

Emanation and Radiation

- Q. How do the terms “Radiation” and “Emanation” differ in *The Secret Doctrine*?
- A. They express, to my mind, two entirely different ideas, and are the best apologies for the original terms that could be found; but if the ordinary meanings are attached to them the idea will be missed. Radiation is, so to say, the unconscious and spontaneous shooting forth, the action of a something from which this act takes place; but emanation is something from which another thing issues in a constant efflux, and emanates consciously. An orthodox Occultist goes so far as to say that the smell of a flower emanates from it “consciously” — absurd as it may seem to the profane. Radiation *can* come from the Absolute; Emanation *cannot*. One difference exists in the idea that Radiation is sure, sooner or later, to be withdrawn again while Emanation runs into other emanations and is thoroughly separated and differentiated. Of course at the end of the cycle of time emanation will also be withdrawn into the One Absolute; but meanwhile, during the entire cycle of changes emanation will persist. One thing emanates from the other, and, in fact, from one point of view, emanation is equivalent to Evolution; while “radiation” represents to my mind — in the pre-cosmic period, of course — an instantaneous action like that of a piece of paper set on fire under a burning glass, of which act the Sun knows nothing. Both terms, of course, are used for want of better.¹

The doctrine of Emanations

Aeons,² Angels, Emanations, Evolutions, are all one and the same.

In its metaphysical meaning, [Emanation] is opposed to Evolution, yet one with it. Science teaches that evolution is physiologically a mode of generation in which the germ that develops the foetus pre-exists already in the parent, the development and final form and characteristics of that germ being accomplished in nature; and that in cosmology the process takes place *blindly*, through the correlation of the elements, and their various compounds. Occultism answers that this is only the *apparent* mode, the real process being Emanation, guided by intelligent Forces under an immutable LAW. Therefore, while the Occultists and Theosophists believe thoroughly in the doctrine of Evolution as given out by Kapila and Manu, they are *Emanationists* rather than *Evolutionists*. The doctrine of Emanation was at one time universal. It

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (TRANSACTIONS OF THE BLAVATSKY LODGE) X pp. 359-60

² Period of existence — *Liddell & Scott*



was taught by the Alexandrian as well as by the Indian philosophers, by the Egyptian, the Chaldean, and Hellenic Hierophants, and also by the Hebrews (in their Kabbala, and even in *Genesis*). For it is only owing to deliberate mis-translation that the Hebrew word *asdt* was translated “angels” from the Septuagint, when it means *Emanations*, *Æons*, precisely as with the Gnostics. Indeed, in Deuteronomy (xxxiii, 2) the word *asdt* or *ashdt* is translated as “fiery law,” whilst the correct rendering of the passage should be, “from his right hand went (not a *fiery law*, but) *a fire according to law*”; viz., that the fire of one flame is imparted to, and caught up by another like as in a trail of inflammable substance. This is precisely emanation, as shown in *Isis Unveiled*:

“In Evolution, as it is now beginning to be understood, there is supposed to be in all matter an impulse to take on a higher form — a supposition clearly expressed by Manu and other Hindu philosophers of the highest antiquity. The philosopher’s tree illustrates it in the case of the zinc solution.³ The controversy between the followers of this school and the Emanationists may be briefly stated thus: The Evolutionist stops all inquiry at the borders of “the Unknowable”; the Emanationist believes that nothing can be evolved — or, as the word means, unwombed or born — except it has first been involved, thus indicating that life is from a spiritual potency above the whole.”⁴



³ Annotation 7 by Boris de Zirkoff in: *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 630: “The expression “philosopher’s tree” or *arbor Dianae* (tree of Diana, or of silver) has been used, both in chemistry and alchemy, to designate the beautiful arborescent growth of silver amalgam, formed when mercury is placed in a silver-nitrate solution.”

⁴ *Theosophical Glossary*; [on emanations & quoting *Isis Unveiled*, I p. xxxii.]



Aeons are neither worlds, nor ages, nor angels. They are the fabricators of the visible world, divine emanations proceeding from the One.

I have said that I should prove from the testimony of the Apostle Paul, that the Jews were not consistent in confounding *angels* properly so called with Gods. And this appears to me to be evident in the first place from the following passage in Hebrews ii, v. 9 πιστει νοομεν κατηρητισθαι τους αιωνας ρηματι θεου, εις το μη εκ φαινομενων τα βλεπομενα γενομεναι. This in the English version is erroneously rendered;

“Through faith we understand, that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear.”

I say this is erroneously translated, because in the first place *the worlds* is evidently a forced interpretation of *αιωνας*; and even admitting it is not, leaves the passage very ambiguous, from the uncertainty to what worlds Paul alludes. If we adopt *ages*, which is the general sense of the word in the New Testament, we shall indeed avoid a forced and ambiguous interpretation, but we shall render the meaning, of the Apostle trifling in the extreme. For as he has elsewhere said, “that all things were framed by the word of God,” what particular faith does it require to believe, that by the same word he framed the ages?

In the second place, from the definition of faith, given in the first verse of this chapter, that it is “the evidence of *things not seen*,” it is clear, that Paul is speaking in this passage of something *invisible*. Since then *αιωνας* is neither *worlds* nor *ages*, what shall we say it is? I answer, the *æones* of the Valentinians. And agreeably to this, the whole passage should be translated as follows: “By faith we understand, that the *æones* were framed by the word of God, in order that things which are seen, might be generated from such as do not appear (*i.e.* from things *invisible*).” Every one who is much conversant with Greek authors, must certainly be convinced that *εις* means *in order that*; and Bishop Pearson translates as I have done the latter part of this verse.

Now we learn from the second book of Irenæus against the heretics, that according to the Valentinians, all created things are the images of the *æones*, resident in the *pleroma*, or *fullness* of deity. And does it not clearly follow from the above version, that according to Paul too, the *æones* are the exemplars of visible or created things? To which we may add, that this sense of the passage clearly accords with the assertion that “faith is the evidence of things not seen.” For here the things which do not appear are the *æones*; these, according to the Valentinians, subsisting in deity. So that from our version, Paul might say with great propriety, that “we understand by faith, that the *æones* were framed by the word of God, in order that things which are seen, might be generated from such as do not appear,” for this naturally follows from his definition of faith.

I farther add, that among these *æones* of the Valentinians were *νους*, *βυθος*, *σιγη*, *αληθεια*, *σοφια* *i.e.* *intellect*, *a profundity*, *silence*, *truth*, and *wisdom*, which as Gale well observes in his notes on *Iamblichus de Mysteriis* etc. prove their dogmas to be of Chaldaic origin. For these words perpetually occur in the fragments of the Chaldaic



oracles. And the middle of the Chaldean intelligible triad is denominated *αιων æon*,⁵ *i.e. eternity*, and is also perfectly conformable to the theology of Plato, as is very satisfactorily shown by Proclus in the third book of the following work. According to the Chaldeans therefore, the *æones* are Gods; and considered as the exemplars of the visible universe, they are analogous to the ideas of Plato, which also are Gods, as is evident from the *Parmenides* of that philosopher.⁶ According to Paul too, as the *æones* are the fabricators of the visible world, they must be beings of a much higher order than angels, and consequently must be Gods; productive power being one of the great characteristics of a divine nature.⁷



Starry Night by Van Gogh

⁵ Proclus begins the sixth book of the following work with observing that he has celebrated in the preceding book the hebdomadic *æon* of the intellectual Gods. The *æones* therefore, though the cause of them exists in the intelligible, properly belong to the intellectual order; and the Demiurgus or artificer of the universe subsists at the extremity of that order. But the demiurgus according to Orpheus, prior to the fabrication of the world absorbed in himself Phanes the exemplar of the universe. Hence he became full of ideas of which the forms in the sensible universe are the images. And as all intellectual natures are in each, it is evident that *things which are seen were generated from the invisible æones*, conformably to the assertion of Paul.

⁶ I refer the reader who is desirous of being fully convinced of this to the notes accompanying my translation of that dialogue, in Vol. 3 of my Plato. [TTS vol. XL]

⁷ Taylor T (*Tr. & Annot.*). *Proclus' Theology of Plato*. (Vol. VIII of The Thomas Taylor Series) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 1995; [Taylor's Introduction to *The Theology of Plato*, pp. 14-16.]

