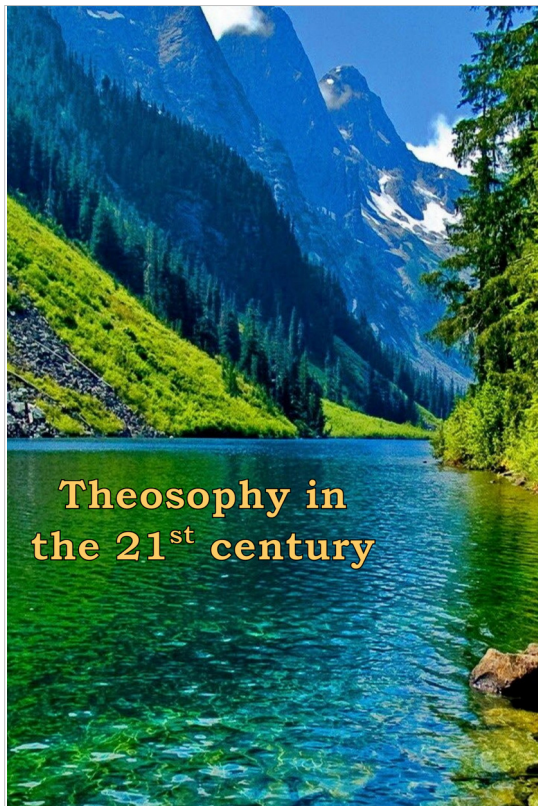




Theosophy in
the 21st century

1 What is Theosophy?

Course created by
Carlos Pérez Menéndez
SOCIEDAD TEOSÓFICA ESPAÑOLA

2018

Essential questions about life

Who am I?

What is the
Universe?

What is the
time?

Is there
fate?



What is the
life?

What is the
death?

Can we be
happy?

Is there
justice?

ORIGINS OF THE ANCIENT WISDOM

From immemorial times the human being has been asking essential questions to himself about the life:

Who am I really?

What's the Universe? What is its meaning? What does time mean?

What is life? What is death?

Why are things like this?

Why do the pain and the joy exist?

Can we reach the happiness?

These questions often arise in our mind when we meet critical facts, in special circumstances in our life. Events such as the death of a loved one, a great professional or sentimental frustration, feeling misunderstood, loneliness or illness, make us abstract our minds from the incessant flow of everyday things and worry about trying to understand, trying to remedy a situation that bothers us.

We wanted things to be different, that there was no conflict, that we could understand each other and that they could understand us.

We feel at the mercy of the forces of nature. Tornadoes, volcanoes and earthquakes remind us that although our technology has advanced a lot, we do not dominate our environment. We still do not know much, it can still cause us harm and we can do it to him. In short, we face the **unknown** to try to understand it.

The right questions are the beginning of wisdom and the legitimate aspiration to understand truth is the motivation of the researcher for the essential facts of life, which transcend everyday knowledge and most of the issues discussed in the mass media and in culture in general.

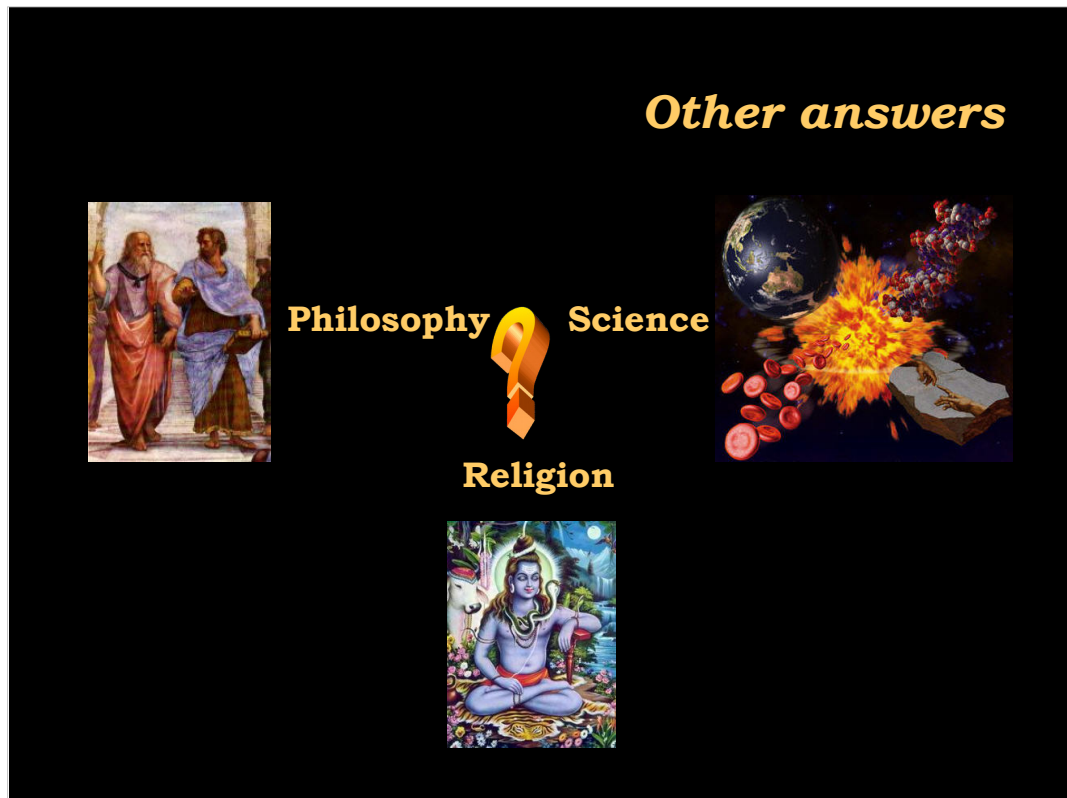


Humanity has attempted to answer these questions by very different means.

In his attempt to understand the forces of Nature, the man has mixed conflicting feelings like the wish to know with the fear of the unknown, the wish to be free with that of being sure and being guided. In this way he has developed **beliefs**.

In the early stages of his quest, human beings have given rise to animistic representations, to religions with implacable gods, selfish, zealous, which are mere projections of their own ignorance and limitations.

The man resorted to the personification of the forces of Nature, believing that behind the lightning, the Sun and the Moon, the winds, the sea and so many things, there were mysterious gods, supernatural beings superior to their understanding. In this way he got an explanation that calmed his anxiety and gave him a sense of security, but at the same time he was stunned and this prevented him from using his mind and his discernment to investigate and understand the true nature of things.



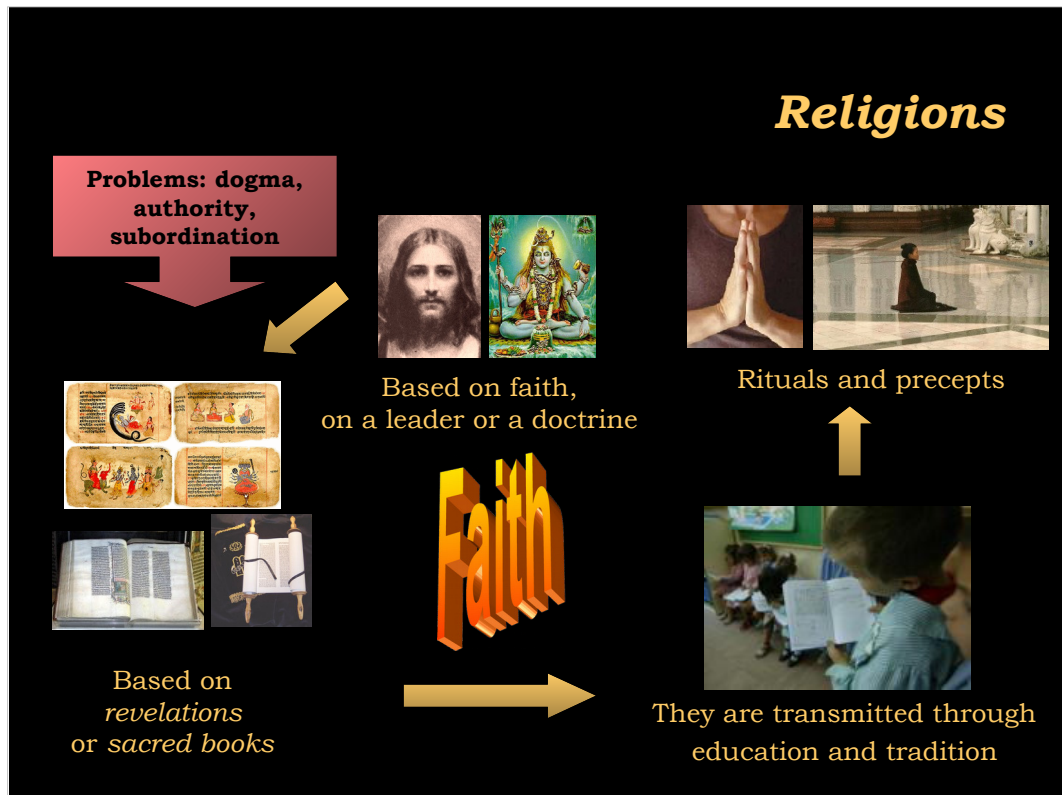
However humanity also developed other more elaborate approaches to find answers to the essential questions.

We can identify 3 great ways that human beings have developed to try to answer their essential questions about Life that he makes especially in critical moments:

- Religion
- Philosophy
- Science

These are three access routes, three approaches to reality, each one with its characteristics. We do not speak of the culture in general that has more expressions like the Art or the Technology but we refer to the knowledge channels used to try to know the reality.

We will look at these three avenues of access to reality in more detail. We will see how each has its characteristics, its benefits and its limitations.



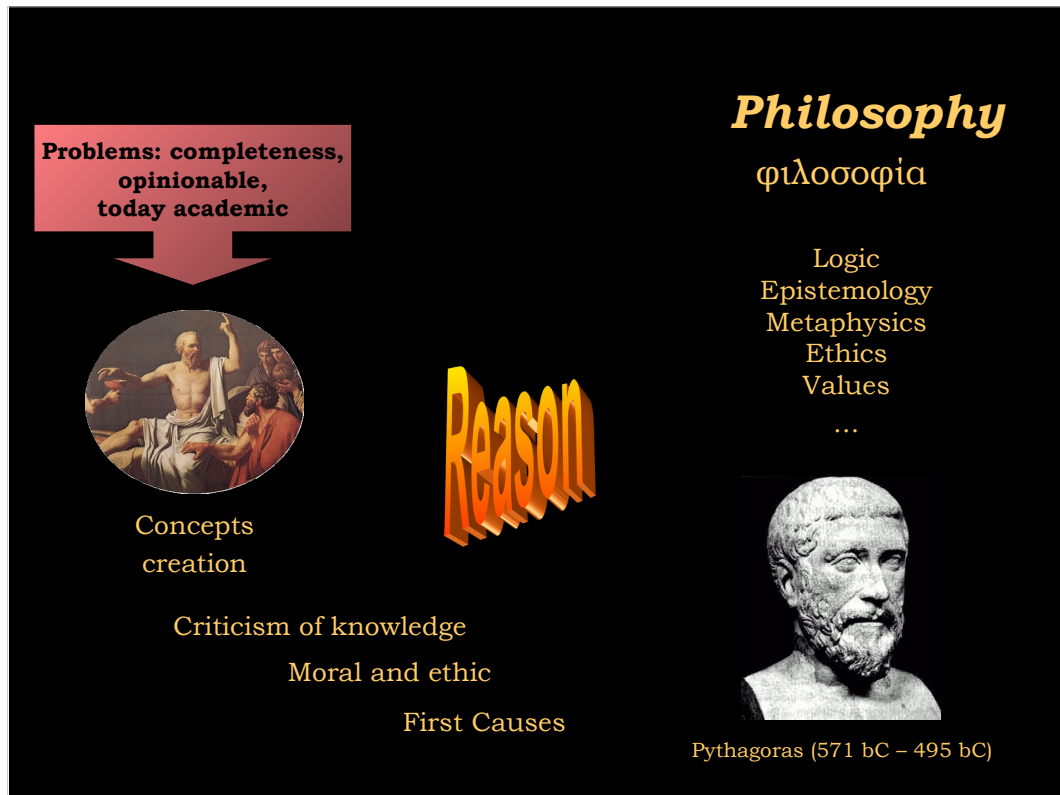
The **religious** teachings arose from the need to answer the essential questions and from the difficulty of obtaining them only through pure reason. Its essence is faith in a doctrine that explains the Universe, man and life, giving an answer of a more emotional nature to these deep needs. Generally, it is said that these doctrines have a divine or superior origin and that they have been obtained by means of a **revelation**, a teaching given by supernatural means to a prophet or leader. These revelations together with their interpretations constitute a doctrine, which has been turned into Scriptures or **Sacred Books**.

Thus, something essential in religions is the belief and acceptance of the **authority** of some religious **leader**, who, pretending to be a special person transmitting a *revelation* or elaborating the doctrine for himself, sets forth a vision of the world and the life that has resulted useful as a foundation for the organization and moral structure of a people.

There are many religions in the world. Almost all have derived from previous ones as a specialization, a reform of another existing religion, or as the combination of several earlier religious sources. In most religions there are some common ideas, expressed through their own language and symbols, which are often supported by myths, symbols and rites that are expressed in the daily lives of the faithful.

However, since religious dogma is a matter of faith and authority, it often causes conflicts in the mind of the human being, who elaborates his own models based on his own experience in daily life, making it difficult to search for truth.

We must differentiate between a **religion** and the **religious attitude**. A religion is a set of doctrines as we have mentioned, but the religious attitude is a quality of the individual who seeks the Truth and even having a limited understanding of it, submits its way of being and its behavior to it. The person with a religious attitude regards life and existence as sacred. We must not forget that according to some meanings, the origin of the word religion is the Latin *religio* and refers in some way to the moral obligation or bond that a person has to his convictions.



Other people were not satisfied with the faith and felt the need to observe, think, deduce, contrast and elaborate ideas to give answers to the essential questions of life. Feeling ignorant in search of Truth, they preferred to call themselves **philosophers**, lovers of wisdom, because this name best represents their status as seekers, researchers, rather than sages. In antiquity, the philosopher was not a mere speculator but someone who was willing to compromise his life in his quest. It was not an academic exercise but an effort to find a sincere desire to know.

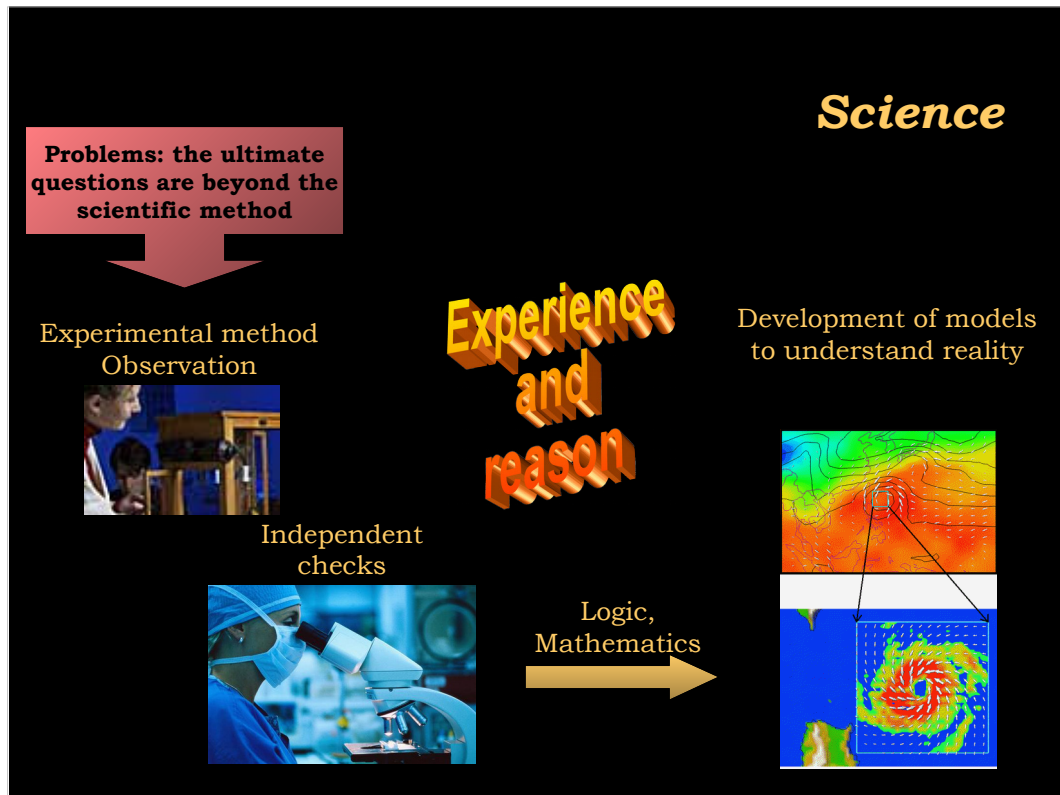
According to Plato: "**the astonishment is the origin of the Philosophy**".

Isocrates, contemporary of Plato, attributes to the Egyptians the invention of philosophy:

"...In addition, the cultivation of the **practice of wisdom** can also be reasonably attributed to the aforementioned Egyptian (Busiris). [...] The priests enjoyed such conditions of life, discovering for the body the help that medical art produces, not the one that uses dangerous drugs but only drugs of that nature that are as harmless as daily food, and Which with all its effects is so beneficial, that all men agree that the Egyptians are the healthiest and the longest possible life among men. And then, for the soul, they introduced the training of **Philosophy**, a search that has the power not only to establish laws but also to investigate the nature of the universe..."

Isocrates, "*Discourses and letters*". *Busiris*; 11, 21-22

Philosophy makes use of reason to elaborate concepts, develop a critical sense about knowledge and how we come to it, what moral and ethical implications our view of the world has. Philosophy tries to answer the basic questions of life, tries to look for the first causes, but its method makes it almost impossible to get results that are valid for the majority. There are as many philosophies as philosophers, based on different points of view, and it is very difficult to reconcile them. On the other hand, now the discipline of philosophy has acquired a very academic cut in which the person does not really involve his life and his behavior in his ideas, but usually they become theoretical speculations. However, true philosophy is the foundation of the search for the Truth about the Universe, Life and Being on the part of the philosopher.



Modernly, another avenue of knowledge emerged: **Science**.

The **scientific method** seeks to develop reliable responses systematically through observation, experimentation and reasoning. Using logic and mathematics scientists develop **formal models** to explain the world. Their results must be verifiable by others and in this way it is possible for researchers to work on the results of those who preceded them. This method gives Science the advantage of being able to enunciate verifiable laws and that the contributions of scientists are incremental, that is to say that they are based on proven foundations.

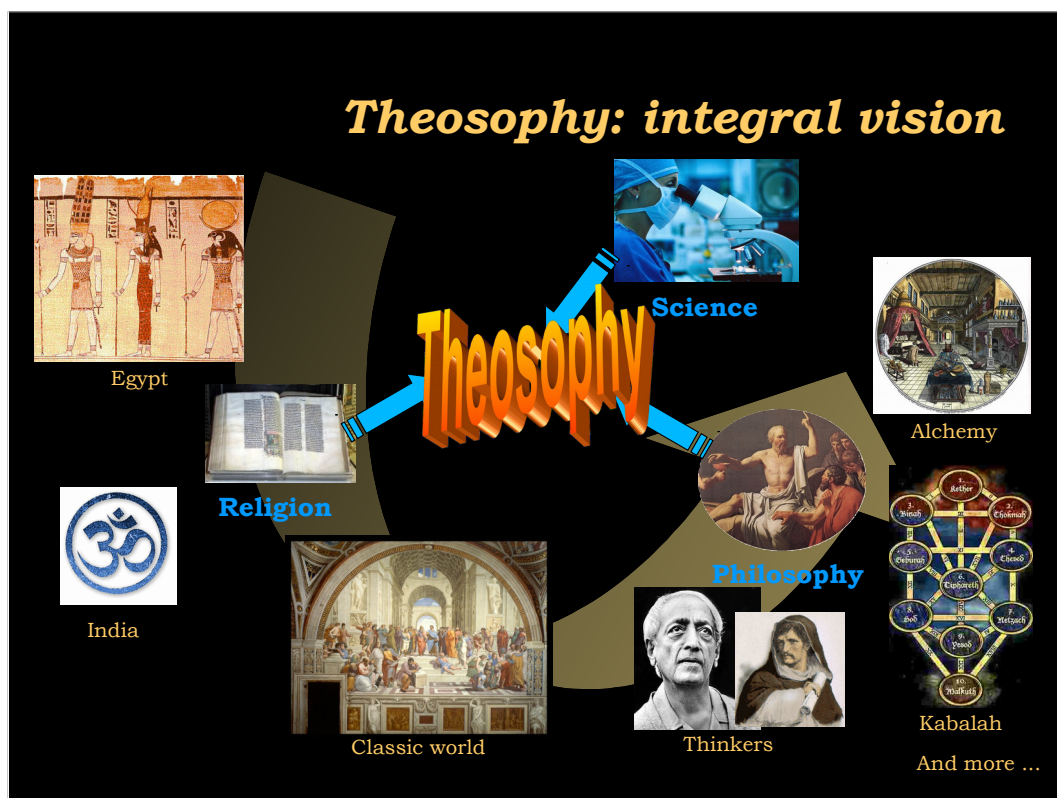
Science has grown enormously in the last centuries allowing us to know many secrets of Mathematics, Physics, Astronomy, Biology and other branches of knowledge.

Science has made possible the impressive technological development of the 20th century, allowing man to explore as never before the world around him and to shape the natural environment to some extent according to his convenience or what he thought fit. However, the requirement of objectivity, ability to repeat reasoning and experimental testing has been at the cost of a price. The basic questions are elusive, and although scientists expand the limits of knowledge, they seem unattainable by this method. The first causes are not part of the field of study of Science.

It is also necessary to distinguish between the duly contrasted knowledge and the innumerable theories that are elaborated to explain the observed facts. Theories change, evolve and are perfected, so they should not be taken as dogma or last word.

“Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are a part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.”

Max Planck



In ancient times the branches of knowledge were not formally specified and separated as they are now.

In all times there were human beings who considered Reality as a whole, Life as something complete and integrated that can not be understood if it is divided.

From remote times and places like Egypt, India, China, Greece and Rome, even to medieval Europe, there were more or less public currents of thought that expressed a body of similar ideas trying to answer the essential questions of life.

There were people who realized that many myths, legends, religious traditions, philosophical schemes and symbols are only flashes of Truth. That there is a common current that lies behind and that has been partially understood and manifested in these different expressions.

Among these people, there were persons who with their own conscience managed to connect more closely with Reality and understand the mysteries of Life. They left their testimony and tried to convey signs of Reality, which is an experience and not simply a set of ideas or doctrines.

The seeker of Truth, therefore, should not adhere dogmatically to any of these ideas but must see what lies behind them, must see behind the veil, to find his own expression, his own understanding and point of view .

This syncretic, eclectic, integrative, holistic approach is known as **Theosophy**.

Theosophy can then be considered as the synthesis of Philosophy, Science and Religion in the constant search for Truth.

Theosophy: semantics

- From the Greek: *Theos* + *Sophia*

θεοσοφία

- Theosophy is the **Divine Wisdom**
- Is the wisdom of the essential principles of Life
- Wisdom is not knowledge but realization, experience, identity
- Other equivalent words:
 - Brahma Vidya
 - Ageless wisdom
 - Perennial philosophy
 - Occult doctrine
 - Esoteric philosophy



Sophia (Wisdom) in the Celso library, Efeso

The body of ideas that appeared in so many times and places under different forms but with the same essence, was given the name of **Theosophy**.

The word comes from the Greek:

Theos	Divine, from the realm of the gods
Sophia	Wisdom

Therefore, Theosophy is **Divine Wisdom**. It is the first-hand knowledge of the laws of Nature that give man a transcendent sense of Life, as well as an ability to understand his apparent contradictions and conflicts.

You have to differentiate between **knowledge** and **wisdom**. Knowledge is information with context, it is explanation based on models, based on ideas and reasoning. But wisdom is something more, it is experience, realization, it is a consciousness of Reality that surpasses the limits of mind and reasoning.

Theosophy has also been known by other names, according to where it has manifested itself or the approach given to it, such as Brahma Vidya, Ageless Wisdom, Perennial Philosophy, Occult Doctrine, Esoteric Philosophy, etc.

Although the *word* Theosophy can be defined, it is not possible to define what is Theosophy because it is not a set of ideas or doctrines. Any attempt to express Truth in words is reduced to speaking about it but it can not be enclosed in a set of concrete ideas. This is similar to the fact that a map or travel guide to a particular place is not the same as experiencing the trip to that place. Says an old aphorism "The finger that points the Moon is not the Moon." In this course we will touch on some fundamental principles of Theosophy to promote research and reflection, but we can not state Theosophy, since it is really an individual and transcendent experience of reality.

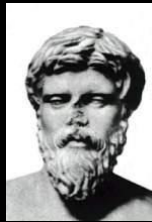
Theosophy is the science of Life and the art of living.

C. Jinarajadasa

Theosophy: origin of the name



Alexandria Library
(reconstruction)
Ancient Center of
Research and Knowledge



Ammonius Saccas
(175? – 242)



Plotinus
(205 - 270)

Neoplatonism

Theosophical Eclectic School

And also Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, ...

According to historical records the first time the name Theosophy was used was in Alexandria around 200 AD by the Neoplatonic philosophers of the *School of Alexandria*.

In Alexandria, in the first centuries of our era, a wonderful center of universal knowledge developed thanks to the presence of many thinkers from different branches of science and philosophy, such as Archimedes, Heron, Euclid, Aristarchus of Samos, Eratosthenes. This was possible by the creation of a large library that came to contain a million works according to some say.

There, a philosopher, **Ammonius Saccas**, founded a school of philosophy in which he tried to rescue the subtle essence that lies behind so many philosophies and religions, integrating them, and called it the **Theosophical Eclectic School**.

His main disciple, **Plotinus**, organized it and continued this line, as well as many other philosophers, who also expanded it geographically, showing the world the possibilities of this body of ideas and how they offered a coherent explanation of the Universe.

Its teachings in turn have their roots in a tradition that goes back to Egypt, India, pre-Socratic philosophers, mainly Pythagoras, and other important sources of wisdom in the ancient world.

The Theosophical School enjoyed a great reputation and attracted the attention of thinkers and influential people of the ancient world who were disciples of some of its highest exponents. In addition to the above, we must name Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus as the most outstanding.

It should be noted that the influence of the Neoplatonists was not limited to their epoch, but it is extended to the present day.



Theosophy flourished throughout history and in different places through the message of notable thinkers who were visionary, brilliant, and have left a mark that has transcended their own time. They have expressed their vision of Perennial Wisdom under different names or without any particular one.

A long list of philosophers, religious leaders, scientists, writers, artists and thinkers in general have been and are also in our time individual expressions of some aspects of the Theosophical tradition. Many scriptures considered sacred are veiled, partial and symbolic expressions of this very essence.

They have been the cries of the Ageless Wisdom, who like leaves of a tree have been nourished of the same sap that all the other leaves of the same tree to give their particular focus, his personal message, but ultimately based on the same universal wisdom, in Divine Wisdom or Theosophy.

If we wanted to make a list of these historical figures this would be extremely incomplete, but we should include names like Gautama the Buddha, Hermes, Pythagoras, Heraclitus of Ephesus, Lao-Tze, Plato, Jesus of Nazareth, Plotinus, Iamblichus, Shankaracharya, Paracelsus, Patanjali, Leonardo Da Vinci, Giordano Bruno, Isaac Newton, Spinoza, and many, many more.

The Theosophy researcher has at his disposal an extensive collection of sources of information of these thinkers with their contributions and studies, which motivate and enrich the research. However we must remember that not even the most extensive collection of all these sources is not in itself Theosophy because it is the direct experience of the Reality in the own conscience.

Divine Wisdom is to realize the identity of the Conscience with the Reality of ourselves and of the Universe.

Theosophy in modern times

- It emerged at the end of the 19th century thanks to **Helena P. Blavatsky**, an extraordinary Russian woman for the time.
- She had traveled extensively visiting knowledge centers in the East and relating to notable beings, who introduced her to Esoteric Philosophy.
- She gathered interested people with whom she founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875.
- Her teaching had an important impact on all modern culture.



Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

In the modern era, in the 19th century, there was a wakeup of an interest in the occult, the paranormal, that which was beyond the mechanistic explanations of the science of the time and of the established religious dogmas.

An extraordinary Russian woman, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), traveled in her youth throughout the world visiting different cultures and centers of knowledge especially in the East. There she was associated with notable beings who taught her the depths of Esoteric Philosophy or Theosophy. These beings were known by her and other people as **Mahatmas** (meaning great soul in Sanskrit), or spiritual masters. They were another expression of that long chain of enlightened beings who realized and gave to the world these teachings through all ages and places.

In 1873 Helena Blavatsky went to the United States and met Colonel Henry Steel Olcott who at that time collaborated as a journalist investigating psychic phenomena. Together they undertook to investigate the phenomena that were present in the manifestations of the spiritism of the time because they defied the materialism that dominated the culture of that time.

Blavatsky herself possessed extraordinary psychic powers, but she gave them no importance and considered them only as a sign that there is much more to the world than it seems through its material manifestation. Her interest was the Perennial Wisdom which explains the basic questions of life, the origin of the Universe and the transformation of the human being to realize his magnificent inner potential.

The Theosophical Society

▪ Founded on November 17, 1875 in New York by:

- Helena P. Blavatsky
- Henry S. Olcott
- William Q. Judge
- and others

Internacional name:

The Theosophical Society

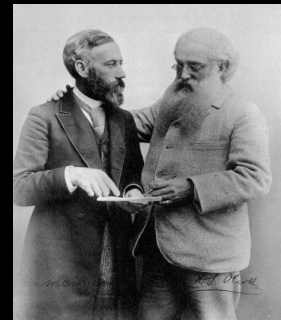
▪ Dedicated to the research, study and promotion of Theosophy.

Motto:

There is no religion higher than truth



Blavatsky and Olcott



Olcott and Judge

Blavatsky, also known by his initials HPB, and Olcott were enthusiastic in the task of recovering the teachings of Perennial Philosophy almost lost in the western world of that time.

To this end they initiated a movement to attract people interested in investigating ancient mysteries, strange phenomena and philosophy, which led to the founding of **The Theosophical Society** in New York City on November 17, 1875.

The main founders of the TS were Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the first Russian woman naturalized as an American citizen, and Henry Steel Olcott, a prominent lawyer and journalist who became the first President of the Society. Associated with them were William Quan Judge, a young lawyer from New York and other enthusiasts interested in the philosophy exposed by Madame Blavatsky.

The circumstances and stories surrounding the meeting of the founders and early times of the Theosophical Society are very well told first hand by Olcott in his book:

Old Diary Leaves [Henry Steel Olcott]

The book recounts what happened from the meeting of the founders to the early years of the Theosophical Society including the establishment of its International Headquarters in India, where it is nowadays.

Objectives of the Theosophical Society

1- To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

2- To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.

3- To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.



Emblem of the Theosophical Society

The Theosophical Society was founded with a spirit of research and improvement of humanity. The formulation of its objectives was evolving and although it maintained its essence it got to stabilize to its present form in 3 objects.

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

2. To encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.

3. To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man.

The first objective establishes as the basis for the ST the formation of a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without any kind of distinctions. As we will see throughout the course, this is not simply a moral basis for establishing a harmonic group. It is much more than this, it is the focus on the unity of all Life which is the essential basis of all the theosophical work.

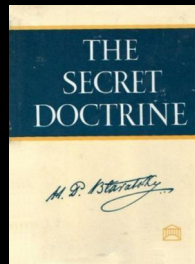
The second objective establishes that ST will seek to promote access to knowledge of the essential aspects of life provided by religion, philosophy and science, but from a broad, integrating, non-dogmatic point of view, in order to try to find that universal essence that underlies the three ways.

The third objective proposes a direct challenge to go into the unknown and investigate the Laws of Nature that are still a mystery to common academic knowledge. And it is not a mere curiosity but the development of latent capabilities in every human being. The great enlightened beings that have existed and exist prove to us that we have an extraordinary potential that we can develop if we want to unravel the mysteries of the Universe and of ourselves. It is not the development of paranormal faculties, but the pure expansion of Conscience, the development of faculties such as discernment, universal love, the consciousness of the eternal or the vision of the true.

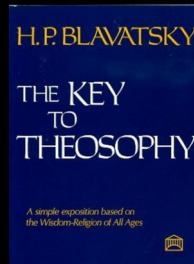
Fundamental works of Helena P. Blavatsky



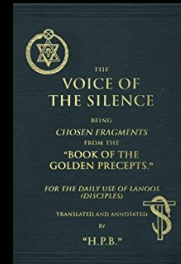
1877
2 volumes



1888
3 volumes



1889



1889



Helena P. Blavatsky
(1831 – 1891)

Helena P. Blavatsky was a Russian woman of noble birth in whose family were writers, novelists and passionate about culture. His grandfather had a library in which there were books of Hermeticism and Alchemy for which she became interested from a very young age.

As a young woman, she traveled all over the world in search of wisdom about the nature of life and the reason for human existence. Finally, Blavatsky brought the spiritual wisdom of the East and the ancient Mysteries to the modern West, where they were virtually unknown. His writings became the first exposition of modern Theosophy.

In 1877, H.P. Blavatsky published **Isis Unveiled**, which, according to her, was "the fruit of a somewhat intimate relationship with Eastern adepts and the study of their science." Its success was immediate worldwide. It aroused the interest of notable people in many countries and a considerable number of people entered the Society and they came to play an important role in it.

Later, Blavatsky decided to make his masterpiece, **The Secret Doctrine**, whose first volume was published in 1888 and which constitutes a profound treatise on the ideas of Ancient Wisdom based on a book not known till then in the West, The Book of Dzyan.

In 1889 she wrote the book **The Key to Theosophy** in which in the form of questions and answers she explains frequently asked questions about Theosophy and the Theosophical Society.

Also in 1889 she wrote another book called **The Voice of the Silence**, a classic for the seekers of inner realization and which HPB himself explains in the preface is the partial transcription of an ancient book called "The Book of the Precepts of Gold" that is part of the same series from where she took the Stanzas of Dzyan.

We do not regard the work of HPB as a dogma but as a monumental work worthy of study and analysis that had an extraordinary influence not only in esotericism but in the general culture as many scholars have recognized.

The Theosophical Society today

The Theosophical Society

Present in more than 60 countries (National Sections).

Members are grouped in Branches or Lodges in different cities.

Headquarter:
Adyar, Chennai (formerly Madras), India

International President
Mr. Tim Boyd (since 2014)



Tim Boyd
International President



Headquarter in Adyar, Chennai, India

The Theosophical Society is an international association formed by National Sections which is present in more than 60 countries around the world.

The members of the TS are people who meet in groups called Branches or Lodges, in which they carry out various activities of study, exchange of ideas and experiences, courses, conferences, workshops and fraternization, all tending to meet the 3 Objectives already set forth. Branches exist in several cities but there are also other localities in which there is only one isolated member that maintains relationship with the Section Secretariat as there are no Branches in its proximity.

The headquarters of the Theosophical Society is a large campus known as **Adyar**, which is located in the city of Chennai, formerly called Madras, in the state of Tamil Nadu in southern India. Adyar is a well-known place in the region and receives many tourist visits for the beauty of the place, on the banks of the river Adyar at its mouth in the Bay of Bengal. The profuse vegetation, its peace and the fact of being the center from where the work of the Society is directed in pursuit of the human improvement make Adyar a very special place. In the Headquarters also is the Library that contains a lot of documentation related to TS, about 250,000 volumes and a large collection of about 20,000 palm leaf manuscripts from different places in the East. It is a research center highly visited by academic scholars.

TS members from around the world democratically elect their local authorities and their International President. Since 2014, Mr. Tim Boyd of the United States of America has been the International President. There is also a General Council composed of the Presidents of the National Sections and other designated persons who make important decisions and assist the President.

On Internet

Headquarters: <http://www.ts-adyar.org/>

It has a directory with links to the websites of National Sections and Federations.

Members of The Theosophical Society

Requirements

- Accept the 3 objectives of The Theosophical Society
- Payment of TS dues

Freedom of thought

Guaranteed by resolution of the General Council

Freedom of expression

It only demands respect from others

Rights

- Participation in Lodge meetings
- Events
- Use of library
- Elect authorities



Becoming a member of the TS does not make you a theosophist
The ideal of the members is to be seekers of the Truth

To join the Theosophical Society it is only necessary to fill out an application, accept its 3 objectives and pay the fees set by the Section and by the Branch.

The TS does not impose beliefs on its members, who are united by a common search for Truth and the desire to learn the meaning and purpose of existence through study, reflection, self-responsibility, and compassionate service.

There is freedom of thought and expression, guaranteed by a resolution of the General Council which gives the right to any member to freely express their opinions on the sole condition that he also respects the opinions of others.

The member has the right to participate in the Branch meetings, at national and international events and to use the facilities of the Branch as his library. He can also take part in the election of local and international authorities as long as it complies with the provisions of the Statutes.

There are various publications, magazines, e-newsletters, forums and other means by which the member may be communicated with the TS organization and with other members.

It should be noted that joining the Theosophical Society does not make one a **Theosophist**, since the experience of Divine Wisdom is a personal experience that can not be gained by any external means. The Society simply expects its members to be fervent seekers of the Truth with the purpose of clearing the ignorance and illusion that so much suffering causes in the world and to improve the Life of all.

To think



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

- 1- What is the meaning of the word Theosophy? What is the antiquity of Theosophy? And of the name Theosophy?
- 2- In what sense can it be said that Theosophy is religious but it is not a religion, it is philosophical but it is not a philosophy, and it is scientific but it is not a science?
- 3- Is Theosophy a revelation given to the world in the works of Helena P. Blavatsky?
- 4- What is the meaning of the word religion in the context of the TS motto "*There is no religion higher than truth*"?
- 5- Is a student of Theosophy the same as a Theosophist?
- 6 - What does the phrase "*the powers latent in man*" mean in the third objective of the TS? Mention some one that at your discretion would be important to develop.
- 7- The elevator speech: If you had to briefly explain to someone what Theosophy is, what would you say?