

Remote Cosmologies of Control: An Investigative Analysis of the Archon–Prison-Planet Narrative in Gnostic, Esoteric, Psychological, and Cultural Contexts

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ABSTRACT

The idea that Earth functions as a “prison planet” governed by hostile or parasitic intelligences, often framed in contemporary esotericism as Archons harvesting human emotional energy (“loosh”) through cycles of reincarnation, has become increasingly prominent in modern metaphysical and digital spiritual cultures. This article offers an academic, investigative analysis of this worldview, grounding it in the classical Gnostic concept of Archontic rulers, exploring its development through Theosophy, occultism, and New Age cosmologies, and situating it within current psychological, sociological, and cultural contexts. Drawing on scholarship in comparative religion, depth psychology, critical theory, and cultural semiotics, the article suggests that the prison-planet narrative functions not as a literal cosmology but as a powerful cultural metaphor for experiences of alienation, suffering, emotional extraction, and perceived systemic control. The persistence of Archontic themes reflects enduring human concerns about autonomy, embodiment, authority, and existential purpose, revealing a resonant symbolic system through which individuals interpret power, suffering, and the structure of reality.

Keywords: Gnosticism; Archons; cosmology; esotericism; reincarnation; cultural theory; depth psychology; alienation.

INTRODUCTION

The belief that humans live within a controlled or limited cosmological system, often described in modern esoteric circles as a “prison planet,” has gained renewed interest in recent decades. It appears across online occult forums, digital spirituality, ufology, simulationist philosophies, and conspiracy-influenced subcultures. Despite their differences, these groups agree that human consciousness is subject to external forces imposed by nonhuman intelligences—frequently called Archons—conceived as transdimensional, metaphysical, or hypermaterial entities that constrain autonomy, distort perception, influence reincarnation, or drain emotional energy (“loosh”) as noted by Robert Monroe (1971, 1985, 1994).

Although such claims remain outside mainstream scientific cosmology, they draw from a long tradition of mythological, philosophical, and psychological motifs dating back to classical Gnostic cosmologies, where the cosmos appears as a realm that obscures, traps, or diminishes the divine spark within humanity (Jonas 1963; Pagels 1979; King 2005; Layton 1987). The re-emergence of these motifs in late modernity reflects what scholars describe as the gnosticisation of contemporary spirituality—a renewed focus on cosmologies of concealment, captivity, and transcendent liberation within post-secular culture (Hanegraaff 2012; Strube and Aspren 2021).

This article undertakes a scholarly and investigative examination of the Archon–prison-planet narrative. It aims to: (1) trace the origins of Archontic beings in ancient Gnostic traditions such as *The Apocryphon of John* and *The Hypostasis of the Archons*; (2) analyse their reinterpretation within modern esoteric and occult systems including Theosophy, Anthroposophy, New Age metaphysics, and ufological religions; (3) examine psychological and archetypal logics of parasitic entities within depth psychology and trauma theory; (4) situate the prison-planet worldview within sociological and cultural frameworks of alienation, domination, and emotional extraction; and (5) compare the narrative with global cosmological traditions involving rebirth, cosmic

imprisonment, and hierarchical governance. The aim is not to adjudicate the empirical reality of Archons or reincarnational mechanisms, but to understand why such frameworks persist and resonate. Research in religious studies, cultural psychology, and anthropology suggests that esoteric narratives often function as symbolic structures that express lived experience, existential tension, and socio-political critique (Eliade 1964; Geertz 1973; Campbell 1949; Taylor 2007). Scholars of esotericism similarly argue that alternative cosmologies encode responses to crises of meaning, authority, and identity in late modern societies (Faivre 1994; Hanegraaff 2012; Asprem and Taves 2023). Viewed through this lens, the Archon–prison-planet narrative operates as a modern myth of control and agency. It offers a symbolic framework through which individuals articulate experiences of entrapment and exploitation within increasingly complex systems—technological, economic, psychological, or metaphysical. By examining the narrative in this way, the article positions Archonic cosmology not as fringe speculation but as a culturally rooted artefact that concentrates broader anxieties about power, selfhood, suffering, and the nature of reality.

Classical Gnostic Origins of the Archon Concept

The term Archon originates from the cosmology of classical Gnosticism, a varied religious movement that emerged in the first centuries CE and gained attention with the 1945 discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in Upper Egypt (Robinson 1978; Layton 1987; Meyer 2007). These Coptic texts, which preserve earlier Greek originals, depict a mythological universe where the visible cosmos stems from flawed or ignorant cosmic rulers. In *The Apocryphon of John*, *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, and *On the Origin of the World*, Archons are shown as cosmic administrators or gatekeepers under the authority of the Demiurge, a lesser and arrogant creator figure who constructs the material world in metaphysical error (King 2005; Pagels 1979; Pearson 1990).

Across Gnostic schools such as the Sethians and Valentinians (Jonas 1963; Williams 1996; Turner 2001), several themes recur:

- The material world is a realm of confinement or illusion, sometimes described as a cosmic “prison.”
- Human souls originate in a higher, non-physical pleromatic realm but have fallen into body-bound existence through accident, ignorance, or entrapment.
- Archons exercise authority through deception and coercion, policing the cosmos and hindering ascent to the divine source.
- Liberation occurs through *gnosis*—transformative knowledge of one’s divine origin and transcendence of the Demiurge’s world.

Archonic power in Gnosticism is both existential and cosmological. Archons influence perception, create illusion, uphold cosmic law, and entrap souls through fear and ignorance (Pagels 1979; Rudolph 1987). In some texts, they are associated with planetary spheres or astral rulers who hinder the soul’s ascent, reflecting Hellenistic astral religion and Jewish apocalyptic traditions (Böhlig and van Oyen 1978; Tardieu 1984). In others, they are depicted as deformed emanations of the Demiurge, embodying disorder on psychological and cosmic levels (Meyer 2007; Williams 1996).

Gnostic cosmology is therefore inherently anti-authoritarian, rejecting the legitimacy of earthly and cosmic rulers by portraying authority as rooted in ignorance rather than wisdom or goodness (Jonas 1963; Smith 2003; King 2020). The cosmos is a flawed construct maintained by beings who misunderstand or oppose the higher divine order. This perspective resonates with modern “prison-planet” theories, which similarly depict the world as governed by deceptive or extractive powers, whether metaphysical, ideological, or technological.

Gnostic texts do not treat Archons as purely metaphorical abstractions. Their ontological status varies from literal cosmic beings to symbolic representations of ignorance or bondage, but they consistently operate on mythic, psychological, and cosmological levels (Mack 1995; Brakke 2010; Meyer 2007). They hold distinct roles within a structured, yet flawed, cosmic system and thereby encode both metaphysical speculation and a critique of power and domination.

Modern esoteric reinterpretations often select elements from these sources, blending them with Theosophical, Hermetic, New Age, or ufological frameworks. Yet, they maintain the core Gnostic idea of cosmic rulers restricting human freedom, whether depicted as astral intelligences, interdimensional beings, psychological

complexes, or systemic forces within technological societies. The lasting appeal of the Archon motif lies in its ability to express experiences of constraint, control, and the longing for spiritual or existential liberation.

Modern Esoteric and New Religious Reinterpretations

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Archon motif was reinterpreted within Western esotericism, occult revivals, and emerging new religious movements. Even where Gnostic language was absent, Gnostic structures—such as cosmic hierarchies, spiritual antagonists, and layered realities—were expressed in new idioms.

Helena P. Blavatsky's Theosophy introduced a cosmology of “planetary spirits,” “root races,” and hierarchies of higher intelligences guiding evolution (Blavatsky 1888; Godwin 1994; Hammer 2001). While avoiding explicit Gnostic terminology, Theosophy reshaped ancient esoteric and Gnostic motifs, especially dualistic struggles between enlightened adepts and deceptive “lower forces” (Hanegraaff 1996; Goodrick-Clarke 2008).

Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy similarly depicted a universe populated by spiritual beings whose interactions influence human destiny. His account of Ahrimanic and Luciferic forces, which distort development by promoting materialism and confusion, echoes Gnostic conflict between human seekers and metaphysical rulers (Steiner 1913, 1925; Lindenberg 1992; Welburn 1997). Human spiritual evolution unfolds within a contested cosmology resembling Archonic obstruction.

By the mid-20th century, Gnostic motifs merged with UFO metaphysics. Scholars such as Partridge (2003, 2005) and Dyrendal (2016) show how extraterrestrial contact stories adopted Gnostic structures, depicting humanity as overseen or manipulated by technologically advanced or hyperdimensional beings. Contactees like George Adamski, Orfeo Angelucci, and Whitley Strieber described non-human intelligences monitoring or influencing human consciousness (Partridge 2003; Lewis 1995; Strieber 1987), acting as cosmic overseers with unclear motives. Robert Monroe's accounts in *Journeys Out of the Body** (1971), *Far Journeys** (1985), and *Ultimate Journey** (1994) popularised the idea of “loosh,” an energy generated by intense human emotion and supposedly harvested by non-physical beings. His experiential stories greatly influenced New Age cosmology and digital esotericism (Hanegraaff 2012; Aspren 2023), reinterpreting Gnostic themes of entrapment and predation in energetic terms. Later figures such as Carlos Castaneda (1976), John Keel (1970), and David Icke (1999) further propagated images of “hyperdimensional predators” and “energy-feeding entities.” Castaneda's eagle that consumes awareness and Keel's “ultraterrestrials” resemble Archontic rulers in their deceptive and exploitative roles. Scholars note that these frameworks reinterpret spiritual practice and psychic warfare through a Gnostic lens, viewing reincarnation and spiritual life as systems of containment, forgetfulness, or manipulation. In the 21st century, these streams converge in online esoteric and conspiracy-spiritual spaces. Digital platforms foster “hybridised esotericism” (Aspren and Dyrendal 2015; Granholm 2014), where Gnostic, ufological, occult, cybernetic, and simulationist motifs merge into prison-planet cosmologies.

Common claims include:

- A controlling metaphysical authority—Archons, AIs, extraterrestrials, or interdimensional entities—manipulates human perception.
- Human emotional energy is extracted through trauma, conflict, and repeated incarnations.
- Consciousness is trapped via false memories, soul-recycling mechanisms, or illusory afterlife constructs.
- Liberation arises through gnosis, critical awakening, or metaphysical insight, echoing classical Gnostic soteriology.

Researchers of digital religion argue that such narratives thrive in algorithmically curated media ecosystems that amplify esoteric content and recombine it into new mythic forms (Campbell 2010; Possamai and Turner 2021). Their fusion with simulation theory and surveillance anxieties reflects broader postmodern concerns about agency, authority, and ontological security (Bauman 2000; Lyotard 1979; Zuboff 2019).

Across Theosophy, occultism, UFO religions, New Age spirituality, and digital esotericism, the Archon becomes a versatile symbol of external control and epistemic deception, repeatedly adapted to new historical conditions while preserving its core function as a mythic figure of domination and resistance.

Psychological and Archetypal Dimensions

Depth psychology interprets Archonic mythologies as expressions of psychic dynamics rather than literal cosmology. Carl Gustav Jung viewed mythic beings as archetypal projections of the collective unconscious (Jung 1959, 1968). Oppressive or parasitic entities symbolise aspects of the shadow, the disowned or repressed parts of the psyche—and encounters with them dramatise internal conflicts, internalised authority, or unresolved trauma. Contemporary trauma theory extends this view. Judith Herman (1992) and Bessel van der Kolk (2014) describe how complex trauma can make suffering feel invasive and external. Trauma imprints create enduring patterns—hypervigilance, dissociation, emotional looping, that are experienced as something happening to the person. The idea of “loosh harvesting” can thus be read as a metaphor for emotional extraction in dysfunctional relationships or coercive systems: conflict and fear generate the “fuel” that sustains maladaptive patterns.

Within this framework, Archons correspond to:

- internalised authoritarian voices, akin to Freud’s superego (Freud 1930) or Fromm’s accounts of internalised domination (Fromm 1941);
- repetition compulsion, where unresolved trauma generates cycles of self-defeating behaviour resembling reincarnational loops (Freud 1920; Caruth 1996);
- emotional exploitation, as in Hochschild’s analysis of emotional labour and Illouz’s work on commodified feeling (Hochschild 1983; Illouz 2007);
- experiences of psychic parasitism and depletion in abusive environments (Kirmayer 2007; McWilliams 2011).

Myth theorists such as James Hillman (1975) and Joseph Campbell (1949) emphasise that myths externalise psychological states. The “prison planet” becomes a concise symbol for existential entrapment, rigid family conditioning, and oppressive institutions, while loosh refers to burnout, co-dependency, and affective exhaustion. In this reading, Archons are multifaceted symbols for systems of control operating both externally—through social hierarchies, institutions, and exploitative relationships—and internally, through trauma, conditioned responses, and inherited psychic structures. Their significance lies less in metaphysical claims than in their capacity to illuminate psychological suffering and the desire for integration and freedom.

Sociological and Cultural Dynamics

Sociologically, the prison-planet narrative arises from experiences of alienation and diminishing agency within late-modern social structures. Global economic, technological, and political systems often seem opaque and unaccountable, prompting individuals to interpret them as quasi-intentional forces. Mythic frameworks such as the Archon narrative translate abstract structural pressures into personalised cosmological imagery.

Michel Foucault’s analyses of disciplinary and biopolitical power demonstrate how modern institutions regulate bodies and behaviours (Foucault 1977, 1978). Recent critics highlight automated decision-making, algorithmic governance, and the commodification of everyday life. Zuboff (2019) describes surveillance capitalism, where constant monitoring and behavioural prediction exert ongoing psychological pressure.

Concurrently, scholars observe declining trust in institutions and widespread political disillusionment. Bauman (2000) characterises contemporary life as “liquid,” marked by instability and fragile social bonds. Giddens (1991) and Taylor (2007) associate late modernity with crises of meaning driven by acceleration, pluralism, and weakened traditional frameworks. Within this context, the metaphor of loosh resonates with lived experiences of:

- emotional exhaustion from precarious labour and performance demands;
- economic insecurity and the extraction of labour value;
- information overload and the cognitive strain of constant connectivity;
- rising inequality that makes one’s efforts feel captured by distant elites;
- social atomisation and isolation;
- digitally mediated outrage cycles that monetise attention (Crary 2013; Illouz 2007; Hochschild 1983).

“Loosh harvesting” thus symbolises affective exploitation: the draining of emotional energy, attention, and vitality by social systems. Cultural theorists note that mythic narratives often function as critiques of ideology (Eagleton 1991; Žižek 1989). Myth offers emotionally resonant images of power that abstract sociological language lacks. The Archon becomes a figure for structural domination, encapsulating experiences of exploitation and opacity in late-modern contexts. The narrative’s popularity reflects its capacity to articulate diffuse discontent within a vivid cosmological framework.

Comparative Mythology and Global Cosmological Parallels

The Archon–prison–planet motif echoes across various cosmological traditions that depict existence as limited, cyclical, or governed by higher powers. These similarities suggest that ideas of cosmic imprisonment and metaphysical testing are common archetypes rather than marginal anomalies.

In Buddhist cosmology, the doctrine of *samsara* describes a cyclical process of rebirth characterised by suffering and dissatisfaction. Rahula (1959) emphasises that *samsara* is both a metaphysical and experiential account of how beings become trapped by craving and ignorance. Liberation (*nirvana*) through insight closely mirrors the Gnostic emphasis on *gnosis*. The Upanishadic tradition presents the world as veiled by *maya*, an illusion concealing the true unity of consciousness (Radhakrishnan 1957). Ignorance (*avidya*) sustains bondage; liberation comes through recognising the Self (*Atman*) beyond phenomena. Structurally, this parallels Gnostic accounts of imprisonment in a false order and liberation through knowledge.

Zoroastrian dualism between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) offers another model of cosmic conflict. Angra Mainyu embodies deceit and corruption, leading the world into suffering. Humanity’s task is to align with truth (*asha*), reflecting Gnostic resistance to Archonic ignorance (Boyce 2001). Ancient Egyptian ideas of the Duat depict an underworld managed by gatekeepers and judges who test the soul after death

(Hornung 1999). These figures both maintain order and limit ascent, resembling Archons as astral gatekeepers. The Tibetan Buddhist Bardo describes an intermediate state where consciousness encounters deities and visions that can either liberate or imprison it (Fremantle and Trungpa 1975). This focus on deceptive or overwhelming post-mortem experiences parallels Gnostic routes of psychic and cosmic entrapment.

In Platonic philosophy, particularly in the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge creates an imperfect, imitative cosmos (Cornford 1957). Later Platonism often depicts the material realm as a diminished copy of true reality, from which the soul must ascend through philosophical purification, again echoing Gnostic themes.

Taken together, these traditions illustrate that stories of cosmic captivity, trial, and liberation recur across various cultures. Whether through cycles of rebirth, illusions, astral gatekeeping, dualism, or flawed craftsmanship, they explore the relationship between consciousness, suffering, and cosmic structure. The Archon–prison–planet narrative is thus best understood as a modern expression of a universal archetype that addresses enduring questions of freedom, destiny, and reality.

Philosophical Analysis: Freedom, Suffering, and Meaning

Philosophically, prison-planet cosmologies dramatise debates about freedom, determinism, and meaning. They ask whether human choices are truly free or influenced by hidden forces. Thinkers from Sartre (1956) to Frankfurt (1971) have debated whether freedom is fundamental or conditioned by awareness and circumstance. The Archonic myth becomes an allegory for this tension: apparent agency limited by opaque structures. Suffering is equally central. Nietzsche (1887) and Frankl (1959) see suffering as intrinsic to human existence and as a potential source of value or meaning. Prison-planet narratives reinterpret suffering as extraction and domination, placing personal anguish within a broader metaphysical system of control.

Questions of theodicy also arise. Hick (1966) explores why a benevolent creator would allow pervasive suffering. Gnostic and Archonic frameworks invert this expectation: suffering is evidence of a flawed or malevolent cosmic order, not a morally justified one. This challenges traditional theology and offers alternative explanations for disorder.

The metaphysics of consciousness is implicated as well. Nagel (1974) and Chalmers (1996) highlight the difficulty of reducing subjective experience to physical processes. Prison-planet narratives often assume that consciousness is fundamental and capable of existing independently of material structures, raising questions about whether the mind is primary or emergent.

Deleuze's (1992) account of "societies of control" suggests that modern power functions through subtle modulation and surveillance rather than overt prohibition. This aligns closely with Archonic imagery: power becomes infrastructural and diffuse, shaping behaviour and attention instead of issuing simple commands. Loosh harvesting, read metaphorically, criticises the extraction of emotional and cognitive labour within contexts of complexity and unequal power.

Symbolically, Archons map onto tensions between:

- autonomy and structural domination;
- meaning-making and existential constraint;
- selfhood and systemic demand;
- spiritual aspiration and material limitation.

The narrative thus functions as a philosophical allegory of constrained agency, contested consciousness, and the search for significance within enclosing systems.

Why the Archon Narrative Persists

Several interlinked factors underlie the persistence and revival of the Archon–prison-planet motif:

1. Psychological resonance

The narrative offers a structured symbolic language for experiences of suffering, limitation, and depletion. It externalises trauma, vulnerability, and burnout into a coherent story, making diffuse distress more intelligible and manageable.

2. Sociological relevance

It encodes critiques of complex global systems—technological infrastructures, economic asymmetries, and political institutions—that appear remote and unaccountable. As surveillance, algorithmic governance, and precarity shape daily life, the Archonic framework symbolically maps structural domination and shrinking agency.

3. Mythic continuity

By echoing Gnostic, Buddhist, Platonic, Zoroastrian, Egyptian, and other cosmologies, the prisonplanet motif taps into enduring archetypes of captivity and liberation. This continuity grants it cultural depth and recognisable narrative patterns.

4. Narrative power

The motif links personal trauma, historical domination, and metaphysical speculation into a single storyline of captivity, deception, awakening, and emancipation. Its integrative capacity allows it to operate as both explanation and orientation device.

5. Epistemic uncertainty

In an age of contested authorities, misinformation, and fragmented knowledge, the narrative reframes epistemic instability as evidence of systemic concealment. Doubt about institutions becomes proof of Archonic interference, reinforcing the story's self-confirming logic.

The modern revival of Archon–prison-planet cosmology is thus best understood as a hybrid creation bridging ancient mythic frameworks with contemporary experiences of technological, economic, and political authority.

It remains persuasive because it sorts anxieties and interpretive crises into a meaningful, though unsettling, worldview.

CONCLUSION

This investigation suggests that the Archon–prison–planet narrative is best understood not as a literal cosmology but as a multilayered cultural, psychological, philosophical, and mythopoetic framework through which experiences of limitation and suffering are interpreted. Its classical Gnostic roots, developments in Western esotericism, and modern reinterpretations across digital spirituality and conspiratorial subcultures show a striking continuity: the recurring human impulse to narrate tensions between freedom and restriction, knowledge and ignorance, and agency and domination. Over time, the motif has proved highly adaptable. In antiquity, it accounted for the soul’s entrapment within a flawed cosmos governed by lesser powers. In modern esoteric systems—Theosophy, Anthroposophy, UFO metaphysics, and New Age thought—it became a critique of hidden intelligences and subtle forms of influence. In contemporary societies marked by technological acceleration, systemic opacity, surveillance infrastructures, and institutional mistrust, it now functions as a cultural lens for making sense of diffuse pressures and affective exhaustion.

Psychologically, the Archon symbolises internal conflict, trauma, and emotional depletion, resonating with deep psychological understandings of archetypes and repetition. Sociologically, it aligns with analyses of structural dominance, attention economies, and late-capitalist alienation. Philosophically, it highlights questions of free will, consciousness, suffering, and existential justice. Comparative mythology reveals that it participates in a broader archetype of cosmic captivity and liberation found across various traditions worldwide. The persistence of the Archon–prison–planet narrative thus reflects a human need to interpret the structure of existence, identify sources of suffering, and envision ways to achieve emancipation: spiritual, psychological, social, or philosophical. Rather than dismissing this motif as mere fringe speculation, it is more productive to recognise it as a symbolic worldview that engages with fundamental questions about reality and the human condition.

In this context, the Archon narrative serves as a modern myth and conceptual instrument. Its power lies more in its ability to express the emotional tensions of existence and the persistent longing for freedom within an increasingly complex and uncertain world than in literal assertions.

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