

# The Four Ethers and the Threefold Commonwealth

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## *The Four Ethers*

The Four Ethers—Warmth, Light, Sound, Magnetism—are the four "formative forces" which for MMG constitute the physical world. The Anthroposophist Guenther Wachsmuth's "Die ätherischen Bildekräfte in Kosmos, Erde und Mensch" (1923/24, 1926/27; English translation "Ethereic Formative Forces in Cosmos, Earth, and Man," 1932) is sometimes cited as a source for her ideas, though in MoA she only acknowledges ancient Greek science.

The Four Ethers serve as a cosmology since all matter, including the solar system and the Earth, moves from warmth, through light and sound, to magnetism. Certain ethers predominate in certain geographical areas: Light in India, Sound in the Southern Hemisphere and the Mississippi Valley, and Magnetism in the Northern Hemisphere. The Four Ethers thus offer an explanation of the processes of the physical world, and the smashing of the atom, which revealed the world to be made of ether-like "forces," gave MMG hope that this theory would be more widely recognized and accepted.

The theory is never systematically explained in MoA though it is frequently referred to (e.g., **I.198-199**, **II.522**, **III.441-442**, **IV.370** ff). Unfortunately, MMG's references to the system are not always consistent: ethers may have different properties in different passages. The following highly provisional, diagram (based in part on **III.416**) attempts to gather together the properties most frequently associated with each ether in MoA.

<i>ether</i>	<i>creation / manifestation</i>	<i>color</i>	<i>geometric form</i>	<i>planet</i>	<i>"fairy" (?)</i>
warm(th)	fire, heat	red	sphere, circle	Saturn	(fire) fairies (?)
light	gas, air	yellow	triangle	Sun	sylyphs (?)
sound (chemical)	water, liquid	blue	crescent, wave	Moon	undines (?)
magnetism life	solid(ity), earth	lilac	polygon: rectangle, cube	Earth	gnomes (?)

MMG also frequently mentions "fairies," the spirits which "build the vegetable kingdom" (**IV.247**). Gnomes dissolve the rocks for plant rootlets; Undines build up stems and leaves and carry up the sap; Sylphs form and paint the flowers; Fire Fairies feed and form the seeds and fruit. (**IV.370** ff) MMG claims to have actually seen these beings. Their habitats (e.g., gnomes - earth; undines - waterfalls; etc.) seem to have close affinities with the elemental Four Ethers.

## *The Threefold Commonwealth*

According to MMG, ". . . a human community has three functions to fulfill and so requires three complete community organs to fulfill them, one for equity, one for liberty and one for mutuality, a political, an ability & an economic organ each consisting of the total citizenry." (IV.326) The Threefold Commonwealth—the Abilities, Economic, and Political "organs"—represents for MMG the structures by which society should be organized to allow individuals to realize their potential. It is likely that these ideas are based on Anthroposophical (or Theosophical) thought, perhaps even on a book by Rudolf Steiner, "Die Kernpunkte der sozialen Frage . . ." (1919/20; variously translated in the 1920s as "The Threefold Commonwealth," "The Threefold State," "The Triorganic Social Organism"). Large sections of many of the essays in MoA are devoted to the concept, though the emphasis is on the organs' functions rather than on their structure. The most detailed overview is provided by MMG in two diagrams (II.241, IV.194). As with the Four Ethers, the details of the system sometimes vary from passage to passage. The conjectural diagram below attempts to offer one possible version of the system.

<i>organ(ization)/ realm</i>	<i>associated concepts</i>	<i>additional associations</i>	<i>bodily relations</i>	<i>symbol(s)</i>
abilities (social) ..... hierarchical	liberty, capacities, culture	social; freedom; ability, imagination, education; consciousness	head/brain/mind spirit (thinking?)	5-pointed star Holy Spirit
economic ..... planned	mutuality, fraternity, efficiency	mutuality, co-operation	body/stomach (willing?)	infinity symbol God the Father
political ..... democratic	equity, equality, security, moral(ity)	rights; police / military	heart/soul (feeling?)	heart image Christ

MMG is most emphatic on one particular point: the complete separation of the political and economic organs. A metaphor she frequently uses in this regard is that of a policeman (the political organ) regulating vehicular traffic (presumably the economic organ). She writes:

*Just as the traffic policeman does not have to work out the problems of motor car construction and sale, nor of trucks, nor does he have to equalize speed and power of the various types of transportation in order to maintain equity but has only to stand and see to it that all forms of transportation, whatever their power, vehicular or pedestrian, have equal opportunity to cross the streets, even if one of them be a cripple and so exceptionally slow. So with its task understood government could maintain equity without undertaking or managing business. (III.433)*

In MoA the Threefold Commonwealth is an ideal which serves as a critique of contemporary society. With the establishment of the United Nations, which was developing organizational structures similar to the Threefold Commonwealth, MMG saw signs that this system of governance would be more widely adopted.