

# Hermeticism and Cosmic Cycles

By Gauthier Pierozak

## I

*It is as if the whole humanity had forgotten  
and is trying to remember some kind of a Lost Law.*

Villiers de l'Isle Adam

The study of some metaphysical aspects of the Infinite, and in particular of what pertains to manifestation, defined as the determination of a possibility within the Absolute of the Supreme Principle, allows us to discover some general cosmic laws that one can particularly analogize to mathematical fractals.<sup>1</sup>

René Guénon clearly mentions this in his work, particularly when he introduces the doctrine of the *cosmic cycles*. He thus states that a given cycle can be

*“considered part of another more extended cycle<sup>2</sup>; but by virtue of a certain law of correspondence, each of the secondary cycles reproduces, on a reduced scale, phases comparable to those of the great cycles of which it is a part. What can be said of the cyclical laws in general will therefore find its application at different degrees: historical cycles, geological cycles, and true cosmic cycles, with divisions and subdivisions that further multiply these possibilities of application. Besides, when one goes beyond the limits of the terrestrial world, there can no longer be any question of measuring the duration of a cycle by a number of years understood literally; the numbers then take on a purely symbolic value, and express proportions rather than real durations.”<sup>3</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Mathematical term, from the Latin *fractus*, meaning “fraction”, designating an object whose structure does not vary whenever its scale is altered. In other words, one can find the same proportionate structure at whatever distance the observer is placed in relation to the subject, ranging from indefinitely close to indefinitely far. See Figure 1.

<sup>2</sup> We are emphasizing in italics.

<sup>3</sup> René Guénon, *The Esoterism of Dante*, Cosmic cycles, Sophia Perennis, 2001, p. 45.

This is indeed the description of a fractal principle, and is what justifies, if it still required any justification, the use of correspondences and symbols to signify higher metaphysical concepts that are typically indescribable, because the “lesser” can symbolize the “greater”, according to the law of analogy.

Looking more closely at the “structure” of a cosmic cycle, René Guénon says that

“any cycle can be divided into two phases, which are, chronologically, its successive halves [...] ; but in reality these two phases represent, respectively, the action of two adverse and yet complementary tendencies; and this action can obviously be simultaneous as well as successive.”<sup>4</sup>

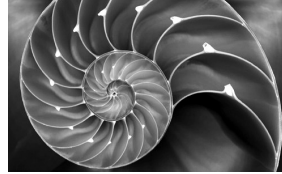


Fig. 1: the nautilus is an example of a fractal found in nature.

And he clarifies

“We can [...] divide the whole cycle into two phases, the one descending, proceeding in the direction of ever more accentuated differentiation, the other ascending, returning toward the principal state. These two phases, which the Hindu doctrine compares to those of respiration, are also to be found in the Hermetic doctrine, where they are called ‘coagulation’ and ‘solution’ ”<sup>5</sup>

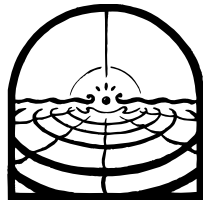
The very source, or principle, of duality in any cosmic cycle symbolizes the Supreme Principle, which is also the ineffable Infinite or the universal Possibility. The metaphysical Being is the determination of one of the possibilities in the Infinite, and it is the source of our own manifestation. In contrast, what is *not* the Being can be called the Non-Being, i.e. the possibilities that are non-manifestable, or that are manifestable but not determined.

Cosmic cycles therefore symbolize the passage from the non-manifested to the manifested, and the return from the manifested to the indetermination of the non-manifested. We can find these two phases, symbolically, in correspondence with the circulatory system (new blood leaving the heart, old blood returning to the heart), with respiration (expiration of the breath, inspiration of breath), with digestion (excretion, ingestion), with the ocean tides (flow of water swelling back and forth upon the shore), in all natural rhythms of expansion and contraction, in the alternation between life and death for every species, in the

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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