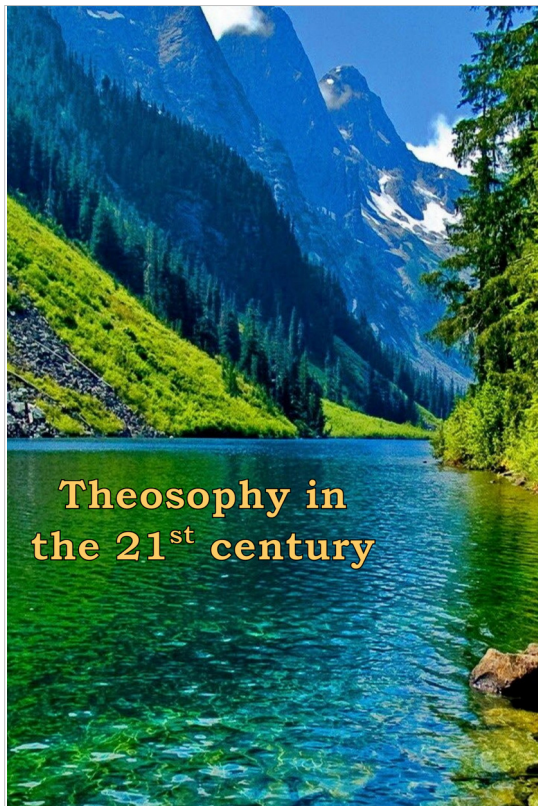




**Theosophy in  
the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

# ***10 Theosophy through the ages***

Course created by  
Carlos Pérez Menéndez  
SOCIEDAD TEOSÓFICA ESPAÑOLA

2018

## *Theosophy through history*



Pythagoras

Plato

Leonardo Da Vinci

Paracelsus

Giordano Bruno

Isaac Newton

And many more ...

- The essence of Theosophy flourished in different times and places.
- It was taught to the world by thinkers of all times

Since the most remote antiquity and in different regions of the world have emerged remarkable people, geniuses of the time, philosophers, spiritual leaders, remarkable and brilliant people who captured, lived and transmitted the foundations of Ageless Wisdom or Theosophy.

The fundamental ideas that we see in this course are not new but we can find them in the legacy of these great thinkers.

These spiritual leaders left an important mark in the history of humanity and constitute the foundation of a large part of our current culture. To communicate their knowledge they founded schools, gathered disciples around them, wrote books, traveled, interviewed other people and undertook this activity because they were aware of the importance of this wisdom about Life that we know today as Theosophy.

Theosophy is then a universal knowledge although it has not always had this name. They have been the heralds of that ageless Wisdom, who like the leaves of a tree have been nourished from the same tree sap as all the other leaves to give their particular focus, their personal message, but ultimately based on the same transcendent universal knowledge, Theosophy.

## *Theosophy through history*

▪ There were some essential ideas about Life that appeared in different times and places:

- Egypt
- Mystery Schools
- Buddha
- Greek philosophers
- Neoplatonics
- Geniuses of the Renaissance
- Greats of Enlightenment
- Modern Theosophy
- Modern thinkers
- . . .



In this chapter we will look at some of these remarkable sources of Theosophy to show that it is not in any way an invention of Helena P. Blavatsky or her followers, or ideas that are fashionable every now and then, but rather a powerful current of thought that has flourished at different times in humanity.

There were many outstanding thinkers in the history of humanity and all contributed something to the culture and knowledge of the world and who we are, but here we want to point out some that have stood out especially in their time, perhaps not for being geniuses in some specialty but for his universal and profound vision of life and of the human being.

This summary does not intend to be an exhaustive study because it would be outside the limits and purposes of this course, but we will simply try to show that the seekers of truth have existed and have always been noticed.

The ideas of Ageless Wisdom can be traced back to ancient civilizations, as in some of Mesopotamia and notably ancient Egypt and India. In Europe and the Middle East flourished institutions called the Mystery Schools where through symbols and representations were taught the fundamental ideas of Life.

Over time, the teachings become rigid doctrines and dogmas, losing their freshness and original value. Reform movements then emerge headed by some instructor such as Gautama Buddha in the bosom of Hinduism or Jesus of Nazareth in the Hebrew world.

In ancient Greece and Asia Minor, notable philosophers flourished and with their ideas they built the foundation of modern civilization. In Alexandria emerged the Neoplatonists who devised the term Theosophy to refer to this body of universal truths. Theosophy also had a lot to do with the Renaissance movement and the Enlightenment movement.

## The initiatory tradition in Egypt

2500 bce

390 ce

### Myth of Osiris

**Osiris** is killed by his brother Seth, who cut him up and scattered his remains.  
**Isis** recovered them, united them and had a son with him, **Horus**.  
 Osiris became the god of the dead.

### Osiris

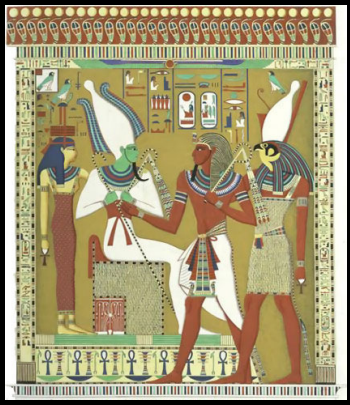
God of life and death, of the rebirth, of fertility.  
 Redeemer.  
 Judge of the dead.



### Isis

Goddess of matter, magic and regeneration.





Ancient Egypt was a land of myths and mysteries. His pantheon of gods with animal heads and the legends that surrounded them is well known. The stories were transmitted from mouth to ear and their magical and extraordinary character made them attractive and easy to remember. Although the people did not have in general the culture necessary to interpret the hidden aspects behind these stories, there were schools of mystery and initiation that went beyond the apparent and interpreted and applied the teaching behind them to solve the riddles of the life.

The most well-known and important Egyptian myth is the **Myth of Osiris**, which was related by Plutarch, although there are many versions and variants of it.

**Osiris** was king of Egypt and ruled with his wife and sister **Isis**. Through an artful trap, Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, cutting his body into fourteen pieces that he scattered throughout Egypt. Isis lovingly recovered all the members, except the virile member, who had been eaten by a fish. With the help of his adopted son, Anubis, he embalmed him and, later, Isis with his powerful magic managed to breathe new life into the mummified corpse of Osiris, becoming pregnant with him. Osiris and Isis thus fathered their only son, **Horus**, who avenged his death by banishing Seth to the desert and reclaiming the throne of Egypt, while Osiris would remain as king of the dead, in the fertile fields of Aaru.

Osiris thus became the god of the dead, the symbol of the resurrection, the redeemer, the judge of the dead. In commemoration of this myth the Mysteries of Osiris in Abydos were celebrated, where the funeral procession took place, the boat trip, the vigil and the most secret part of the mysteries, the resurrection on the third day with its regeneration and transfiguration. The Mysteries of Osiris are a forerunner of the mysteries of the death and resurrection of Jesus in Christianity.

## *Meanings of the myth*

2500bce —

390 ce —



Book of Emerging Forth into the Light (Book of the dead)

| Exoteric                                                                                      | Esoteric                                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>The life after death.<br/>The reincarnation of the soul.<br/>Cycles throughout nature.</p> | <p>The resurrection of the human soul.<br/>Regeneration and the start of a new life.</p> |

As we have said before, myths have several interpretations. Some of them are more evident and popular, external or exoteric interpretations, while other interpretations are deeper and linked to the student's own life that approaches the myth. These are the internal or esoteric interpretations.

The myth of Osiris represents the cycle of life, death and resurrection in nature. Osiris is considered as the god of death and the symbol of reincarnation. After a cycle of activity from birth to death, Osiris or the human soul is in the underworld or Amenti where it is judged and remains there until nature and the need for a new experience make it return to physical life. This is an exoteric interpretation. Many myths of the ancient world speak of the cycles in nature and the regeneration of life. Life flows in cycles.

But there is also an esoteric interpretation related to the awakening of consciousness and the transformation of the human being.

The death of Osiris at the hands of Seth, his brother (darkness, ignorance) symbolizes Life scattered in material forms, the manifestation in diversity seemingly fragmented into innumerable beings and atoms of matter. Osiris dead represents the consciousness identified with the external, with matter, and divided by ignorance. Isis is the regenerating aspect of consciousness, the spiritual soul that is conscious at its level of the unity of life and that perceiving the fragments as part of a unity, unites them. For his conscience the veil of separateness has fallen and she perceives the Unity of Life. From this mystical union of the spiritual soul and the human soul is born Horus, the radiant spirit, the enlightened mind, the product of human evolution and one of the deepest mysteries of life.

Osiris, Isis and Horus thus constitute the sacred trinity father-mother-son, the fundamental principles in the manifestation of the Universe that we saw at the beginning of the course when we examined the Dzryan Stays discussed in the Secret Doctrine of H.P. Blavatsky.

## *The tradition of the Mysteries*

1500bce

396 ce

- The Mysteries were initiatory systems of the ancient world.
- They spread from Egypt and Asia Minor to the Mediterranean.
- Its objective was to help awaken the candidate's inner conscience.
- His teachings were symbolic.  
Initiation: *new life*
- Minor Mysteries (exoteric)  
Major Mysteries (esoteric)
- Mystery Schools: Orphic, Eleusis, Mithra, Samothrace, ...



Myths were widely used in the initiatory systems of the ancient world.

The objective of these systems was to help interested people to produce an inner transformation that would allow them to better understand life, the Universe and our role in it. The candidates went through a process of preparation in which they had to purify their psychological nature, strengthen their morals and their character and finally following a ritual they were initiated into a new life.

The **Mystery Schools** were very popular in the ancient world. They spread from Egypt and Asia Minor to the countries of the Mediterranean Sea such as Greece and Rome where they had great boom. The first recorded evidence dates back to Egypt, some 1,500 years before our era. The mystery schools lasted until the end of paganism, in 396 AD, when Emperor Diocletian put an end to them and their temples were looted.

Their external activity was related to the annual or five-year celebration of the Mysteries in which people attended ritual representations of the themes that constituted the myth worshiped in them, received certain teachings and were put in contact with sacred symbols.

There is almost no documentation of the activities of these schools, except for the story of a few who attended their events. From the Mysteries of Orpheus we know something about the written Orphic hymns that have survived and also thanks to Pythagoras.

There were *Minor Mysteries* and *Major Mysteries*. The Minor Mysteries were fundamentally popular, exoteric representations. The Major Mysteries were esoteric, reserved for those who were preparing for the goal of undertaking a new life. They were accepted men and women who did not have crimes of blood, regardless of whether they were lords or slaves.

## The schools of Mysteries

- Common theme in the mysteries: cycles, rebirth, regeneration.
- The Orphic mysteries were the basis of a kind of religion. Eurydice, wife of Orpheus, dies and he goes to rescue her at Hades. With his lyre he convinces the gods to allow him to return to the world of the living.
- Everything was spoiled when they left and Orpheus looked back even though he had been forbidden.



Orpheus (Roman mosaic)

A recurring theme in the myths of the mysteries is that of cycles in nature and rebirth, not only pointing out how the seasons work for the benefit of agriculture, but also trying to understand the very mystery of the cycles and the rebirth of the human soul.

In the **Orphic Mysteries**, the descent of Orpheus to Hades (the underworld, the world of the dead) was celebrated to rescue his beloved Eurydice and his subsequent return. In the origins of the myth was also the death and resurrection of Dionysus, son of Zeus and Persephone (who descended to Hades every winter and returned every spring). The Orphics followed a pure lifestyle, they were vegetarian, they did not kill animals and they believed in reincarnation.

See more details in Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphism\\_\(religion\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orphism_(religion))

The **Mysteries of Eleusis** were dedicated to the myth of Demeter and his daughter Persephone. The latter had been kidnapped by Hades and Demeter, goddess of agriculture, went to rescue her but neglected their tasks and winter came until in its return came the rebirth of life with spring.

See more on:

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleusinian\\_Mysteries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleusinian_Mysteries)

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Roman\\_mysteries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Roman_mysteries)

Also see the interesting work of Edward Beach, *The Eleusinian Mysteries*:

[http://www.faculty.umb.edu/gary\\_zabel/Courses/Phil%20281b/Philosophy%20of%20Magic/Pythagoras,%20Empedocles,%20Plato/The%20Ecole%20Initiative%20The%20Eleusinian%20Mysteries2.htm](http://www.faculty.umb.edu/gary_zabel/Courses/Phil%20281b/Philosophy%20of%20Magic/Pythagoras,%20Empedocles,%20Plato/The%20Ecole%20Initiative%20The%20Eleusinian%20Mysteries2.htm)

## Hermetism

- The hermetic tradition has its origin in the teachings of **Hermes Trismegistus** and is of Egyptian and Greek origin.
- The fundamental work of hermeticism is the **Corpus Hermeticum**, a set of 18 philosophical, mystical and moral treatises.
- Hermeticism is at the origin of esotericism in the West and has inspired innumerable seekers of truth.



Hermes Trismegistus

One of the most influential currents of thought of antiquity has been Hermetism. It is about the teachings of an Egyptian priest, **Hermes Trismegisto** (the 3 times great or 3 times anointed) who had a great influence in the Hellenic world.

The ideas of hermeticism are contained mainly in his fundamental work: the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a recompilation of 18 treatises from different eras. Another work discovered later is the *Emerald Tablet*, highly symbolic and of alchemical value.

Hermeticism is a philosophy and not a dogma or a set of revelations. Its objective is the Gnosis or the supreme knowledge of life, the interior illumination and the transformation of the human being making him aware of his spiritual nature.

For hermeticism there is a correspondence, a oneness between the Macrocosm, the universal, and the Microcosm, the human being, as the Vedas and the modern proponents of the holographic model of the Universe affirm.

That which is below is like that which is above & that which is above is like that which is below to do the miracles of one Only Thing

And as all things have been and arose from One by the mediation of One: so all things have their birth from this One Thing by adaptation.

*Emerald Tablet*

Hermeticism has had a great influence on the philosophers of the Renaissance and on many thinkers and writers from different eras.

The historian Frances Yates studied how hermeticism and esotericism along with Neoplatonism inspired the thinkers of the Renaissance.



The existence of a current of thought based on a profound wisdom in the world has not been overlooked for some thinkers. The German psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) has defined what he has called the **axial age** or pivotal time. It is the period of history between 800 bce and 200 bce, which is revealed as the deepest dividing line in the history of mankind. During this period the same line of thought appeared in three regions of the world: China, India and the West.

In the blog called *Homo Homini Sacra Res*, an interesting article about Jaspers' postulate is published (in Spanish).

According to Jaspers, the most important thing of this time in the "three worlds", which correspond to the East, the Middle East and the Greek Hellade, is that man clearly perceives his own existence and impotence in such transcendental and unavoidable matters as the death. At the same time that it integrates its own vital limits, it also exercises itself in achieving the highest goals in the time it has to live, and more specifically, in the possibility of overcoming, in life, the suffering that its own conscience provokes. If reflection leads to such a state of anxiety, it is also reflection that allows you to seek solutions to your problems. Thought becomes the object of thought itself while accessing the universal.

<http://www.homohominisacrares.net/sec/historia/eraaxial/queestienpoeje.htm>

It is evident that what Jaspers discovered is the emergence of Ageless Wisdom or Theosophy at a crucial period in history and the influence it has had on humanity.

So much was the strength and diffusion of these new philosophical-religious paradigms, which still maintain their validity throughout the world, and have defined in many aspects the current civilizations. In this time and in a geographical line between the mentioned parallels 40 and 20 there are: the appearance of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and all possible philosophical tendencies, from skepticism to materialism, sophistry and nihilism, in addition to the doctrine of universal love of Mo zi or Mo ti; the Upshanidas, which synthesize the vast and complex conglomeration of Hindu beliefs and the life doctrine of Jaina Mahavira; the doctrine of Zoroaster in Persia; the imprint of Elijah, first, and then Jeremiah and Isaiah later, in Judaism, and the so-called passage from Myth to the Logos in Magna Grecia from the Presocratics to Plato.

In this sense, Blavatsky also offers a look at history:

The days of Constantine were the last turning-point in history, the period of the Supreme struggle that ended in the Western world throttling the old religions in favour of the new one, built on their bodies. From thence the vista into the far distant Past, beyond the “Deluge” and the Garden of Eden, began to be forcibly and relentlessly closed by every fair and unfair means against the indiscreet gaze of posterity. Every issue was blocked up, every record that hands could be laid upon, destroyed. Yet there remains enough, even among such mutilated records, to warrant us in saying that there is in them every possible evidence of the actual existence of a Parent Doctrine. Fragments have survived geological and political cataclysms to tell the story; and every survival shows evidence that the now Secret Wisdom was once the one fountain head, the ever-flowing perennial source, at which were fed all its streamlets — the later religions of all nations — from the first down to the last. This period, beginning with Buddha and Pythagoras at the one end and the Neo-Platonists and Gnostics at the other, is the only focus left in History wherein converge for the last time the bright rays of light streaming from the aeons of time gone by, unobscured by the hand of bigotry and fanaticism.

Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 1, Introductory

Next we will see some examples of how Theosophy was expressed by the great thinkers of humanity.

## Lao-Tse

500bce  
?



### Taoism

Lao Tse = Lao Tzu =  
Old master

Author of **Tao Te Ching**

The **Tao**: the One,  
the essence, the way

Ying-Yang:  
Female-Male

Basis of ancient philosophy  
of China

I would like to possess the wisdom to be able to march on  
the great road without fear of deviating.  
The great road is flat but people love the trails.

*Lao Tze*

Taoism is called the philosophical teachings of the great sage **Lao Tzu** who is credited with a small book, the *Tao Te Ching*, very profound, that using a poetic language and full of paradoxes is directed beyond logical thinking. The fundamental idea of Lao Tzu is the **Tao**. The Tao is the ultimate Reality that transcends all opposites and that is the fundamental principle of the Universe.

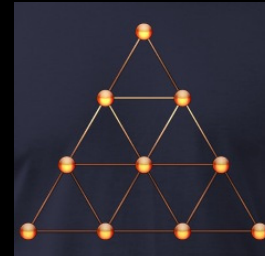
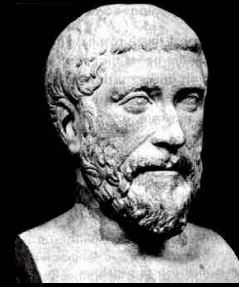
The Tao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Tao.  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.  
The name is the mother of the ten thousand things.  
Send your desires away and you will see the mystery.  
Be filled with desire and you will see only the manifestation.  
As these two come forth they differ in name.  
Yet at their source they are the same.  
This source is called a mystery.  
Mystery of misteries, the gateway to Secret of All Life.

Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

The expression of the Tao is necessarily cyclical since in Lao-Tzu's words "The return is the movement of the Tao". The Tao is also the path for the one who seeks to realize the nature of the Tao.

## Pythagoras

- Pythagoras was a Greek philosopher and mathematician.
- He studied in Egypt and defined himself as a lover of wisdom (philosopher).
- He founded his practical philosophical school in Crotona.
- The number is the abstract representation of the processes of manifestation, of the emanations of the Universe (Tetraktys).
- He was the most influential of the pre-Socratic philosophers.



Pythagorean Tetraktys

570 ac

475 ac

Pythagoras combined the science of mathematics that he promoted with his developments with the philosophy and spirituality that were the foundation of his School. The Pythagoreans were seekers of the truth and harmony of the Universe and had high standards of life. An example of this is found in the Golden Verses of Pythagoras.

Consult and deliberate before you act, that you may not commit foolish actions.  
For it is the part of a miserable man to speak and to act without reflection.  
But do the thing which will not afflict you afterwards, nor oblige you to repentance.  
Never do anything which you do not understand.  
But learn all you ought to know, and by that means you will lead a very pleasant life.

.....

Only do the things that cannot hurt you, and deliberate before you do them.  
Never allow sleep to close your eyelids, after you went to bed,  
Until you have examined all your actions of the day by your reason.  
In what have I done wrong? What have I done? What have I omitted that I ought to have done?  
If in this examination you find that you have done wrong, reprove yourself severely for it;  
And if you have done any good, rejoice.

Practise thoroughly all these things; meditate on them well;  
you ought to love them with all your heart.  
It is those that will put you in the way of divine virtue.  
I swear it by he who has transmitted into our souls the Tetraktys,  
the source of nature, whose cause is eternal.

Pythagoras, *Golden Verses*

## Gautama Buddha

▪ Gautama Buddha was the great instructor of a spiritual reform movement in India.

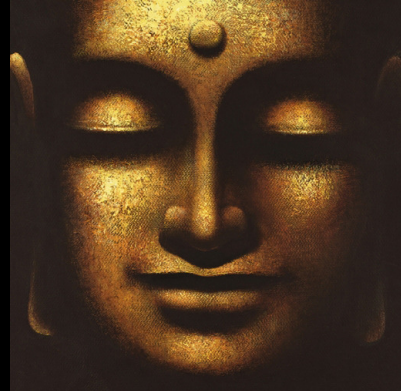
▪ Buddhism is a philosophy rather than a religion.

▪ It focused on suffering, its causes and how to avoid it.

▪ The 4 **noble truths**:

- The existence of suffering
- Desire is the cause of suffering
- The cessation of suffering
- The noble eightfold path

▪ His influence reaches our days.



563 ac

483 ac

(aprox)

Gautama Buddha was an instructor who motivated to discover the cause of suffering and after experiencing the richness of his home and the deprivations of an ascetic life he attained enlightenment, saw the problem with total clarity and devoted himself to traveling and teaching others.

His teachings are recorded in the notes of his sermons and his fundamental legacy is the 4 Noble Truths. Buddha acted like a doctor curing a sick person by showing the role of desire and self in the human mind as the cause of suffering and as an obstacle to being happy and living a full life.

But Buddha did not want simple followers, he wanted people to think for themselves, he wanted free-thinkers and this was made clear in one of his sermons:

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher.'

Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them.

**Be a Lamp Unto Yourself.**

Gautama Buddha, *Kalama Sutta*

## The Neoplatonists of Alexandria

▪ Philosophical school of great prestige founded by Ammonio Sacas in Alexandria called "Eclectic Theosophical School"

▪ His ideas are known today as **Neoplatonism** and is the convergence of Eastern thought with that of Pythagoras and Plato.

Fundamental ideas:

- The One
- Emanations
- The Soul of the World
- The intelligible world and the sensible world
- Theurgy

Ammonius Saccas

Plotinus

Porphiry

Iamblichus

Proclus

Hipatia



175bce

485 ce

In the ancient city of Alexandria in Egypt, the Ptolemaic dynasty created and sustained the great Library that was an intellectual beacon in the ancient world, even more than its legendary lighthouse for navigation. There flourished geniuses of the sciences like Euclides, Archimedes or Eratosthenes. In this favorable environment, a philosophical current emerged that brought together teachings from Egypt and India as well as from Pythagoras and Plato.

To study and transmit these ideas **Ammonius Saccas** founded the Eclectic Theosophical School, coining the term Theosophy for ageless Wisdom. His teachings are known today as Neoplatonism and had prominent philosophers such as Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus. The last great thinker of this school was a brave woman, Hypatia who died at the hands of the Christian hordes that destroyed what was left of the Library.

The teachings of Neoplatonism present a holistic vision of the Universe as we have outlined in this course. Its fundamental ideas are the existence of the "One", the Reality that does not divide with the manifestation but emanates from itself the "undetached sparks" that constitute the diverse beings.

All beings have their existence for the One, not only the beings so called in the first sense, but those who call themselves attributes of those beings. Because, what could exist that was not one? If we separate it from the unit, it immediately ceases to exist. Neither the army, nor the choir, nor the flock would have any reality if they were no longer an army, a choir or a flock. In the same way, the house and the ship lack existence if they do not possess unity; because both the one and the other are a unit and, if it is lost, they also cease to be a ship and a house.

Plotinus, *Enneads: About the good and the One*

## Middle Age



Kabbalistas



Alchemists



Dante Alighieri  
(1265-1321)

### Great thinkers

Symbolic systems:  
- Hebrew Kabbalah  
- Alchemy

They protected themselves from  
persecution of the church.

Various thinkers. E.g.:  
- Dante Alighieri

900

1300

During the Middle Ages in the West there were no favorable circumstances for free thought and philosophy. The power of the Catholic Church and that of the empires and absolutist kingdoms determined an atmosphere of dogma and rigidity in thought, persecuting those who defied the official religion. This state of affairs motivated the appearance of groups of thinkers who used symbolism and metaphors to hide the true issues of their elaborations to the eyes of the official religion, thus being able to communicate them in this way to those who possessed the keys to their interpretation.

One of the clearest examples has been the movement of **Alchemy**. Its origin is in ancient Egypt, but during the Middle Ages it had a resurgence in Europe. The alchemists used a symbolic system based on elements and chemical reactions to explain the transformation of man, the true transmutation into gold.

The **Kabbalah** is the esoteric system rooted in Judaism. Although its origins are supposed in Babylon, the current Kábala emerged in the south of France with Isaac the Blind and in Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth century with Azrael de Gerona and many other notables such as Ponce de León. It explains the universe and man through a system of principles, the *Sephiroth*, in a complex structure that have much correspondence with the ideas of Theosophy.

**Dante Alighieri** (1265-1321), the Italian poet who wrote *The Divine Comedy* and *The New Life*, was not only a great writer. Beign still a child he met Beatrice, a girl he fell deeply in love with. Although his family arranged a marriage with another woman, Dante always had Beatrice in her heart and he had to endure the pain when she died very young. In the Divine Comedy Dante recounts his journey in the post-mortem world through Hell and Purgatory, guided by Virgil, the Roman poet, to finally be rescued by Beatrice, the personification of pure love, who leads him to Paradise. In addition to being a theme similar to the myths of the Mystery Schools, The Divine Comedy is full of allegories. But it is known that Dante belonged to a brotherhood of poets called *Fideli d'amore*, who according to William Anderson in his book *Dante the Maker*, worshiped ladies who more than real women represented the ideal Female, Sapientia or Holy Wisdom. Another author, Henry Corbin, says that "The Fideli d'amore profess a secret religion [...], the union between the intellect attainable by the human soul and the active Intelligence [...] the Angel of Knowledge or the Wisdom-Sophia, visualize and experience as a loving union". We see here the ideal of the Divine Wisdom, the Divine Sophia, the Theos-Sophia or Theosophy.

## Renaissance

- Rediscovery of the ancient world.
- Revival of the philosophy independent of religion (natural philosophy, Neoplatonism)
- Persecution of the Church

Featured thinkers:

- Marsilio Ficino
- Pico della Mirandola
- Leonardo Da Vinci
- Cornelio Agripa
- Jacob Boehme
- ...



Marsilio Ficino  
1433 - 1499



Pico della Mirandola  
1463 - 1494



Leonardo Da Vinci  
1452 - 1519



Cornelio Agripa  
1486 - 1535

1400

1600

The Renaissance was prodigal in characters that produced a revolution in European thought by rediscovering the classical world that had been buried by the Church. There was a revaluation of the independent philosophy of religion. Many thinkers turned their eyes to natural philosophy and Neoplatonism, which earned them the persecution of the Church. Among the notable people that we find in the Renaissance, they stand out:

**Marsilio Ficino** (1433-1499). Florentine philosopher, translator and commentator of Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Hermes, Zoroaster, and many others, was the leader of the Florentine Platonic Academy and promoter of the rebirth of Neo-Platonism.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsilio\\_Ficino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marsilio_Ficino)

**Leonardo Da Vinci** (1452-1519). Genius par excellence of the Renaissance, inventor, engineer, artist. He used many hermetic themes in his works, even though they were religious commissions.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo\\_da\\_Vinci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_da_Vinci)

**Pico della Mirandola** (1463-1494). Philosopher, theologian, hermetic and Kabbalist Florentine, disciple of Marsilio Ficino, In his main work, Conclusions, Pico revises classical philosophy, interested in the process of union of the embodied soul with the spiritual portion of the soul.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni\\_Pico\\_della\\_Mirandola](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Pico_della_Mirandola)

**Cornelius Agrippa** (1486-1535). German philosopher, Kabbalist, alchemist and writer. His main work, The Three Books of Hidden Philosophy, is a compendium of the occult doctrines of the time. His treatise Hidden Numerology is based on Pythagoras and the Hebrew Kabbalah.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich\\_Cornelius\\_Agrippa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Cornelius_Agrippa)

**Jacob Boehme** (1575-1624). Philosopher and writer, nicknamed "The German Theosophist". He was a mystic, and he gave a spiritual interpretation of alchemy. He wrote about the origin of good and evil.

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jakob\\_B%C3%B6hme](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jakob_B%C3%B6hme)

## Giordano Bruno

- Religious, philosopher, astronomer and Italian poet of the Renaissance.
- It was nourished by Platonism, Neoplatonism and Hermeticism.
- He had a relationship with other esotericists in the Church.
- Main ideas:
  - Unity of the Cosmos
  - Soul of the Universe
  - Implicit infinity vs explicit infinity
- Burnt at the stake because of the Inquisition accused of being a heretic.



Giordano Bruno  
1548 - 1600

1548

1600

**Giordano Bruno** (1548-1600). He was a philosopher, writer, religious, astronomer and Italian poet of the Renaissance. He went through Calvinism, with which he had conflicts. Thanks to his travels in European cities he established relationships with people from esoteric and hermetic circles. Giordano defended the Neoplatonic and universal ideas, reaching to maintain that the Universe is infinite and that there could be other inhabited worlds (*Of the infinite universe and the worlds*), which finally earned him the condemnation of the Inquisition and being burned at the stake. He published multiple works that are currently preserved.

... in short, well that there are innumerable individuals, everything is one, and knowing this unity is the object and term of all philosophy and natural contemplation.

Giordano Bruno, *Concerning Cause, Principle, and Unity*, IV

The English historian Frances Yates studied the relations of Bruno with the esotericism of the Renaissance and especially with the hermetic philosophy.

Frances A. Yates (*Giordano Bruno and the hermetic tradition*) has highlighted the importance of the "hermetic tradition" in Bruno's thought. There is, according to Bruno, an "**ancient wisdom**", which the Egyptians already possessed; is that which is expressed in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and was developed by Plato, the ancient Neoplatonists and the Neoplatonists on Renaissance. It is a magic that makes possible the communion of man with the powers of Nature. True religion is embodied in "hermetic" pantheism.

José Ferrater Mora, *Diccionario de Filosofía*

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giordano\\_Bruno](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giordano_Bruno)

## Spinoza

- Born in Amsterdam, of a Sephardic Jewish family.
- He read Giordano Bruno.
- Great philosopher of the 17th century. Stream of rationalism.
- Pantheism: *Deus sive Natura* (God or Nature)
- Monistic vision of Reality, like the esoteric tradition.



Baruch Spinoza  
1632 - 1677

1632 —

1677 —

**Baruch Spinoza** (1632-1677) was a Dutch philosopher born into a family of Sephardic Jews. He read the work of Giordano Bruno and adhered to the stream of rationalism within philosophy, which opposed the consideration of ecclesiastical dogma, along with Descartes and Leibnitz.

One of his main ideas has been that of **pantheism**, according to which he considered that the sacred is in everything, contrary to the predominant ecclesiastical theism. For other rationalists there were different substances, but for Spinoza there is only one universal substance, a single Reality. Spinoza spoke of "*Deus sive Natura*" (God or Nature), as equivalent terms.

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.

...

That which is itself and is conceived by itself; that is, that whose concept does not need the concept of something else, from which it must be formed.

...

Men deceive themselves by believing themselves free; and the reason for this opinion is that they are aware of their actions, but they ignore the reasons why they are determined; therefore, what constitutes their idea of freedom, is that they do not know any cause of their actions.

Spinoza, *Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order*

See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch\\_Spinoza](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baruch_Spinoza)

## Modern Theosophy

- In 1875 the Theosophical Society was founded in order to investigate and promote the Ageless Wisdom again in the world
- Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society rediscovered for the West the values of the Orient and its own classical tradition.
- HPB said that she did not make known something new but it was the knowledge accumulated during ages.



Helena P. Blavatsky  
and  
Henry S. Olcott

When Helena P. Blavatsky, Henry S. Olcott, William Judge and others founded the modern theosophical movement in 1875, what they did was to allow the Western world to rediscover the ideas of the East.

Academics argued that the thought of the classical world and the ideas contained in the philosophies of India were mere myths without transcendence or were based on superstition and had only a literary value, like stories.

The work of the Theosophical Society had great influence on the rediscovery of oriental scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas, the teachings of Yoga and Buddhism. Many thinkers from different branches understood the value of Ageless Wisdom to transform the life of the human being allowing him to be more aware of the fundamental truths of life. For example, Mohandas Gandhi, the leader of India's independence through nonviolence, declared in his *Autobiography* that he discovered the values of the Bhagavad Gita and the Hindu tradition thanks to his participation in meetings at the Theosophical Society in London.

The founders and Theosophical writers made it clear that they were not giving any new philosophy or religion to the world, but the body of Theosophy is the fruit of knowledge accumulated for ages by great sages, initiates and Adepts, that Theosophy is Ageless Wisdom.

## Modern influences

- Scientists philosophizing:
  - Albert Einstein
  - David Bohm
  - Karl Pribram
  - Carl Gustav Jung
  - Fritjof Capra
  - ...
- Modern Theosophy allowed the popular (though distorting) *New Age* movement
- Modern Freethinkers:
  - J. Krishnamurti
  - Ken Wilber
  - Eckhart Tolle
  - ...



At the moment, the influence of the Theosophy is very wide although popularly the origin of the ideas that she has inspired is not known.

Theosophy and the work of spreading oriental teachings in the West is pointed by many as the cause of the movement of the new age, which although it is not defined and brings together ideas that in some cases are contradictory, has popularized in culture concepts such as Karma, reincarnation and meditation.

Many scientists reach the frontiers of what the scientific method allows, but they continue to wonder and move into the field of philosophy. Albert Einstein, the creator of the theory of relativity, had as a result of his conceptions about the laws of Physics, glimpses about the Universe very related to the Ancient Wisdom.

Other scientists that we have mentioned as David Bohm and Karl Pribram have conceived the holographic paradigm, a great confluence towards the fundamental idea of the philosophies of India, of the Pythagoreans and of Neoplatonism: the Universe is one, and in each part is the whole in power. Fritjof Capra, the physical author of the bestseller "*The Tao of Physics*" exhibits in his books many ideas of Theosophy and left Physics to devote himself to systems theory and ecology.

On the other hand, free thinkers like Krishnamurti, Ken Wilber, Eckhart Tolle and many others are consciously or unconsciously nourished in Theosophy.

In short, we can say that Theosophy is a living spring that has been drunk and drunk by thinkers from all eras. His expression changes, inspires ideas that change with the time, but its essence is permanent and vital. Its value is its capacity to transform the individual and the world.

## *To think*



Watch, think, investigate, inquire ...  
Make the following questions or thoughts suggestions  
But don't stay here, ask yourself and find out.

- 1- Find some quotation from the Renaissance philosophers who show the message of Ageless Wisdom in them.
- 2- Do you think that the appearance of the great instructors such as Lao Tzu and Buddha in different places at such a defined time has been coincidence?
- 3- Mention other philosophical currents that have not been cited in which the fundamental ideas of Theosophy are evident.
- 4- What modern authors do you know whose ideas can be said to be inspired by Theosophy?

