

The Seven Eternities

Slumbering in the Night of the Universe, when Time was not.



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Quick overview of the terms¹

- Eternity and “Seven Eternities” differ.
- Cosmic Pralaya differs greatly from deep sleep.
- Duration is infinite. But time is a finite conception.²
- Duration contains time. But time has no duration.
- Space and duration are one and the same.
- One cannot image Space as not being, for Space always is.
- Aiōn (or Aeōn) is no “Eternity,” it is a finite period of time, and an emanation.

No philosopher in days of old ever took Eternity to mean beginningless and endless duration. Neither the Aiōns of the Greeks nor the Neroses³ convey this meaning. In fact, they had no word to convey this precise sense.

The word Aiōn, which in the Bible is translated by Eternity, means not only a finite period, but also an angel and *being*. In fact, Aiōn (AIΩ) is a permutation of the famous IAΩ. The **A** of AIΩ represents Spirit, linked to Matter **Ω**, by Mind **I**.⁴

Carl Taylor-Robinson
SERIES EDITOR

¹ Selected by the Series Editor.

² [Cf. “The cycle of Mahāyuga, personified by Śesha — the great serpent called ‘the couch of Vishnu,’ because that God is Time and Duration personified in the most philosophical and often poetical way.

It is said that Vishnu appears on it at the beginning of every Manvantara as ‘the Lord of Creation.’ Śesha is the great Serpent-Cycle, represented as swallowing its own tail — thence the emblem of Time within Eternity. Time, says Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) — Time is ‘duration set forth by measures,’ and Śesha sets forth evolution by symbolizing its periodical stages. On him Vishnu sleeps during the intervals of rest (*pralayas*) between ‘creations’; the blue God — blue because he is space and the depth of infinity — awakens only when Śesha bends his thousand heads, preparing to again bear up the universe which is supported on them.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FRAGMENT ON CYCLES AND MODERN FALLACIES) VII pp. 278-79. Also cf. “Churning the Ocean of Milk” in the same series.]

³ Naros or *Neros* (*Hebrew*). A cycle, which the Orientalists describe as consisting of 600 years. But what years? “There were three kinds of Neros: the greater, the middle, and the lesser. It is the latter cycle only which was of 600 years. (*Theosophical Glossary*: Naros)

Webster declares very erroneously that the Chaldæans called *saros*, the cycle of eclipses, a period of about 6,586 years, “the time of revolution of the moon’s node.” Berosus, himself a Chaldæan astrologer, at the Temple of Belus, at Babylon, gives the duration of the sar, or saros, 3,600 years; a *neros* 600; and a *soessus* 60. (*Isis Unveiled*, I p. 30 *fn*. See Cory, *Ancient Fragments*, pp. 32-35, 329-30: Berosus (fragment from Abydenus), “On the Chaldæan Kings and the Deluge”; and frag. from Theon of Alexandria in MS ex cod. reg. Gall. gr. No. 2390, fol. 154. Also, Eusebius, *Chronicon*, I, vi)

As the Hindus divided the earth into seven zones, so the more western peoples — Chaldæans, Phœnicians, and even the Jews, who got their learning either directly or indirectly from the Brāhmans — made all their secret and sacred numerations by 6 and 12, though using the number 7 whenever this would not lend itself to handling. Thus the numerical base of 6, the exoteric figure given by Āryabhatta, was made good use of. From the first secret cycle of 600 — the Naros, transformed successively into 60,000 and 60 and 6, and, with other noughts added into other secret cycles — down to the smallest, an Archaeologist and Mathematician can easily find it repeated in every country, known to every nation. Hence the globe was divided into 60 degrees, which, multiplied by 60, became 3,600, the “great year.” Hence also the hour with its 60 minutes of 60 seconds each. The Asiatic people count a cycle of 60 years also, after which comes the lucky seventh decas, and the Chinese have their small cycle of 60 days, the Jews of 6 days, the Greeks of 6 centuries — the Naros again. [*Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (SECRET CYCLES) XIV pp. 359-60]

⁴ See Appendix for an in-depth analysis of Aiōn, and reflect upon the difference between “Emanation and Radiation,” in our Confusing Words Series.

The Seven Eternities

Stanza I, śloka 1

THE ETERNAL PARENT (*Space*), WRAPPED IN HER EVER INVISIBLE ROBES, HAD
SLUMBERED ONCE AGAIN FOR SEVEN ETERNITIES.

The “Parent Space” is the eternal, ever present cause of all — the incomprehensible DEITY, whose “invisible robes” are the mystic root of all matter, and of the Universe. Space is the *one eternal thing* that we can most easily imagine, immovable in its abstraction and uninfluenced by either the presence or absence in it of an objective Universe. It is without dimension, in every sense, and self-existent. Spirit is the first differentiation from THAT, the causeless cause of both Spirit and Matter. It is, as taught in the esoteric catechism, neither limitless void, nor conditioned fullness, but both. It was and ever will be.¹

Thus, the “Robes” stand for the noumenon of undifferentiated Cosmic Matter. It is not matter as we know it, but the spiritual essence of matter, and is co-eternal and even one with Space in its abstract sense. Root-nature is also the source of the subtle invisible properties in visible matter. It is the Soul, so to say, of the ONE infinite Spirit. The Hindus call it Mūlaprakriti, and say that it is the primordial substance, which is the basis of the Upādhi or vehicle of every phenomenon, whether physical, mental or psychic. It is the source from which Ākāśa radiates.

By the Seven “Eternities,” aiōns or periods are meant. The word “Eternity,” as understood in Christian theology, has no meaning to the Asiatic ear, except in its application to the ONE existence; nor is the term sempiternity, the eternal only in futurity, anything better than a misnomer.² Such words do not and cannot exist in philosophical metaphysics, and were unknown till the advent of ecclesiastical Christianity. The Seven Eternities meant are the seven periods, or a period answering in its duration to the seven periods, of a Manvantara, and extending throughout a Mahā-Kalpa or the “Great Age” — 100 years of Brahmā — making a total of 311,040,000,000,000 years; each year of Brahmā being composed of 360 “days,” and of the same number of “nights” of Brahmā (reckoning by the Chandrayāna or lunar year); and a “Day of Brahmā” consisting of 4,320,000,000 of mortal years. These “Eternities” belong to the most secret calculations, in which, in order to arrive at the true total, every figure must be 7^x (7 to the power of x); x varying according to the nature of the cycle in the subjective or real world; and every figure or number relating to, or representing all the different cycles from the greatest to the smallest — in the objective or unreal world — must necessarily be multiples of seven. The key to this cannot be given, for herein lies the mystery of esoteric calculations, and for the purposes of ordinary calculation it has no sense. “The number seven,” says the Kabbalah, “is the great num-

¹ See PROEM, pp. 2 et seq.

² It is stated in Book II, ch. viii, of *Vishnu-Purāna*: “By immortality is meant existence to the end of the Kalpa”; and Wilson, the translator, remarks in a footnote: “This, according to the *Vedas*, is all that is to be understood of the immortality [or eternity] of the gods; they perish at the end of universal dissolution [or Pralaya].” [Wilson, Vol. II, p. 269, fn. 2] And Esoteric philosophy says: They “perish” not, but are *re-absorbed*.

ber of the Divine Mysteries”; number ten is that of all human knowledge (Pythagorean Decad); 1,000 is the number ten to the third power, and therefore the number 7,000 is also symbolical. In the Secret Doctrine the figure and number 4 are the male symbol only on the highest plane of abstraction; on the plane of matter the 3 is the masculine and the 4 the female: the upright and the horizontal in the fourth stage of symbolism, when the symbols became the glyphs of the generative powers on the physical plane.¹

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness:
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice: then darkness again and a silence.
— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow²

Stanza I, śloka 2

TIME WAS NOT, FOR IT LAY ASLEEP IN THE INFINITE BOSOM OF DURATION.

Time is only an illusion produced by the succession of our states of consciousness as we travel through eternal duration, and it does not exist where no consciousness exists in which the illusion can be produced, but “lies asleep.” The present is only a mathematical line which divides that part of eternal duration which we call the future, from that part which we call the past. Nothing on earth has real duration, for nothing remains without change — or the same — for the billionth part of a second; and the sensation we have of the actuality of the division of “time” known as the present, comes from the blurring of that momentary glimpse, or succession of glimpses, of things that our senses give us, as those things pass from the region of ideals which we call the future, to the region of memories that we name the past. In the same way we experience a sensation of duration in the case of the instantaneous electric spark, by reason of the blurred and continuing impression on the retina. The real person or thing does not consist solely of what is seen at any particular moment, but is composed of the sum of all its various and changing conditions from its appearance in the material form to its disappearance from the earth. It is these “sum-totals” that exist from eternity in the “future,” and pass by degrees through matter, to exist for eternity in the “past.” No one could say that a bar of metal dropped into the sea came into existence as it left the air, and ceased to exist as it entered the water, and that the bar itself consisted only of that cross-section thereof which at any given moment coincided with the mathematical plane that separates, and, at the same time, joins, the atmosphere and the ocean. Even so of persons and things, which, dropping out of the to-be into the has-been, out of the future into the past — present momentarily to our senses a cross-section, as it were, of their total selves, as they pass through time and space (as matter) on their way from one eternity to another: and these two constitute that “duration” in which alone anything has true existence, were our senses but able to cognize it there.³

¹ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 35-36; [For an in-depth analysis of the horizontal and vertical lines, see “The Rope of the Angels” in the same series.]

² *Tales of a Wayside Inn* iii; “The Theologian’s Tale,” Elizabeth IV

³ *Secret Doctrine*, I pp. 36-37

Discussion with H.P. Blavatsky

From the *Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society*. Fifth Meeting, held 7th February 1889. Presiding Chairman, T.B. Harbottle.¹

Eternity and “Seven Eternities” differ.

B. Keightley Why should you speak of seven eternities? Why put it in that way?

Blavatsky Because of the invariable law of analogy. As Manvantara is divided into seven periods so is Pralaya; as day is composed of twelve hours, so is night. Shall we say because we are asleep during night and are not conscious of time, that the hours do not run the same? They pass on and the clocks strike though we may not hear or count them. Pralaya is the “Night” after the Manvantaric “Day.” There is no one by and consciousness is *asleep* with the rest. But since it exists and is in full activity during Manvantara, and that it is fully alive to the fact that the law of analogy and periodicity is immutable, and being so that it must act equally at both ends, why cannot the sentence be used?

Ellis I should want to know how you can count an eternity.

Blavatsky Here we are! Because we Westerners are foolish enough to talk about and to speculate on something that has neither beginning nor can end, therefore the ancients must have done the same. I say they did not. No people in days of old has ever meant by “Eternity” beginningless and endless duration. Take the Greeks, speaking of Aiōns. Do these mean something eternal? No more than their *Neroses* did. They had no word for eternity in the sense we give it. *Parabrahman* and *Ain-Soph*, and the *Zervān Akarana* of the *Avesta* represent alone such an eternity — all the other periods are finite. All these were astronomical, moreover, based on tropical years and other enormous cycles — withal, finite and therefore, they are not eternities, but a way of speaking of eternity. It is the word Aiōn in the Bible that was translated as eternity; and yet it is not only a period but means an angel and a being as well.

Harbottle But is it not true to say in Pralaya there is the Great Breath?

Blavatsky Assuredly, for the “Great Breath” is ceaseless; it is the universal *perpetuum mobile*.

¹ First published in two parts by (1) The Theosophical Publishing House, London and New Work, 1890 and 1891, respectively. Republished by (2) The Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, 1923, and (3) B. De Zirkoff. (Comp.) *H.P. Blavatsky Collected Writings*, Vol. X. Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, 1964 and 1974. The latter includes a historical review of the *Transactions*, etc., pp. 298-300. Various other editions and reprints, conventional and digital, exist today. While all issues were apparently abridged and anonymised, a presumably unabridged copy of the original minutes from the estate of the late B.P. Wadia has been made available for publication to the Theosophical Society, Point Loma-Covina, in 1992. A transcription of that MS. was subsequently published in: (4) M. Gomes. (*Transc. & Annot.*). *H.P. Blavatsky The Secret Doctrine Commentaries*. I.S.I.S. Foundation, Hague, 2010, from where this passage was excerpted (pp. 9-16). Headings, annotation, and typography by ED. PHIL.

- Harbottle** If so, it is not possible to divide it into periods? It does away with the idea of absolute and complete nothingness. It does seem incompatible that you should speak of any *number* of periods; but if you have the Great Breath you might say there are so many indrawings and out-drawings of the Great Breath.
- Blavatsky** And this would make away with the idea of absolute rest, were not this absoluteness of rest counteracted by the absoluteness of motion. Therefore, one is as good as the other. There is a magnificent poem on the Pralaya. I forget the name of its Hindu author. It is written by a very ancient Rishi and he writes and compares that motion of the Great Breath during the Pralaya to the rhythmical motions of the ocean. It is a most magnificent picture. It is the only reference on this subject that I know or ever heard of.
- ?** The only difficulty is when the word eternity is used instead of the word Aiōn.
- Blavatsky** Why should I use the Greek word when I can use an English one? I give the explanation in *The Secret Doctrine* by saying the ancients had no such thing as eternity — as commonly understood.
- ?** Aiōn, to the ordinary English reader, would not mean eternity.
- Blavatsky** We have quite enough of foreign words; I have tried to avoid and put them into English.
- Harbottle** Aiōn, to most European Christian readers, does mean eternity, as they have translated it as “for ever and for ever.”
- Ellis** That always involves a beginning at least.
- Harbottle** No, “for ever and ever” backwards and forwards.
- Ellis** It is sempiternal. It has a beginning, but it has no end. If you make a thing plural you divide it. There you make a point of beginning and a point of end. You will always make a division.
- Harbottle** Then you agree with the seven eternities.
- Ellis** I think it is only a word that may be taken up by one of the daily papers. I do not think there is any difficulty in the least. The meaning of it is that there are seven concurrent phases, going on at the same time. It is division of time laterally. That is what I meant, if you can understand it. That is what I wanted to know, if you count it in that way.
- Blavatsky** I count it in such a way as to translate as best I can the real meaning of a very difficult and abstruse text, and then to give the interpretations that I was taught and have learned. It is just as you say; because if you read my explanations, there you will find the same thing.

Cosmic Pralaya differs greatly from deep sleep.

B. Keightley Before we leave the subject, I would ask, is the relation of Pralaya and Manvantara strictly analogous to the relation between sleeping and waking?

Blavatsky In a certain sense only, of course. It has that relation, if you take it in the abstract. During night we all exist and we are, though we sleep and may be unconscious of so living. But during Pralaya everything disappears from the phenomenal universe and merges in the noumenal. Therefore *de facto* there is a great difference.

B. Keightley You remember you gave us a very remarkable thing about sleep, saying that “it was the shady side of life.” Then is the Pralaya the shady side of cosmic life?

Blavatsky You may call it so. It is a time of rest. Even cosmic matter, indestructible though it be in its essence, must have a time of rest, its Laya condition notwithstanding. The absoluteness of the eternal all-containing one essence has to manifest itself equally, in rest and activity.

Duration is infinite, time is a finite conception.¹

B. Keightley The next question is on śloka 2. “Time was not, for it lay asleep in the infinite bosom of duration.” The first point is what is the difference between time and duration as here used?

Blavatsky Duration *is*: it is neither a beginning nor an end, nor time, as its very name implies, though we may divide it into Past, Present and Future. What is time? How can you call that “time” which has neither beginning or an end? Duration is beginningless and endless; time is finite.

B. Keightley Duration is the infinite, and time the finite conception?

Blavatsky Time can be divided, duration cannot; therefore the word duration is used.

Kingsland The only way you can define time is by the motions of the earth.

Blavatsky But you can define time in your conception also, can't you?

Kingsland Duration, you mean?

Blavatsky No, time; for as to “duration” there is no such thing as splitting it, or putting landmarks on it. It is impossible.

Kingsland But we can define time by certain periods.

¹ [Cf. “The cycle of Mahāyuga, personified by Śeṣha — the great serpent called ‘the couch of Vishnu,’ because that God is Time and Duration personified in the most philosophical and often poetical way.

It is said that Vishnu appears on it at the beginning of every Manvantara as ‘the Lord of Creation.’ Śeṣha is the great Serpent-Cycle, represented as swallowing its own tail — thence the emblem of Time within Eternity. Time, says Locke (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*) — Time is ‘duration set forth by measures,’ and Śeṣha sets forth evolution by symbolizing its periodical stages. On him Vishnu sleeps during the intervals of rest (*pralayas*) between ‘creations’; the blue God — blue because he is space and the depth of infinity — awakens only when Śeṣha bends his thousand heads, preparing to again bear up the universe which is supported on them.” *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (FRAGMENT ON CYCLES AND MODERN FALLACIES) VII pp. 278-79. Also cf. “Churning the Ocean of Milk” in the same series.]

Blavatsky But not duration, which is the one real eternity. In this finite and phenomenal universe, of course you can. All you can do is to divide time in duration and take illusions for realities.

Kingsland But without that you would not be able to define time at all.

Blavatsky Why not? The natural division of time is night and day.

Kingsland The essential idea of duration is existence, it seems to me.

Duration contains time. But time has no duration.

Blavatsky Existence has limited and definite periods, and duration is a thing which has neither a beginning nor an end. While it is something perfectly abstract and contains time, time is that which has no duration. Duration is just like space. Space as an abstraction is endless; but in its concreteness and limitation, space becomes a representation of something. Of course you can call space the distance between this book and that table or between any two points you may imagine. It may be enormous, or it may be infinitesimal, yet it will always be space. But all such specifications are divisions in human conception. In reality, space is what the ancients called Deity itself.

Space and duration are one and the same.

B. Keightley Then time is the same as space. They are one in the abstract.

Blavatsky As two abstractions they may be one; yet I would say duration and space, not time and space.

B. Keightley You get time and space with differentiation, time being the subjective character corresponding to space, the objective, one being the objective and the other being the subjective side of all manifestation.

Harbottle They are the only attributes of the infinite, really. But attribute is a wrong word, inasmuch as they are coextensive with the infinite; but then that is also a difficult word.

Ellis How can you say that? They are nothing but the creations of your own intellect. They are nothing but the forms in which you cannot help conceiving things. How can they be called attributes? Take cause and effect, they are nothing but the way in which you think of things. If you had a different brain you would think about things in a different way.

One cannot image Space as not being. Space always is.

Blavatsky And now you speak as a Hylo-Idealist would. We do not speak of the phenomenal world, but of the noumenal universe. It is without space and time, but still there is duration and abstract space. In the Occult Catechism it is asked: "what is the thing which always *is*, which you cannot imagine as not 'being', do what you may." The answer is — Space. For, there may be not a single man in the universe to think of it, not a single eye to perceive it, not a single brain to sense it, but still space *is* — and you cannot make away with it.

- Ellis** Because you cannot help thinking of it.
- Blavatsky** My or your thinking has nothing to do with it. Space exists there where there is nothing and must exist in full vacuum as elsewhere.
- Ellis** The philosophers have reduced it to this. They say they also are nothing but attributes, nothing but accidents.
- Blavatsky** Buddha says better than this still. He says, speaking of Nirvana, that Nirvana, after all, is also an illusion.
- Ellis** You would not call eternal space and duration the only attributes of the Infinite?
- Blavatsky** I would not give to the Infinite any attributes at all. That only which is finite and conditioned can have attributes.
- B. Keightley** You touched upon a question that is put here. Time and space in modern philosophy are conceived of, as you said, simply as forms of the human physical brain, and as having no existence apart from human intellect, as we know it. Thence arises this old question: "We can conceive of no matter that is not extended" (in consequence of that faculty or that peculiarity of mental faculty), "no extension that is not extension of something. Is it the same on the higher planes, and if so, what is the substance that fills absolute space, and is it identical with that space?" You see, that brings to a focus the question.
- Blavatsky** "Is it the same on another plane?" Now how can I answer your query? I never travelled in absolute space, as far as I know. All I can give you is simply the speculations of those who had a thousand times more brains than I, or any of you have. Some of you would call them vagaries. We don't.
- Ellis** Does not he answer his own question in the question itself?
- Blavatsky** How?
- Ellis** He presupposes that that is the only way in which the intellect can think.
- B. Keightley** I say on this plane our intellect is limited. In this way we only conceive of matter extended.
- Ellis** If your soul or anything else could conceive, we will imagine for a moment, in another form. You cannot get an answer in words to that, can you? Your intellect has to understand those words. Therefore intellect, not being able to conceive in any other way, cannot get an answer in any other way.



Appendix

Aiōn (AIΩ) is a permutation of the famous IAΩ

This triple triplicity, in another aspect, becomes the famous IAΩ of such frequency on the Gnostic gems, and in its permutation AIΩ represents Spirit (A) linked to Matter (Ω) by Mind (I).

[PS 125] These are the Names which I will give from the Infinite downwards. Write them with a Sign that the Sons of God may show them forth from this Region. This is the Name of the Immortal AAA ΩΩΩ, and this is the Name of the Voice, which is the Cause of the Motion of the Perfect Man, III. And these are the interpretations of the Names of the Mysteries. The first is AAA, and its interpretation is ΦΦΦ. The second is MMM, or ΩΩΩ, and its interpretation is AAA. The Third is ΨΨΨ, and its interpretation is NNN. The fourth is ΦΦΦ, and its interpretation is NNN. The fifth is ΔΔΔ, and its interpretation is AAA. The interpretation of the second¹ is AAAA, AAAA, AAAA. The interpretation of the whole Name²

AAA, ΩΩΩ, III, are the unmanifested arūpa planes, aeōns or emanations, and also the *nine mutes* of Marcus. This triple triplicity, in another aspect, becomes the famous IAΩ of such frequency on the Gnostic gems, and in its permutation AIΩ represents Spirit (A) linked to Matter (Ω) by Mind (I). These three are probably the Mysteries of the Ineffable and the seven which follow are the Mysteries of the First Mystery, though later on we read of Seven Mysteries of the Ineffable. “The first is AAA and the interpretation is ΦΦΦ”; turning the letters into figures and neglecting the noughts and reduplication, we resolve it into “the interpretation of 1 is 5,” or in other words the revealer, or manifestor, of the first and greatest mystery, corresponding to *ātman*, is the fifth principle, or immortal *Ego* of man. “The second which is MMM or ΩΩΩ and its interpretation is AAA.” Now Ω or ω is often found on the gems in straight lines, thus W which is the reverse of M or ∞ the usual sign of Water or “Matter” in symbology. By referring to the table of the members of the Celestial Man of Marcus, it will be seen that M is the opposite pole to A, as also Ω when the letters are “unfolded.” If this folding of the letters is taken to represent one spiral of evolution, in the next spiral M and N would be on the same plane as A and Ω and we should have four letters abreast or on one plane. M and Ω would then be interchangeable and their interpretation would be A. “The third is ΨΨΨ, and its interpretation 000. The fourth is ΦΦΦ and its interpretation is NNN.” Now Ψ = 700 and 0 = 70, Φ = 500 and N = 50; therefore, as 10 is the “radix” of numbers, 70 interprets 700 and 50, 500, as every higher plane interprets the lower. “The fifth is ΔΔΔ and its interpretation is AAA.” In other words the interpretation of 4 is 1, just as that of Ω or

¹ i.e., the sixth, for *Buddhi* is either the *sixth* or the *second* principle, or mystery.

² *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (COMMENTARY ON THE PISTIS SOPHIA – PS 125) XIII p. 51

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8 is also I, for whether we count by *threes* or *sevens*, the fourth and the eighth will always be the first or the next class, plane, degree, emanation, or whatever we choose to call it. The next mystery, approaching the end of the cycle of evolution, differentiates the original triple trias into a triple quaternary, and having thus added to its experience returns into the silence of the Great Name. When the key of the seven planes and principles has been understood, it will be easy to place the seven on the *lower four* planes of a higher septenary, as in the diagram in the *S.D.*, and then we shall see how the type of the three highest *arūpa* planes is reflected in the seven planes of the lower four.¹



Students should be fully conversant with the metaphysical concepts and learning aids set out in the same series, particularly with those prefixed with “Proposition 1.”

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (COMMENTARY ON THE PISTIS SOPHIA – PS 125) XIII pp. 53-54