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Teleological and Aesthetic Perfection in the *Aurora Consurgens*

Karen Parham

Abstract: This paper examines the concept of perfection in relation to the celestial magic described within the alchemical work *Aurora Consurgens*. This fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript has been erroneously attributed to Thomas Aquinas and was popularised by Carl Gustav Jung. It contains an entire section on ‘astronomy’, which is one of the keys to wisdom and perfection. Perfection, a multifaceted concept, proves useful in elucidating further philosophical understanding of the various traditions within Western esotericism. By identifying interpretations of this concept within *Aurora Consurgens*, I hope to demonstrate how this approach can aid in the understanding of both *Aurora Consurgens* and of alchemy and its relationship to celestial magic in general. This will then provide an opening to identifying concepts that are common to all Western esoteric traditions.

Aurora Consurgens, or ‘morning rising’, is an alchemical composite work consisting of two books written in Latin containing delectable illuminated emblems that caught the imagination of the early twentieth-century psychoanalysts Carl Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz.¹ Chapter four in Book I provides reasons why the title *Aurora Consurgens* was chosen.² The *aurora*, or dawn, ‘the Mother of the Sun’, is the golden hour of the day, the end of all darkness, and has a typical display of red and yellow colours intermediating between the blackness of night and the whiteness of day. These same two colours are evidence of the transition between *nigredo* and *albedo* in the alchemical process’ and ‘the dawn soothes and relaxes all those who suffer from various night-time afflictions, so in the

¹ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980), pp. 177-272; Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (1953; London: Routledge, 1993, repr.).

² *Aurora Consurgens*, trans. Paul Ferguson (Glasgow: Magnum Opus Hermetic Sourceworks No. 40, 2011), pp. 14-15.

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dawn of this Science all the evil odours and vapours that afflict the Craftsman's mind will wither and diminish'.³

The *Aurora* is one of the earliest European emblematic alchemical manuscripts, and survives in ten late medieval versions/copies. The earliest dating for Book I is the fourteenth century; the emblems and the second book appear to have been added at the later date of 1420.⁴ It was written by an anonymous cleric who some scholars, such as von Franz according to Andrea DePascalis, claim was the Scholastic philosopher Thomas Aquinas.⁵ However, this has since been disputed and the consensus now is to refer to the author as Pseudo-Aquinas. Pseudo-Aquinas makes reference to various authorities in alchemy and philosophy, including Aristotle, Alphidius, Hermes and 'Senior'.⁶

For this paper, I have used a translation of the *Aurora* by Paul Ferguson, which is based on a printed edition made available by Dr Johann Rhenanus in 1625 and Conrad Waldkirch's 1593 version.⁷ According to Jung, Waldkirch's edition omitted the first book because the printer perceived it as being sacrilegious.⁸ The author of the *Aurora* unintentionally suggests that Scripture was composed in honour of alchemy. Entire paragraphs consist of linked paraphrases from various books of the Bible that explain the author's version of the alchemical process. In the opening paragraph, for example, there are three biblical references in the first sentence:

Now all good things came to me (Wisd. 7:11) together with the first wisdom of the south (Matt. 12:42), which preacheth abroad, which uttereth her voice

³ *Aurora*, pp. 14-15. The 'evil odours and vapours' refer to the gaseous sulphur and mercurial fumes used during the *nigredo* processing.

⁴ Adam McLean, 'The mystery of the *Aurora consurgens*', http://www.alchemywebsite.com/aurora_consurgens_extract.html [accessed February 2013]; *Aurora*, p. 1.

⁵ Andrea DePascalis, *Alchemy The Golden Art: The Secrets of the Oldest Enigma* (Rome: Gremese International, 1995), p. 71.

⁶ Alphidius was an ancient philosopher frequently quoted in alchemical literature such as the *Rosarium Philosophorum* and *Splendor Solis*. Senior is believed to be the acclaimed Arabic alchemist Mohammed Ibn Umail, see Jeffery Raff, *The Wedding of Sophia: The Divine Feminine in Psychoidal Alchemy* (Berwick, ME: Nicholas-Hays, Inc., 2003), p. 57.

⁷ *Aurora*.

⁸ C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (1953; London: Routledge, 1993 repr.), p. 376.

in the streets, which at the head of multitudes crieth out, and which in the entrance of the gates of the city uttereth her words (Prov. 1:20-22) saying, 'Come ye to me and be enlightened (Ps. 33:6), and your enterprises shall not be confounded'.⁹

Jung and von Franz omitted Book II because of its more practical contents which failed to support their psychoanalytical approach which they applied to Book I. I am, therefore, approaching the work in its entirety with the assumption that there is some coherence and interrelatedness which Rhenanus, among others, recognised. To assist in the discussion of the various chapters from the two books, see the Table in Figure 1.

Alchemy is often described as the art of perfection where perfection is synonymous with successful transmutation.¹⁰ However, there is more to this concept than meets the eye. Perfection is a relative and comparative term with many instantiations. The Australian philosopher John Passmore, for example, identified nine different types of perfection in his book *The Perfectibility of Man*.¹¹ Two of these types, teleological and aesthetic perfection, are most pertinent to the *Aurora*. According to Passmore, teleological perfection then 'consists in attaining to that end in which it is one's nature to find final satisfaction' and aesthetic perfection as 'the perfect performance of tasks in a flawless whole'.¹²

The aim of this paper is to identify any relationship there may be between the two books of the *Aurora* by analysing how teleological and aesthetic perfection is perceived. I will consider the text as an expression of universalism: the idea of a universal, inner understanding of reality proposed in pseudo-epigraphical works attributed to Hermes. This

⁹ *Aurora*, p. 7.

¹⁰ To give just two examples, Pseudo-Geber of the thirteenth century named one of his alchemical treatises *Of the Investigation or Search of Perfection*, and in the *Libellus de Alchimia* attributed to Albertus Magnus, it states that: 'Through this art, corrupted metals in minerals are restored and the imperfect made perfect', see Stanton J. Linden, ed., *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 101.

¹¹ John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, third edition, 2000), pp. 12-17. The nine types that Passmore recognises are: technical, moral, teleological, obedientiary, exemplary, deiform, immaculate, metaphysical and aesthetic. All of these types are evident in the *Aurora* but are less significant to the overall message wanting to be conveyed.

¹² Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, pp. 15 and 24.

universalism is communicated in terms of teleological and aesthetic perfection. At the core of this universalism is the experience of gnosis.¹³

| Book I | | Book II | |
|--------|---|---|--|
| I. | Introduction | Prologue | |
| II. | What is wisdom? | Explanatory preamble to 'Treatise on Astronomy' | |
| III. | Of those who are ignorant of this Science and refuse to accept it | I. | A Treatise on Astronomy |
| IV. | How this book got its name | II. | Arismetrica explained in the parabolical style |
| V. | The irritation of the foolish | III. | Natural phenomena explained according to the process of nature |
| VI. | First parable | IV. | The story of Mother Alchemy expressed in the parabolical style |
| VII. | Second parable | V. | Enigmatic discourse |
| VIII. | Third parable | VI. | Typical discourse |
| IX. | Fourth parable | VII. | How the Stone resembles the seed of man in the procreation of his descendants |
| X. | Fifth parable | VIII. | On the four things found in the human being |
| XI. | Sixth parable | IX. | On four internal organs within the human body |
| XII. | Seventh parable | X. | On the comparison of the Science with an egg |
| | | XI. | On the comparison of the Science with the basilisk and other poisonous worms, due to the similarity of their nutriment |
| | | XII. | On the minerals |
| | | XIII. | On the multiplicity of quicksilver |
| | | XIV. | On arsenic and orpiment |
| | | XV. | On marcasite, magnesia and tutty |
| | | XVI. | On the individual qualities of all the metals |
| | | XVII. | On the four imperfect metallic bodies |
| | | XVIII. | On the comparison of the Science with trees. Herbs, flowers, roots, and other vegetable matter |
| | | XIX. | On the manifold and varied plurality of the Art |
| | | XX. | On the varied character of the Work of the Philosophers |
| | | XXI. | On the other modes of the operation |
| | | XXII. | On the effects of this Medicine or Tincture |
| | | The Tale of the Saracen and Protonotary | |

Fig. 1. Table.

¹³ See Roelof van den Broek, 'Gnosticism and Hermeticism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation', in *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 120.

As defined by Hanegraaff, gnosis is ineffable and unverifiable and, according to its adherents, offers a more profound type of knowledge than reason and faith.¹⁴ It is spiritual, as opposed to physical or worldly, and is experiential; for this reason it is said to surpass mere wisdom, which is reliant on the mundane. Therefore, gnosis is a more appropriate term to use with respect to the aims of the *Aurora*, rather than wisdom, which is the general term commonly applied.¹⁵ It will become clear that celestial magic, understanding and replicating the powers of the seven planets, is an aspect of this gnosis in the *Aurora*.

Teleological Perfection: the realisation of gnosis

Originating from the Greek word *teleios*, meaning goal or purpose, teleological perfection relates to Aristotle's final cause.¹⁶ Teleology suggests that things go through a process in fulfilling an unconscious or innate purpose which culminate in a natural end. As Passmore put it, teleological perfection implies a relationship between completion and the achievement of an inherent end.¹⁷ In alchemy, teleological perfection is generally considered to be the successful transmutation of a base metal into gold. In the *Aurora*, I would argue that the true *telos* is to become an enlightened being. This is made possible by gnosis personified as the allegorical female figure of Sophia. She represents divine knowledge, gnosis, and her skill is in harnessing the powers of the four elements and the seven planets.

Book I draws heavily on wisdom literature originating from the ancient Near East, represented in the Bible in the canonical books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus and Hosea, and the Apocryphal books of Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon. Such wisdom/gnosis literature aims at providing insights and reflections into the human condition and an understanding of nature and reality acquired through observation and contemplation and expressed through daily practice, as opposed to sole reliance on the revelatory messages in

¹⁴ Wouter Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, New Delhi, New York and Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 89.

¹⁵ See for example, Raff, p. 45 or p. 53.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, repr. 1999), p. 39. The final cause or 'fourth way' in which the word cause is used is 'for the end'. 'This is what something is for'.

¹⁷ Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man*, p. 15.

Scripture.¹⁸ The *Aurora* takes this one step further by paraphrasing scriptural references, thus suggesting this wisdom is inspired and reliant on the revelations of the Holy Writ. This is confirmed in the second chapter of Book I of the *Aurora*, where seekers of wisdom are encouraged to ‘a study of the Prophets, and will engross you in the subtleties of her parables, and will cause you to search out the hidden meaning of proverbs, and will persuade you to become conversant in the secret of parables (Ecclus. 39:1-3)’.¹⁹ This combination of natural philosophy and revelation produces gnosis: divine, ineffable and unverifiable knowledge hidden but waiting to be discovered through transmutational experience.

Four of the five introductory chapters of the *Aurora* discuss the nature of gnosis, which is the key to understanding the sequential parables, and how this gnosis (translated using the generic term wisdom) is obvious but ignored by the foolish. In chapter one, the *Aurora* formulates it as follows: ‘Who is wise that he shall understand that thing (Hos. 14:10) that Alphidius refers to as something that adults and children pass by regardless in the streets and highways and which mules and sheep every day tread into the dung?’.²⁰ I would argue that the parables pertain to the alchemical redemption processes that an individual’s body, soul and spirit are subjected to in order to become enlightened. The process starts with the body and soul being in an initial state of corruption. After being cleansed the body and soul are united with the spirit, at which point the individual gains gnosis and become enlightened reaching his or her *telos*.

The first parable explains that the initial state is one of ignorance, lacking gnosis, when humankind was corrupted by original sin. It is as if the soul is covered by a ‘huge cloud’.²¹ The seven planets are the keys to the salvation of the soul. They appeared when ‘the heavens opened and there thundered forth the voice of Him who has seven stars in his hand, which are the seven spirits (Apoc. 1:4) sent to the whole Earth to preach and bear witness’.²² In order to be cleansed, extraction of the pure spirit hidden in the filth of the corrupted soul takes place. This is followed by the extraction of the individual soul from the body.²³ The soul must learn to rise above the density of matter with the aid of the seven planets and

¹⁸ W. David Stacey, *Groundwork of Biblical Studies* (London: Epworth Press, 1979. repr. 2000), p. 280.

¹⁹ *Aurora*, p. 10.

²⁰ *Aurora*, p. 7.

²¹ *Aurora*, p. 18.

²² *Aurora*, p. 19, second parable.

²³ Raff, p. 76.

separate itself from the body. The removal of the corrupted soul, where the body is reduced to ashes, allows the soul to rise and be replenished by spirit, 'with innate humour'.²⁴ The Holy Ghost plays a vital part in this as it is responsible for causing the death of the corrupted body and reviving the soul through baptism using the three heavenly elements represented in water, blood (representing Air) and flame.²⁵ The author observes that these three forms of baptism are present in the three terms of pregnancy: 'in the first trimester of pregnancy it is water that nourishes the foetus in the womb, and in the second trimester air, while in the third trimester it is fire that nourishes and guards it...'.²⁶ This suggests that blood, the second form of baptism, is representative of Air. The Holy Ghost is the 'spirit of wisdom and understanding', the third aspect of the alchemical and Holy Trinity who exposes and inspires the soul (third parable).²⁷ Its gifts are only available to those who enter the house it has built based on fourteen virtues using the four elements as keys (fifth parable).²⁸ This now virtuous and wise soul returns to the ashes of its previous body generating a second Adam rid of any original sin (sixth parable). The newly embodied cleansed soul is ready then to unite with spirit eliciting the union between heaven and earth (the four elements), between God and the Holy Ghost (knowledge of the essence of God) and the generation of the philosopher's stone (seventh parable).²⁹ The end product is the embodiment of gnosis, an enlightened soul reborn into a purified body, 'that we should live in union and love' (p. 42). A similar process of sublimation (which involves a transition from solid to gas without the liquid state) in the alchemical vessel converts a dense element, a solid, into the element of air, a gas before, ultimately, becoming cinnabar (Book II, chapter twenty).

In the *Aurora*, the Holy Ghost or Spirit can be identified with Sophia or gnosis. The Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son and brings enlightenment through its sevenfold gifts (parable four). The Spirit is the means by which 'terrestrial things become heavenly', that is, defiled souls are purified of sin and imbued with the 'perfection of life'.³⁰ Similarly

²⁴ *Aurora*, p. 22.

²⁵ *Aurora*, p. 26, fourth parable.

²⁶ *Aurora*, p. 26.

²⁷ *Aurora*, p. 24.

²⁸ The fourteen virtues are: healing, humility, holiness, chastity, virtue, victory, belief, hope, charity, benignity, patience, temperance, spiritual discipline or intellect, and obedience.

²⁹ Raff, p. 134.

³⁰ *Aurora*, p. 26.

Sophia is ‘the Medicine that puts poverty to flight’, where poverty refers to an impoverished soul that is ignorant and scorns knowledge.³¹ Sophia/Holy Spirit is the essence or goodness of God and infuses her perfection (gnosis) into a wise person’s soul. An analogy is drawn between Sophia and the Queen of the south wind, the Queen of Sheba, an alchemist herself, who offered Solomon gold and precious stones (1 Kings 10:2).³² The Queen of Sheba possesses knowledge of transmutation and by transmitting it to Solomon (representing the soul) he too becomes wise. Sophia is, therefore, the transmuting agent that inspires a soul to attain its *telos*, which is to hold knowledge of her and her transmuting principles. She is the philosopher’s stone that actualises teleological perfection. Gnosis is the potential that is hidden in the corrupted soul. By eradicating all the obstacles, the corrupting influences, it is possible to uncover gnosis and become enlightened. However, it also needs that same gnosis in order to do so. This is made possible by the seven gifts of the Spirit, the seven celestial powers recognised in every microcosm on earth.

Book I is concerned with the teleological perfection of humankind, which is to actualise potential gnosis inherent from the beginning but buried. This seed of gnosis is the spirit which is only visible to the soul once it has been extracted from the body. As it ascends into the Hermetic errant spheres, it perceives the forces and qualities of the seven celestial powers and the four elements and the necessary phases and stages that will lead to their perfection. The teleological perfection of each phase and stage delivers aesthetic perfection; ‘the perfect performance of tasks in a flawless whole’.³³ Sophia has the role of revealing this aesthetic perfection which is the key to teleological perfection.

The harmony of aesthetic perfection

Aesthetic perfection requires harmony, order, stability and unity: Passmore explains how the ideal State, which is aesthetically perfect, will have the characteristics of harmony, order, stability and unity and that the perfect citizen in that state will perform the tasks allotted to him thus contributing to total social harmony.³⁴ It entails a holistic notion that the harmonious whole depends on the successful completion of its

³¹ *Aurora*, p. 11

³² *Aurora*, Book I, introductory chapter five; see also Raff, p. 67.

³³ Passmore, p. 25.

³⁴ Passmore, p. 24.

contributory processes. The *Aurora* describes such processes that contribute to a harmonious whole, that is, the universe and everything in it.

Chapter nineteen of Book II in *Aurora* lists the numerous procedures of the ‘celestial operation’ that have been proposed. Some philosophers suggest the operation requires ‘calcining, dissolving, distilling and coagulating’, while others recommend ‘sublimating, reiterating and fixing’, ‘inceration and imbibition’, ‘ablution or cleansing’, ‘killing and made white’, ‘quickenning and nourishing’, ‘putrefying and corrupting’, etc.³⁵ The list appears vast but Pseudo-Aquinas assures us that these all pertain to the same thing and an intelligent person ‘would see them as interdependent and linked together like a chain, so that where one ends the other begins’.³⁶ These processes occur on a macrocosmic and microcosmic level and their correspondences are reflected in various synchronicities between the four elements, the Holy Trinity and the seven planets and life on earth, as I will now demonstrate.

Fundamental to the acquisition of gnosis in the *Aurora* are the four elements and the principles they represent. All elements are present in differing degrees in each other. They are also present in a human but require processing before they can produce an enlightened person. The general principle is that the element of Earth, mother of all elements, gave rise to the heavenly elements of Water, Air and Fire (Book I, sixth parable). Earth (the microcosm) with the aid of the same three elements (the macrocosm) was able to sustain life when the heavenly elements projected the powers of the seven planets into the centre of the Earth, making it possible for plants, animals and healing herbs to grow. The heavenly elements were separated from Earth and from one another through death and are returned to it by commingling with the aid of permanent water (philosophical mercury). Sophia enabled the union of these elements through transmutation, symbolised by the Moon and then the Sun that represent the actions of *albedo* and *rubedo*. Quoting Senior (Ibn Umail), Book II, chapter one explains how the Sun represents the hot and dry qualities of Fire in the element of Earth that conjoins with the Moon, the Water in the element of Air that is cold and moist, to create a united body and cleansed soul that is equipped to receive the ‘light’ (p. 54).³⁷ This is mirrored in a laboratory process of fixing soul, gaseous

³⁵ *Aurora*, p. 95.

³⁶ *Aurora*, p. 95.

³⁷ *Aurora*, p. 54.

sulphur, with the body of magnesia, mercury, to produce a sparkling sulphur-mercury composite cinnabar.³⁸

The *Aurora* compares the alchemical process, which attempts to create a harmonious system, to an egg (Book II, chapter ten). The outer shell is Earth, the albumen is Water, the membrane joined to the shell is Air and the yolk is Fire, a system borrowed from the *Turba Philosophorum*.³⁹ Philosophers of the ‘Science’ are able to recognise the four elements in the egg and the fifth, represented as the chick in a bird’s egg, as being comparable with the operations within alchemy. What the *Aurora* is suggesting here is that the alchemical operation focusing on balancing each element to produce the fifth is similar to the way the egg, containing the four elements, gives rise to the chick. An integral part of the alchemical process required the four elements and their four qualities of hot, cold, moist and dry to be perfectly balanced in order to give rise to the fifth element.⁴⁰ The author adds: ‘although this analogy is not to be understood literally in the sense of the eggs that are produced by birds, but rather in terms of that egg of which the Philosophers speak’.⁴¹ This Philosopher’s egg probably refers to a hermetically sealed glass vessel shaped like an egg used by alchemists.⁴² It was used to incubate the essential ingredients containing the four elements that would ultimately emerge as the philosopher’s stone. The fifth element is a product of the perfection of the four and in this sense the four elements are contained in and constitute a whole (the fifth) that is aesthetically perfect. This ability to create aesthetic perfection involves Sophia: an understanding of the ubiquitous nature of the four elements and the insight and expertise required in proportioning them perfectly.

Another correspondence can be recognised in the four principal organs and fluids – the brain and phlegm, the heart and red bile, the liver and blood, and the testicles and black bile – that are governed by Water, Fire,

³⁸ Gabriele Ferrario, ‘An Arabic Dictionary of Technical Alchemical terms: MS Sprenger 1908 of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (fols. 3r-6r)’, *Ambix* 56 (March 2009): p. 45. Magnesia was classified as a stone by the Arab alchemist Abu Bakr Mohammed Ibn Zakariyya al-Razi. Cinnabar is mercury sulphide.

³⁹ *Turba Philosophorum: A Complete English Translation* by Arthur Edward Waite (San Francisco: Ouroboros Press, 2006), fourth dictum.

⁴⁰ Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 37-44.

⁴¹ *Aurora*, p. 75.

⁴² John Read, *Through Alchemy to Chemistry: A Procession of Ideas and Personalities* (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1957), pp. 31 and 35.

Air and Earth (Book II, chapter nine). These four elements are conjoined by a quintessential principle that is life, which is ‘neither hot nor cold, neither moist nor dry’.⁴³ This quintessential principle is the fifth element or life that together with the four elements produces aesthetic perfection.

The four elements and their four qualities are present in a manifest or concealed manner in all metals. The fiery hard Martian metal iron, for example, has a dry and hot manifestation but conceals cold and moist qualities that are difficult to extract and which are immediately absorbed by the dominance of Fire (Book II, chapter thirteen). Alchemical iron, with its prevailing heat, is described as ‘the life of a roaring lion [or spirit]’.⁴⁴ Iron is able to ‘constrain’ tin or lead, two soft metals that are manifestations of the cold and moist qualities of Water.⁴⁵ Together they are capable of producing a Tincture, a sign that gnosis has been attained.

Of the three hypostases (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), the *Aurora* claims it is the Spirit that manipulates the three heavenly elements (Book I, fourth parable). The Spirit provides seven gifts with corresponding virtues projected onto the Earth that ensures salvation or alchemical transmutation. This same theme returns in Book II when discussing the views on the relationship between alchemy and astrology by the different authorities (Book II, chapter one). Aristotle, according to the *Aurora*, identified four main planets as governing the four elements: Saturn Earth, Mercury Water, Jupiter Air, and the Sun Fire.⁴⁶ In the same chapter, the *Aurora* explains how Saturn corresponds to the initial blackening phase when Earth lacks light. Mercury signals the blossoming of the whitening phase (*albedo*) that introduces Water and light. Jupiter with the element of Air represents the fruition of *albedo* that must subsequently undergo incineration in order for the completion to take place governed by the Sun. This same procedure is evident in plants; if a plant bears flowers not fruits, it is governed by Jupiter because it has reached the stage of whitening but not goldening that would produce the fruits.⁴⁷ The three heavenly elements of Water Air and Fire ensure that the plant can grow and reach its full potential. The *Aurora* suggests in Book I that the application of these same three elements leads to an enlightened soul; ‘a living soul’ infused with the ‘perfection of life’.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Aurora*, p. 73.

⁴⁴ Rhenaus refers to spirit (*spiritus*) whereas Waldkirch has lion (*leonis*), see *Aurora*, footnote on p. 90.

⁴⁵ *Aurora*, p. 89.

⁴⁶ *Aurora*, p. 50.

⁴⁷ *Aurora*, p. 53.

⁴⁸ *Aurora*, p. 47.

Thus, the heavenly elements and their corresponding planets (Mercury, Jupiter and the Sun) together with the element of Earth work to form an aesthetically perfect whole that allow or plants and souls to reach their *telos*.

Continuing in Book II, chapter one, an unnamed philosopher suggests that Fire's most successful results are yielded when the Sun is at its height in the three Fire signs consecutively: Aries, Leo and then Sagittarius. The Fire is in its most intense in Leo and attains 'true rest and tranquillity' in Jupiter.⁴⁹ It is in Jupiter that the 'earth holds onto the spirit, and from that moment does not allow him to escape'.⁵⁰ The attainment of 'true rest and tranquillity' suggests completion when the element of Fire and its corresponding planet, the Sun, has achieved its goal. The same is true of the element of Water and the Moon.⁵¹ This is how the heavenly elements work their teleological perfection: their representative planets transit over the corresponding zodiacal constellations until they reach 'true rest and tranquillity' having played their role in perfecting whatever substance needed their aid. Again this suggests aesthetic perfection where the planets perform their task in a flawless whole.

Thus, it is through invoking the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven celestial powers of the three heavenly elements, by performing an alchemical process when the powers that drive the seven planets are at their highest, that the key to divine knowledge and knowing thyself is disclosed. The resultant gnosis is the realised physical, psychological and spiritual potentials of body, soul and spirit. The success of unleashing these powers, of actualising the potentials, and the attainment and application of gnosis relies on the aesthetic perfection of the alchemical system that was introduced when 'a huge cloud darkening the entire Earth' signalled the corruption of the soul.⁵²

Concluding Remarks

Although Books I and II of the *Aurora* differ in topics and styles, they are related and deserve consideration as a whole, as the compilers intended. Book I focuses on gnosis, the *telos* of teleological perfection as revealed in Scripture. Book II provides the key, in the form of natural philosophy, to finding this *telos* within an aesthetically perfect system of interconnected,

⁴⁹ *Aurora*, p. 54.

⁵⁰ *Aurora*, p. 54.

⁵¹ *Aurora*, p. 54.

⁵² *Aurora*, p. 18.

interrelated parts and processes. Aesthetic perfection in the *Aurora*, therefore, refers to the ideas of universal correspondences and of living Nature, two characteristics of Western esotericism identified by Antoine Faivre.⁵³ Teleological perfection is concerned with Faivre's two remaining intrinsic characteristics of intermediaries and transmutation. The Holy Spirit's seven gifts, the seven celestial powers, are the intermediaries between heaven and earth, between the soul and the body, and are a tool of gnosis. This celestial tool is the knowledge of hidden forces in nature, a common medieval understanding of magic or *magia naturalis*.⁵⁴ It is these hidden forces that initiate transmutation.

The *Aurora*, I have argued, is concerned with teleological and aesthetic perfection expressed in alchemical terms. The *telos* of teleological perfection is gnosis, the successful transmutation of an individual into an enlightened being. Gnosis is an innate potential that can be realised by recognising and replicating the aesthetic perfection of the alchemical process revealed by Sophia. By examining teleological and aesthetic perfection, it can be ascertained that gnosis, within the context of the *Aurora*, can be defined, in universal terms, as the acquisition of a certain type of knowledge on how to actualise an inherent potential. Everything that is actualised can be said to be a potential that is realised through a combination of revelation and practice. This is analogous with extracting sulphur in order to solidify it in its purest form with the aid of mercury.

By assuming a belief in a universal inner dimension underlying material reality, it has been possible to recognise the relationship between gnosis and the idea of correspondences and living Nature crucial to aesthetic perfection. In highlighting the presence of an inner dimension, that is, a potentiality of gnosis waiting to be externalised or realised, the links between both books become clearer. Book I is concerned with the inner and its *telos* whereas Book II with how this *telos* can only be manifested if there is the presence of aesthetic perfection.

⁵³ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 10-15.

⁵⁴ Hanegraaff, p. 22.