The Greco-Egyptian origins of Western myths and philosophy, and a note on the magnificence of the creative mind.

He not busy being born is busy dying (Bob Dylan)

Introduction

I have known emeritus professor Wim van Binsbergen since my twenties as a passionate intercultural philosopher. As his student-assistant at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, I made sure that this professor did not run out of library books, which he needed to consult in order to write his ever-growing pile of self-written books. I always wondered what happened with all the books that I ordered for him and so did the librarian of the African Studies Centre. On a weekly basis, he was in need of more books, but he was reluctant to return any of them. I used to joke with the librarian by saying that he had eaten all of the books I had ordered for him. Clearly, Professor Van Binsbergen needed his food for thought.

One of the books that I ordered for him and of which I, later on, received a copy as a token of his appreciation for my hard work was 'Life against Death: the psychoanalytical meaning of history' by the American classicist Norman O. Brown. From the ceremonious way in which Van Binsbergen handed me this book I understood it must have been very important to him. I tried to read it, but at the time I found the book quite impenetrable, incomprehensible, and generally not my piece of cake.

Later in life, I decided to read Brown's 'Life against Death' again, and this time I read it in its entirety. I now understand that, according to Brown, human beings have not one, but two souls, which are the repelling magnets of nature.

1. Apollo and Dionysus

Every person is equipped with both the Dionysian or life force soul (in Greek *Eros*), and the Apollonian or death force soul (in Greek *Thanatos*). Dionysus was a Greek fertility god from c.a. 580 BCE associated with wine, music, and choral dance (Csapso 2016). In Attic art, Dionysus was often depicted as a slumping god on a ship, which had a vine overladen with grapes as a mast, surrounded by a sea with a pod of dolphins; the dolphins being the rescuers of sailors (life force) (Carpenter 1990). Dionysus, who was resurrected from death, represented hedonism, happiness, and the good life that he celebrated with a glass of wine. His half-brother Apollo was in many respects his polar opposite. Apollo was a cerebral god associated with the sun, light, and intellectual pursuit. Dionysus symbolized the ability of (wo)man to submerge him- or herself in a greater whole, the ecstatic, and the chaotic emotions. Apollo, on the contrary, symbolised his or her formally rational and reasoning mind.

The Dionysian and Apollonian natural forces are complementary and one needs both to be a balanced person; one needed to be capable of creating form and structure as well as being passionate and vital. Brown believed that a utopian society would primarily consist of such balanced persons who are at home in both the world of rationality and logic and of symbols and emotions (Brown 1959).

Dionysus and Apollo were two Greek deities, which suggests that the concepts of death and life force have a Greek origin and that the Greeks were the first to focus on the necessity of balancing natural forces within the human mind. When studying renowned Egyptian myths, however, it becomes clear that as early as the historical period of the Old Kingdom (c. 2686 BC - c. 2181 BC), the Egyptians have been familiar

with these natural forces. Greek writers, such as Herodotus and Plutarch[1], borrowed these concepts from the Egyptians by studying their myths, such as the myth of Osiris; an ancient Nubian god that entered Egyptian mythology and the pyramid texts in 2350 BCE. Osiris, which was the first Egyptian god with a human appearance, is a pharaoh-god connected with life-giving power and the preserver of the ideal natural order (Maät). Amongst the Greeks in Alexandria Dionysus (death force) and Osiris (life force) were venerated simultaneously, as was observed by the historian Herodotus (Herodotus 2015 [first edition 440 BCE]: book II, 42).

Osiris' younger brother Seth, who did not inherit the throne, was associated with envy, death force, and the disorder and chaos of the universe. Seth was so jealous of his elder brother that he chopped Osiris' body into thousand pieces and dispersed all body parts over the earth. Since Osiris' body was no longer whole it appeared that Seth successfully prevented the resurrection of his brother. However, Isis, Osiris' sister and wife, found all pieces of her husband's body. She then transformed herself into a bird and used her magical skills to resurrect her brother. During the act, Isis and Osiris conceived their son Horus; the falcon-headed god. After Osiris passed away, Horus (life force) and Seth (death force) were involved in various struggles for political power. Their fight for the thrones of Upper and Lower Egypt ended with Horus winning both thrones. This fight symbolised the natural forces of order and disorder in the universe (Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1993).

It is the historian Herodotus, again, who comments that the Egyptian god Horus and the Greek god Apollo were one and the same. He remarks: 'In Egyptian, Apollo is Horus, Demeter is Isis, Artemis is Bubastis' (Meeks and Favard-Meeks 1993) (Herodotus 2015 [first edition 440 BCE]: book II, 156). The Greek mythology was thus strongly influenced by the ancient Egyptian myths.

Figure 1: the procreation of Horus, son of Isis, Abydos Temple relief Sethos, Egypt.

[1] Plutarch was the first who wrote down the full myth of Osiris deducted from various Egyptian text fragments, such as the pyramid and sarcophagus texts, hymns, the book of the dead, and descriptions of the Osiris festivals that were celebrated all over Egypt. Van den Berk, T. (2015). Het Oude Egypte: Bakermat van het Jonge Christendom [The Old Egypt:Craddle of young Christianity]. Zoetermeer, Meinema, Pelckmans.

2. Egyptian morality and a recent theory of higher consciousness

The ancient Egyptians believed that the natural forces of the universe (the macrocosm), i.e. the life and death force, were represented by deities (the microcosm). Ideally, the deities maintained the right balance between these forces to preserve the order of the universe. The Egyptian pharaohs were responsible for the preservation of the right balance between the aforementioned natural forces. They upheld the moral ideals of ancient Egypt and the laws of nature, represented by laws laid down by the goddess of justice Ma'at. The concept of Ma'at is used throughout Egyptian history and its meaning as an interrelated order of rightness, including the divine, natural and social, is repeatedly affirmed. Ma'at is that which confirms the order of the universe, the good, that which is opposite to disorder, injustice and evil (*isfet*). Ma'at stands for the totality of ordered existence in the universe and justice, right relations and duty in the socio-political communal domain and the following of rules and principles in the personal domain. It extends from the elements of nature into the moral and social behaviour of mankind. Whether a man has behaved righteous depends on a person's reputation with his pharaoh and fellow citizens. This does not mean, however, that a person has no personal conscience, but that conscience itself is a relational concept. What one thinks of oneself is based largely on the evaluation by significant others (Karenga 2004).

The existence of Ma'at in Egyptian society and its myths in the meaning of both the pharaonic and individual adherence to rules and principles to keep on the right path reveals that most Egyptians did have a good understanding of just and unjust social behaviour. In terms of consciousness, this implies that Egyptians were self-reflexive; they were moral human beings capable of reflecting upon their own behaviour over a period of time. This assertion is supported by the Italian neuroscientologist Antonio Damasio's theory of consciousness. In 'The feeling of what happens' (2000), Damasio makes a distinction between three cumulative forms of human consciousness: 1. *the protoself*: a person's bodily state, which is the most basic representation of self. 2. *The core self*: the awareness of the biological bodily state and emotions in the here and now, which is a more evolved form of consciousness. 3. *The autobiographical self:* a person's reflection on the awareness of emotions over a longer period of time. The autobiographical self is the third layer and most evolved form of consciousness. It draws on memory and past experiences which involve the use of higher thought processes. It requires a person to have a language, an autobiographical memory capacity, and reasoning ability. Damasio believes that the autobiographical self is a necessary condition for both rational and mythological thinking. Therefore, to his mind, mythological thinking does ***not*** belong to a lower form of consciousness. Damasio stresses that myths are not the product of the core self but, similar to rational thinking, are the result of self-reflexive thoughts of the autobiographical self, which is both an individual and a group member. An adult constructs this self with its experiences, ideas, images, evaluations, likes, dislikes, achievements and failures. Although the autobiographical self is unique to a person, he or she shares narratives with members of the same peer group, community, or culture. This means that besides using our own experiences, we include the experiences, ideologies and beliefs we inherit from (deceased) members of our cultures, which makes us part of the larger narratives of mankind. The autobiographical or self-reflexive self is thus the result of mythological and logical individual thoughts of a person, whose consciousness is at the same time constructed by and part of the collective consciousness of humanity as a whole (Damasio 2000).

The Egyptian moral principle of Ma'at departs from the notion that autobiographical selves are constructed in a social context, which largely determines the social position of the individual self and the righteousness of a person's behaviour. The existence of Ma'at as a significant concept among the ancient Egyptians implies that these ancient Africans did not have a primitive mind. It demonstrates that, on the contrary, the Egyptians had a self-reflexive or higher order consciousness, which enabled them to

create a sense of continuity of the self over space and time, a stream of contemplations and evaluations about themselves over longer periods of times and to develop ideas about the future. The Egyptians were moral human beings and the fact that they were capable of creating myths implies that they were also capable of thinking logically since both mythology (*mythos*) and rational thinking (*logos*) are products of higher order consciousness created by the self-reflexive autobiographical self.

3. A short history of theories of consciousness

My insight that the Egyptians must have had a high consciousness, as result of an autobiographical self, runs counter to the still mainstream idea among Western philosophers that the ability of human beings to think rationally and philosophise, i.e. to develop *logos*, did not exist prior to the emergence of the first philosophers, called the pre-Socratics, in ancient Greece (c. 500 BCE). Before that time, they argue, people were only able to come up with mythological explanations for social or natural phenomena, which were the creations of a primitive mind. The Egyptian myth of the boat journeys of the Sun god Ra in the sky, for instance, provided a primaeval explanation for sunrise and sunset. The pre-Socratics were allegedly the first who attempted to explain these movements of the celestial bodies by making empirical observations and thinking rationally.

The eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that once the Greeks had developed their ability to think rationally and to come up with proto-scientific explanations for the existence of the universe and social order, mythological thinking disappeared from Greek society. In his opinion, myths belong to societies that are deprived of the ability to think rationally, because they are less developed than societies that celebrate the use of the *logos* over *mythos* and value philosophers and other rational thinkers more than narrators and minstrels.

It is striking how obstinately the stage theory, which relegates myths to the cultural products of human beings with a lower level of mental development, is rehashed in today's academic circles. Especially, when one reads the oeuvre of the nineteenth century born German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, who convincingly argued that man is *animal symbolicum* and *animal rationale*. In his three-volume work, 'The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms', Cassirer explains that what distinguishes a man from an animal is not only his exact comprehension of the world (*Weltbegreifen*) but his ability to create and use symbols and to represent the world (*Weltverstehen*). In Cassirer's words 'the "expressive" phenomena, like myths and religion, and the conceptual systems, like mathematics, are all the result of a *Weltverstehen*, a free activity of the mind' (Cassirer 1957 [first published in German 1929]). To Cassirer's mind 'what distinguishes man from nature is the system of human activities of which language, myth, religion, art, science and history all are the constituents' (Cassirer 1944). In his opinion, scientific discoveries did not make the function of myths in societies defunct as they continued to offer an explanation for phenomena in society in a metaphorical language. Cassirer stressed that *mythos* and *logos* should be understood as complementary concepts. In his view, the creation of myths and the use of ratio are alternative coexisting ways to explain the existence of phenomena and situations in the social word in both (ancient) history and contemporary times.

However, for various contemporary scholars, such as Watterson (2013) and Massey (2008), the ancient Egyptians and other ancient cultures with a significant focus on mythology have remained to be primitive people with an underdeveloped mind. These scholars believe that the Egyptians lacked self-reflexivity and were not capable of rational thought. They found evidence for their point of view in the Egyptian relationship between body and mind, more precisely, the relationship of one body with a multiplicity of minds or souls.

In the next two sections, I aim to enhance understanding of the Egyptian concept of body and mind and to debunk this stage theory derived proposition.

4. The Egyptian concept of body and soul

For the Egyptians, the human body (*khat*)  was a model of the universe that resembled the macrocosm. The energies in the universe were considered to be similar to those inside the *khat*. The two sides of the body were considered to have different qualities due to the connection of these body parts with the entrance and departure of the personality soul (the *ba*). The *ba* was thought to enter the body into the right ear at the moment of a baby's birth and to leave the body via the left ear after a person had passed away, allowing it to start its journey through the underworld (Merkel and Joyce 2003). The right part of the human body was, therefore, associated with life force and light, and the left part with death force and darkness. Similar to humans, the gods were believed to have a light side and a dark side. The eyes of the pharaoh-god Horus, for instance, were associated with the sun (right eye) and the moon (left eye) and with the life and death force in nature (Littleton and Fleming 2004).

Besides a human body, the Egyptians believed that an individual was born with multiple souls that were loosely connected to a person's *khat*. In fact, the body was perceived as the temporary seat of five soul elements that formed the individual: the *ka* or life force  , the *ba* or personality/bird soul  , the *akh* or immortal combined *ka*-*ba* soul (the ibis or phoenix)  , the *ren* or name soul, and the *sjoet* or shadow soul. These souls could permanently or temporarily dwell inside the *khat* until death brought a person into a liminal stage of existence. This stage would end after the *ba*-spirit had made its journey to the gate of Osiris, the Lord of the Netherworld (the *duat*) (Lamy 1989). The *ba*-soul was only allowed to enter this gate to be eternally united with Osiris in the case of a positive outcome of the verdict over the heart (*ib*), which was still inside the mummified body, during the weighing of the heart ceremony. During this ritual, the heart of a person was weighed against the feather of Ma'at to determine whether or not (s)he had lived righteously. Only when the heart of the mummified person was equal to or lighter than Ma'at's feather, the *ba* of the deceased gained access to the *duat* (Rossiter 1974).

During the opening of the mouth ceremony, the *ba*-soul would return to the mummified body of the deceased to enable him or her to eat and drink again in the afterlife. The Egyptians believed that a deceased person would need his or her body again during the afterlife. For this reason, depending on the social status of the deceased and his or her gender, all kind of attributes that the deceased could use in the Afterlife were added to the grave, such as combs, jewellery, or perfumes; the alleged sweat of the Sun-god Ra. Once the deceased person's senses had returned to the mummy and his or her *ba* had passed Osiris' gate and thus completed its dangerous journey through the underworld, the *ba* became immortal. This happened through the unification of the *ba* with the *ka*-soul and their transformation into the *akh*; the deceased's magical powered and enlightened immortal soul. The *akh* soul only emerged when the mummification process had been successful (Geru 2013).

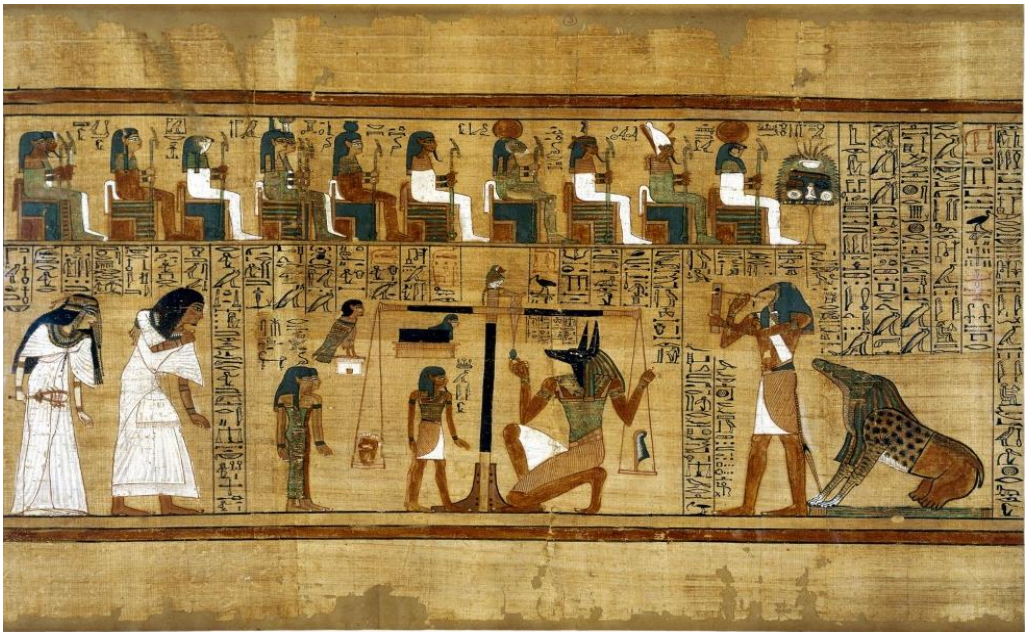

Figure 2: The weighing of the heart ceremony on 'The papyrus of Ani'. The British Museum (Rossiter 1974).

Figure 3: Vignette of Spell 23 - the opening of the mouth ceremony from the Papyrus of Hunefer (New Kingdom - 19th Dynasty).

The Egyptians considered the relationship between body and soul to be non-dualistic. Although the *akh* was immortal, its existence depended on the wholeness of the body of the deceased. The body's completeness was meant to be guaranteed by its mummification. Neither in the social world nor in the *duat* were body and soul considered to be separated entities (a dualism). Instead, the Egyptian person was made up of a loose connection between a material body and five (quasi)-material soul entities that together made up the ancient Egyptian as a person (Merkel and Joyce 2003). The enlightenment of one of the *akh* souls was the positive outcome of the dangerous journey of the Egyptian souls through the *duat*, which symbolised the struggle of the soul(s) on its way to higher consciousness (the eternal light) and reincarnation. The ancient Egyptian are often misunderstood as people obsessed with death and death manuscripts and rituals, such as the book of the dead and the process of mummification. In reality, however, they were the venerators of life force and spiritual enlightenment. The ancient Egyptians considered the daily reincarnated sun to be the

source of all life, including that of the reincarnated and enlightened individual soul (the *akh*). The Egyptian book of the dead was not a veneration of death force but a hymn to life force and the human ability to reach higher consciousness. For the ancient Egyptians, enlightenment and soul harmony were the positive outcomes of the moral struggle of a person's multiple souls (Geru 2013).To my mind, the ancient Egyptian's experience of a bright light and a higher consciousness prior to one's (near) death resembles those of contemporary patients with a near-death experience. In 'endless consciousness', the cardiologist Pim van Lommel (2011) describes the experiences of patients that he interviewed, who survived a cardiac arrest. He mentions their strong awareness of the aforementioned bright light and how; consequently, their personalities underwent a permanent change. After the arrest, his patients had become aware of the fact that love is most important in life and that the heart was the seat of their affection and higher consciousness. The patients informed Van Lommel that they had reached a higher stage consciousness and had become more emphatic and sensitive towards the feelings of others. On the basis of his twenty years of research, Van Lommel concludes that the current mainstream materialistic philosophy of consciousness, which states that all consciousness is the result of brain activity, is too narrow to properly understand the aforementioned near-death experiences. These experiences demonstrate that the human consciousness does not always coincide with brain functions and can be experienced separately from the body**.** Did Van Lommel empirically research the existence of a phenomenon that was part of the ancient Egyptian's intuitive knowledge?

Of the multiple souls, the ancient Egyptians considered the heart to be the most central of all quasi-material entities. They believed that the heart was the seat of both reason and emotional knowledge. The heart was the most important thinking and feeling human soul. For this reason, the heart was the only organ that was not removed from the body prior to its mummification. This organ was the seat of a person's morale and only those Egyptians who had lived righteous were allowed to undertake the dangerous journey from the land of the living to the Netherworld. The wrongdoers ended up as a delicious meal for the Nile crocodile Ahmit after which the body of the deceased would undergo a second death and disappear forever into oblivion. The living would, then, cease to remember the person, which heralded the end of his or her existence (Rossiter 1974).

Despite the ancient Egyptian's relatively advanced knowledge of surgery obtained by the mummification of bodies, the nervous system and of (brain-related) diseases they believed that the heart and not the brain was the most important organ of the body. The Egyptians did not have much empirical knowledge of this organ's blood circulating function but they often, symbolically, referred to the working of the heart as the flooding of the Nile. Similar to this long river, which was the source of Egyptian life, the heart consisted of channels that connected all organs to one another and delivered them the necessary fluids to function (e.g. blood, air, saliva, sperm, and nutriment). The brain was regarded as insignificant and was, therefore, discarded during mummification. In ancient Egypt, diseases were often explained by a human state of blocked organs, like irrigation canals through which the water could no longer flow (Finger 2005). Similar to Indian early civilisation, connected to the ancient Egyptians through various trade networks (van Binsbergen 2012), yoga-like exercises were prescribed to those patients who needed their heart channels to be opened up for the mentioned fluids to flow healthy through their bodies. Too much openness of the body was, however, regarded as dangerous, because malevolent spirits could more easily dwell inside an open body and unpermitted use it as their new home (Finger 2005).

It is very likely that the ancient Egyptian open or blocked organ theory is the origin of Hippocrates' system of medicine known as humoralism. This system detailed the makeup and working of the human body positing that an excess or deficiency of any of four distinct bodily fluids (humors) directly influenced a person's temperament and health. These fluids were: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. In the treatise

On the Nature of Man, Hippocrates describes that health is primarily the state in which the fluids are in the correct proportion to each other, both in strength and quantity, and are well mixed. Pain occurs when one of the substances presents either a deficiency or an excess, or is separated in the body and not mixed with others (Mann and Lloyd 1983). The body fluids also represented the Four Temperaments or Humors (of personality) as they later became known. The medical theory of humoralism shows parallels with the central theoretical ideas of Ayurveda, which developed in the mid-first millennium BCE (Basham 1976, Comba 2001). As a medical theory, humoralism influenced the ancient Greeks and subsequent Western medical philosophy and Muslim scholars. Humoralism remained an influential theory until the nineteenth century (Wittendorff 1994).The ancient Greeks thus borrowed from ancient Egyptians and Indian medical wisdoms to gain an understanding of the human body and its connection to the soul.

5. The Greek concept of soul

Before the fifth century, the Greeks believed that only human beings had a soul (*psuchê*) and that the Netherworld was the sole domain of deceased persons (and thus not of e.g. the Egyptian Nile crocodile Ahmit). In the Homeric poems, the word *psuchê* is most often used in those cases where people's life was at risk and the spirits of death were close by, such as in the case of the life of Achilles in the Iliad (Fagles] 1998 [original 800 BCE]). In the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the pre-Socratics also started to use the word 'ensouled' (*empsuchos*) to refer to the condition of being alive, which was applied to human beings and other living things. The human soul was associated with courage and morality, and an entity engaged in thinking and planning. In ordinary Greek life, the soul was treated as the bearer of moral qualities, and as responsible for practical thought and cognition. In pre-Socratic philosophical thinking in this period, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Pythagoras, also believed that plants and animals had souls. Pythagoras even believed that human souls could animate plants (Lorenz 2003). As mentioned before, the Egyptians already had a much longer tradition of attributing soul life to animals and plants. Since 3200 BCE they, therefore, buried various small and large animals, including the African wild bull, the leopard, the elephant and a hippopotamus. From 700 BCE, which is two centuries before the pre-Socratics, the Egyptians also embalmed many animals, such as cats and birds (Quirke 2014). If we add this to the fact that Pythagoras and many of the other pre-Socratics had studied and lived in Egypt, it is likely that the idea of *panpsychism* or animism was not of Greek but of African origin. In both ancient Egypt and Greece, one believed in a divine life principle to which each and everything was connected. Body and soul were not radically different and considered to be part of the matter of the universe. The pre-Socratic Heraclitus, for instance, believed that the soul was bodily (material) but consisted of fine matter, such as air or fire. The Greeks made a distinction between a life soul, three body-souls (*thymos*, *nous* and *menos*) and a free soul (psyche, in Greek *psuchê*), which is comparable to the Egyptian *ka*-soul. *Thymos,* was the active soul comparable to the Egyptian *ba*-soul, the source of intense emotion, passion and associated with breath, blood, heart, liver, and the human desire for recognition. One believed that *Thymos* was material - dependent on the body - mortal and only active when the body was awake. This soul was located between the heart and the sternum. *Nous* was the intellect or the faculty of the human mind necessary for understanding what is true or real and was located in the chest, and *menos,* meaning strength, was located in the head. The ancient Greeks believed that of all mentioned souls only the free soul or (*psuchê*) was immortal. When someone passed away, the (*psuchê*) would leave the body through a body opening, mostly the mouth or the person's nose. Unlike the Egyptian, the Greeks did not believe that the free soul (*ka* or *psuchê*) would return to the body during a later stage in the life of the deceased to unite with another soul (The Egyptians believed that the *ka* and the *ba*-

soul became *akh*). The Greeks thought that the *psuchê* would lead its own life, away from human bodies. Therefore, the Greek ancestors could allegedly neither speak nor smile or walk, which is why they moved differently from the living. The Greeks did, however, not leave any exact descriptions about the wanderings and behaviour of the immoral souls of their ancestors and beloved ones (Bremmer 1987). The pre-Socratics thus only had some vague beliefs in the immortality of the *psuchê* separate from the mortal body.

To sum up, since the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the ancient Egyptians and Greeks shared a belief in the human body as a model of the macrocosm and multiple souls of whom at least one was considered to be immortal.

6. Contemporary views on the ancient Greek and Egyptian concepts of soul

Bremmer (1987), and other philosophers of consciousness have categorised the belief in multiple souls as "primitive". Brenner wrote, 'although the concept of *psyche* developed into the modern unitary soul, its "primitive" character can be discerned in the so-called shamanistic traditions and the early descriptions of dreams' (Bremmer 1987:11). Soul development goes together with the notion that in every 'body' houses just one rational and immortal soul (*psyche-logos*), which brings life to the body. This soul idea was developed by the Greek philosopher Plato, the intellectual successor of the pre-Socratics, who introduced an anthropological radical form of dualism in the belief between body and soul. Although Plato's ideas about the relationship between body and soul are unclear, in his view, intelligence is a characteristic of the soul, but not of the body. The latter is dependent upon the soul for its movements. Although the body is thus conveyed by the soul, the soul is contained within the body, like a prisoner in jail (Olshewsky 1976). In the Republic, Plato offers a theory of soul (comparable to the Egyptian *ka*), which allows attribution of (in principle) all mental or psychological functions to a single subject, the soul as separated entity from the body (Lorenz 2003). And whereas the body, the sense organs, enable us to gain an understanding of the physical world, the world of matter, it is the soul that connects us to the world of the perfect forms and ideas. According to Plato, body and soul link us to two different and radically separated worlds, of which the metaphysical one is superior to the physical. To know the higher truth, one should not rely on one's senses but upon one's soul and its meditative connection to the perfect forms. It is the ideal world that is the source of the immortal soul, which pre-existed before a person's birth and which, after one passes away, will always return to the ideal world (D.J.Vaughan] 1997). Several scholars, such as George G.M. James (1954), believe that Plato derived his ideas of the immortality of the soul from Egyptian priests, who believed in the eternal *ka-soul*, *ba-soul* and the *akh*-soul. Plato received part of his philosophical education from these priests, with whom he stayed for a period of over thirteen years. Nevertheless, Plato is often considered to be the father of Western philosophy, because of his singular concept of the soul as the seat of rationality as one can find in Plato's *Phaedo*.

The idea of one soul as the seat of *logos,* rather than a multiplicity of soul entities, is generally considered to be a step forward in the history of the philosophy of consciousness. For only unitary souls are considered to be self-reflexive, which is a characteristic of higher consciousness. The reasoning is that soul reflexivity can only exist if there is a continuation of a narrative within the soul over a longer period of time. Such a perpetuation of streams of conscious ideas about the self cannot occur in bodies with multiple souls flying in and out of a body because there would not be one single self to develop a narrative about the self. This train of thought implies that the consciousness of ancient Egyptians and pre-Socratics, who adhered to a belief in multiple souls, was less developed than that of the Greeks since Plato and successive generations of (Greek) philosophers. It would also imply that rational higher order thinking would not occur before Plato, who is, therefore, the legitimate fathers of Western philosophy.

If this is the truth, the question remains, where this leaves the ancient Egyptians, the pre-Socratic Greeks and also contemporary Muslims and (Pentecostal) Christians in e.g. Africa. In her award-winning book 'Dreams that matter', the anthropologist Mittermaier examines the encounter and engagement of present-day Muslims in Egypt with the Divine. She comes to the conclusions that many contemporary Muslims in this North African country believe that (religious) knowledge is channelled through the gods and that various spirits enter the body to enlighten Muslim believers (Mittermaier 2011). Similarly, many Pentecostal Christians in various countries in Africa, including Nigeria, believe in malevolent spirits, which can dwell inside a person and can only be removed by church rituals of exorcism (Adogame 2012). Would all these ancient adherents of a concept of multiple minds and the abovementioned contemporary believers really be incapable of thinking rationally or is there something else at stake? By all means, what these ancients and contemporary Muslims and Christians have in common is the belief in a central core soul among all souls (the heart or psyche), which remains in place regardless of the alien spirits' temporary occupation of a person's body. To my mind, as long as this central core soul develops a narrative of the self and is thus self-reflexive, the multiplicity of soul theory is merely the result of a cultural difference than that it, in any way, affects the thought process of its adherents. In my view, the human capability to think rational (*logos*) is thus, for the most part, unrelated to people's philosophy of consciousness in past or present times.

By all means, historical knowledge and the remains of the pyramids themselves make it easy to refute the presumption that neither the Egyptians nor the pre-Socratics were capable of philosophising. Between 3300 BCE until 396 BCE, the ancient Egyptians wrote in hieroglyphs, which were native to Egypt. Concerning the hieroglyphs, the famous Jean-François Champollion (1790-1832) who deciphered the Rosetta stone, commented; "It is a complex system, writing figurative, symbolic, and phonetic all at once, in the same text, the same phrase, I would almost say in the same word". Champollion, who held a chair in Egyptian history, did not consider the ancient Egyptians to be primitive people, whereas he did not live long enough to discover that many of the hieroglyphic writings contain literary works, poems, medical texts and mathematical treatises, that predated the Greeks by thousands of years (Parkinson 2002). The *Mathematical Papyrus*, for instance, which deals with arithmetical problems and geometry, was written during the reign of the Egyptian King A-User-Re (approx. 1650 BCE). This significant document in the history of maths thus far predates Plato's geometrically based theory of the ideal forms. The Egyptians were the first to discover the use of decimal points and fractions as well as methods of solving problems pertaining to volumes of pyramids and areas of cylinders, which have been adopted by modern mathematicians (Olela 1997). Egyptian sage philosophers were so well known for their mathematical knowledge that the pre-Socratic Pythagoras left his birth town Samos in Iona to study in Egypt, which was a more stimulating place to work (Brock 2004). Besides, the Egyptians also had a relatively advanced knowledge of surgery, which they used to cure patients with psychological or physical illnesses and to remove those organs that they wished to preserve after a person had passed away (the lungs, the liver, intestines, and the stomach). The heart was left in the body so that the righteousness of the in the heart located soul could be judged against the feather of Ma'at  (Finger 2005).

These characteristics of ancient Egyptian and pre-Socratic culture demonstrate that the assumption that rational thinking (*logos*) did not develop until the philosophy of Plato does not hold. It is, therefore, more useful to concentrate on how narratives to explain the world (*mythos*) and descriptions of natural phenomena based on the sense experiences (*logos*) were used as alternative complementary explanatory models in the Greco-Egyptian ancient world. The pre-Socratic philosopher Thales, for instance, believed that water was the underlying substance of all materialism in the universe and that all worldly material would reincarnate and return to an invisible form of water. Thales, who was educated in Egypt by sage priests, borrowed his ideas from the

Egyptian wisdom that, together with the sun, the Nile was the source of all life. However, he also studied the Egyptian myth that the god of the ocean water (Nun) was the primordial chaos and darkness of which the Sun-god Atum emerged (Hart 1990). Thales took his ideas from the Egyptian belief in a divine form of consciousness as the source of all matter (in Greek *nous*). Both the ancient Greeks and Egyptians thus not only defined their gods as natural forces but also observed the natural phenomena as gods.

The Egyptian gods and their energies were considered to be part of nature. The Egyptians were very good at observing nature and they used symbols to decode the natural universe. They, for instance, empirically observed frogs and came to the conclusion that frogs were amphibians, who lived between water and land. The goddess frog Heket symbolised the transforming energy in these amphibians, which enables them to live in between water (the primordial chaos of which all life came into being) and land (the dry space that babies enter after they have left their mother's watery womb). Heket also symbolised a midwife. She accompanied Chnoem, the god of creation, in the conception of the virgin birth of the children of Ahmes; an Egyptian queen in the old Egyptian kingdom. The goddess Heket thus symbolised transformation. This does not mean, however, that Egyptians were not capable of understanding rationally how a frog could live under water and on land. Nevertheless, by visualising the energy of genesis in nature the ancient Egyptians enhanced a deeper phenomenological understanding of the natural world. Heket symbolised the transition from the stage of non-being to being, from chaos to order, from the existence of land and (human) life out of water due to the flooding of the Nile (Van den Berk 2015). As the pre-Socratic historian, Hecataeus of Miletus and the ancient Greek historian Herodotus put it: 'the birth of Egypt is a gift of the Nile' (Gwyn 1966, Herodotus 2015 [first edition 440 BCE]: Book II, Chapter 5). Another animal, which among the Egyptians also functioned as the head of a god, was the scarab (*scarabaeus sacer*). Because these beetles use the dung ball that they are rolling for themselves as a brood chamber for their eggs, it symbolised the reincarnation of the dead and the rising of the sun. Equal to the sun the scarab beetles rolled their ball from East to West and equal to Ra the young scarab beetles appeared to be capable of spontaneous creation as they emerged from their burrow (Van den Berk 2015). Twinge scarabs also characterised the human brain, which was similar in shape. The Egyptians associated the scarab and the brain with creative (sexual) force and spontaneous resurrection. Since the Middle Kingdom, the scarabs were placed on the heart of mummies to protect this alleged central organ during the body's entry in the afterlife. The bottom of the scarab contained an inscription from 'the Book of the Dead'. The inscription was meant to protect the deceased against confessing to any of the wrongs that (s)he might have committed during his or her lifetime once (s)he was brought before Osiris and the tribunal of the gods (the weighing of the heart ceremony) (Wilkinson 2008).

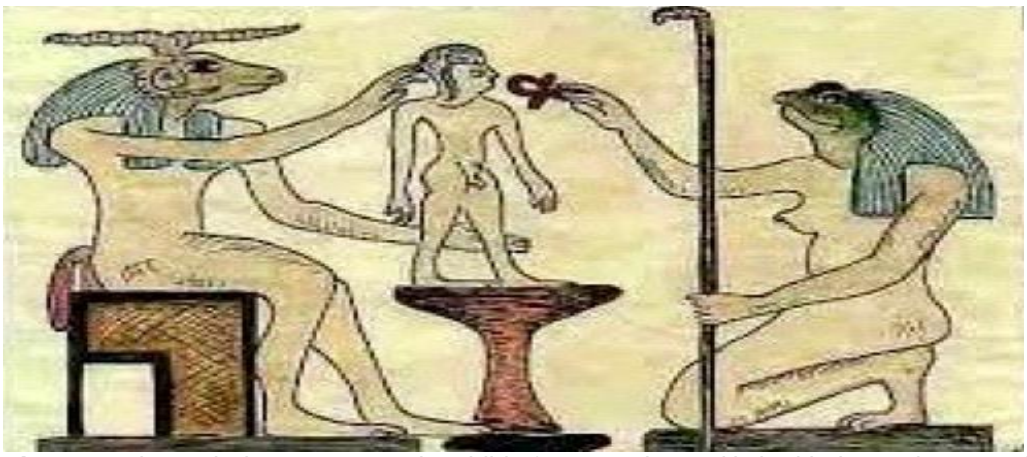

Figure 4: The god Khnum creates the child of queen Ahmes (Ihy) with the assistance of the frog goddess Heket. A relief from the mammisi (birth temple) at Dendera Temple complex, Egypt (south of Abydos).

Figure 5: A picture of Khepri, the scarab-headed god, the tomb of Nefertari (Dynasty XIX) in the Valley of the Queens.

The scarab-god Khepri was closely associated with the creator god Atum and the sun-god Ra. This demonstrates that the Egyptian belief was syncretistic, which means that the natural forces were often represented by a combination of gods, such as Atum-Ra or Khepri-Ra. The fact that the frog goddess Heket and Khepri symbolised transformation demonstrates that the Egyptians made use of a multiplicity of approaches to symbolically explain the working of the universe. They believed that specific energies, such as that of transformation, inhabited several beings. This enabled them to choose from a variety of symbols to represent these energies and to mythically explain the origins of the universe. For them, the analysis of empirical observations of nature was the foundation of the mythical explanations that were believed to sprout from a higher order of consciousness (Hart 1990). The Egyptians believed that the symbolic understanding of the natural energies was more important than the understanding of the empirically observable world. This does not imply, however, that the Egyptians were not capable of thinking logically nor that this preference for a mythological explanation for the existence of the universe was related to the Egyptian concept of mind. Instead, it was the result of a cultural orientation that placed mind over matter and believed that the heart was the centre of the soul.

The effect of this cultural orientation was that the Egyptians, who were well aware of the working of the human nervous system, used rational methods to cure their patients (e.g. by treating a nervous condition with herbs), but also invoked the appropriate gods, such as Chonsoe - the god of medicine. The combination of *logos* and *mythos* in the treatment of illnesses was, moreover, also common in the Greek society of the fifth century. After the aforementioned Hippocrates, the father of medicine, discovered that not the heart but the brain was the central organ of the human body, many neurological diseases - such as epilepsy - were no longer believed to be a punishment inflicted by the gods. Yet, Hippocratic physicians were not offended if their patients wanted to pray and were sometimes encouraged to invoke their gods. In the Hippocratic treatise ‘On Regimen,’ one can read that prayer is good, but while calling on their gods for help and comfort, humans should also treat each other (Hippocrates [460BCE-380BCE]). Because the Hippocratic physicians were influenced by the pre-Socratic vegetarian Pythagoras, these doctors were not allowed to dissect any human or an animal (Finger 2005). As a result, they knew very little about anatomy and physiology and focussed their treatment on patient care and

prognosis rather than diagnosis. A French doctor, therefore, called the Hippocratic treatment ‘a meditation upon death’ (Jones 1868). In the third century BCE, for the dissection of bodies for medical purposes, Greek doctors went on an internship to Alexandria in Greek-ruled Ptolemaic Egypt. In Alexandria, physicians conducted ground-breaking investigations into internal human anatomy by dissecting human corpses. Under the reign of Ptolemy (323-30 BCE), the medical school at Alexandria grew quickly to become the medical centre of the Hellenic Age. The medical research that took place in Alexandria in this century, which built upon the knowledge of the ancient Egyptians of mummification and that of the Hippocratic physicians, was a unique event in the history of medicine and the Ancient World. In the West, dissection remained prohibited until the Renaissance and, consequently, anatomists were not allowed to practice on human corpses. This prohibition obstructed anatomic research until humans became the central focus of attention in the universe (Faulkner 2015).

7. *Mythos* and *Logos*

In the previous paragraphs, we have seen that many of the Egyptian myths focused on the maintenance of the balance between the death and life force in nature (the macrocosm) and in the individual (the microcosm). Several of the struggles between the gods, such as those between Seth and Osiris, and Seth and Osiris’ son Horus were not only fights for the throne of Upper and Nether Egypt but also symbolical contests between light and darkness, morally better and worse behaviour. The boat journey of the Sun-god Ra through the Sky during the day and the Netherworld at night not only symbolised the daily reincarnation of the sun but the reincarnation of all life on earth. The individual journey of the deceased person’s *ba* through the Netherworld clarified the connection between microcosm and macrocosm. The Sun-god Ra and the *ba* of a righteous deceased person made the same journey through the Netherworld as part of the eternal cycle of life. Both the sun and an individual person would be reborn and be part of the energy of the Sun-god Ra, the life force and light of the universe. The self-reflexivity of a person in this universe was his or her conscious knowledge of being part of the eternal circle of life, which included the ancestral spirits (the living-dead) in the Netherworld located in the reed beds of Egypt (Allen 2003). The historical consciousness of that person was a consciousness of the eternal cycle of historical events of the rise and fall of the Egyptian civilisation and the birth and rebirth of the pharaohs and their subjects (the Egyptians created lists of pharaohs and annals of individual reign. All pharaohs were considered to be the reincarnation of the first pharaoh-god, the Jesus-like Horus, whose birthday was celebrated each year) (Quirke 2014). The Egyptians were raised with a cyclical time consciousness (*neheh*) and the concomitant circular perception of individual and social history understood as a series of events. In this consciousness, self-reflexivity is not the result of a linear process but of the awareness of the circulation of natural energies including those of the individual. Next to *neheh*, the Egyptians were also aware of linear time (*djet*) that they associated with the time of the land (Traunecker 2001). Cyclical thinking, which was the dominant way of thinking among the Egyptians, is not illogical but derives from multiple starting points. It allows thoughts to flow, to brainstorm about a topic in attempts to arrive at a solution in the process. Non-linear or right hemisphere thinking by the brain increases possible outcomes and enables the mind to zoom in and out to see details or the bigger picture there were necessary. It is as useful as linear thinking in thought processes and does not imply a lack of development of the *logos* but of an alternative way of dealing with challenges and dilemma’s (Joseph 2012). As demonstrated before in this article, by no means did the right hemisphere dominance prevent the ancient Egyptians from being inventive in the fields of e.g. written language, mathematics, astronomy, geometry and surgery and above all morality.

Morality and the search for balance between better and worse forces in nature and mankind were at the heart of ancient Egyptian society. The ancient Egyptians

understood that good and evil are not one another's opposites but energies on a spectrum and that eventually no harmony can be reached in (human) nature without an underlying strife between the feminine and the masculine, the light and dark natural forces (Karenga 2004). The myth of the strife between Seth and Osiris and Seth and Horus were necessary for the Egyptian society to remain healthy and harmonious. Despite all of Seth's dark energies, he was also venerated and beloved by the Sun-god Ra, who often supported him in his fights against Osiris and Horus (Littleton and Fleming 2004).

Morality, which focuses on the question of what is good, is also an important field in Western philosophy. Ideas similar to those of the ancient Egyptians about harmony after inner (moral) strife can be found in the works of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (540 BCE) and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) (Nietzche 1995 [first published 1871]). Moral philosophical thoughts cannot be realised without rational thoughts. And yet, in most twenty-first-century textbooks, it is not the Egyptians but the Greek pre-Socratics, who are considered to be the first proto-rational or philosophical 'Western' thinkers. However, most of the first pre-Socratics (Thales, Anaximenes and Anaximander from Miletus; part of a Greek colony in Asia Minor) were not concerned with morality and reflecting on what is right on a social and individual level. Instead, they asked themselves what elements the world is made of and what the origins of the universe are. They were, therefore, recognised as (proto) natural scientists (the *physikoi*). What these pre-Socratics had in common was the notion that they themselves were capable of gaining knowledge of (human) nature and that knowledge was not channelled to them by the gods. This point of departure distinguishes the pre-Socratics from earlier renowned Greeks, who contributed to literary studies, such as Hesiod. This poet felt that his main poetic work, the Theogony, was a gift of the gods. The ancient Greeks were, however, not unique, in their notion that not all knowledge had a divine origin. In fact, the source of the aphorism 'know thyself', which could be found in the temple of the Greek oracle of Delphi was the Internal Temple of Luxor. One this temple wall, one could find the aphorism: 'Man, know thyself, and you are going to know the gods' (Schwaller de Lubicz and Lamy 1978). This aphorism reveals that some Egyptian priests believed that the source of human knowledge was mankind itself. Another similarity between the ancient Greeks and the Egyptians is that one of the creation myths shows the connection between the gods and the elements of nature. According to the Egyptian Theogony of Heliopolis, the ancestor-gods of Isis, Seth and Osiris are natural elements. The god Nu, for instance, represents the element water, Shu stands for air, Tefnut for moisture, Geb for the earth, and Nut for the sky (Hart 1990). This Theogony reveals that equal to contemporary physicians, the Egyptians were searching for a so-called 'theory of everything'; a hypothetical theory that fully explains and links together all physical aspects of the universe.

The pre-Socratics are also considered to be the first philosophers, the earliest proto-logical thinkers because they disbelieved or were critical about the belief in gods. Xenophanes of Colophon (c.570-475 BCE), for instance, was convinced that men anthropomorphized the gods, which is why 'Ethiopians say their gods are snub-nosed and black, Thracians that theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired' (Watterson 2013). The classicist Whitmarsh is convinced, though, that atheism is a characteristic of every (ancient) culture. Atheism is thus not a distinctive feature of ancient Greek culture, but Greek society was, in most cases, exceptionally tolerant towards atheists (Whitmarsh 2015). Greek society brought forth great philosophers and proto-scientists, such as the pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, the astronomer Ptolemaeus and the physician Hippocrates. Nevertheless, most Greeks were convinced that the immortal gods had supernatural powers and could interfere with the lives of the mortals. Apollo was, for instance, considered to be empowered with the gift of predicting the future. The Greeks believed that the wisdom of this god was channelled to the priestess (Pythia) of the Oracle of Delphi. Similarly, in the New Kingdom, the Egyptians attributed soothsaying powers to Seth, Isis and other deities and the ancient Egyptians could visit their oracles

to seek advice (Shafer, Baines et al. 1991). Apollo's image was mixed with that of the Sun-god Helios and equal to the Egyptian Sun-god Ra, he travelled through the air in a vehicle (either a boat or a solar car) to enable the sun to shine during the day. Both Greek and Egyptian gods could turn themselves into an animal and use its energies to their benefit. According to the Book of the Dead (Chapter 27), the local goddess Henen-Su, for instance, turned herself into a cat. She did so in order to please the Sun-god Ra and to kill the malevolent serpent spirit Apophis (or Apep) that fought with Ra and aimed to destroy his solar boat each night thereby threatening the rebirth of the sun the following day. Henen-Su's heroic deed was also carried out by the ancient Greek god Apollo, who slew the great dragon Python and by the Medieval dragon slayer Saint George (Remler 2010, McCullough 2013).

In summary, the ancient Egyptians and the ancient Greeks were combined convergent with divergent thinking, which resulted in the creation of myths and rational thoughts. Despite the proto-scientific discoveries of these ancient people, they were predominantly right brain hemisphere oriented. As discussed in this article, the myths, philosophies and the discoveries of the ancient Greeks about the origin and working of the natural world were in line with those of the sage priests of ancient Egypt of whom they borrowed ideas and on whose shoulder they stood to make their own contributions to both the humanities and the natural sciences.

Figure 6: The local goddess Henen-Su turned herself into a cat to kill the malevolent serpent spirit Apophis (or Apep) (Remler 2010).

Figure 7: An oil painting of the French Rococo Painter Ernemond-Alexandre Petitot (1727-1801). Https://www.1st-art-gallery.com/Ennemond-Alexandre-Petitot/Ennemond-Alexandre-Petitot-oil-paintings.html.

Figure 8: Saint George and the Dragon Greek, Ionian Islands School Mid-17th century Tempera and gold on gesso and wood. The Temple Gallery, London.

Conclusion

This article aims to contribute to the understanding of the birth of Western philosophy (the *logos*). The author argues that rational thinking and philosophy are not a Greek invention. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, were perfectly able to think logically, which resulted in great discoveries in the fields of written language, mathematics, astronomy, surgery and medicine. The fact that the ancient Egyptians left us hieroglyphs with astonishing mythological figures and parts of stories, such as the myth of Osiris, does not reduce their capacity for rational thinking. Although the ancient Egyptians were predominantly right brain hemisphere oriented, they combined convergent and divergent thinking and valued both myths and logic. The article stresses that the ancient Greeks, including the pre-Socratics and Plato, were not so different from their Egyptian predecessors, whose rich and advanced culture they admired and from which they borrowed elements in the fields of both mythology and proto-scientific thinking. The article dismisses the stage theories of consciousness that stress that logical thinking developed itself at the cost of mythological thinking and that the ancient Egyptians were primitive minded people incapable of producing rational thoughts. The author demonstrates that the multiple soul theory of the ancient Egyptians was shared by the pre-Socratics and that this theory hindered neither of them in thinking logically. The self-reflexivity of the soul, which enables both mythological and logical thinking, is hardly related to singularity or multiplicity of soul-belief in antiquity. In fact, life force does not suppress the death force of one or multiple souls. Instead, the intuitive knowledge that is felt to be channelled to a person by the gods, regardless of his or her number of souls, link that person to a collective culture consisting of stories, myths and symbols. This process enables him or her to harmonise the opposing forces, the life and death force, within oneself. By doing so, it also makes the person a better thinker freed from the displacements of the unconsciousness by the rational soul. The history of the ancient Greeks and Egyptians demonstrates that (their) creations and discoveries are the results of the harmonious interactions between the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere of the brain. This is an important conclusion since our contemporary world is dominated by computers and other technology that enforces cognitive thinking, which can lead to feelings of depression and alienation. The scientific history of mankind is often described as a detachment process of human beings of their gods. The discovery of the origin and working of human nature enabled them to free themselves in the belief of gods and to celebrate rationality. Creativity was thereby most often depicted as something unrelated to human discoveries, imagination was perceived as a waste product of the mind. However, it is the imagination, the ability to think about the future, to create stories, myths and to understand symbols that keep our mind healthy, connected to others and socially engaged. The twenty-first century is heralded as the age of creativity, an era in which we will increasingly have to compete against computers by using our imagination and our creative mind. Of all the things that I learnt from professor Wim van Binsbergen the most valuable one is to use my creativity in my pursuit to wisdom. Van Binsbergen's gift, Norman O. Brown's 'Life against Death', has certainly helped me to balance the opposing souls inside myself. This article being the creative result.

8. Literature

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