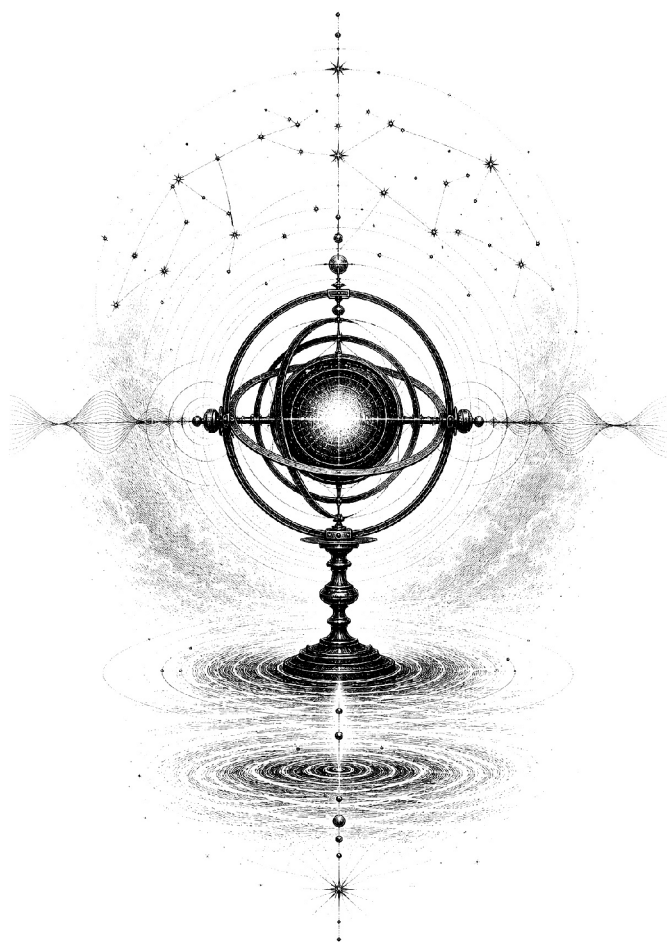


CHAPTER III

THE REALM OF MUSIC

THE PRINCIPLE OF VIBRATION



“Nothing rests; everything moves; everything vibrates.”

– *The Kybalion*

The Music of the Ainur – an editorial retelling of the passage cited in the Polish edition, not a quotation from Tolkien’s English text.

Before the world, there is Eru, called Ilúvatar in Arda. From his thought come the Ainur, the Holy Ones. He gives them musical themes, and they sing before him. At first, each understands only the part of his thought from which that being arose. Understanding the others takes time. By listening, they gradually learn to join their voices in a richer harmony.

Then Ilúvatar gathers them and reveals a theme greater than any they have yet encountered. He invites them to develop it together, drawing on the creative fire he has given them and contributing ideas of their own. He will listen as their separate gifts bring its beauty into song.

Their voices become an immense music: strings and winds, organs and choirs, melodies crossing and changing, rising and descending beyond the reach of hearing. It fills their dwelling and passes beyond it into the Void. What had been empty now resounds.

But Melkor wants a larger part in the work. He introduces ideas that depart from Ilúvatar’s theme, seeking to magnify his own power and splendor. Discord enters the music.

Later, Ilúvatar allows the Ainur to see what they have sung. Before them appears a world, suspended in the Void, unfolding its history as they watch. Their contributions have become part of its life. Even

Melkor's hidden inventions belong to a whole he could neither foresee nor command: his designs cannot stand outside the greater work.¹

– After J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*,
“Ainulindalë”

*An introductory reflection on the supplied passage
by Julio Cortázar.*

Cortázar finds an invitation to metaphysics in an ordinary bus journey: the conductor urges passengers to move farther into the vehicle and make use of the room ahead. What if thought could answer the same invitation? A small movement might open a perspective we could not see while standing still.

His playful dialogue turns toward a creation story attributed to the Māori, imagining the world emerging through many stages rather than appearing all at once. We need not treat the literary account as an authoritative account of a tradition to recognize its suggestive image: becoming as a journey. The invitation to move forward will accompany us as we consider the changing world and our brief passage through it.²

Unseen harmony is stronger than visible harmony.

– Heraclitus, working translation of the Polish
wording³

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EVERYTHING IS PLAYING

In this third chapter, we will travel to the Realm of Music, following the third Hermetic principle: the Principle of Vibration. This journey will engage our senses more directly than the previous two. It will ask us to use our imagination and occasionally set the

book aside to listen closely, perhaps putting on a recording. Its main attraction will be an excursion into one of physics' most extraordinary research programs: string theory, which renewed hopes for a unified account of nature, sometimes grandly called a Theory of Everything. We are entering a sea of change and transformation, where we may repeatedly find ourselves uncomfortably close to Big Questions—and equally Big Answers.⁴

In the Realm of Music, everything seems to move, tremble, and vibrate. Occasionally we will need to switch to slow motion to take a closer look at this shimmering world. Listening to ourselves and to what surrounds us, we will look for expressions of the third Hermetic principle:

“Nothing rests; everything moves; everything vibrates.”

In this book's arrangement, Vibration is the last of the three principles we first approach as descriptions of the universe. *The Kybalion* uses it to connect material, mental, and spiritual existence. Its language invites us to picture everything—from subatomic particles to nebulae, from inanimate matter to conscious beings—as different expressions of movement. Physics also gives oscillations and waves a central place, but it does not establish that everything is one substance called “pure energy,” vibrating on a single scale.

In the Hermetic picture, matter occupies the lower end of a scale and spirit the higher. Here “higher” and “lower” express a spiritual hierarchy. They are not measured frequencies: a faster physical oscillation is not inherently wiser, healthier, or more virtuous than a slower one.

The first two Hermetic principles present the universe as the work of a Primordial Thought reflected both above and below. Within that philosophical picture, the vibrations described by the third principle should belong together, forming something like a cosmic harmony: the universal symphony associated with the Pythagorean “music of the spheres,” discussed in Chapter II. During our journey, we will seek traces of this divine harmony within ourselves and in our surroundings, among the stars and under the microscope, in science and myth, in everyday experience, and, of course, in art.

For if the harmony of the spheres exists in this sense, the Universal Mind must be a great artist.

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I hope we will hear something of that extraordinary cosmic music along the way. In the Pythagorean tradition, its very constancy helps explain why we do not ordinarily notice it: what has always accompanied us offers no contrasting silence. As philosophy, this is an invitation to attend to what habit conceals. It is not a scientific account of an audible celestial orchestra. To explore the connections it suggests, we will need inward attention, our other senses, modern instruments, and—as always—physics and mathematics.

Let us begin with something basic: getting ready to listen.

Tuning in to ourselves, and to the universe.

For some, that will come easily; for others, it will take practice. This is also a way of approaching freedom: we can try to hear the orchestra around us and decide what we wish to contribute to it.

First, let us try to distinguish sound from what is not sound.

In our experience, a sound often seems to emerge from silence.