

The Dignity of Man in Western Intellectual History, Esotericism, and Art **A CEU SUMMER UNIVERSITY COURSE, Budapest**

(As of 180520)

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Date: July 1-8, 2018 (from Sunday to Sunday)

Title: **The Dignity of Man in Western Intellectual History,
Esotericism, and Art**

Study areas: intellectual history, religious studies, visual culture

CONCEPT AND COURSE DESCRIPTION

One of the curious phenomena of our contemporary culture is the prevailing lure of the occult. From popular culture to certain trends of high-brow philosophy, esotericism still offers a valid and respected world picture, although closer to counter-culture than the mainstream scientific world view. This persistence cries out for a scholarly explanation which can only be achieved by interdisciplinary research, coordinating cultural theory and history, religious studies, art- and literary history, sociology, social psychology, etc. The academic research and graduate education of this field has been growing for a few decades and by now such flourishing institutions can be mentioned as the university departments at the Sorbonne and the University of Amsterdam, where a doctoral degree in the study of esotericism can be obtained provided the subject is approached from a scholarly viewpoint of intellectual history, religious studies, sociology, literature, or the arts. Some international academic organizations also foster these studies, such as the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism (ESSWE), or the American Society for the Study of Esotericism (ASE).

As a historiographical overview, it should be remembered that the modern study of Western Esotericism grew out of intellectual- and cultural historical studies beginning from the first half of the 20th century, represented for example by Lynn Thorndike's monumental *History of Magic and Experimental Sciences* (1923-58); the Warburg school in London (D.P. Walker, Frances Yates); continental scholars such as A.-J. Festugière, Eugenio Garin, Walter Pagel, Gershom Scholem, Cesare Vasoli. These studies quickly proliferated towards the end of the century comprising scholars from all over the world (Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggeman, Brian Copenhaver, Allen Debus, R. J. W. Evans, Moshe Idel, Richard Kickhefer, Paola Zambelli, Rafal Prinke), however remained confined mostly to the period from late

Antiquity to the early modern period. As of the 21st century, scholarship reached the point to realize that the connections between "old Hermeticism" and newer, post-Enlightenment occultism are stronger than previously thought. This insight boosted the emergence of the study of Western Esotericism based on a wider interdisciplinary and methodological basis. Leading figures of this reconfiguration have been and still are Allison Coudert, Antoine Faivre, (the late) Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Kocku von Stuckrad and many others, including numerous young and very young scholars. This historiographical context will be presented and explained in the first class of the course, as well as introduced by some of the preliminary requisite readings.

This academic field is also present in the curriculum of CEU – related to History, Medieval Studies, and Religious Studies. During the past ten years, the initiator of this project, György E. Szönyi (also a board member of ESSWE mentioned above) has been regularly teaching courses such as "Introduction to Western Esotericism," "Religion, Science, and Magic in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance," or "Ascension on High." Some of his MA and doctoral students have specifically worked on the cultural historical study of Western Esotericism and they have chosen CEU because of the availability of these subjects. Other colleagues, such as Gábor Klaniczay, Matthias Riedl, Aziz al-Azmeh have also been regularly offering courses related to the academic study of esotericism (on heretic movements and radical protestants; on religious enthusiasm; on philosophical hermeticism).

The present proposal aims at contributing to this pertinent and complex problematic by offering a case study, the *cultural history* of the idea of human deification – or as it was called in the Renaissance "the dignity of man" (understood in the sense of Pico's famous *Oration* and not to be mixed up with a wider and more modern philosophical and political interpretation of human dignity). The history of this idea cuts across long periods of time (from late Antiquity to the present, however our investigation will concentrate on the medieval and early modern periods *but always anticipating the modern reverberations, such as modern art and psychoanalytical interpretations by Carl Gustav Jung and his followers*); cultural registers (from theology and philosophy to popular culture); and media (from textual heritage to visual representations and feature films). One reason to pay a special attention to the early modern period is that its research is pertinent for both the History and Medieval Studies Departments which at present are developing a focus group on Early Modern Studies under the auspices of the Humanities Initiative program of CEU. The stress on mediality has connections with another Humanities Initiative program, the Visual Studies Platform.

The idea of deification appears in association with the origin myths of mankind, the questions of the creation of the world, and possible human role in it. In the state of fallen disgrace people speculated about the golden past, when Man had been made after the image of God and became a partner in creation as a Demiurge. This Golden Age was lost, but the desire remained to regain the lost privilege: either to achieve epiphanic grace by

means of individual perfection, or create a perfect society which will bring about an earthly paradise and thus be ready for the apocalyptic second coming. The present course proposes to concentrate on the individual means (outside or beyond organized religions and their rituals) among which one finds philosophical meditation, ecstatic mysticism, and magical techniques in various compositions. The Pythagorean-Platonic enlightenment, the Hermeticism of Asclepius, the medieval and Renaissance Jewish Kabbalah – from the fifteenth century also Christianized –, the mystical alchemy of some Protestants, such as Jakob Böhme, the revelations of Swedenborg, the Theosophy and Anthroposophy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the New Age hopes of the 1970s are all episodes of a continuous story which sometimes disturbs, sometimes comforts even today.

One should not forget about the fact, however, that Western esoteric thought has always been influenced by non-European and non-Christian currents, too. The Indian Brahmins already appear in Plato; later Sufi mysticism, Indian theosophy as well as the already mentioned Jewish Kabbalah have been fertilizing mainstream esotericism. Although an extensive review of all these cannot be accommodated in the present summer course which concentrates on the classical, Christian, and Jewish trends, the organizers and lecturers will bear in mind to remind of the wider perspectives.

The study of these phenomena highlights such visions and dreams of humankind that over the centuries have been catalyzing great creative energies in the fields of religion, art, even science. The classes on Jungian psychology, and esoteric inspiration in modern art, as well as the discussions of feature films reflecting on early modern ideas of deification will serve to make participants aware of the continuity of the tradition and the varieties within it.

INTELLECTUAL RESOURCES AND ACADEMIC PROGRAM

The distinguished lecturers of the course are experts of one or another aspect of the story outlined above. The goal of the course is to provide a solid picture of some key phenomena of Western Esotericism – primarily the human self-deification by means of occult and magical means – and the learning outcome should be the acquisition of methodological tools to approach and assess those in a reliable scholarly way: close reading of texts; interpretation of images; placing cultural representations in social and historical contexts. The Summer Course would also help CEU to consolidate its place as an internationally important research center of this field.

Teaching load: over six days 14 x 100 minutes academic sessions and 2x100 minutes complementary discussion. Integrated cultural programs include 3 film screening thematically connected with the course (Murnau: *Faust*, 1926; Branagh: *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, 1994; Polanski: *The Ninth Gate*, 1999); and 2 optional field trips in Budapest (Rumbach Synagogue and a meditative tour in the Buda Castle Labyrinth – a small entrance fee is required in both places).

Principal and adjunct lecturers

PROF. BRIAN P. COPENHAVER (3x100 minutes)

Brian Copenhaver (Professor [emeritus] of Philosophy and History at UCLA, former Provost of UCLA's College of Letters and Science) is an international authority on magic as a philosophical tradition from the late antiquity to the seventeenth century. His authoritative translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* has become the standard in the field. His studies on the relationship between philosophy, science, and magic have been shaping the academic field since the 1970s and his new results attract continuous interest. Important publications: *Symphorien Champier and the Reception of the Occultist Tradition in Renaissance France* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978); *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *A History of Western Philosophy, III: Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); with Charles Schmitt; *Magic in Western Culture from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); *The Book of Magic: from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (A Penguin Classics Hardcover, 2015).

Offered classes: 1/ Deity, Deities and Magic; 2/ Magical Ascensions Contested; 3/ Christian Responses to Pagan Magic.

DR. JÚLIA GYIMESI (1x100 minutes)

Júlia Gyimesi is an assistant professor at the Department of Psychology of the Károli University of the Reformed Church in Budapest. She has been studying the relationship between early twentieth-century (Hungarian) psychoanalysis and Western Esotericism. She has published in various international journals on spiritism and early psychology in Hungary and her doctoral dissertation was published as *Psychoanalysis and Spiritism* (Budapest, 2011).

Class offered: From Archetypical God to God-complex. The Psychological Concepts of Human Deification in Light of Western Esotericism.

PROF. MOSHE IDEL (3x100 minutes)

Moshe Idel (Professor [emeritus] of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem – successor of Gerschom Scholem). Idel has undertaken a systematic revision of the history and analysis of Jewish mysticism. His explorations of the mythical, theurgical, mystical, and messianic dimensions of Judaism have been attentive to history, sociology, and anthropology, while rejecting a naive historicist approach to Judaism. His 1988 work, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (Yale University Press), is said to have revolutionized Kabbalah studies. Important publications: *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (tr. from the Hebrew by Jonathan Chipman. Albany, State University of New York Press, 1988); *Golem: Jewish magical and mystical traditions on the artificial anthropoid* (Albany, State University of New York Press, 1990); *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1994); *Absorbing Perfections, Kabbalah and Interpretation* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002); *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders* (CEU, Budapest, 2005); *Kabbalah in Italy 1280-1510* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2011).

Offered classes: 1/ The Human as Potentiality to Change: From Arabic, To Jewish and Renaissance Anthropology; 2/ Theurgy: Human *Imitatio Dei* and the Divine *Imitatio Fidei*; 3/ Tiqqun: the Reparation of the Divinity by Human Actions.

PROF. BENEDEK LÁNG (1x100 minute)

Benedek Láng is professor of intellectual history and the history of science at the Institute of Philosophy of the Technical University of Budapest. He is a CEU graduate and recently the Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. He is internationally known as a researcher of medieval magic as well as early modern cryptography. His most important monographs include: *Magic in the Middle Ages* (in Hungarian, Budapest, 2007); *Unlocked*

Books: Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); *Cryptography in Early Modern Hungary* (in Hungarian, Budapest, 2015 – forthcoming in English!).

Offered class: Medieval Ceremonial Magic and the Dignity of the Magus.

PROF. GYÖRGY E. SZÖNYI (2x100 minutes)

György Szönyi is Professor of English at the University of Szeged and Visiting Professor of History and Medieval Studies at CEU, Budapest (since 2006). He is a cultural historian with special interest in Western esotericism, especially in the Renaissance period; also in the relationship of words and images; cultural semiotics; and literary history. Most important monographs: *Gli Angeli di John Dee* (Roma, 2004); *Pictura and Scriptura. Twentieth-century Theories of Tradition-based Cultural Representations* (in Hungarian, Szeged, 2004); *John Dee's Occultism: Magical Exaltation through Powerful Signs* (SUNY Press, 2004, 2010). In the making: *The Enoch Readers: A Cultural History of Angels, Magic, and Ascension on High*; and *The Mediality of Culture and the Emblematic Way of Seeing*.

Offered classes: 1/ Western Esotericism: Definitions, Historiography, Challenges; 2/ Enoch for the Modern and Postmodern People; 3/ From the Hieroglyphic Monad to Angel Magic. Enoch, John Dee, Exaltatio; 4/ With Prof. Wilke: The Fortunes of Faust.

PROF. CARSTEN WILKE (2x100 minutes)

Carsten Wilke is associate professor of History at CEU, his teaching covers Jewish history and culture from the Middle Ages to modernity, as well as other aspects of the interaction between religious cultures and communities in Europe and in the Mediterranean region. His academic background combines a training in Jewish Studies, obtained at the University of Cologne and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with a diploma in comparative Religious Studies from the École Pratique des Hautes Études of Paris. Before coming to CEU in 2009, he taught at the Universities of Heidelberg, Düsseldorf, and Brussels, and held research positions in France, Germany, Mexico, and the USA. His books include: *Jüdisch-christliches Doppelleben im Barock* (Peter Lang, 1994); *The Marrakesh Dialogues: A Gospel Critique and Jewish Apology from the Spanish Renaissance* (Brill, 2014); *Farewell to Shulamit. Spatial and Social Diversity in the Song of Songs* (DeGruyter, 2016).

Offered classes: 1/ Hekhalot Traditions, Enoch, and the Dignity of Man; 2/ Guillaume Postel: Christian Kabbalah and the Transfiguration of Humanness; 3/ With Prof. Szönyi: The Fortunes of Faust.

CLASS TOPICS, READINGS, DAT-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

(Readings are available on the Course homepage and participants can download them prior to their coming to Budapest)

SATURDAY (June 23)

17:30—19:00: Meeting of the participants for registration and an informal gathering at the 2nd floor cafeteria of CEU (Nador Street 15). Many venues at CEU can only be accessed with an electronic card which participants will receive at the registration. However, the cafeteria can be accessed without the card.

19:00—22:30: A "Magical Mystery Tour." Since that Saturday is the Night of the Museums, we shall visit the underground Gothic and Renaissance remains of the Royal Palace on Castle Hill of Buda, then visit the Castle Labyrinth, eventually the old, medieval synagogue.

SUNDAY (June 24)

9:00: Gathering in the classroom and getting acquainted with the logistics of the academic program.

Classes from 9:20:

Szönyi 1: *Western Esotericism: Definitions, Historiography, Challenges*

Please read Szönyi 1a-1b from "Literature".

Copenhaver 1: *Pico's Concept of Dignity – Contested Readings*

Please read Copenhaver 0, "Read Me First", than Copenhaver 1 and 3 from "Literature".

Wilke 1: *Hekhalot Traditions, Enoch, and the Dignity of Man*

Please read Wilke 1-5 from "Literature".

Evening film screening: Murnau, *Faust* (1926)

MONDAY (June 25)

Idel 1: *The Human as Potentiality to Change: From Arabic, To Jewish and Renaissance Anthropology*

Please read Idel 1 from "Literature".

Láng: *Medieval Ceremonial Magic and the Dignity of the Magus*

Please read Láng from "Literature".

Szönyi / Wilke: *The Fortunes of Faust*

Please read Szönyi/Wilke 1-2 from "Literature".

Evening program: **SUN reception.**

TUESDAY (June 26)

Copenhaver 2: *Pico's 900 Theses and its Contexts*

Please read Copenhaver 0, "Read Me First", than Copenhaver 2 and 4, 5.

Idel 2: *Theurgy: Human Imitatio Dei and the Divine Imitatio Fidei*

Please read Idel 2 from "Literature".

Szönyi 2: *Enoch Recycled Since the 19th Century*

Please read Szönyi 2a-2b from "Literature".

Evening film screening: Branagh, *Frankenstein* (1994)

WEDNESDAY (June 27)

Wilke 2: *Guillaume Postel: Christian Kabbalah and the Transfiguration of Humanness*

Please read Wilke 6-7 from "Literature".

Szönyi 3: *From the Hieroglyphic Monad to Angel Magic. Enoch, John Dee, Exaltatio*

Please read Szönyi 3 from "Literature".

Gyimesi: *From Archetypical God to God-complex. The Psychological Concepts of Human Deification in Light of Western Esotericism*

Please read Gyimesi from "Literature".

Evening film screening: Polanski, *The 9th Gate* (1999)

THURSDAY (June 28)

Idel 3: *Tiqqun: the Reparation of the Divinity by Human Actions*

Please read Idel 3 from "Literature".

Discussion of the Films (with all professors available)

From 13pm: free program, individual or optional cultural programs; campus tour.

19:30: **Farewell dinner**, 2nd floor cafeteria of CEU (Nador Street 15).

FRIDAY (June 29)

Copenhaver 3: *Dignity as a Philosophical Problem*

Please read Copenhaver 0, "Read Me First", than Copenhaver 6 and 7.

Conclusions (with all professors available)

From 13pm: free program, individual or optional cultural programs; departures.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

(Add to the items below the books of the course lecturers which are listed under their biographical summary. Prerequisite readings will be uploaded to the conference site in pdf format well before the course and made available to the successful applicant for this course.)

Butler, E. M. 1980. *The Myth of the Magus* (1948). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coulianu, I. P. 1991. *Out of This World. Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein*. London, Boston: Shambala.

Faivre, Antoine. 1994. *Access to Western Esotericism*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press (Series in Western Esotericism).

Forshaw, Peter ed. 2016. *Lux in Tenebris: The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism*. Leiden: Brill (Aries Book Series, 2017).

Garr, W. Randall. 2003. *In His Own Image and Likeness : Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism*. Leiden: Brill.

Godwin, Joscelyn. 2007. *The Golden Thread. The Ageless Wisdom of the Western Mystery*

Traditions. Wheaton, Illinois: Quest Books.

Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. 2008. *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 2001. "Beyond the Yates Paradigm: The Study of Western Esotericism between Counterculture and New Complexity." *Aries* 1.1: 6-37.

—. 2012. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*. Cambridge University Press.

—. 2015. *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. ed. 2006. *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*. Leiden: Brill.

Kilcher, Andreas B. ed. 2010. *Constructing Tradition. Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*. Leiden: Brill (Aries Book Series).

Rossi, Paolo. 1975. "Hermeticism, Rationality, and the Scientific Revolution." In M. L. Righini-Bonelli and William R. Shea eds. *Reason, Experiment, and Mysticism in the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Science History Publications.

Thomas, Keith. 1972. *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in 16th and 17th century England*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson (Rpt. London: Penguin University Paperbacks, 1973).

Thorndike, Lynn. 1923-58. *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (8 vols). New York: Columbia University Press.

Trinkaus, Charles. 1995. *In Our Image and Likeness : Humanity and Divinity In Italian Humanist Thought*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

Versluis, Arthur. 1986. *The Philosophy of Magic*. Boston, London: Arkana.

—. 2007. *Magic and Mysticism. An Introduction to Western Esotericism*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield.

Vickers, Brian. 1984. "Introduction." In Brian Vickers ed. *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-57.

von Stuckrad, Kocku. 2013. *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*. Tr. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. Durham: Acumen.

Westman, Robert S. 1977. "Magical Reform and Astronomical Reform: The Yates Thesis Reconsidered." In Lynn White ed. *Hermeticism and the Scientific Revolution*. (Papers read at the Clark Library Seminar, March, 1974). Los Angeles: UCLA, W.A. Clark Memorial Library.

Yates, Frances A. 1964. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

—. 1967. "The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science." In Charles S. Singleton, ed. *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

—. 1972. *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Zambelli, Paola. 2007. *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*. Leiden: Brill (Medieval and Reformation Traditions).