodified images of perfect 'relational products' women, and increasingly men, increasingly submit to invasive procedures including surgery to alter the way they look. The body itself becomes an object/product/machine to be moulded, acted upon, etc. like everything else in our objectified and commodified social world. The social imperative is to constantly renovate and up-date our physical appearance and mental abilities. 'Stable' (read: older, boring) versions of self are to be superseded (discarded) in favour of more contemporary models brought to us via the mass (Hermesian) media. Not surprisingly anxiety levels skyrocket and depressive disorders proliferate among those unable to compete, change, up-date, *sell* themselves afresh with each new day. Such social imperatives also contribute to epidemics of fragmentation and derealisation since one literally doesn't recognise oneself from one year to the next!

Once we begin to think in terms of patterns associated with particular archetypes a range of apparently disparate personal and social phenomena suddenly begin to make sense. So far this article has concentrated on the negative aspects (the 'shadow' aspects) of our theorised Hermesian intensification. But the same archetype can also explain other phenomena sometimes understood as 'progressive' in nature. Although I do not want to go into depth here, the sexual revolution of the 1960s clearly had positive dimensions for significant numbers of people—e.g. young people, women in general, as well as members of various previously oppressed sexual minorities.

Hermes is not an authoritarian archetype. He is not interested in developing, least of all *imposing* on others, rules that might give rise to any kind of erotic monotheism. Indeed he takes great delight in exposing the hypocrisy and psychological schizophrenia that comes with all kinds of sexual puritanism (hence the endless revelations in our age concerning the abuse of children in the care of so-called ‘celibate’ priests etc.).

Similarly, his generally non-violent and democratic nature means that an age in which his energies intensify is likely to see less explicit interpersonal violence (especially violence towards women and children). The so-called political ‘left, as well as the ‘centre’ in many Western democracies, is apparently closer to this aspect of the Hermes intensification than the political ‘right’. Perhaps this is because the members of the political right are motivated by a need to maintain and strengthen their own dominance over particular societies—the more authoritarian ‘father god’ archetype (historically associated with patriarchal monotheism but also evident in some secular ideologies e.g. communism and fascism) is thus more likely to seem attractive to right wingers. In some senses this has been the defining political conflict in many Western nations since the September 11 terrorist attacks. In the US we could say that more progressive Hermesian impulses have battled an increasingly authoritarian ‘father god’ inflation/negative polarisation that at times (e.g. the invasion of Iraq, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, the ‘secret rendition’ policy, etc.) paralleled the kind of ‘father god’ inflation/negative polarisation associated with Islamic terrorism.

We have perhaps moved into social commentary, however, a general democratic dislike of violence—particularly interpersonal violence—currently prevails among significant sections of any given Western population. This trend is all of a piece with the anti-oppressive tendencies of Hermes, but also perhaps represents the culmination of the ‘Promethean’ impulse of the preceding period. Prometheus, we recall, wished, above all, for ‘liberation’ i.e. from the oppression he was experiencing at the hands of Zeus. He refused to acknowledge the Olympian Gods, seeing Zeus in particular as a divine psychopath, and he saw himself as a great friend to humanity. Above all he wished to liberate humanity from the capricious cruelty of the Gods. Inevitably then, an age in which Prometheus figures (i.e. from the scientific revolution to then end of WWII) inevitably tends toward atheism or, at minimum, agnosticism. Anti-oppressive ideologies are likely to be common among the intelligentsia and the masses—Marxism, Feminism, Gay Rights, Environmentalism, the rights of children, anti-colonialism, etc.

A Hermesian intensification, on the other hand, is likely to continue aspects of this democratic levelling but with less passion, patriotism/provincialism and (potentially authoritarian) certainty.³ Hermes, as the archetype of zones between cultural realities, ushers in a period of scepticism and perspectivism—even cynicism—though these tendencies remain in the service of a more or less democratic outlook. The tendency of the Hermes archetype is also to reformulate oppression as a phenomenon to be tackled by linguistic/ communicational methods (hence the postmodern obsession with ‘language’ and ‘sign’ systems). Translated into personal ethics there has been a tendency to believe that morality is largely relativistic and to see the self as a mere social construct. What else would we expect from the archetype that has to ‘trade’ with and ‘mediate’ between a host of warring

³ Thought we note that the notion of ‘intersectionist oppression’ has, of late, replaced and elaborated upon earlier ‘singular’ notions oppression.

‘realities/paradigms/perspectives’. Reality becomes contingent and tolerance (‘multiculturalism’ as we call it in Australia) becomes a survival mechanism rather than a deeply felt ethic (in contrast to the passion for liberation of the Promethean phase).

Extreme forms of this Hermesian ‘blank slate’ perspective on personal identity posit the self as a series of changeable social masks, constructed narratives or positionings—there is no essence, no depth, no real self. Acceptance of this fact, if one is an extreme devotee of postmodern Hermes, supposedly leads to personal liberation. The reality for many who attempt to live this ideal, however, has been somewhat less utopian. Fragmentation and derealisation (often accompanied by other virulent symptoms) have become epidemic post-modern maladies that appear to have mutated into a super-bug version of the chronic ennui cycle.

A general curtailment of deep emotion is another aspect of the Hermesian intensification we are currently undergoing. This phenomenon works hand in hand with a general cultural tendency to privilege the intellect (cognition). This is no recent phenomenon, true—after all the industrial age privileged reason and mathematics above many other human faculties. The scientific revolution, as a Promethean impulse, clearly distrusted spirituality, intuition, emotion, etc. preferring instead the evidence of the senses carefully accumulated and scrupulously analysed. Here again, however, we note a change of tone in the postmodern period. ‘Pure science’ is routinely corrupted by commercial and political concerns and universities increasingly pursue knowledge according to calculations based upon the use value of particular research projects (i.e. their likely economic benefits). ‘Cognitive complexity’ is everywhere in the postmodern world, and escalating as a social phenomenon, but logic, reason and pure science have a declining influence. The cognitive complexity of our era, is Hermesian, and thus apparently ‘meaningless’ (in terms of older models of rationality)—mere background noise. We are flooded with data and trivial information from all directions but little of it is trustworthy, relevant or connected to systematic overviews. These values are not relevant to Hermes, God of trade and travel and interconnectivity.

The bureaucratic ‘data/fact flood’ of the Hermesian inflation assaults subjective consciousness in fragmented, non-holistic ways—leading to an epidemic of cognitive hyper-activity that easily degenerates in to stress responses and (information age) anxiety. For many of us the morning ‘email check’ typifies this ‘flood’ or ‘avalanche’. Sustained cognitive hyper-activity in the workplace and increasingly at home atrophies our emotional and even physical engagement with the world. Indeed in terms of Jung’s four functions, emotion, intuition and physicality are all but banished in favour of a cognitive function set adrift even from Apollonian and Promethean forms of reasoning. The further one goes up the corporate ladder these days the more one is exposed to this potential ‘cognitive disorder’. In many organisations to be promoted is to lose touch with one’s body and one’s capacity to express emotion spontaneously—the simple act of sitting at the computer for dozens of hours a week trying to sort out real ‘information’ from mere background noise may make us prone to the disorder we’re documenting.

Here we are emphasising again the more shadowy aspects of Hermes but we should state that given the horrors of the 20th century it is no small achievement for Westernised societies to have strengthened significantly notions of universal human rights and to have legislated so comprehensively against so many forms of systematised oppression. So long as we do not allow the extremes discussed above to dominate it is worthwhile celebrating a number of aspects of the current Hermesian

intensification i.e. in particular the notion that we ought to be more tolerant of difference. At the height of the cold war the US and the USSR came close to launching nuclear strikes against each other on numerous occasions. Did the 'Hermesian' intensification that began in that era help keep in check what Jungians understand as our tendency to project the shadow aspects of our psyches onto others? Awareness of 'personal shadow' allied with awareness of the sentience of others, are fundamental gifts of Hermes the mediator—they are also very useful personality traits for an age in which Hermesian technologies have shrunk the distances between peoples.

In keeping with Hermes' association with trade, wealth, economics etc., a Hermesian intensification would also likely posit economic freedom ('free markets' etc.) as a fundamental source of *personal* freedom and liberation. The 'Invisible Hand' of the hyper-capitalist state is an archetype, the archetype is Hermes. In some respects the economic story of the last forty years has seen both left and right in Westernised nations attempt to control the fruits of both economic globalisation and information age technological developments (both, as we have noted elsewhere, distinctly Hermesian phenomena) though for entirely different purposes. The right wishes to maintain and strengthen its ideal society i.e. an innately oppressive hierarchic society based upon extreme differences between the wealthy and the poor—i.e. the right attempts to put Hermes in the service of the authoritarian Father (the Father manifesting as either God, Darwin or some billionaire entrepreneur). The left, on the other hand, thoroughly steeped in Hermesian postmodern theory, and in horror of communist authoritarianism (the 'old left'), has sought to democratise wealth whilst at the same time furthering a range of other progressive social agendas by harnessing the technological and economic developments associated with the Hermesian intensification.

Neither agenda has been entirely successful. Some understanding of archetypal theory might help us understand why. Historically, Hermes, is best defined as a catalyst for change—in the personality and in society generally. His anti-authoritarian tendencies, as well as his request that we acknowledge all the Gods (in our personalities and in our relationships with others), i.e. all perspectives, would suggest that he is a God of 'in-betweens'. The 'interstitium' heralded by Hermes then is likely to be one in which old maladaptive structures (particularly negative polarisations related to other Gods/archetypes) are purified on the way to what the alchemists call an 'Albido' or 'Rubido' flowering. The interventions of Hermes, then, can be seen as species survival epiphanies. Of all the Gods it is most likely that his 'negative polarisations' and 'inflations' are not so much related to his own essence (for he is too volatile to fixate rigidly for any length of time) as to the process by which his essence absorbs negative elements related to other archetypal patterns. In short, an Hermesian inflation may be a more complex phenomenon than say a 'Zeus/father God' inflation, since in alchemical understandings it is Hermes that initiates and oversees (catalyses) the transformations undertaken by a range of other gods. An apparent Hermes inflation/negative polarisation may, on closer analysis, represent a purification of some other archetype's excesses.

In terms of US and European politics the postmodern Hermesian intensification first absorbed and reordered the leftist excesses/fixations of communist authoritarianism (this occurred in the 60s and 70s). It simultaneously absorbed and attempted to reorganise the 'authoritarian father' fixations of the political right—though arguably with less success. The question we might like to ponder is as follows:

if the Age of Hermes is a volatile in-between period what exactly is this intensification of the archetype preparing us for? Possible answers will be covered in full in another article, however, for the present I'd like to introduce one particularly hopeful possibility. Hermes is an immanent principle when positively polarised. He tends to move those subject to his influence in relatively democratic, anti-oppressive directions. As archetypal mediator he tends to ask that all sides acknowledge the essential sentience of others. There is a certain sacredness to this process that promises to re-enchant everyday relationships. In the process the materialistic excesses of the Promethean age may also be corrected.

If we examine closely what is left standing after the deconstructive and anti-oppressive ideologies of the postmodern period have done their work we might speculate that the mediator God asks us to acknowledge our intricate dependence on a finite web of terrestrial life. From the Hermesian perspective the self is never an isolated entity. Such a notion is sheer delusion. Rather, the self is always *in relation*—ultimately it is defined by the quality or otherwise of its relationships with others, i.e. people, animals, plants and world/cosmos etc.. This epiphany is perhaps the hidden gift accompanying a contemporary positively polarised Hermesian perspective. To experience it fully is to experience a kind of grace. This grace may ultimately represent an antidote to some of the postmodern maladies of the subject we've been discussing in this article—though for the present I want to leave the question of therapy for another article.

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