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# THEOSOPHICAL HISTORY

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followers. In addition, the journal is also receptive to related movements (including pre-Blavatskyite Theosophy, Spiritualism, Rosicrucianism, and the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg to give but a few examples) that have had an influence on or displayed an affinity to modern Theosophy.

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There is no limitation on the length of manuscripts. In general, articles of 30 pages or less will be published in full; articles in excess of 30 pages may be published serially.

Brief communications, review articles, and book reviews are welcome. They should be submitted double-spaced.

All correspondence, manuscripts, and subscriptions should be sent to:

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# Editor's Comments In This Issue

Once again, the format of *Theosophical History* will depart from its usual mix of communications, articles, and reviews. As readers are aware, the occasion for the change of format for the last issue was the untimely demise of Associate Editor John Cooper. The occasion for the current change is, however, brought about by a circumstance that is more fortuitous: the English translation of Antoine Faivre's "Le courant théosophique (fin xvi<sup>e</sup>-xx<sup>e</sup> siècles): essai de périodisation." This article summarizes all the major writers and thinkers responsible for the theosophical phenomenon: from pre-Boehmian theosophers such as Paracelsus, Valentin Weigel, Heinrich Khunrath; to the central figure of Jacob Boehme; to important 17th century figures such as Johann Georg Gichtel, Aegidius Gutmann, Robert Fludd, Jane Leade, and Gottfried Arnold; to 18th century theosophers, among whom were Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, Jacob Brucker, Martinés de Pasqually and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin; and the important figures of the 19th and 20th centuries, including the founders of the Theosophical Society.

When one reads Professor Faivre's article, one must take into account his significant contribution to the field. Although he has been engaged in defining the field known as esotericism or Western esotericism for well over twenty years, it is only within the last few years that his views have come to generally known in the English-speaking world. In his own words

(quoted from "Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe," in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*: 2), "esotericism"

refers to an ensemble of spiritual currents in modern and contemporary Western history which share a certain *air de famille*, as well as the form of thought which is its common denominator. Each of these historical currents has a name of its own. . . . As for the underlying "form of thought," we have elsewhere presented it as an ensemble of six constitutive elements. Four of these are intrinsic to "esotericism": the doctrine of universal correspondences, living nature, imagination/mediations/ and transmutation. The other two are extrinsic (i.e., they may be absent in certain cases): concordance of traditions, and transmission of knowledge.

Among the currents that comprise western esotericism<sup>1</sup>, three are identified by Professor Faivre as "currents of thought, the manifestations of which have become the referential corpus of western esotericism": *Hermetism* (Alexandrian, Medieval neo-Alexandrian, and Modern neo-Alexandrian), *Christian Kabbalah*, and *Paracelsism* ("Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe": 4). Two additional currents that arose in the early 17th century were *Rosicrucianism* and *Theosophy*. Since both these currents arose by virtue of the influence of the first three currents, Professor Faivre remarks that "the Theosophical Society founded by H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) is not a successor of this current but represents a

different orientation, although again an esoteric one" (*Ibid.*: 5). Early in the article appearing in this issue, repeats this view:

Two major forms [of theosophy] appear to stand out: on the one hand, there is a single esoteric current among others which does not correspond to an official Society; on the other, there is an official Society which has given to itself the title "theosophical" and simultaneously a programmed orientation. The first major form is an initially amorphous galaxy which began to acquire shape in the spiritual climate of late 16th century Germany. . . . The second major form is represented by the Theosophical Society itself. . . which has pursued relatively precise directions and goals ever since its inception. . . to the point where it is sometimes, rightly or wrongly, regarded as a new religious movement, if not a new religion.

Although I end the quotation here, I would urge the reader to pay very close attention to what follows. His acknowledgment of the observation of Jean-Louis Siémons defending the connection of the two theosophies (the current and the Blavatskyian) and the use of the analogy of "common rooms" in a mansion that may be shared by the two theosophical "families" does not make the T.S. and Theosophical current mutually exclusive. Further remarks on these two forms come at the end of the article as well.

In light of the above observations, "The Theosophical Current: A Periodization" should be read in accordance with Professor Faivre's analysis of Western esotericism as a general concept encompassing a number of currents and "notions" from the early modern period up to the present day, that "theosophy" refers to one of these currents, and that the "theosophical cur-

rent" is not identical with the teaching of the Theosophical Society.

\* \* \*

## **Symposium on Western Esotericism and Jewish Mysticism**

A symposium on "Western Esotericism and Jewish Mysticism" will take place at Durban, South Africa from August 5-12, 2000. All proposals for panels, symposia and roundtables should reach the Secretariat on or before December 31, 1998. Proposals for individual papers must be received by March 31, 1999. Further information on the IAHR may be obtained from

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This symposium is part of the International Association for the History of Religions, an international body of national and regional societies for the academic study of religion. Information on the IAHR and the symposium may be accessed through its web-site at <http://www.udw.ac.za/iahr>. Quoted below is a passage explaining the IAHR's purpose and origin:

The International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) serves to promote the

academic study of religions through the international collaboration of all scholars whose research has a bearing on the subject (c.f. Constitution, article 1). It consists in principle of its member associations which are established in various countries and regions throughout the world. The IAHR was founded as an organization in 1950 on the occasion of the VIIth International Congress for the History of Religions, held in Amsterdam. The first Congress in the series was held in Paris in 1900. . . .

During recent years, the IAHR has grown to include more than thirty national associations in Australia, Belgium with Luxembourg, Canada (two associations), China, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea (ROK), Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Russia, Southern Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine, and the United States. Two important regional associations cover Africa and Latin America. . . .

The IAHR is itself a member association of the Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines (CIPSH) under the auspices of UNESCO. This association, also known in English as International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies, acts to coordinate the interests of a number of comparable associations in various fields.

International symposiums such as the Durban symposium are held every 5 years. The last symposium, therefore, was held in Mexico City in 1995 under the title, *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, the proceedings of which have recently been published under the joint-editorship of Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff by the publishing firm of Peeters (ISBN 90-429-0630-8). This publication may be purchased directly from the publisher,

whose address is Bondgenotenlaan 153, B-3000, Leuven, Belgium.

\* \* \*

## Cesnur Conference

The 13th International Conference organized by CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions, Torino) and The Faculty of The Bryn Athyn College of the New Church (Pennsylvania), will take place on June 2-4, 1999. The theme of the conference is "Religious and Spiritual Minorities in the 20th Century: Globalization and Localization." Topics will include:

- the established religions' reactions to the NRMs (New Religious Movements);
- the social institutions (governments, health services, justice, media, schools) and their reactions to the NRMs;
- the interactions between mainline religions and the NRMs;
- the NRMs' adaptation to the social and cultural context;
- the NRMs and the social contract: the NRMs and the search for common values in society.

Information is available through the following addresses:

Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan  
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CESNUR  
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10122 Torino  
fax: 39-011-541905  
phone: 39-011-541950 (Monday to Friday,  
10:00 am to 1:00 pm)  
e-mail: cesnurto@tin.it

\* \* \*

## Past Conferences

Two conferences were held in November and December: The Julius Evola Conference and the XIV<sup>th</sup> International Colloquium sponsored by *Politica Hermetica*.

The Evola Conference, "Julius Evola: Un Pensiero per la Fine del Millennio," was held on November 27 and 28, 1998, in Milan. Among the speakers and papers were:

Joscelyn Godwin (Colgate University and Associate Editor of *IH*), "Evola, preistoria e teosofia";

Enrico Crispolti (University of Siena), "Evola pittore tra Futurismo e Dadaismo";

Stefano Zecchi (Università Statale de Milano), "La questione della crisi: Evola e Spengler";

Enrico Montanari (Università "La Sapienza" di Roma), "Spiritualismo moderno e rischi della 'persona'."

According to Professor Godwin, there were three Evola Centenary conferences were held in 1998, the other two held in Rome. Although

information is lacking of the Rome conferences, a two volume publication of the papers is scheduled to appear sometime in 1999 by the Fondazione Julius Evola (Via S. Veniero 76, 00192 Rome).

On December 12 and 13, *Politica Hermetica* held its annual Colloquium under the presidency of Emile Poulat. Entitled "Les Langues Secretes" speakers and papers included:

Toufik Fahd, "les écritures des Sages Hermétiques d'après Ibn Wahshiyya (X<sup>e</sup> siècle)";

Gilles Lepape, "les alphabets à lunettes: une langue angélique?";

Guy Tamain, "les alphabets maçonniques."

All papers and proceedings will appear in *Politica Hermetica*. Information on this important publication is available at

L'Age d'Homme, S.A.R.L., 5, rue Férou, 75006 Paris (telephone: (1) 46 34 18 51; fax: 40 51 71 02).

\* \* \* \* \*

## Note

<sup>1</sup>I refer above only to Professor Faivre's first of three categories of currents: those "which are not notions." The other two categories are: a) "currents which also correspond to notions" (alchemy, astrology, magic or *magia*), occultism, and perennialism (each except the last-mentioned are subdivided into sub-categories); b) "notions which are not currents" (Hermeticism, gnosis). See "Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe": 6-10.

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# Introduction to Antoine Faivre's "The Theosophical Current: A Periodization"

*"The Theosophical Current: A Periodization" is an updated English translation of the paper "Le courant théosophique (fin xv<sup>e</sup>-xx<sup>e</sup> siècles): essai de périodisation", first read at the Eighth International Colloquium of Politica Hermetica ("Les postérités de la théosophie, du théosophisme au New Age" (December 12 and 13, 1992) held at the Sorbonne and later printed in Politica Hermetica 7 (1993): 6-41. A revised version of the paper was later printed in volume two of Antoine Faivre's *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996), 45-100.*

*The translation of the work began shortly after the appearance of the paper in 1992, with the following individuals translating various portions of the paper: Robert Boyd, Jean-Pierre Brach, Jean-Louis Siémons, and Brigitte Taquin. From circa 1996, Karen-Claire Voss also contributed to an inclusive translation of the paper. Finally, the person who rendered the translation in its semi-final form and who provided final editing touches was Christine Rhone. The final proof-reading of the paper was provided by Antoine Faivre himself, who corrected numerous passages and improved upon many passages that were less than clear. Finally, the paper was proofed by John Drais and Dr. Albert Vogeler for grammatical and stylistic problems. A final contribution was made by Professor Joscelyn Godwin, who translated the passage*

*from Boehme's Aurora on pages 189-190. All the principals have spent untold hours on the project to insure as flawless an essay as possible. Responsibility for whatever failures that arise in the text must rest with me.*

*The format presented in this issue of Theosophical History differs from its usual format of columned texts and endnotes. The original plan was to publish "The Theosophical Current" as an Occasional Paper. The decision was made, however, to publish it in the journal because of the importance of the subject and because of the journal's wider circulation. Columns and endnotes were abandoned because of the length and importance of the notes. It would have been difficult to read a columned text with such long footnotes, yet the notes were important enough to place them under the numbered text rather than at the end of the text. Punctuation style is also different from the usual Chicago Manual requirements. My decision was to follow the punctuation format as it appeared in the original French text.*

*Finally, a word about the author, Antoine Faivre. Born in Reims in 1934, Professor Faivre is currently Directeur d'Études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section of Religious Studies, Sorbonne), where he holds the chair of the History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe. He is the*

*author of numerous books and articles, among which are Eckartshausen et la théosophie chrétienne (Paris: Klincksieck, 1969), Mystiques, Théosophes et Illuminés au siècle des Lumières (Hildesheim: Georg Olmsseries Studien und Materialien zur Geschichte der Philosophie [Band 20], 1977), Access to Western Esotericism (Albany: SUNY, 1994), The Eternal Hermes (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1995), and Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental, vol. II (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1996). This book is expected to be published in English translation in 1999 by SUNY Press. As mentioned elsewhere, Professor Faivre is also the co-editor (with Wouter J. Hanegraaff) of the recently published book, Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion (Gnostica No. 2) [see Editor's Comments].*

James Santucci

\* \* \*

# The Theosophical Current: A Periodization

by Antoine Faivre

École Pratique des Hautes Études  
(Section des Sciences Religieuses), Sorbonne

When we use the term “theosophy”, (a word with a long-standing history), we should always be specific about the sense in which we intend it<sup>1</sup>. In 1987, James Santucci and Jean Louis Siémons published the results of their respective research on the use of the word ‘theosophy’ during late antiquity and the Middle Ages<sup>2</sup>. From this it springs out that Porphyry (234-305) appears to have been the first to introduce the term “*theosophia*”. In Porphyry’s view, a “*theosophos*” is an ideal being within whom are reconciled the combined capacities of a philosopher, an artist and a priest of the highest order<sup>3</sup>. Iamblicus (250-330) spoke of “the divinely inspired Muse” (*theosophos Mousè*”; Proclus (412-485) uses *theosophia* to mean “doctrine”, whereas, among the first Christian writers, for example, Clement of Alexandria (circa 150-215), we find that “*theosophos*” means “moved by divine science”. Likewise, when reading the works of pseudo-Dionysus we are hard put to distinguish between “*theologia*”, “*theosophia*” and “divine philosophy”, whereas the late Platonists used the word “*theosophia*” to designate practically any kind of spiritual tenet, even theurgy itself. Finally, during the middle ages the term ended up acquiring the ordinary meaning of “*theologia*”<sup>4</sup>, “*theosophoi*”

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<sup>1</sup> The present study is devoted not merely to the history of a trend of thought but also to a history of a specific word. It has been anticipated by other more concise articles I have published under the heading “Theosophie” in *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (vol. XV [Paris, 1973], 1095 f.), a text which must undergo heavy editing and improvement before being reprinted, and in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique* (Paris, Beauchesne, 1990, fasc. 96-98, col. 549 sq. See also “Part One” in A. Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Jean Louis Siémons, *Théosophia. Aux sources néo-platoniciennes et chrétiennes (IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Paris, Cariscript, 1988, 41 pp. James A. Santucci, “On *Theosophia* and Related Terms”, *Theosophical History*, vol. II, no. 3 (July 1987): 107-110 and James A. Santucci, *Theosophy and the Theosophical Society* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1985). On the use of *theosophia* in patristic literature, see also G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, vol. I (Oxford, 1961), 636. On the same word as used within the Theosophical Society, cf. J.-L. Siémons, “De l’usage du mot théosophie par Madame Blavatsky”, in *Politica Hermetica*, no. 7: *Les postérités de la théosophie: du théosophisme au Nouvel Age* (Paris, L’Age d’ Homme, 1993): 125-34.

<sup>3</sup> J.-L. Siémons, *Théosophia*, 11f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-18, 21-23, 26f. As regards John Scot Eriugena, commentator of Pseudo-Dionysus (around 862), cf. more particularly Migne, *Patrologie latine*, vol. 122, p. 1171.

thereby becoming, just as in the *Summa Philosophiae* attributed to Robert Grosseteste, (1175-1253) merely another name for the authors of Holy Scripture<sup>5</sup>.

These few examples exhibit as much multiplicity of meaning as they do affinity. Accordingly, if we assume that the overall significance of the word ‘theosophy’ remains the “Wisdom of God” or the “science of divine things”, one can choose either to emphasize the semantic discrepancies among the different meanings or to look for a middle term and a common ground, according to our individual preference. In the first case, one risks overlooking the subtle ties which connect the different writers; in the second, one risks obscuring the contours of individual meanings so that both the authors and their theories become interchangeable. It is not only the texts from late antiquity and the middle ages which present us with this dilemma: from the time of the Renaissance until today the word ‘theosophy’ has continuously had different meanings ascribed to it. Here, my aim is not simple enumeration, because that would yield only a fragmented picture of the whole, nor shall I attempt to reduce all of these terms to one common principle (an impossible task; moreover, one which would imply a doctrinal bias). Rather, I mainly want to draw attention here to the advantage of starting from empirical data<sup>6</sup> and to ask questions such as these: Is it possible for an observer to draw some major trends from the myriad uses and meanings which the word ‘theosophy’ has been given in the West, and how? If so, what are the essential elements each of these trends is comprised of? Approaching the subject in this way means we are afforded an escape from the dilemma which has just been alluded to, while at the same time the landscape is allowed to disclose itself as it really is.

It seems that the answer to the first question could hardly elude any visitor to the imaginary museum composed of the esoteric and mystical currents which pervade modern and contemporary western culture. Two major forms appear to stand out: on the one hand, there is a single esoteric current among others<sup>7</sup> which does not correspond to an official Society; on the other, there is an official Society which has given to itself the title “theosophical” and simultaneously a programmed orientation. The first major form is an initially amorphous galaxy which began to acquire shape in the spiritual climate of late 16th century Germany, reaching such heights in the 17th century that it has continued to penetrate, with phases of growth and decline, part of western culture until the present day. The second major form is represented by the Theosophical

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<sup>5</sup> *Summa Philosophia Roberto Grosseteste ascripta*, in *Bäumker's Beiträge zur Geschichte des Mittelalters*, vol. IX, 1912, p. 275 *passim*. Some Latin commentators and translators of Pseudo-Dionysus (Hugo of St. Victor, for instance) retain the word “*theosophia*”; after the Renaissance, it is often substituted by “*sapientia divina*” (*cf.* below, no. 21).

<sup>6</sup> I have proposed an approach to the concept of esotericism in the same way; *cf.* “Part One” of *Access to Western Esotericism*, 1-19.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to alchemy and astrology, obviously present before in various guises, the other esoteric currents in early modern Western thought are: Neo-Alexandrian hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, Paracelsism, “*philosophia occulta*” (which takes various forms), theosophy, and Rosicrucianism.

Society itself, officially founded in 1875 at the instigation of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), which has pursued relatively precise directions and goals ever since its inception, (an endeavor incumbent upon any group of this kind), to the point where it is sometimes, rightly or wrongly, regarded as a new religious movement, if not a new religion. Of course, there are obvious similarities between these two: first, they both play an important part in western esotericism; and secondly, both claim to deal with “wisdom” or “knowledge” or “divine things”, not from a theological perspective, but from a gnostic one. The gnosis in question—particularly the rapport and mediation which unite the human being to the divine world—is considered to be a privileged path of transformation and salvation. Why then the attempt to distinguish between these two “theosophies”? In the first place, they do not actually rely on the same reference works; in the second place, their style is different. The referential corpus of the first belongs essentially to the Judeo-Christian type; its foundational texts date from the end of the 16th to the beginning of the 17th centuries. That of the second reveals a more universal aspect; it is deeply infused with eastern elements, particularly Hindu and Buddhist. Of course, transitions and common elements among the material used by both trends are in evidence: for example, borrowings from the theosophical current by the Theosophical Society are not unknown.

In *Politica Hermetica* (see above, note 2) Jean-Louis Siémons points out that at least twenty references to Boehme can be found in Mme Blavatsky’s works. While acknowledging obvious discrepancies between the Theosophical Society and western theosophy, Siémons adds that these dissimilarities, “however, are not important enough to cause an insurmountable barrier . . .”. One cannot help but agree with him on this point. If we admit the existence of different rooms inside the esoteric mansion as we can observe it, then each should be allotted its own style of furniture; if, on the other hand, each of the two theosophical “families” is large enough and rich enough to settle in one or even several of these rooms, there is nothing to prohibit their sharing the common rooms and the grounds. Likewise, although western Europe has indeed known a Romantic era, it would be meaningless to put both Novalis and Alfred de Musset into the same category unless one had in mind the concept of an “eternal Romanticism” (not unlike that of the “primordial Tradition” so dear to some). But here we would deal with a different matter, one which is fraught with subjectivity and not without doctrinal undertones.

These preliminary distinctions being made, the purpose now is to present the genesis, development and specific features of the first form (“classical theosophy”) in the framework of a periodic overview. It appears that four different periods comprise its historical evolution, and these periods have provided me with the structure I adhere to in the present article<sup>8</sup>: I) From the end of the 16th century through the 17th, the development of a specific textual corpus which

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<sup>8</sup> This periodization (in the sense of dividing and discussing this current in developmental periods) differs from that suggested by Bernard Gorceix (*La Mystique de Valentin Weigel [1533–1588] et les origines de la théosophie allemande* [Université de Lille III, 1972, p. 455f., note): “A history of German theosophy (16th to 19th centuries) should distinguish

will be deemed “theosophic” from that time on; this period is a kind of first “Golden Age” of this particular current. II) The spreading of that corpus and its reception by historians of philosophy in the first half of the 18th century. III) Its revival in the pre-Romantic and Romantic era (*i.e.*, the second “Golden Age”). IV) Its decline and also its endurance from the mid-19th century until the present.

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three periods: the Bohemian period (Jacob Böhme, 1575–1624), foreshadowed by Valentin Weigel, by the “renaissance” of kabbala and alchemy in the 16th century, by the Paracelsism of Gerhard Dorn; the period of the end of the 17th century and of the beginning of the 18th century, around the figure of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), a period which is contemporary of the kabbalistic renewal in Knorr von Rosenroth (1636–1689) and of the Swedenborgian movement, with Johann Albrecht Bengel, Johann Conrad Dippel, Philipp Matthaëus Hahn; the third period, the richest one, is that of mystical Romanticism, announced by the French Illuminist movement, with Kirchberger, Kleuker, Eckartshausen, Baader, *etc.*”. It is only possible to put things this way if one chooses to end the “Bohemian period” early. For my part, I am inclined to consider the entire 17th century as a whole. Let us add moreover that Oetinger’s first publications did not begin to appear until 1731; that is, fifty-three years after Knorr von Rosenroth’s *Kabbala Denudata* (1677). Besides, neither Bengel’s works nor Christian Kabbalah form part of the theosophic current understood *stricto sensu* (even though Kabbala is indeed a kind of theosophy). Finally, the “Swedenborgian movement” began in the second half of the 18th century.

# I. The Birth and the First Golden Age of the Theosophical Current (end of the 16th century through the 17th century)

## A) *Its Genesis and Appearance*

At the end of the 15th century was constituted what one could call a prefiguration of the modern Western esoteric landscape. This is due to the appearance of new currents, to the revival or adaptation of more ancient traditions, and most of all, to the impetus to reconnect each of these different fields of research or knowledge with one another. Neo-Alexandrian Hermetism, Christian Kabbala, “*magia*” (as it was understood by Pico della Mirandola), and of course alchemy and astrology can be numbered among these currents. During the 16th century the Paracelsian current arrived, and it was also around this time, at the end of the century when the writings of Paracelsus (1493-1541) began to be systematically published, that another current which was soon to be called ‘theosophy’ appeared. Born in Germany, like Paracelsism, theosophy draws on the former, and has a great deal of affinity with it. By this time, Paracelsus had already introduced a mode of reflection on Nature into European esotericism; a cosmology that was comprised of magic, medicine, alchemy, chemistry, experimental science, and complex speculations about the networks of correspondences uniting the different levels of reality in the universe. However, because of the emphasis he placed on something he called the “Light of Nature”, for the most part Paracelsus remained within the limits of the “second causes”, although he claimed to be returning to the “principles”. Subsequently, it fell to a few inspired thinkers to fit these cosmological causes into a more global vision; that is to say, to ensure a transition between Paracelsian thought and theosophy proper. These thinkers truly appear to have been the “proto-theosophers”.

There are, in the first place, three German thinkers: Valentin Weigel, Heinrich Khunrath, and Johann Arndt. The theosophy of Valentin Weigel (1533–1588) “was born out of a remarkable encounter between two traditions: the influence of the Rhine-Flemish, which he maintained more fervently than anyone else in the Reformation period, and the influence of the great Paracelsian synthesis, which would not become known in Germany until after the peace of Augsburg”<sup>9</sup>. Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605) was the author of *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595 and 1609) among other works, an alchemical-theosophical work which has considerable influence on most of the esoteric currents in the 17th century. In his *Vier Bücher vom wahren Christenthum*, Johann Arndt (1555–1621) (also the alleged author of an interesting commentary on four plates of the *Amphitheatrum*), formulated (particularly in Book IV, published in 1610), what would come to

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<sup>9</sup> Gorceix, *La Mystique de Valentin Weigel*, 15. We remind our readers that there are two great Paracelsian trends, one with a rather “scientific” and rational outlook, exemplified by authors like Quercetanus or Severinus who do not belong to the esoteric field, and the other, which we are treating here.

be known as “mystical theology”, from the title of a writing by pseudo-Dionysus. His system blends medieval mysticism together with the Paracelsian legacy and the alchemical tradition, and he insists on the existence of a specific faculty innate in human beings, that of being able to attain a “second birth”, which he understood as being the acquisition of a new body within the elected soul. Arndt’s influence was to be enormous, not only on theosophy, but also in the genesis of the Rosicrucian current. To these three names we must add two more: First, that of Aegidius Gutmann (1490–1584), whose 1575 *Offenbabrung göttlicher Majestät* enjoyed a wide private circulation (although it was not published before 1619) and played a large part in the emergence of both the Rosicrucian and the theosophical currents. Secondly, that of the German heterodox Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490–1561) who, although a confirmed docetist, nonetheless elaborated a theory of the spiritual body (the “*Geistleiblichkeit*” or spiritual corporeity), an idea which would become central in theosophy. Thirdly, that of Gerhard Dorn (ca. 1530–ca. 1584), editor and commentator of Paracelsus. In his alchemical writings, he developed a philosophy of Nature (a visionary, highly elaborated “*Physica*” which in many aspects foreshadows that of Boehme<sup>10</sup>).

With Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) the theosophical current acquired its definitive characteristics, the Boehmian work representing something like the nucleus of that which constitutes the classical theosophical corpus. One day in 1610, while contemplating a pewter vase, Boehme had his first “vision”, a sudden revelation, thanks to which he grasped at one stroke an intuitive awareness of the networks of correspondence and of the implications between different worlds or levels of reality. He then wrote his first book, *Aurora*, which I am inclined to see as the definitive birth of the theosophical current strictly speaking. This book was followed by many others (all written in German), and in turn, by those which numerous other spiritual thinkers wrote in the wake of Boehme’s thought.

The theosophy of Boehme is a kind of amalgam between the medieval mystical tradition of 16th century Germany and a cosmology of the Paracelsian type. Judeo-Christian, it is presented as a visionary hermeneutic applied to biblical texts. Germanic in language, it is “barbaric” in the sense that it owes practically nothing to the Latin or Greek esoteric currents, whether a question of neo-Alexandrian Hermetism or Christian Kabbalah. In Boehme’s theosophy we rediscover more alchemical elements and a bit of the Jewish Kabbalah, but above all, it should be emphasized, we find Paracelsianism. In any event, the Boehmian synthesis went far beyond the Germanic countries, imbued as it was with a range of characteristics which, when taken as a whole, served to capture the attention of a large public for a long time and gave rise to a theosophical calling in many people.

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<sup>10</sup> The Paracelsian heritage is however not essential to Arndt; what is, is the mystical theology inherited from Tauler through the *devotio moderna* and the *Theologia Deutsch*—in other words, a mystical theology popularized on a more practical plane, that of the *praxis pietatis*. On Caspar Schwenckfeld’s theory of “spiritual flesh”, see for instance Alexandre Koyré, *Mystiques, Spirituels, Alchimistes du XVI siècle allemand* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1955), *Cahiers der Annales*, no. 10, p. 16. Most of G. Dorn’s treatises have been reprinted in the *Theatrum Chemicum* in several editions (Ursel, 1602, Strasbourg, 1613 and 1659–1661), which contributed to their fame. Boehme may have possibly known Dorn’s work through the *Theatrum*.

## **B) The Characteristics of Theosophy and the Reasons for Its Success.**

Although there is no single point of doctrinal unity among theosophers, they do have some common traits. I propose to distinguish three:

a) *The God/Human/Nature Triangle*. This inspired speculation bears simultaneously on God—the nature of God, intradivine processes, *etc.*; on Nature—whether eternal, intellectual, or material; and on Man—his origin, his place in the universe, his role in the workings of salvation, *etc.* Essentially, it deals with the relations between these three. The three angles of this Triangle (God–Man–Nature) are in complex relationships with one another, a complexity made of dramatic processes. To these three factors was added a fourth, the Scripture (it is through active imagination that one is made capable of apprehending all of these correspondences).

b) *The Primacy of the Mythic*. The active, creative imagination of the theosopher gets support from what is given by Revelation, but always at the cost of privileging its most mythic elements (for example, those which are found in Genesis, the vision of Ezekiel, and the Apocalypse) and by tending to mythicize those elements which are less mythic. Thus, great use is made of various characters, mythemes, and scenarios such as the Sophia, the angels, the primeval androgyne, the successive falls (*e.g.*, of Lucifer, of Adam, of Nature herself, *etc.*), all these being things which theologians tend to rationalize or even to pass over entirely in silence. Theosophy is a kind of theology of the image; one could almost speak here of a return to a multi-faceted imaginary starting from which theologies (in the strict sense of the term) work, but which they present in a rational mode in order to legitimate themselves, thereby allowing themselves to be dissociated from what for them is no more than dross<sup>11</sup>.

c) *Direct Access to Superior Worlds*. Man possesses in himself a generally dormant but always potential faculty<sup>12</sup> to connect with directly, or to “branch out onto”, the divine world or that of superior beings. This faculty is due to the existence of a special organ within us, a kind of *intellectus*,

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<sup>11</sup> This accounts for the fact that theosophy is often better received within religions devoid of authoritative dogmas. The Kabbalah of the *Zohar* is nothing but a Jewish theosophy (*cf.* Gershom Scholem, *Les Grands Courants de la mystique juive* [Paris: Payot, 1960], 221f.) On theosophy and Islam, see below “New outlooks on theosophy”. Concerning the successive Falls, there are indeed two of them: one, that of Adam, described in the Bible; the second, or Lucifer’s, is hardly touched upon by Scripture. Now, it is part of the theosopher’s attitude to stray out from the biblical text, so as to find the key to the major question: *Unde Malum?* (“Whence Evil?”). This question G. Scholem views as the true starting point of theosophic speculation; that is how the matter stands with Boehme, anyway. Theosophy is always, one way or the other, a theodicy of some sort and its constant aim is to exonerate God (I owe this last remark to Pierre Deghaye).

<sup>12</sup> This faculty may of course be compared with the human *mens* (*noûs*) according to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and to the spark of the soul (*Seelenfunken*) found in Master Eckhart.

which is none other than our imagination—in the most positive and creative sense of that term. Once achieved, this contact exhibits three characteristics: 1) it permits the exploration of all levels of reality; 2) it assures a kind of co-penetration of the divine and the human; and 3) it gives our spirit the possibility to “fix” itself in a body of light, that is to say, to effectuate a “second birth”. Here we can see a rapport with the mystic, however, the mystic purports to abolish images whereas, to the contrary, for Boehme and his successors the image signifies accomplishment<sup>13</sup>.

Taken by themselves, these three traits are not outside the field of esotericism<sup>14</sup>. None of them is peculiar to theosophy, but the simultaneous presence of all three in the very center of this field make for the specificity of theosophical discourse. Moreover, the style of the theosophical discourse also appears to be quite specific. It is generally baroque, not only because the work of Boehme and his various German successors was already strongly marked by this form of expression which was dominant at the time, but most of all, by virtue of its invariable recourse to myths of the fall, of reintegration, and of transformation, all of which were dramatically lived out or relived in the soul of the theosopher. These factors can also account for the recurrence of this style, albeit in a less spontaneous fashion, in the works of later theosophers.

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<sup>13</sup> This world is imbued with the same nature as the *mundus imaginatis* mentioned by Henry Corbin in reference to Islamic theosophy (cf. below, “New outlooks on theosophy”). However, Boehme’s Godhead can never become an object of knowledge, since it resides in a totally unattainable light. As for its revelation through Nature, only the man who is born from above is capable of receiving it. Boehme repeatedly quotes I Cor. 2, 14: “A man who is unspiritual refuses what belongs to the Spirit of God”. Boehme says “*der natürliche Mensch*” or “*der psychische Mensch*”, for “the man who is not spiritual”. Now, if mysticism admittedly claims to suppress all images, this can really be said only of the higher forms of contemplation and, even so, some shading must be introduced as, for instance, in the cases of Hildegard of Bingen or Maria of Agreda. As Pierre Deghaye (*La Doctrine ésotérique de Zinzendorf (1700-1760)* [Paris: Klincksieck, 1969], p. 443) justly remarks: “Theosophy describes essentially intra-divine life. Mystical theology also deals with that life. A mystic like Tauler describes, naturally, the process of divine life on the trinitarian level. But what is most present in that mystical theology is the description of inner states. A contemplative is unceasingly attentive to his own “ground”; he has to abide by that rule, and when he relates his experience he deals mostly with the life of this soul. As for the theosopher, he makes us more forgetful about his own person. He presents himself mostly as a spectator of mysteries without necessarily getting back to his own self”.

And again: “For theosophy, for erstwhile theologians, the fruit of our thought materializes under the visible symbolic form” (*ibid.*, p. 540).

<sup>14</sup> At least the esoteric field as I have attempted to circumscribe it, is as a form of thought built upon the association of four basic components (the idea of universal correspondences; (a) the idea of a living Nature; (b) the essential part played by creative imagination and the mediating planes it is linked with; (c) the importance of the transmutation of the self and/or Nature and (d) two secondary elements (notions of transmission and “concordance”). See above, note 6.

Here we might ask what was it in the 17th century that was able to encourage the successful emergence of this kind of discourse? The style itself (*i.e.*, the art form) is not enough to account for it. There was another contributing factor which can help account for both the appearance and the vogue of esotericism (understood as a melange of currents and traditions constituting the referential body noted above which became specific toward the end of the 15th and 16th centuries). We find that theosophy, which had only recently been born, quickly attached itself to these currents and to this corpus and benefited from this vogue. Still other factors were at play. In the absence of any doctrinal unity or even doctrine, pure and simple, we find only systems of thought, peculiar to each theosopher, a characteristic guaranteed to appeal to minds which had been disturbed by the religious quarrels during the period that kindled the Thirty Years War. We can distinguish four different factors of a politico-religious type which were linked to Lutheranism, and two of a philosophico-scientific type.

Originally, theosophy emerged from Lutheran soil. First of all, Lutheranism allows free inquiry (whether theoretically or by definition), which in certain inspired souls can take a prophetic turn. Secondly, Lutheranism is characterized by a paradoxical blend of mysticism and rationalism, whence the need to put inner experience under discussion, and inversely, to listen to discussions and to transform them into inner experience. Thirdly, at the beginning of the 17th century, less than one hundred years after the Reformation, the spiritual poverty of Protestant preaching and the dryness of its theology were sometimes sorely resented, whence the need for revitalization. To these three factors was added a fourth, which presented itself as a challenge: if in the milieus where Lutheran theosophy was born (*i.e.*, among the nobility and the physicians) there was a certain freedom *vis-à-vis* ministers of the cult, prophetic activity was nevertheless not well-tolerated; *e.g.*, Boehme was a scapegoat of the Lutheran minister in Gœrlitz, and in other places people were fiercely orthodox. In the same period, the same factors accounted for the appearance of the Rosicrucian current, also a recent arrival in the terrain of western esotericism and also with a reformist slant. In addition, one can observe that since the time of the Renaissance most esoteric thinkers are, according to their various lights “reformers” as well, if we give this word a general meaning so as not to confuse it with Protestantism *per se*.

On the philosophico-scientific level, it is commonplace to recall that the epoch witnessed an intensified desire for the unity of sciences and ethics—a need to unify thought. The idea of a solidarity of thinkers, that of a “total” science, formed part of the spiritual and intellectual climate. Now, theosophy appeared to respond to this need. Theosophy is globalizing in its essence. Its vocation demonstrates an impetus to integrate everything within a general harmonious whole. It is the same with Rosicrucianism (*Fama Fraternitatis*, 1614 and *Confessio*, 1615) and with the “pansophic” current which it created; pansophy above all presented itself as a system of universal knowledge, just as Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670) had proposed: all things are ordained by God and classified according to analogical relations. Or, if one prefers, a knowledge of divine things is acquired by starting from the concrete world, from the entire universe, which in the first place is a matter of deciphering

“signatures” or hieroglyphs<sup>15</sup>. The second philosophico-scientific factor was the appearance of mechanism, which favored the emergence of Cartesianism. In contrast to this new form of scientific imagination and to an epistemology which emptied the universe of its “correspondences”, theosophy and pansophy reaffirmed the place of the microcosm in the macrocosm. Certainly, theosophy is not scientific, and pansophy has never gone beyond the project stage. Nevertheless, at this time, both of them appeared to many people as a promise, a hope, a new dawn of thought. Moreover, the poetic aspect of their discourse favored a co-penetration of literature and science and by virtue of this contributed to the development of the popularization of science.

### **C) The First Corpus and the First Critical Discourses**

By the theosophical corpus of the 17th century, we understand an ensemble of texts which the theosophers themselves as well as non theosophically-oriented observers of the latter (historians, theologians) range under that heading.

There is a list which is cited frequently, albeit with some variants regarding the names of authors; we also note that the words ‘theosophers’ or ‘theosophy’ are not always used. In any case, here I am providing a list of the 17th century authors most frequently cited in the 17th and 18th. The names are arranged according to countries and the list is limited to mentioning only a single work written by each author. Besides Paracelsus and Weigel, often cited as being representatives of the theosophical current, and Boehme, whose name constantly recurs and

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<sup>15</sup> Contrary to F.A. Yates’ statement (*The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 169), “*pansophia*” does not originate in Patrizi himself but could have been derived from his own terminology (“*panarchia*”, “*panpsychia*”, “*pancosmia*”) or directly borrowed from Philo or Pseudo-Dionysus. Carlos Gilly, who pointed this out in 1977 (see his study “Zwischen Erfahrung und Spekulation. Theodor Zwinger und die religiöse und kulturelle Krise seiner Zeit”: 57-137 in *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, no. 77, 1977: 80), also drew attention to the use of “*pansophia*”, as early as 1596, in a writing by the Polish hermeticist Bartholomäus Scleus: *Instanz Theologia Universalis*, reprinted in the *Theosophische Schriften* of the same author (Amsterdam, 1686, 181). Right then, “*pansophia*” evokes the overall concept of a wisdom obtained by divine illumination, in other words theosophy, or furthermore, a wisdom attained through the Light of Nature, also called “*Anthroposophia*” (cf. also below, no. 22). Gilly also noted the reappearance of “*pansophia*” in the very title of the Dutch physician Henricus Van Heer’s dissertation *Altar Iatrosophicum paniasoni pansophiaeque dicatum* (Basel, 1600), in a different sense, though, than that given by the rosicrucian current and more with the meaning of universal knowledge. On the other hand, it is understood as referring to theosophy and science of Nature in a general way by Henricus Nollius (*Physica Hermetica*, Frankfurt, 1619, p. 689). In his *Panosophia. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte der weissen und schwarzen Magie* (Berlin: Eric Schmidt, 1936, p. 392f.; reprint, 1956), Will-Erich Peuckert has introduced some confusion between “theosophy” and “pansophy”. For a list of authors employing the word “*pansophia*”, see W. Begemann, “Zum Gebrauche des Wortes Pansophia”, pp. 210-21 in *Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, 5, 1896 and K. Schaller, *Pan. Untersuchungen zur Comenius-Terminologie*, The Hague, 1958, p. 14f.

whose works are known because of numerous editions and translations<sup>16</sup>, we find, first of all, in Germany: Johann Georg Gichtel (1638-1710), *Theosophia Practica* (published in 1722, but written a long time previously); Quirinus Kuhlmann (1651-1689), *Kühlpsalter*, 1677; Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), *Das Geheimnis der göttlichen Sophia*, 1700. Sometimes, the lists also include Aegidius Gutmann (1651-1689), *Offenbahrung göttlicher Majestät* (cf. *supra*) and Julius Sperber (? - 1616), *Exemplarischer Beweis*, 1616. In Holland, we have Johann Baptist Van Helmont (1618-1699), *The Paradoxical Discourses concerning the Macrocosm and the Microcosm*, 1685. In England, there is Robert Fludd (1574-1637), *Utriusque Cosmi Historia*, 1617/26; John Pordage (1608-1681), *Theologia Mystica, or the Mystic Divinitie of the Æternal Invisibles*, 1683 and Jane Leade (1623-1704), *The Laws of Paradise given forth by Wisdom to a Translated Spirit*, 1695. Henry More (1614-1687), one of the Cambridge neo-Platonists, is sometimes added to this list. Finally, in France, there is Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), *L'Économie Divine, ou Système universel et démontré des œuvres et des devoirs de Dieu envers les hommes*, 1687 and Antoinette Bourginon (1616-1680), *Œuvres* (edited by Pierre Poiret in 1679 and 1684).

That is about all there is. There are relatively few names, but it is an important corpus (many of these authors were prolific). Besides Sperber, Van Helmont, Fludd, More, and of course Gutmann, we find that a majority of the names are those of persons who are “disciples” of Boehme. One notes too that with rare exceptions (for example, Robert Fludd) the theosophers did not write in Latin but in the vernacular, the mother tongue being more advantageous than Latin for the expression of visions and feelings. The same can be said of the “proto-theosophers”, with the exception of Khunrath. And alongside mention of writings proper, it is appropriate to call attention to the existence of a rich theosophical iconography—a “theosophy of the image”—which Khunrath’s *Amphitheatrum* had inaugurated in a particularly lavish and radiant way, and which is also found beautifully exemplified in Gichtel’s 1682 edition of the complete works of Boehme. It is true that this period had beautiful esoteric images, a fact which is attested to by the numerous illustrated alchemical books published all throughout the first half of the 17th century. But this flourishing iconography did not survive at the end of the century; we must wait a hundred years to see its reappearance, again shining only for a short time (cf. *infra*, “Three Areas of the Theosophical Terrain”).

Toward the end of the century, many philosophers and historians began to speak of theosophy, adopting either an attitude of acceptance or rejection. Two warrant our special attention, because of their very particular use of terminology and because of the substance of their works. The first, Ehregott Daniel Colberg (1659-1698), a Protestant minister from Greifswald, devoted himself to an

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<sup>16</sup> Concerning the German and foreign editions of Boehme’s works, cf. the almost exhaustive bibliography completed by Werner Buddecke, *Die Jakob Böhme Ausgaben. Ein beschreibendes Verzeichnis* (two volumes, Göttingen, 1937-1957). The relevant literature is still very abundant; among the best critical works, John Schulitz, *Jakob Boehme und die Kabbalah* (Frankfort, 1933); Pierre Deghaye, *La Naissance de Dieu ou la doctrine de Jacob Boehme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985).

attack on various spiritual currents in which he perceived a danger to the faith. The title of his book, *Platonic-Hermetic Christianity* . . . (published in 1690-91<sup>17</sup>) manifests an explicit program in itself: His targets are Alexandrian Hermetism, Paracelsus, Boehme, astrology, alchemy, pansophy, as well as mysticism in general. He believes he sees a common denominator in all of these, that is to say, the postulate that human beings, who are of divine origin, possess the faculty of self-divinizing thanks to knowledge or appropriate exercises. If the word 'theosophy' does not appear here, the idea is present, although it lacks precise contours; Colberg finds it exemplified in the writings of some authors (besides Paracelsus, Boehme, and Antoinette Bourignon), and also to have been integrated into neighboring currents; all this, when taken together, comprises a goodly portion of the esoteric terrain.

Beyond the theosophers themselves, it was Pietism that Colberg targeted, and beyond Pietism, he saw mystical theology as problematic because the mystic deifies the human being. It was the theory of a new birth, conceived as the earthly regeneration of the human being, as opposed to the doctrine of imputation, which Colberg refuted. The new birth in Germany at least was the main idea not only in the writings of Boehme and Arndt, but also in those of pietists and theosophers of every persuasion. Widely read, Colberg's book was republished in 1710.

The second historian is Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), a theosopher himself (*cf. supra*) and the author of two histories. His monumental *Impartial History of Sects and Heresies* . . ., published in 1699-1700, bears a slightly misleading title since theosophy and many of the other trends Arnold deals with have nothing sectarian or heretical in them. This history was followed by another, entitled *History and Description of Mystical Theology* . . . (1703)<sup>18</sup>. In the first, the concept of theosophy is sympathetically presented along with a wealth of information (this great book remains an oft-consulted reference work on the subject of western spiritual trends). It was something of a response to Colberg's book, which is occasionally cited, but with the difference that Arnold omits mention of certain esoteric currents, such as neo-Alexandrian Hermetism (although the 1703 volume devoted a few pages to the subject). The theosophers whom he treats are Boehme, Bourignon, Poiret, and Kuhlmann. A lengthy section of the work deals with the writings of Paracelsus and those of the Rosicrucians. In the second history (1703) he returns to

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<sup>17</sup> Ehregott Daniel Colberg, *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christentum, begreifend die historische Erzeblung vom Ursprung und vierley Secten der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie, unterm Namen der Paracelsisten, Weigelianer, Rosencreutzer, Quäcker, Böhmisten, Wiedertäuffer, Bourignisten, Labadisten und Quietisten*, two volumes (Frankfort and Leipzig, 1690 and 1691. Reprinted in 1710).

<sup>18</sup> Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, vom Anfang des neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, two volumes (Frankfort, 1699-1700, reprinted in 1729); by the same author, *Historie und Beschreibung der mystischen Theologie oder geheimen Gottes Gelehrtheit wie auch derer alten und neuen mysticorum* (Frankfort, 1703). Followed, within the same volume, by *Vertheidigung der Mystischen Theologie*. Latin edition: *Historia et descriptio theologiae mysticae, seu theosophiae arcanae et reconditae, itemque veterum et novorum mysticorum* (Frankfort, 1702). As shown by this last title, "theosophy" is understood as "Gottesgelehrtheit", that is, a mere form of theology.

Boehme at length, and also mentioning Thomas Bromley, but like Colberg, he does not distinguish between these spiritual thinkers and mystics proper<sup>19</sup>, and though he justifies Boehme, he is not his disciple. That which he extols more than anything else is mystical theology, which according to him represents true Christianity. Besides, he rarely employs the term ‘*theosophy*’ or ‘*theosopher*’, in his first *History*, and in the second, he does not give it the same meaning it has for us here.

Indeed, that meaning continued to be fluid until the end of the 17th century, and will always remain so. At the dawn of the 17th century *theosopher* was employed pejoratively. Thus, for Johann Reuchlin it designated a decadent scholastic, and for Cornelius Agrippa, a theologian who is a prodigious maker of syllogisms<sup>20</sup>. In his *Theosophia*, which appeared in many volumes from 1540 to 1553, Alabri (the pseudonym of Johannes Arboreus), claims that part of religious teaching must be reserved for elites, but the title of this great book is deceptive because it turns out that his meaning of ‘theosophy’ is practically synonymous with ‘theology’<sup>21</sup>. It is possible that 1575 is the date of the first use of *theosophia* in the sense with which we are dealing here: that year, a booklet of magic, *Arbatel*, was published at Pietro Perna’s in Basel. It was to be reprinted many times and

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<sup>19</sup> Arnold does differentiate, however, between the “two theologies”. He writes thus in the Latin edition of his *History of Mystical Theology* (cf. preceding note): “*Theologia duplex [...] Hacque mente divinarum rerum doctrina in duo genera dividebant. Quorum alterum, manifestum, apertum et cognitum, quod discursibus et demonstrationibus convincere posset; alterum vero occultum, mysticum et symbolicum, ut et purgans penetrans, et ad perfectionem ducens dicebant*” (p. 72). Further (p. 598f.), he mentions as members of a similar intellectual family: Paracelsus, Weigel, Sperber, Scleus (Sclei), Franciscus Georgius Venetos, the two Van Helmonts, John Scot Eriugena, Postel, Bromley.

<sup>20</sup> In his *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Dei*, Agrippa mentions the quarrels caused “*a recentioribus aliquot theosophistis, ac philopompis exercentur ad monem vanitatem*” by mis-translation of Aristotle (the document has been published by Paola Zambelli, in *Testi umanistici su l’ermetismo* (Rome, 1955), 158). See also the letter to Erasmus, of November 13, 1532, in *Opera*, vol. II, 1016: “*Coeterum, quod te scire volo, bellum mihi est cum Lovaniensibus Theosophistis*”.

<sup>21</sup> François Secret has already called attention to this book; cf. “Du *De Occulta Philosophia* à l’occultisme du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle” in *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* (Paris: P.U.F., vol.186 (July 1974): 60. A new augmented version of the same article appeared in *Charis. Archives de l’Unicorne*, no. I, Arché, Milan, 1988. The word has enjoyed a lasting favor in this sense. In Ficino’s translations of Porphyry’s and Iamblichus’ works, as in Proclus’ by Aemilius Pontus, “*theosophia*” is always rendered by “*sapientia divina*” or by “*theologia*”. In his *Commentarii Linguae Graecae*, G. Budé recommends “*religio christiana*”. Henri Etienne, in his *Thesaurus linguae Graecae*, gives “*rerum divinarum scientia*” (cf. C. Gilly, p. 88 in his article quoted above, no. 15).

was often quoted. Here the term designates the *notitia gubernationis per angelos* and is associated with *anthroposophia*<sup>22</sup>.

It is perhaps under the influence of *Arbatel* that Heinrich Khunrath used the term *theosophia* a few years later, thereby becoming chiefly responsible for the use of the word to designate the literature with which we are concerned. In fact, he had the term figure significantly in no less than two of his works. From the time of the first edition (1595) of his *Amphitheatrum*, even the title is signed: “*instructore Henricus Khunrath Lips, Theosophiae Amator*”. And in *Vom Hyleatischen . . .*, a work which appeared a short time later (1597), he even explained what he meant by it: it is a question of a meditative activity, of the oratory, and distinct from alchemical activity proper, of the laboratory, but for him one cannot exist without the other<sup>23</sup>. Accordingly, he declared that he was speaking as a theosopher, and one can

<sup>22</sup> *Arbatel. De magia veterum. Summum sapientiae studium*, Basle, 1575. The “*scientia boni*” includes theosophy (itself divided into “*notitia verbi Dei, et vitae juxta verbum Dei institutio*” and “*notitia gubernationis Dei per Angelos quos Scriptura vigiles vocat*”) and, on the other hand, the “*anthroposophia homini data*”, divided into “*scientia rerum naturalium*” and “*prudencia rerum humanum*”. The “*scientia mali*” is again divided by two headings (“*kakosophia*” and “*cacodaemonia*”, also subdivided in their turn). The *Arbatel* is published by the neo-paracelsist Pietro Perna (on him and the book itself, see Carlos Gilly, article quoted above no. 15). Peuckert thought the book “the first treatise on white magic in Germany”. Its success can at least partly be explained by the elegance and clarity of the edition as a whole. Quotations from the *Arbatel* have appeared for the first time in Johann Jakob Wecker, *De Secretis Libri XVII*, 1583, also published by Perna (cf. sect. XV, “*De secretis scientiarum*”). The *Arbatel*’s scheme of Theosophy-Anthroposophy has been taken over by Wolfgang Hildebrand (*Magia Naturalis*, Erfurt, 1611) and Robert Fludd (*Summum Bonum*, p. 1, 1629). About these texts, see Carlos Gilly, article quoted above note 15, p. 188 of the second section (Text II, no. 79, 1979).

<sup>23</sup> The caption of the engraving from the *Amphitheatrum* showing a tunnel to which access is obtained by seven steps states that these symbolize the way of the “*Theosophicorum vere Philosophicam, filiorum Doctrinae . . . ut sobbistice non moriantur sed Theosphice vivant*”. At the foot of the other famous oval engraving depicting the alchemist in his oratory/laboratory, one reads: “*Hinricus Khunrath Lips; Theosophiae amator. . .*”. These are but a few occurrences of the word in the whole treatise. On the editions of the book, see Umberto Eco, *L’énigme de la Hanau*, 1609 (*Enquête bibliographique sur “L’amphithéâtre de L’éternelle sapience. . .” de Heinrich Khunrath* [Paris: J.-C. Bailly, 1990]). In *Vom Hyleatischen, das ist Pri-materialischen Catholischen oder Allgemeinen Natürlichen Chaos* (Magdebourg, 1597), several reprints (Latin edition: *Confessio de chao physico-chemicorum catholico . . .* [Magdebourg, 1596]) and a recent facsimile edition (Graz, Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1990, with an introduction by Elemar R. Grüber), Khunrath writes (in the preface): “*So vermöge Zeugnüssen vieler Philosophischer guter Schrifften; aus (Gott Lob) unverrickter Vernunft: erfahrner Leute Cabbalisschen Traditionen; Zum Theil auch beydes Theosophischer in Oratorio, und Naturgemäss-Alchymischer in Laboratorio, eygner Übungs Confirmation; und also auss dem rechten Grunde dess Liechts der Natur, nicht alleine Wabr sondern auch so viel ihre Eygnschafften Göttlicher und Natürlicher Gebeimmussen in jetziger verkehrten Welt öffentlich an Tag zu bringen zu lassen Klar herfür gegeben*”. Further, he says this about the “*Gott-Weissliche Gelehrte*”, i.e. the erudite theosopher: “*Alleine der Gott-Weisslich gelehrte und von dem Liecht der Natur erleuchte auch sich selbst recht erkennende Mensch kan Gott-weisslich Naturgemäss und chrislich darvon schliessen, Sonst niemand*”. Also in the preface: “*Von den Wörtlein Theosophus, Theosophia, Theosophicè, ein Gott-weiser—Göttliche Weissheit—Gott-weisslich—hab ich p. 28. Confessionis hujus, in scholiis kürzlich mich genugsam erkläret. Will ein ander lieber dafür sagen Philotheosophus, Philotheosophia, Philotheosophice, das lasse ich auch geschehen. Ich will über den Worten mit niemand zanken, man lasse nur den Verstand gut bleiben. Wortzänckerey bauet nicht*”. This sounds like an allusion to a quarrel about the choice of word (“*theosophia*” or “*philotheosophia*”), although I am not cognizant of it. Further on, p. 28 (p. 26-7 in the 1708 edition) one finds: “*Theosophicè, Gott-Weisslich (wann Gott der Höchste Jehovah,*

see that his *Amphiteatrum*, dedicated to Divine Wisdom, would almost certainly have caught Boehme's attention. At this time—1595, 1597—the theosophical current proper had not yet been born, and was only on the verge of appearing, but soon 'theosophy' would seem sufficiently adequate to its representatives to begin assigning it the meaning which Khunrath intended, which they did increasingly on account of the influence of the numerous reeditions of the *Amphitheatrum*. Besides, the term "*magia divina*", which was still a rival for the "*theosophia*" (for instance, in Bruno, Patrizi, Godelman), had a more dubious ring than the latter, at least in Germany. Therefore, "*theosophia*" would be preferred, from the time of the first decade of the 17th century onward, thereby being accepted once again, after having fallen into near oblivion for centuries. But now it was laden with a more specific connotation than in the past, although the use in a more vague sense still persisted<sup>24</sup>. In any case, around 1608-1610 Khunrath's meaning was being used more and more, although some people still persisted in using the term in a less specific sense.

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*der Herr Herr will denn seine Gnade wäbret von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit über die so Ihn fürchten kan, gesagter gestalt, wo ferne wir uns selbst in die Sache nur recht Christlich schicken, dasselbe auch Uns (sowohl als den Alten Theosophis vor uns) eröffnet und bekant werden. Dann Gott der Herr schencket auch noch wohl heutigen Tages einem einen Trunck aus Josephs Becher. Oder aber auch seine Natürlichen Signatura, das ist Bezeichnung welche auch eine Warbeits-Stimme und Geheimniss-reiche recht lehrende Rede Gottes mit uns aus der Natur durch die Creatur ist: oder auch aus Schrifflicher oder Mündlicher Anleitung und Unterweisung eines erfabren guten Lehrmeisters der von Gott dissfalls zu Uns oder zu deme Wir gesenden werden".*

<sup>24</sup> In using "*theosophia*" more or less with the meaning of the paracelsian *philosophia adepta*, Khunrath is followed by Nicolaus Bernaud (1601), Libavius (1606, but with a pejorative innuendo), Oswald Croll, Israel Harvet (1608). On this use and these authors, cf. Carlos Gilly, p. 89 of the article quoted no. 15. Let us also mention the *Rosarium Novum Olympicum S Benedictum. Per Benedictum Figulum; Vienbaviatem, Francum: Poëtam L.C. Theologum, Theosophum; Philosophum; Medicum Eremitam* (Basle, 1608) and the dedication to a "*philosopho ter maximo Theosopho jurisperito medico*" in D. Gnosii, *Hermetus tractatus vere aureus* (Leipzig, 1610), p. 246 (quoted by François Secret in article quoted above, no. 21; cf. p. 68 and 19 respectively). In 1620, Johann Arndt sent to Morsius a treatise by Alexander von Suchten dedicated as follows: "Clarissimo Theosopho et philosopho D. Joachimo Morsio" (cited in *Fegfeuer der Chymisten* (Amsterdam, 1702, Paris National Library shelfmark R. 38757). One wonders if the influence of the new esoteric trend (theosophy) is at work behind the use of *theosophia* in the Jesuit B. Cordevius' translation (1644) of the *Mystic Theology* by Pseudo-Dionysus (cf. Migne, P.G., vol. 3, pg. 998), following in the footsteps of John Scot Eriugena. On the expression *magia divina* as a rival of *theosophia*, eventually to be almost completely substituted by it (because the last was considered less questionable, at least in Germany), cf. Carlos Gilly, p. 188 of the article quoted above no. 15 (second section, 1979). Giordano Bruno makes use of *magia divina* as well as Patrizi (1593), Johann Georg Godelman (1601) or Campanella (1620); this expression will be commented upon by Diderot (*Encyclopedie*, ed. 1775, vol. IX, p. 852). As regards *theosophia* understood at the time in the vague, general sense of theology and philology (akin to Roger Bacon's *prima philosophia*), it is found in B. Keckermann (*Opera*, 2, Geneva, 1614, p. 229) and Ioh. Lippius (*Metaphysica Magna*, Lyons, 1625, p. 5) as indicated by Carlos Gilly (article quoted above no. 15, first section 1977, p. 891). See further the title of the anonymous and devotionally-oriented miscellany *Libellum Theosophiae de veris reliquis seu semine Dei* (Neustadt, 1618), as well as, later on, the list of authors mentioned by Gottfried Arnold (see below, no. 30): these bear no relation to our theosophers and testify only to the double use of the word.

While it is not found in the proto-Rosicrucian writings (*Fama Fraternitatis*, 1614; *Confessio*, 1615; and *Chymische Hochzeit*, 1616), it appears under the pen of Adam Haslmayr, in his “Response” (1612) to the “Laudable Fraternity of the Theosophers of the Rosy-Cross”. Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654), the primary founding father of the Rosicrucian adventure, uses it later; for example, in his utopian *Christianopolis* (1619), in which he imagines many “auditoriums”, one of which is reserved for metaphysics, destined to serve as a place for “*theosophia*”, presented here as a superior “contemplation” directed towards “the divine Will, the service of the angels, [and] the pure air of fire”. This does not prevent Andreae from conferring a very perjorative connotation on the word ‘theosophy’ every now and then in some of his other writings<sup>25</sup>. But it is all the more interesting to observe similar fluctuations of meaning in a single author—Andreae in this case—because the beginning of the 17th century proved to be an altogether decisive moment in the history of the word.

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<sup>25</sup> Haslmayr’s book (*Antwort an die lobwürdige Brüderschafft der Theosophen vom RosenCreutz... 1612*, s.l.) has just been rediscovered by Carlos Gilly (cf. his study *Adam Haslmayr, Der erste Verkünder der Manifeste der Rosenkreuzer*, Amsterdam, In de Pelikaan, 1994). Haslmayr also uses the word elsewhere (cf. *ibid.*). Concerning Andreae’s use of it, cf. *Christianopolis*, heading no. 60 (in Richard van Dülmen’s edition, Stuttgart, Calwer Verlag, 1972, pp. 140-42): “De Theosophia: *Hoc idem auditorium superiori adhuc contemplationi servit. Haec theosophia est, nihil humanae inventionis, indagacionisve agnoscens, omnia Deo debens. Ubi natura desinit, haec incipit, et a superno numine edocta mysteria sua religiose servat . . . . Imprudentes nos qui Aristotelem nobis praeferimus, homuncionem nobiscum, non Dei admiranda amplectimur, quae illum pudefaciunt. Dei FIAT, angelorum servitium, ignis auram, aquae spissitudinem, aeris depressionem, terrae elevatione, hominis infinitatem, bruti loquelam, solis remoram, orbis terminum non potuit ille credere an noluit, quae nobis certa sunt. Si Deum audimus, longe maiora his apud eum expedita sunt . . . . Scrupuletur philosophia, theosophia acquiescit; opponat illa, haec gratias agit: haesitet illa, haec secura ad Christi pedes recumbit*”. Thus, Theosophy means humility, obedience, submissive receptivity. It starts where Nature itself ends, is attributed the same “auditorium” as dialectics and metaphysics but it is taught by God. See also the remarks by Roland Edighoffer, p. 363f. and 419 of his *Rose-Croix et Société idéale selon J.-V. Andreae*, Paris, Arma Artis, 1982. Again, in *De Christiani Cosmoxeni genitura iudicium* (Montbéliard, 1615), the theosophic vision of the perfect Christian devotee resides in the supreme paradox of sinful Adam’s death and the glorious life of Christ the Redeemer; Andreae writes, p. 41: “*Hactenus de Christiano nostro Iudicium Theosophicum, id est, Hominis in his terris verè Hospitantis, et in coelesti itinere promouentis Imago expresa*”. Cf. also *ibid.* p. 186 and Roland Edighoffer, *op.cit.*, p. 364. But in *Turris Babel, sive iudiciorum de Fraternitate Rosaceae Crucis Chaos* (Argentorati, 1619), one reads these words put in the mouth of the character called *Impostor*: “*Sed meminetis, esse Philosophum, Philologum, Theologum, Theosophum, Medicum, Chymicum, eremitam, Fraternitatis invisibilis Coadjutorem, Antichristi bostem intractabilem, et quod ad rem maximè facit, etiam Poetam*” (pp. 23f.). At last, in a fourth writing by Andreae entitled *De Curiositatis pernicie syntagma ad singularitatis studiosos* (Stuttgart, 1620), the author ridicules an occult philosophy which adorns itself with the name “theosophy” whereas it is but a dubious and impious magical speculation: “*Itaque jam characteres, conjurationes, constellationes synchronismi tuto adhibentur. Postquam Daemonomania in Theosophiam mutata audit. Visiones, apparitiones, revelationes insomnia, voces auguria, sortes ac omne genus false Divinitatis exiguntur fiuntque horrendae incantationes, in aliis supplicio digna, filiis tamen huius dubiae lucis, licita*” (pp. 22f.). On this passage, see also R. Edighoffer, *op.cit.*, vol.I, pp. 345, 363f., whom I hereby thank for calling my attention to these four extracts. We must add that, in the Rosicrucian wake, “theosophy” is sometimes made use of with reference to the Rosy-Cross; thus, for instance, Josephus Stellatus (*a.k.a.* Christoph Hirsch) who defends the Rosicrucians in his *Pegasus Firmamenti. Sive Introductio brevis in Veteram Sapientiam* (s.l., 1618) urges (p. 21) the “theosophiae studiosi” to drink from the true wellspring of Hermetic, Rosicrucian, Paracelsian philosophy and pansophy.

We should not be surprised that the word rarely appears, despite Khunrath's influence, in the writings of Boehme; who, moreover, gave it a limited meaning: "I do not write in the pagan manner, but in the theosophical", he wrote, so as to make it quite clear that he was not conflating Nature with God. It is nevertheless his works which will powerfully contribute to the spread the use of the word after Khunrath; this is on account of the title of some of the more important ones, but these titles appear to have been chosen more by the editors than by the author himself<sup>26</sup>.

When *Cedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652-54) by Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680) appeared, the word 'theosophy' was already found to be well-imbued with this new meaning, thanks to Khunrath and to the editions of Boehme's books. However, the Jesuit father was not much interested in modern Germanic theosophy and far more interested in the esoteric thought of the Ancients, to part of which—without doing any violence to it—he assigned the word 'theosophy:' a very important section of this enormous work is entitled "Metaphysical Theosophy or Hieroglyphic Theology"<sup>27</sup>. Kircher deals with the metaphysics of the Egyptians, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Neoplatonism. And so, in a work which was able to find a large and enduring audience, Kircher once again gave to the word one of its most generally accepted ancient meanings, that of divine metaphysics.

Later, some other publishers of Boehme contributed to the fashion of using the word 'theosophy' to refer to the current. Thus we have Gichtel, who entitled his edition of the complete works: *Des Gottseligen . . . Jacob Böhmens . . . Alle Theosophische Werken* (Amsterdam, 1682), and that of the

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<sup>26</sup> "Ich schreibe nicht heidnisch, sondern theosophisch, aus einem böheren Grunde als der äussere Werkmeister ist, und dann auch aus demselben" (*Aurora*, ch. 8, §56). The work was published in 1634. Boehme's treatises were first circulated as manuscript copies: during his life, *Der Weg zu Christo* was the only one to appear in print (1622), followed by *Aurora* (1634), *De Signatura rerum* (1645), *Mysterium Magnum* (1640), etc. A Dutch translation by W. Van Beyerland of several of his works appears in 1642, followed some twenty years later by John Sparrow's English versions. The first complete edition in German by J.G. Gichtel (1682) is based on the manuscripts collected by Beyerland. It is of interest to try and assess the impact of such an editorial activity—in German and other languages—on the fame enjoyed by the word "theosophy" during the 17th century. Studying closely Buddecke's bibliography (cf. above no. 16) goes a long way towards unearthing a rich fund of information. The insertion of "theosophy" in the titles of Boehme's treatises is in fact the editors' choice and its first use is in connection with the author's letters: *Theosophische Epistel* of 1639 (cf. Buddecke, I, p. 226), followed by a Dutch version procured by Beyerland in 1641 (Buddecke, I, p. 45). Several other letters by Boehme are published later as *Theosophische Sendbriefe* in 1642 and 1658, edited by Abraham von Franckenberg (cf. Buddecke, I, p. 214). In English, the word makes its first appearance (under adjectival form "theosophical") with the *Theosophicall Epistles* (Buddecke, II, p. 171) of 1645, which is also and by the way the first English publication of a writing by Boehme; "theosophick" is later met with, in *Theosophick Epistles* (John Sparrow's version; cf. Buddecke, II, p. 143), and is found again under the same translator's pen in 177 *Theosophick Questions* (1661) and *Theosophick Letters* (same year; Buddecke, II, pp. 61f.), as well as in *Jakob Boehmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* by another translator, 1691). In German, we find a 1658 edition under the title *Eine Einfältige Erklärung . . . aus wahren Theosophischen Grunde*, Buddecke I, p. 212) and the expression "*Theosophische Fragen*" appears in the title of Quirinus Kuhlmann's *Neubegeisterter Böhme*, 1674; Buddecke I, p. 86). Small wonder, then, to see the word featured in the title itself of Gichtel's 1682 edition and, even more predictably, in that of the first 1686 complete edition in Dutch (*Alle de Theosophische of Godwijze Werken Van . . . Jacob Boehme*; cf. Buddecke, II, p. 5).

<sup>27</sup> *Cedipi Aegyptiaci Tomi Secundi Pars Altera*, Rome, 1653, Classis XIII (pp. 497-546).

correspondence: *Erbauliche Theosophische Sendschreiben* (1700-1701). Around that time appears a *Clavicula Salomonis et Theosophia Pneumatica* (Duisburg and Frankfurt, 1685), edited by A. Luppium and inspired by the book *Arbatel*. It is no surprise then when Daniel Georg Morhof (1639-1691), an author with esoteric leanings and an historian of literature and professor of oratory and poetry at Kiel, employed the word ‘theosophy’ following Gichtel’s meaning. More favorably disposed towards esotericism than the latter, Morhof dedicated a dozen pages in his *Polyhistor* (1688) to “mystical and secret books” whose authors he divided into three categories: theosophers, prophets, and magicians. The first teach divine and hidden things about God, spirits, demons, and ceremonies; the Ancients also call these authors “theurgists”. Hermes, Pythagoras, Iamblicus, Pseudo-Dionysus, Boehme, and Paracelsus are included in this category, as are Jewish Kabbalists (“Hebrews called their theosophical books ‘Kabbalah,’” he wrote). The second category is represented by those endowed with the ability to predict the future, like certain astrologers or like Nostradamus. The third is represented by Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, Johann Reuchlin, Cornelius Agrippa, Guillaume Postel, Tomasso Campanella, and the magnetisers and alchemists . . .<sup>28</sup>. Nevertheless, in Colberg’s *Platonic-hermetic Christianity* and in Arnold’s great *History* (cf. *supra*), the word is almost never used<sup>29</sup>. However, in his second history Arnold devoted a heading to it: “*Was Theosophia sey?*” (“What is theosophy?”). As for what is meant by true theology, he wrote, the word ‘theosophy’ corresponds to the “Wisdom of God” or “Wisdom which comes from God”; this “secret theology” (*geheime Gottesgelehrtheit*) is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Arnold cited the use of the word in that sense by Pseudo-Dionysus (“the Trinity is the overseer of Christian theosophy or the Wisdom of God”), and commented that some Protestant theologians are not afraid of using it<sup>30</sup>—of course, in the sense of good theology. This is a far cry from the meaning used by Morhof.

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel Georg Morhof, *Polyhistor sive de notitia auctorum et rerum commentarii*, Lübeck, 1688 (in two books; book III, posthumous, 1692). Reprint 1695. Cf. pp. 87-97 of book I, chapter X: *De libris mysticis et secretis* where one reads in particular: “*Mysticos et secretos libros dicimus, qui de rebus sublimibus, arcanis, mirabilibus scripti, suos sibi lectores postulant, neque omnibus ad lectionem concedi solent, neque ab omnibus intelligi possunt*” (p. 87). *Ibid.*, p. 88: “*Theosophicos nunc eos vocant, qui de rebus divinis atque abstrusiora quaedam docent, quales apud Gentiles Theurgici dicebantur, quibus doctrina de Deo, Daemonibus, genis, deque ceremoniis, quibus illi colendi, tradebatur. Alii magiam divinam hanc Theurgiam vocant. Haec ceterum Metaphysica fuit*”. And p. 93: “*Hebraeorum Theosophici libri, quos illi Cabalae nomine vocarunt. . .*”. On the same page, he adds, after mentioning the names of Pico, Postel, Reuchlin: “*Christianorum jam a primis temporibus mystici quidam in Theosophia libri fuerunt. Principem in his locum sibi vendicant decantata illa Dionysii Aeropagitae opera*”.

<sup>29</sup> Still, Arnold does quote the extract from the *Arbatel* in its German version (*Unpartheische, op.cit.*, I, p. 457).

<sup>30</sup> *Historie und Beschreibung. . .*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-7: “*Und eben diesem wahren Verstand des Wortes Theologie ist nun gleichmässig das Wort Theosophia, welches die Weissheit Gottes oder von Gott anzeigt. Weil die geheime Gottesgelehrtheit also eine Gabe des H. Geistes von Gott selbst herrühret mit Gott umgeben und auch Gott selbst und seinen Heiligen gemein ist wie diss Wort erkläret wird. . . Es haben aber auch die protestantischen Lehrer dieses Wort Theosophie so gar nicht (wie einige unter ihnen meynen) vor insolent geachtet dass sie es selber ohne Bedencken gebraucht wie so wohl bey Reformirten (Vid. Franc. Junius Lib. de Theologia Cap. 1p. 18 qui fatetur, orthodoxis Patribus Theosophiam, dictam esse Theologiam)*”

## II) The Transitional Period (first half of the 18th century)

### A) Two Theosophical Families

In the first half of the 18th century a second corpus was constituted, once again primarily in Germanic countries. This continuity of theosophy was favored by the same factors that were enumerated above with respect to the beginning of the 17th century because the same questions, in different forms, continued to be asked on philosophical, political, and religious levels. During the course of this period theosophical output was characterized by two main tendencies.

1) There was a tendency which appears to qualify as traditional in that it is closely akin to the original Bohemian current. It was represented notably by the Swabian Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702-1782), whose first book was dedicated to Boehme (*Aufmunternde Gründe zur Lesung der Schriften Jacob Böhmens*, 1731) and whose theosophical production for the most part overflowed the period (cf. *infra*, “Three Areas”). Then there was also the English Bohemian, William Law (1686-1761), the author of *An Appeal to All that doubt, The Spirit of Prayer*, 1749, 1750 and *The Way to Divine Knowledge*, 1752. A German who had emigrated to England, Dionysius Andreas Freher (1649-1728) proved to be one of Boehme’s most inspired interpreters (Freher did texts and translations into English, with re-editions in 1699 and 1720). This was also the period in which Gichtel’s *Theosophia Practica* (1722), a fundamental theosophical work, appeared. *Le Mystère de*

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also *Lutheranern* (Job. Frid. Mayer *Theol. Mariana Artic. I, p. 24. Quid ad has blasphemias Theosophia Lutherana? Conf. Observationes Halenses ad rem literariam spectantes Tomo I. Observ. I. de Philosophia Theosophia—# 2) zu sehen. Dabero die Beschwerung derselben über andere denen als Layen man kein Recht im Göttl. Erkenntniss gemeiniglich zustehe, will billig hinweg fällt nachdem es auch bey denen Schul-Lehrern offenbahrlich ein grosser Missbrauch dieses wichtigen Tituls ist so off t er der zanksüchtigen und gantz ungöttl. Schul-Theologie bey-geleget wird”. In his *Impartial History* (Part IV, sect. III, no. 18 and 19, ed. 1729, t. II, pp. 1103f. and 1110-42), G. Arnold introduces the reader to the work of his friend Friedrich Breckling (1629-1711) and offers large extracts of unpublished material. Breckling, himself a—relatively unknown—theosopher, suggests a beautiful definition of what he understands by “*theosophus*”, whom he compares with a bee: “*Wer aller dinge zable, mass, gewicht, ordnung und ziel ibnen von Gott gegeben, gesetzt und beygeleget, recht im götlichen licht einsehen, abzehlen, ponderiren, numeriren, componiren, dividiren und resolviren kan, das impurum und unnöthige davon abschneiden, und das beste, wie die chimici, davon extrahiren und purificiren kan, und also eines ieden dinges circulum cum exclusione heterogeneorum concludiren kan, in einem lexico-lexicorum alles concentriren, und gleichwie eine biene in seinen apiariis digeriren oder methodice und harmonice zusammen fassen, alles was heut zu lernen und zu wissen vonnöthen ist, der ist ein rechter Theosophus, und dafür müssen dann alle unnütze und unvollkommene bücher fallen und von selbst zu grund geben*” (p. 113, column 1). A little further on, he writes in his rather flamboyant style: “*Nun sind wir bis an die Apocalypsin kommen, welche denen, die in Patbmo mit Jobanne exuliren, und von Gott in Geist erböbet, und gewürdiget werden, di interiora velaminis zu beschauen mit einer offenen thür in geistlichen nach eröffnung der sieben siegel und überwindung aller feinde des creutzes, nach inhalt der sieben sendbrieffe wird geoffenbabret werden, dass sie als geistliche adler aufliegen, und aller dinge penetralia intima bis ins centrum durchschauen mögen, und also Theosopbi per crucem et lucem, per ignem et spiritum werden, welche die Welt nicht kennen noch vertragen mag, weil sie mit Christo und Christus in ibnen kommen, ein licht und feuer zum gericht der welt anzuzünden, daran alles strob sich selbst mit ibren verfolgern offenbahren, im rauch auffliegen und verbrennen muss*” (p. 113, column 2).*

*la Croix* (1736) by the German Douzetemps was published, and so was *Explication def la Genèse* (1738) by the Swiss Hector de Saint-Georges de Marsais (1688-1755), who was akin to spiritual thinkers from the city of Berlebourg (the famous *Bible* of Berlebourg is an edition of the Bible which is rich in theosophical and quietist commentaries).

2) The second was a tendency of the “magical” type, Paracelsian and alchemical in orientation, which was represented by four German authors. Georg von Welling (alias Salwigt, 1655-1727), *Opus mago-theosophicum et cabbalisticum* (1719, reprinted many times); A.J. Kirchweger (? - 1746), *Aurea Catena Homeri* (1723); Samuel Richter (alias Sincerus Renatus), *Theo-Philosophica Theoretica et Practica* (1711; and Hermann Fictuld, *Aureum Vellus* (1749).

With few exceptions, the theosophy of these two tendencies no longer has the nature of the visionary outpouring which characterized that at the beginning of the 17th century and which is also found in Gichtel. Of course we have to deal with some theosophizing speculations about Scripture and Nature, but this dampened theosophy, more intellectual in character, albeit “globalizing”, hardly springs forth from a *Zentralschau* (“central vision”). In the work of theosophers in the periods which followed, this new corpus would serve less as a reference than would that of the periods which preceded it.

## **B) Some Succinct Criticisms**

A series of historical and critical discourses on theosophy, whether defending it or condemning it, assured its recognition in the fields of philosophy and of spirituality. We have already seen that Colberg (an adversary) and Arnold (an advocate) opened the way for this. Here we present three of those new discourses, the most important and interesting among them being those of Gentzken, Buddeus, and Brucker.

For Friedrich Gentzken (*Historia Philosophiae*, 1724)<sup>31</sup> it is Paracelsus who was at the origin of the current of “mystical philosophy and theosophy” (the author does not seem to make much of a distinction between these two terms), which took its inspiration from Kabbalah, magic, astrology, chemistry, theology, and mysticism. Its representatives certainly had a good “theosophical” attitude in that they purported that we are not able to obtain this special “wisdom” (*sophia*) of which they speak without a special illumination, but their discourse is a chaos of truly fantastic things. Gentzken enumerates the theosophers: Weigel, the Rosicrucians, Gutmann, Boehme, J.B. Van Helmont, Fludd, and Kuhlmann. These are people who are guided by an uncontrolled imagination (*tumultuaria imaginatio*) and they do not agree among themselves, however they do hold four points in common: a) the theosopher purports to know the nature of everything better than

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<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Gentzken, *Historia Philosophiae, in qua philosophorum celebrium vitae eorumque hypotheses. . . ad nostra usque tempora. . . ordine sistuntur*, Hamburg, 1724.

ordinary mortals; he or she believes they understand the virtues of hidden things and call this “natural magic”; b) he or she claims to be a genuine astrologer, one who knows how to scry the influence of the stars on our earth; c) he or she purports to know how to fabricate the true seed of metals in order to transform them into gold, to prepare the universal elixir; d) he or she holds that there are three parts in human beings: the body, the soul, and the spirit.<sup>32</sup>

This development calls for two remarks. On the one hand, the names cited are precisely those of a corpus already recognized as such, in spite of the fact that the Rosicrucians were only related to it via pansophy. On the other hand, of the four common denominators proposed by Gentzken only the first could actually be applied to theosophy. The second and third are not relevant since theosophy is not necessarily astrological or alchemical, and the fourth is much too limiting to be validly retained.

Johann Franciscus Buddeus (1667-1729), professor of philosophy at Halle and then of theology at Jena, and a thinker with a close affinity to pietism, talked about theosophers in his book *Isagoge* (1727)<sup>33</sup>. He wrote that “some people, sometimes philosophers, sometimes theologians, who traffic with I don’t know which mysteries and hidden things, give themselves the name theosophers”. He again recalled the tripartite division proposed by Morhof (*cf. supra*, “The First Corpus”) and added that it is pointless to call them “theosophers” since if they are telling some truths, these are in agreement with Scripture, and we find the same truths in those who are called theologians. If they are not telling the truth, they are producing vain things and are not philosophers at all, still less are they “theosophers;” they are only

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249: “Porro observandum est, nostrum Paracelsum originem dedisse philosophiae, mysticae et Theosophicae, quae dogmata philosophica ex cabala, magia, astrologia, chymia et theologia imprimis mystica eruit et illustrat. Vocatur autem hoc philosophiae genus mysticum ideo, quoniam obscurior tradendi ratio in illis obtinet et theosophicum, quoniam citra specialem illuminationem neminem ejusmodi sapientiam capere posse praesumunt. Exstitit autem ab illo tempore haut exiguus Theosophorum numerus, qui phantasticis suis imaginationibus delusi ex theologia et philosophia mixtum et foedum aliquod chaos confecerent, inter quos praecipui sunt . . .”—then Gentzken speaks of V. Weigel, the Rosy-Cross, Gutmann, Kullmann, and goes on to add (p. 256): “Systema mysticae et theosophicae philosophiae exhiberi nequit etenim cum hujus generis Philosophi non sanae rationis, sed tumultuariae imaginationis ductum sequuntur, inter se consentire nequeunt, sed quisque ferme eorum singulares et monstrosas fingit e defendit opiniones. Accedit, quod ut plurimum contorto ac sumoso sermonis genere utantur, unde quid velint, nec ipsi, multo minus alii intelligunt. Plerumque tamen in his momentis consentiunt, (1) Theosophum rerum omnium naturam plenius nosse, ac occultas rerum vires intelligere, qualem cognitionem vocant Magiam naturalem. (2) Theosophum influxum siderum in haec terrena scrutari posse, ac demum verum Astrologum evadere. (3) Theosophum genuinum metallorum semen conficere, adeoque ignobilis metallum in aurum commutare ac inde universalem praeparari medicinam posse. (4) Tres esse hominum partes, corpus, animam, et mentem, etc.”.

<sup>33</sup> Johann Franciscus Buddeus, *Isagoge historico-theologica ad theologiam universam singulasque ejus partes*, Leipzig, 1727, t. I. After reminding his reader of the use of “theology” in the sense of “theosophy”, which he finds in Francisco Iunius (*Liber de theologia*, ch. I, 18, already alluded to by Arnold, *cf. above*, no. 30), Kilian Rudrauff (from Giessen, author of *Collegii pbilo-theosophici volumina duo*) and Herman Rathmann (*Theosophia priscorum patrum ex Tertulliano et Cypriano*, Wittenberg, 1619), Buddeus writes: “Potest tamen theosophia a theologia ea ratione distingui, ut per hanc aut cognito ipsa rerum diuinarum, quae et alias ita vocatur, aut doctrina de iisdem, designetur; per illam autem facultas, siue virtus, bona a malis discernendi, et illa amplectendi, haec fugiendi, quam antea sapientiam diuinam et spiritualem vocamus, et cui speciatim theologia moralis inseruit” (p. 25).

selling smoke<sup>34</sup>. Later, he cited some titles (not only names): Fludd (*Philosophia Moysaica* and *Utriusque Cosmi Historia*), Gutmann (*Offenbahrung göttlicher Majestät*), and Kuhlmann (*Der neubegeisterte Böhme*). These authors, just as others in the same family, are enveloped in the shadows and are hiding, said Buddeus, more than they are illuminating Nature's secrets!<sup>35</sup>

### **C) Jacob Brucker, or the First Systematic Description**

Jacob Brucker (1696-1770), a pastor of Augsburg, can rightly be called the founder of modern history of philosophy. One can only regret that the vast majority of his successors (the historians of philosophy) did not make a place for esoteric currents in the way that he did until the 20th century. Brucker wrote two histories of philosophy, one in German (*Kurtze Fragen*, 1730-36) and the other in Latin (*Historia critica Philosophiae*, 1742-44). Destined to have great success, both served as reference tools for several generations. Never before had theosophy been made the object of such lengthy and systematic treatments as those which are found in these two treatises. Theosophy is in good company in these works, presented right alongside other great currents in the field of esotericism such as Hermetism, the Jewish and Christian Kabbalah, and Paracelsism. Taken as a whole, the chapters Brucker devoted to these currents constitute a general, rather detailed (although negative and tendentious) presentation of ancient and modern esotericism. In any case, his was the first that was so wide-ranging. Brucker established the distinction between those which he called theosophers, and the "restorers of Pythagorean-Platonic-Kabbalistic

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25: "Sunt vero etiam, qui nescio quae arcana et abscondita, tum theologica tum philosophica venditantes, theosophorum sibi nomen speciatim vindicant". Then, after summing up Morhof's opinion (*cf. supra*, no. 26 and 27), he adds: "Ego vero lubens fateor, me nihil, in hisce scriptis deprehendisse, cur auctores eorum, specialiori quadam ratione, theosophi vocari debeant. Si quid enim habent, quod cum veritate convenit, nec ex sola ratione cognoscitur, id ex sacra scriptura hauserunt, et apud alios, qui theologia vocantur, itidem reperitur. Sin aliquid proferant, quod veritati consentaneum non est, non tam sapientiam suam, quam vanitatem, produnt, et ne philosophos quidem dicenti, multo minus theosophos. Qui nescio quae arcana secreta, abscondita crepant, haud raro fumum venditant, vulgaribus et protrititis speciem quamdam ac pretium conciliaturi".

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272: "Qui theosophorum nomen sibi vindicant, prae reliquis Mosaici haberi cupiunt, cum tamen aut chemicorum simul principia admittant, aut alia admisceant, quae nec Mosi, nec aliis, scriptoribus, sacris in mentem venerunt. Referendi huc Robertus Fluddius, in philosophia Moysaica, etc. item in microcosmi et macrocosmi historia physica. Iacobus Boehmius, in mysterio mago, aliique scriptis Aegidius Guthman, in Offenbahrung goettlicher Maiestaet Quirinius Kuhlmann, in dem neubegeisteren Boehmen, aliique, qui suis plerumque ita se inuoluunt tenebris, ut occultare potius, quam recludere, arcana naturae videantur. In qui etiam fere consentiunt, quod spiritum quemdam naturae statuunt; quem similiter admittunt, qui itidem prae religuis Mosaice videri volunt, Conradus Aslachus, in physica et ethica Mosaica, Ioan, Amos Comenius in physicae ad lumen diuinum reformatae synopsi, Ioannes Bayerus, in ostio, seu atrio naturae, et si qui alii sunt ejusdem generis".

philosophy”<sup>36</sup> such as Pico della Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, Reuchlin, Giorgi, Patrizi, Thomas Gale, Ralph Cudworth and Henry More.

According to Brucker, the theosophical corpus is primarily comprised of the works of Paracelsus, Weigel, Fludd, Jacob Boehme, the two Van Helmonts, Poiret, and incidentally Gerhard Dorn, Gutmann, and Khunrath. To these authors, Rosicrucianism can be added. Essentially, Brucker’s indictment was the same as Colberg’s: theosophers posit the existence of an “interior principle” (*inwendiges Principium*) in human beings, a principle which comes from the divine essence, or from the ocean of infinite light. Brucker said that theosophers oppose this emanation, which penetrates like an influx into the depths of the human soul, to “reason” (*Vernunft*), to which they assign an inferior position, only a little superior to “understanding” (*Verstand*). They occasionally make use of the word “reason”, but unfortunately by reason they mean neither the knowledge of the truth which begins from natural principles, nor the virtue by means of which one knows this truth. Brucker reproached Paracelsus for having been the first to propagate this idea of the “illuminating principle” through which human beings purport to be directly connected with the *Naturgeist* (the Spirit of Nature). According to Paracelsus and the theosophers, if one knows how to use this “principle” which is in us it becomes possible to penetrate this “Spirit of Nature”, thereby opening all of its mysteries to our illuminated knowledge. And Brucker cited “one of the most celebrated and elegant” among these theosophers, to wit Boehme, and what he wrote in *Aurora*<sup>37</sup>.

Just as the Holy Spirit has emanated from the Father and the Son, and represents an autonomous Person within the Divinity, and seethes within the Father’s whole interior, even so the virtue that seethes in your whole body has emanated from the virtues of your heart, your veins, and your brain. And the same virtue has emanated from your light-the virtue of reason, intelligence, art, and wisdom-in order to rule your entire body and to distinguish everything that is outside your body. And these two things are one in your soul’s

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<sup>36</sup> Jakob Brucker, *Kurze Fragen aus der Philosophischen Historie, von Christi Geburt biss auf unsere Zeiten. Mit ausführlichen Anmerkungen erläutert*, 1730-1736, VIth part (Ulm, 1735), cf. chapter III: “Von den Theosophicis”, pp. 1063-1254. And *Historia critica philosophiae a tempore resuscitatarum in Occidente Literarum ad nostra tempora*, tome IV (a volume of *addenda*: on theosophy, see pp. 781-97). Chapter III of tome VI: “De Theosophicis”, pp. 644-750. Tome IV, chapter IV, pp. 353-448: “De Restaurationibus Philosophiae Pythagoreo-platonico cabbalisticæ” (on Christian Kabbalists and various writers: Pico di Mirandola, Reuchlin, Georgi, Agrippa, Patrizi, Thomas Gale, Ralph Cudworth, Henry More). Cf. appendix to chapter four in tome VI (1767), pp. 747-59. On the Jewish Kabbalah, cf. tome II, pp. 916-1070. Tome I, Book II, chapter VII entitled *De Aegyptiorum*. . . (pp. 244-305); there, Brucker treats, among other subjects, of Hermes’s Trismegistus and of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (cf. particularly, see pp. 252-68 and *passim*).

<sup>37</sup> [Editor’s note: This passage was translated by Professor Faivre into French from German in the original article. Professor Joscelyn Godwin has rendered the French passage into English with the Editor’s gratitude.] J. Brucker, *Kurze Fragen*. . ., *op.cit.*, pp. 1065f. and *Historia*. . ., *op.cit.*, “Von den Theosophicis”, p. 645. Citation of Boehme’s text, from *Aurora* (chapter III, §38 of *Aurora*): “Nun merke: Gleichwie vom Vater und Sohn ausgebet der Hl. Geist und ist eine selbständige Person in der Gottheit und wallet in dem ganzen Vater, also gebet auch aus den Kräften deines Herzens, Adern und Hirn aus die Kraft die in deinem ganzen Leibe wallet, und aus deinem Lichte gebet aus in dieselbe Kraft, Vernunft, Verstand, Kunst und Weisheit, den ganzen leib zu regieren und auch alles, was ausser dem Leibe ist, zu unterscheiden. Und dieses beides ist in deinem Regiment des Gemütes ein Ding, dein Geist, und das bedeutet Gott, den Hl. Geist. Und der Hl. Geist aus Gott herrschet auch in diesem Geiste in dir, bist du aber ein Kind des Lichts und nicht der Finsternis”.

economy: it is your spirit, and that is to say God the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit emanated from God also reigns in your spirit within you, if you are a child of light and not of darkness.

The theosophers have a heated imagination and for the most part, a melancholic temperament. Purporting to possess an understanding of the most profound mysteries of Nature, they make a strong case for magic, chemistry, astrology, and other sciences of this kind, which they say open the doors of Nature, and they call “Kabbalah” divine philosophy which they believe the secret and very ancient Tradition of Wisdom. While searching for grace by means of the mediation of Nature and of their “interior principle”, they mixed Nature and grace, a direct and an indirect revelation<sup>38</sup>. Brucker reproached them for showing themselves to be generally ignorant of the history of philosophy. Except for Franziskus Mercurius Van Helmont, they do not even know the true Kabbalah<sup>39</sup>. Having possessed a systematic mind, Brucker also complained that one could not find any doctrinal unity among the theosophers (“there are as many theosophical systems as there are theosophers”<sup>40</sup>) but only some common characteristics. These are: *a*) emanation, as in Neo-Platonism: everything emanates from a divine substance and must return to this center; *b*) the quest for an immediate revelation of the soul by the Holy Spirit and not by philosophical reason (the healthy reason of the Aristotelian type, the kind which Brucker preferred); *c*) signatures, which are the image of the divine substance in all things; one knows creatures starting from God, one recognizes them in God; *d*) the idea that a universal spirit (*Weltgeist*) resides in all things; *e*) the use of signatures and of the universal spirit for magical ends, that is, with the aim of penetrating the mysteries of Nature, of acting on and commanding the spirits (*i.e.*, magical astrology, alchemy, theurgy, *etc.*); and *f*) the tripartite division of the human being (divine spark, astral spirit, and body)<sup>41</sup>. Brucker recognized that contrary to the followers of Spinoza, theosophers do not conflate God and the world<sup>42</sup>, but for all that, they are no less “*aphilosophoi*”; their theosophy is an “*asophia*”<sup>43</sup>.

A few years after Brucker’s book, Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* devoted a twenty-six page long entry to “*Théosophie*”. Essentially, as Jean Fabre has shown, the author—that is, Diderot himself—plagiarizes

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<sup>38</sup> J. Brucker, *Kurze Fragen*. . . , *op.cit.*, pp. 1063, 1244f.; *Historia*, *op.cit.*, pp. 745f.

<sup>39</sup> J. Brucker, *Historia*, *op.cit.*, p. 749.

<sup>40</sup> “*Tot systemata (si modo nomen hoc mereantur male cohaerentia animi aegri somnia) theosophica [sunt], quot sunt theosophorum capita*” (*ibid.*, p. 741).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 747-49; J. Brucker, *Kurze Fragen*. . . , *op.cit.*, pp. 1249-52.

<sup>42</sup> “*Non ipsum Deum cum mundo confundunt, et in Spinozae castris militant*” (J. Brucker, *Historia*, *op.cit.*, p. 743).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 747.

<sup>44</sup> *Encyclopédie*, t. XVI, article “Théosophes”, 1758 and 1765, pp. 253f. Jean Fabre, “Diderot et les Théosophes”, pp. 203-22 in *Cahiers de l’Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises*, no. 13, June 1961. Again in *Lumières et Romantisme*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1963, pp. 67-83.

Brucker<sup>44</sup>. Be that as it may, he does so with a great deal of talent, in a style which contrasts with the heavy Latin of his model, but he is clearly less precise than Brucker. This article deals mostly with Paracelsus, and moreover, approvingly (probably this strange, wandering and genial figure of a physician appealed to him); Diderot disdains and ridicules Boehme, and only mentions five other names: Sperber, Fludd, Pordage, Kuhlmann, and J.B. Van Helmont. The mere presence of theosophy in the *Encyclopédie* is all the more interesting as the word does not appear in other dictionaries of this period.

Nonetheless, the word “theosophy” enjoyed popularization around the same time the critical works were making their first appearance. As proof, we have only to consider the titles of “serious” treatises such as those of Welling, Sincerus Renatus (*cf. supra*), and J.F. Helvetius (*Monarchia arcanorum theosophica*, 1709) or more easily accessible and popular, such as the *Theosophic Room of the Marvels of the Superterrestrial King Magniphosaurus very much enamoured of the Incomparable Beauty of Queen Juno* (1709); or even the *Theosophic Meditations of the Heart*, written by the grandfather of Goethe’s princely friend<sup>45</sup>. By giving his edition of Boehme’s complete works a title which includes the word “theosophic”, (*cf. supra*, “The First Corpus”) Gichtel himself may well have played a part in the success of the term as we understand it or in reference, more vaguely, to a host of esoteric ideas. Johann Otto Glüsing and Johann Wilhelm Ueberfeld followed in this vein in producing new editions of the Bohemian corpus under the similar, but more eye-catching title of *Theosophia Revelata. Das ist: Alle Göttliche Schriften der Gottseligen und Hoherleuchteten Deutschen Theosophi Jacob Böhmens* (1715). This author, so important in the development of the theosophical current, was presented by the translator of *Der Weg zu Christo* (*The Way to Christ*) (1722), as the “Teutonic Theo-Philosopher”, and a subsequent German printing of the same book was entitled *Theosophisches Handbuch* (1730), that is, *Theosophical Handbook*. A short while later, in Herrnhut, the Moravian Brothers sometimes used the term “theosophy” in a positive sense. Similarly, around 1751 N.L. Zinzendorf’s son, Christian Renatus, as Pierre Deghaye tells us, invoked “holy theosophy” in a religious chorale where he saw it “smiling in the Urim which symbolizes light on the breast of the priest”. Christian Renatus wrote: “*Komm heilige Theosophie, / die aus dem Urim lacht*”. Here, it stood for gnosis, or the equivalent of what Oetinger called “sacred

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<sup>45</sup> Johannes Fredericus Helvetius, *Monarchia arcanorum theosophica et physico-medica, contra pseudo-philosophiam Spino-cartesianam*, 1709. This book is placed in the context of the confrontation between the new science and ancient wisdoms; that comparison forms an essential element of what will be Oetinger’s thought, somewhat later, and, more generally, of pre-romantic and romantic *Naturphilosophie*. Promotoris Edlen Ritters von Orthopetra K.S. und F.S.R. *Theosophischer Wunder-Saal des in die unvergleichliche Schönheit der unterirdischen Königin Juno inniglich verliebten Überirdischen Königs Magniphosauri. Das ist: Theosophischer Schauplatz/des entdeckten geistlichen Lebens und Wesens aller Creaturen/Insonderheit des Brodt-und Weines/... , Von Theophilo Philatela Corinte (sic)*, 1709. Considerations about the “breath of life” (“*Lebensodem*”). On p. 35, one finds the word “*theosophiren*”. Karl August von Weimar, *Zu dem höchsten alleinigen Jehovah gerichtete theosophische Herzens Andachten oder Fürstliche selbstabgefasste Gedanken, wie wir durch Gottes Gnade uns von dem Fluch des Irdischen befreyen und im Gebet zum wahren Licht und himmlischen Rube eingehen sollen. Nebst einigen aus dem Buche der Natur und Schrift hergeleiteten philosophischen Betrachtungen, von drey Haushaltungen Gottes, im Feuer, Licht, und Geist, zur Wiederbringung der Kreatur*— Philadelphia, 1786.

philosophy”<sup>46</sup>. Zinzendorf himself used the word in a positive sense, for “theology”, he then went on to speak of “*theologische Theosophie*”. To this he opposed “another theosophy”, a questionable one to be sure, but nonetheless more intelligent, which Pierre Deghaye locates in the wake of the Kabbalah and of Boehme<sup>47</sup>.

### **III) From Pre-romanticism to Romanticism, or the Second Golden Age**

#### **A) Reasons for the Revival**

After a fifty year period of latency, interrupted only by Swedenborg’s writings (*cf. infra*), theosophy once again sprang into life during the 1770s and experienced a second Golden Age which lasted until the mid-19th century. Of course such a renewal was connected with the recrudescence of all forms of esotericism, not a surprising occurrence in a period which was simultaneously optimistic and uneasy, enterprising and meditative, and which displayed two contrary yet complementary faces: the Enlightenment and the light of the Illuminists. Nevertheless, there are some very specific factors which can at least partly account for this renewal. First, we see the increasing importance in spirituality that was given to the idea of the “interior” or “invisible” Church, that is to say, to the intimate experience of the believer, independent of any confessional framework: Man does not find God in the temple but in his heart, which was often understood as an organ of knowledge. Secondly, we find a widespread interest in the problem of Evil, more generally in the myth of the fall and reintegration, in which one can see the great romantic myth *par excellence*<sup>48</sup>. That myth was explicated through secularized art forms and in political projects, as well as in theosophical discussions. Many masonic or para-masonic organizations became intent on building the New Jerusalem or reconstructing Solomon’s Temple. Thirdly, we see an interest in the sciences on the part of an increasingly wide public. On the one hand, Newtonian physics had indeed encouraged speculations of a holistic type, more and more concerned with the polarities which exist in nature—the main business being here to reconcile science and knowledge. On the other hand, experimental physics was popularized and was introduced into the salons, in the form of picturesque experiments with electricity and with magnetism that were well-suited for

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<sup>46</sup> P. Deghaye, *op.cit.* (*cf.* above, note 13), p. 439.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439, concerning a text of 1751, and pp. 440f.

<sup>48</sup> Among others Léon Cellier, *L’Épopée romantique*, 1954; republished under the title *L’Épopée humanitaire et les grands mythes romantiques*. Paris: S.E.D.E.S., 1971.

stimulating the imagination because they hinted at the existence of a life or a fluid which traverses all the material realms. Eclecticism is inseparable from this third factor, and it is a trait which also characterized the preceding era which was already fond of curious things—of *curiosa*—since they were concerned to harmonize the givens of knowledge. But in the second half of the century, eclecticism once again took on still more varied forms: people become more and more interested in the Orient (which had become better known through translations), in ancient Egypt and its mysteries, in Pythagoreanism, in the ancient religions, *etc.*; and this, of course, outside the very field of esotericism proper.

## **B) Three Areas of the Theosophical Terrain**

Within the theosophic scene that stretches over these eight odd decades, one could distinguish three relatively different areas which overlap on more than one side.

First (this presentation, however, is not chronological) is the area occupied by some authors located in the wake of the 17th century, that is to say, authors who are more or less Bohemian in outlook, even if they do not all claim allegiance with him. With the exception of Martinés de Pasqually, and every so often Saint-Martin, Eckartshausen or Jung-Stilling in their better moments, one no longer finds in these works the same prophetic and creative inspiration which infused the writings of Boehme, Gichtel, Kuhlmann, and Jane Leade. Essentially, here we are dealing with writers in whom speculative thought prevails over the expression of inner experience.

The Frenchman Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803) somehow inaugurated the renaissance of theosophy with his first book, *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité* (1775), partly inspired by the teachings of his master, Martinés de Pasqually (1727–1774). The latter, a Portuguese or Spanish theosopher and theurgist and author of *Traité de la Réintégration des Êtres créés dans leur primitives propriétés, vertus et puissances spirituelles divines* (which remained unpublished until 1899, although it had considerable influence, whether direct or indirect), had initiated Saint-Martin into his Order of Elect-Cohens around 1765. Thereafter, Saint-Martin wrote his *Tableau Naturel des rapports qui unissent Dieu, l'homme et l'univers* (1781), and then discovered Boehme's work during the years 1788–1791—writings which neither he nor Pasqually had known. Henceforth, he occupied himself with being an interpreter of Boehme, by means of the translations which he made into French and by his own works, which were always original nonetheless (*L'Homme de Désir*, 1790; *Le Ministère de l'Homme-Esprit*, 1802; *De l'Esprit des Choses*, 1802; *etc.*). These works were not merely the productions of an epigone, but of a thinker in his own right, who can be rightly considered the most inspired and the most powerful theosopher in the French language. Among the other great writers, let us recall some here, along with the titles of their major works.

In France, Jean-Philippe Dutoit-Membrini (alias Keleph Ben Nathan, 1721–1793) wrote *La Philosophie Divine, appliquée aux lumières naturelle, magique, astrale, surnaturelle, céleste, et divine* (1793), a book which owed little to Boehme and even less to Saint-Martin. In Germany, where several books by Saint-

Martin were translated (paradoxically, it was the French translations of Boehme's work which were instrumental in the Germans' rediscovery of the latter, to the point where his influence on German romanticism would become significant), seven names come to the fore. There was Karl von Eckartshausen (1752–1803), a native of Munich, who wrote many books, among which some of the most beautiful were published posthumously: *Die Wolke über dem Heiligthum*, 1802; *Über die Zauberkräfte der Natur*, 1819; and *Ueber die wichtigsten Mysterien der Religion*, 1823. Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740–1817), in Marburg: *Blicke in die Geheimnisse der Naturweisheit*, 1787. Frédéric-Rodolphe Salzmann (1749–1821), in Strasbourg: *Alles wird neu werden*, 1802–12, and the Swabian, Michael Hahn (1758–1819), with his *Betrachtungen* (1820–1826). Yet the two most important authors writing in the German language were most assuredly Friedrich Christoph Oetinger and Franz von Baader.

We have already encountered Oetinger (1702–1782) in our survey of the previous epoch. One sees him not only as one of the “Fathers” of Swabian Pietism (like Albrecht Bengel), but also as one of the principal German theosophers of his century. He was also the most erudite. He was a commentator on various works both theosophical (like the writings of Boehme and Swedenborg) and Kabbalistic (e.g., *Lehrtafel [der] Prinzessin Antonia*, 1763), the outstanding precursor of *Naturphilosophie* (with its theosophical propensity), and a remarkable popularizer of esoteric ideas (e.g., *Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch*, 1776). His complete works were published in 1858 (cf. *infra*, “The Word ‘Theosophy’”) under the title *Theosophische Schriften*, in Stuttgart.

Subsequently, and at least equally importantly, we have Franz von Baader (1765–1841), a native of Munich, who stands out among all of the 19th century theosophers as the best commentator on Boehme and Saint-Martin, and who was the major representative (along with Schelling) of romantic *Naturphilosophie*, and finally, the most powerful and original thinker of them all. His works appeared first as numerous scattered short pieces from 1798 to 1841, which were later integrated and republished by one of his closest disciples, Franz Hoffmann (1804–1881) in the form of complete works (1851–60). Among Baader's other disciples were Julius Hamberger (1801–1884), the author of *Gott und reine Offenbarungen in Natur und Geschichte* (1839), *Physica Sacra* (1869), and Rudolf Rocholl (*Beiträge zu einer Geschichte deutscher Theosophie*, 1856). Appearing in the midst of this congregation were a few female characters whose writings were permeated with theosophy and who established relationships and played the part of *inspiratrice* among various members and groups of this theosophical family. Thus we have Bathilde d'Orléans, duchess of Bourbon (1750–1822) and Julie de Krüdener (1764–1824). If they do not possess the powerful visionary capacities of a Jane Leade or an Antoinette Bourignon, they nevertheless testify to the presence of female theosophers in the romantic context.

If the Roman Catholic Baader can rightly be taken as an accomplished example of theosophy and pansophy within the German romantic *Naturphilosophie*, some other writers representative of the latter have shown that they too were influenced by theosophy and pansophy<sup>49</sup>. This family

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<sup>49</sup> The work of Saint-Martin, *L'Esprit des Choses* (1802) seems to be, in France, the only representative of its kind (i.e. being quite dependent on a theosophical *Naturphilosophie*). On the latter, see Antoine Faivre, *Philosophie de la Nature (Physique sacrée et théosophie, 18ème-19ème siècles)*, Paris: A. Michel, 1996.

of *Naturphilosophen* is exemplified by some celebrated people: Friedrich von Hardenberg (*alias* Novalis, 1722–1801); Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810); Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert (1780–1860); Carl Gustav Carus (1789–1869); Carl August von Eschenmayer (1768–1852); Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829); Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887); and Johann Friedrich von Meyer (1772–1849). As a matter of fact, the romantic *Naturphilosophie* has features that connect it, if not directly to theosophy, at least to the project of pansophy; namely, *a*) a conception of Nature viewed as a text which must be deciphered with the help of correspondences; *b*) a taste for the idea of living concreteness and the postulate of a living universe, having several levels of reality; *c*) the affirmation of an identity between Spirit and Nature.

The second area of this theosophical terrain is original for at least two reasons: first, it can be summed up by evoking the name of a single author and second, it seems to owe nothing to the theosophy which preceded it or which was contemporaneous with it. The author in question is the Swede, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), a learned scientist and renowned inventor who one day in 1745, interrupted his properly scientific activities on account of dreams and visions which came to him quite suddenly and transformed his inner life. Henceforth, he gave himself up to the study of Holy Scripture and wrote *Arcana Cœlestia* (1745–58), followed by many other books (*eg.*, *De Nova Hierosolyma*, 1758; *Apocalypsis revelata*, 1766; *Apocalypsis explicata*, 1785–89; *etc.*) All of this work was written prior to the period under discussion here, however it began to spread throughout Europe and America from the 1770's on in the form of innumerable translations, abridged versions, and commentaries which, together with the writings of Swedenborg himself, comprised a new type of referential corpus which would henceforth be widely utilized.

If one considers the three aforementioned main features of this current (*cf. supra*, “The Characteristics of Theosophy”) as it was born at the beginning of the 17th century (*viz.* the triangle God-Man-Nature, the pre-eminence of the mythical, and the idea of direct access to the higher worlds), we find they are certainly present in Swedenborg's work. However, Swedenborg's theosophy distinguishes itself on account of one essential trait: with him the mythical is almost entirely devoid of dramatic elements: the fall, the reintegration, the idea of transmutation, new birth, or the fixation of the spirit in a body of light; *i.e.* the alchemical vision, so omnipresent in theosophy, are almost absent from his visionary conception. Here we find ourselves in a universe interconnected by innumerable correspondences. But finally, in a universe which is quiet, static, and above all lacking in hierarchical complexity or intermediaries. In this respect, we can say that Swedenborg is not much of a gnostic. Sophia is absent, and angels can be merely the souls of the deceased.

One can see that what is different here is the repertoire. While reading Swedenborg, one often has the impression that one is meandering through a garden, rather than participating in a tragedy. But this and “reassuring” theosophy promptly met with tremendous success. Later, in his *Opuscules Théosophiques* (1822), Jean-Jacques Bernard would attempt to unite Swedenborg's thought with Saint-Martin's theosophy, after admirers of Swedenborg, like Edouard Richer, and then Le Boys des Guays (1794–1864), and formerly Dom Pernety (1716–1796), and many others had contributed to

disseminating it. Still more than the other theosophical “areas”, it influenced the works of writers like Baudelaire, Balzac, *etc.*

The third theosophical area is occupied by a number of initiatory societies. Admittedly, these do little more than transmit the theosophy of both of the previous areas, at least in part, and they do it through rituals or through the instructions which accompany the rituals. It is well known that the last third of the 18th century witnessed a rapid proliferation of initiatory organizations, particularly Masonic rites of higher grades (*i.e.*, those which include grades higher than the three conventional Masonic grades: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason). Besides the Order of the Elect-Cohens (mentioned in passing, above), several of the more important ones should be mentioned here: the Rectified Scottish Order (much influenced by the theosophy of Martinés de Pasqually and Saint-Martin), which was created in Lyon around 1768 by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730–1824), a close friend of Saint-Martin’s. This Regime propagated itself throughout Europe and Russia as well. There was also the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross, constituted around 1777 in Germany, and inspired by alchemical and Rosicrucian ideas and the Brethren of the Cross, a rite founded by C.A.H. Haugwitz, also around 1777; the Asiatic Brethren, created around 1779 by Heinrich von Ecker- und Eckhoffen; the order of “Illuminated Theosophers”, born around 1783 (of a Swedenborgian type), important in Great Britain and the United States; and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, created in France, around 1801. A complete list would be long. The activity of these higher grade Masonic Rites was not limited to the Masonic work proper, but would sometimes include editorial projects as well. Thus, in Russia, the Mason Nicolas Novikov (1744–1818) had many books of theosophy translated which he published, while in Germany the Order of the Gold and Rosy Cross did the same. Their press issued the *Geheime Figuren der Rosenkreutzer*, a superb book of “theosophy through images”, which was published in 1785–86 in Altona.

### **C) The Word ‘Theosophy’ and a Few Criticisms**

The time of plentiful critical disquisitions seemed to be finished, but here and there, judgments were still being passed. With respect to vocabulary, although the word “theosophy” had by this time sufficiently taken root so that it meant the current we are presenting in this article, its uses nevertheless remained subject to variations. One fact to be noted is that theosophers themselves used the term sparingly, at least up until the middle of the 19th century. What follows here are some selected characteristic examples.

In his *De la Philosophie de la Nature* (1769), Delisle de Sales quoted the word “theosophy”, employing it in its already classical sense in order to castigate those “detractors of human understanding”, *i.e.*, “R. Lulle, Paracelsus, Fludd, Jacob Boehme, J.B. Van Helmont, and Poiret”, people one ought to “treat like diseased persons rather than as votaries (*sectaires*)”<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> Anonymous (Deslisle de Sales), *De la Philosophie de la Nature*, vol. III (Amsterdam, 1770), pp. 299-307. I thank Jean-Louis Siémons for his drawing my attention to this passage.

In a long poem entitled *Theosophie des Julius* (1784), Friedrich Schiller used the term in an imprecise way which in any case bore no reference to the theosophical current<sup>51</sup>. In 1786, J.G. Stoll's *Judgement on Theosophy, Kabbala and Magick*, was published; it is a superficial text, yet still bears witness to the fashionable nature of the term itself<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, some authors, like Henri Coqueret (*Théosophie ou science de Dieu*, 1803), still used the term as though it were synonymous with "theology", while Friedrich Schlegel quoted it very often in various notes dated from 1800 to 1804, with meanings that are difficult to decipher, but which are generally connected with the idea of a "knowledge of a higher order"<sup>53</sup>.

At the same time appeared an anonymous essay entitled "Recherches sur la doctrine des théosophes" (published in 1807 in Saint-Martin's *Ceuvres Posthumes*<sup>54</sup>. Written "by one of the friends" of the author, it was originally intended to serve as an introduction to those posthumous works<sup>55</sup>. Given Saint-Martin's influence throughout romanticism, this text would require a deeper study. Theosophy, we are told, "was born with Man", and if the theosopher, inspired by "true desire" is first of all "a friend of God and Wisdom", the author specified nonetheless that this quest remains "founded on the relationship that exists between God, Man, and the Universe"—a God who is that of the Christians<sup>56</sup>. Moreover, it provided an insight into the referential corpus of this "doctrine":

Parmi les ouvrages de ces Théosophes, on remarque ceux de Rosencreuz, Reuchlin, Agrippa, François Georges, Paracelse, Pic de la Mirandole, Valentin Voigel [*sic*], Thomassius, les deux Vanhelfmont, Adam Boreil, Boehemius or Boheme, Poiret, Quirinus [*sic*], Kulman, Zuimerman, Bâcon, Henri Morus, Pordage, Jeanne Léade, Léibnitz, Swedenburg, Martinez de Pasqualis, St. Martin, etc.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> In Friedrich Schiller, *Philosophische Briefe*, published in *Thalia*, year 1787.

<sup>52</sup> J.G. Stoll, *Etwas zur richtigen Beurtheilung der Theosophie, Cabala, Magie* (Leipzig, 1786).

<sup>53</sup> It would be interesting to devote a study on the frequent use of the word "Theosophy" by Friedrich Schlegel. Almost always it is in a vague sense, and in personal notes presented in the form of aphorisms and various reflections. Cf. particularly in the recent edition of the complete works (known as *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe*, Zurich: Thomas Verlag), volumes VI, XII and XVIII (numerous notes written during the years 1800-1804).

<sup>54</sup> "Recherches sur la doctrine des théosophes", in Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, *Ceuvres Posthumes*, Paris, 1807, t. 1, pp. 145-190.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147, note. The editor adds in this note: "It reached us too late to be placed, as it should be, at the beginning of this volume; but we would not deprive our reader thereof".

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 150, 154.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154. "Rosencreuz" relates evidently to the "foundation" texts of Rosicrucianism (*Fama*, 1614; *Confessio*, 1615; *Chymische Hochzeit*, 1616). Johann Reuchlin is cited probably because of his *De Verbo Mirifico* (1494) and *De arte cabballistica* (1517). François Georges is Giorgi, the author of *De Harmonia Mundi* (1525, followed in 1536 by his

*Problemata*). Pico represents here a double orientation: the Christian Kabbalah (as Reuchlin and Giorgi) and *magia* (as Cornelius Agrippa). Thus, Rosicrucianism, Christian Kabbalah, and *magia* are found annexed by the author to “theosophy” just as Paracelsus—which makes sense. The annexation of both Van Helmonts (Johann Baptist and Franziscus Mercurius) to that sort of list is also current enough, as seen before. The presence of Francis Bacon is more unexpected. Apart from Weigel, Boehme, Pordage, Poiret, Kuhlmann, Leade, Swedenborg, Martines de Pasqually and Saint-Martin, who represent indeed the theosophic current, there still remain four names which it is of interest to find here: Thomasius, Leibniz, Boreil (*i.e.* Boreel), and Zuimerman (*i.e.* Zimmermann). Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), the author of *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam* (1688), and editor of Pierre Poiret’s book, *De Eruditione triplici*, passes for the principal representative of *Eclecticism*, *i.e.* a thought of syncretistic type, open to all fields of knowledge and opposed to all forms of sectarian philosophy. Being anti-Cartesian, anti-mechanist, he shows a marked interest not only for Poiret, but also for Weigel, Boehme, and Fludd (*cf.*, among others his book *Versuch vom Wesen des Geistes*, 1699), theosophers whose “philosophy of nature”, by many aspects, corresponded to his own orientation. One would hesitate, however, to see in him an esotericist, least of all to make of him a theosopher. The same with Leibniz, whose presence on that list can still be explained by that of Thomasius—or *vice-versa*: Leibniz is one of the “great synthesizers” of his time; he intends to reconcile Aristotle and Plato, and somewhat like Thomasius, to rediscover a “perennial philosophy” by studying the history of philosophical and religious traditions. Therefore, in 1714, he writes, in a letter to Rémond de Montmort: “If I had some spare time for it, I would compare my dogmas with those of the Ancients and other clever men. Truth is more widely spread than one believes, but very often it is varnished and, very often too, wrapped up, even mutilated, corrupted by additions that spoil it or make it less useful. By pointing to these traces of truth in the Ancients (or, to speak more generally, in the predecessors), one would extract gold from mud, the diamond from its mine, and light from darkness; and this would be, in effect, the *perennis quaedam philosophia*”. (Leibniz, *Schriften*, ed. Gerhardt, vol. 3, pp. 624f. quoted by Rolf Christian Zimmermann—*Das Weltbild des Jungen Goethe* [Munich: W. Fink, 1969], p. 21.) The presence here of these two thinkers (Thomasius and Leibniz) is thus explained by the orientation which is both “perennialist” and “interiorist” (a reference to an inner, “interior”, Church) of the author of that opuscule. There is indeed an obvious parallelism between the perennial philosophy of Leibniz and the “aulic” philosophy of Thomasius. The anonymous author could have added even a name like Gottfried Arnold, a great representative of the third branch—equally parallel—that of the “mystical philosophy”, which corresponds to a search for the “core” of all forms of Christian “mysticism”. There remains now to wonder about two names: Boreel and Zimmermann. Both seem to testify to a particular familiarity of the anonymous author with Germanic spirituality. About Adam Boreel (1603-1667), a student of Hebrew, influenced by Sebastian Franck, Gottfried Arnold, his contemporary, gives us information (in *Unpartbeyische*. . . cited *supra*, note 18; *cf.* Vol. II, B. XXVIII. C. XIII, heading 22, 1729 edition, vol. I, p. 1035; and above all, vol II (edition of 1729), Vol. I, ch. VI, headings 28-33, p. 68). Boreel attempted to found a religious society in Amsterdam in 1645. His teaching rested exclusively on the Holy Scripture: he rejected all Churches, to the profit of a “private”, divine service. Thus he too is an apostle of the inner Church, but he is not a theosopher. Among his writings may be quoted: *Concatenatio aurea Christiana seu cognitio Dei ac Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, 1677, also published in Dutch the same year; *Onderhandelinge noopende den Broederlyken Godtsdienst*, 1674. As for Zimmermann, I would not quite rule out the fact that he may have been Johann Georg Zimmermann, (1728-1795), a physician of Hanover (although a Swiss), akin to the *Illuminati* (concerning him, *cf.* Eduard Bodemann, *J.G. Zimmermann, sein Leben und bisher ungedruckte Briefe an denselben*.—Hanover, 1878). But it is hardly probable. With greater likelihood, one could propose the name of Johann Jacob Zimmermann, on whom again Gottfried Arnold informs us (in *Unpartbeyische*. . . , quote *supra*, note 17: *cf.*, tome II, Part IV, Sec. III, Num. 18 § 142; *i.e.* p. 1105 in the 1729 edition): “*astrologus, magus, cabalista*”, a preacher of Strasburg, more or less a disciple of Boehme, who wrote under the pseudonym of Ambrosius Sehmman. His name is also connected with the emigration to Pennsylvania of a group of two score “brothers” and “sisters” whom he directed spiritually. Robert Amadou republished this text under the title *Recherches sur la doctrine des théosophes*. Introduction and notes by Robert Amadou (Paris: Le Cercle du Livre, coll. *La Haute Science*, 1952). In his introduction (p. 21) R. Amadou writes that this text may perhaps be attributed to Gence, the author of the *Notice historique sur Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin* (Paris, 1824). In an appendix, he presents a bibliographic

These remarks are followed by a long passage from the Book of the Wisdom of Solomon (chapter VII), quotations from Pythagorean texts and from Jacob Boehme, and comments indicating a laudative appreciation of Indian religions texts<sup>58</sup>.

A short time later, in 1810, in a book which enjoyed a wide and lasting audience (*De l'Allemagne*) Mme de Staël recalled the necessary distinction between the “theosophers; *i.e.*, those who are engaged in philosophical theology, like Jacob Boehme, Saint-Martin, *etc.*, and mere mystics; the first attempt to penetrate the secrets of Creation; the second are satisfied with their own hearts”<sup>59</sup>. And in his *Opuscules Théosophiques*, Jean-Jacques Bernard thanked Mme de Staël for

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notice (pp. 43-58) in which, concerning Zimmermann, he hesitates between J.G. Zimmermann and the Swiss Jean-Jacques Zimmermann (1685-1756), the author of a book on Pythagoras. He thinks that “Bacon” is Roger Bacon.

<sup>58</sup> *Recherches sur la doctrine des Théosophes, op.cit.*, pp. 155-68. Concerning India (and such texts as the Malabarar [*Mabâbbârata*] and the Poupnekat [*Upanishads*], the latter from the *Vedas*) the anonymous author writes: “The Europeans, in seeing the rapport and striking similarities which the doctrines of India have with those which have been published for a number of centuries by various European theosophers, do not surmise that these theosophers learned them in India. Perhaps the time is not far away when these Europeans will cast their eyes willingly on the religious and mysterious objects which they now view only with suspicion and even contempt. Then, the writings of the different Theosophers and Spiritualists will probably appear less obscure and repugnant to them, since they will discover the bases of all the legendary theogonies of the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans, *etc.*, and will recognize the key of all the sciences with which they busy themselves; perhaps they will finally become convinced that the same bases and the same dogmas which have been generally accepted in places—however farflung—and in times—however removed from one another, must have the same principal character of truth” (pp. 167 ff.).

<sup>59</sup> Mme de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, vol. II, Bruxelles, 1820 edition, Chapter 5 (“De la disposition religieuse appelée mysticité”) ‘mysticism’, vol. II (Brussels: 1830), p. 361: “The religious disposition called “*mysticité*” is only a more intimate way of feeling and conceiving Christianity. Since the word “*mysticité*” conceals something of mystery, people believe that mystics professed extraordinary dogmas and participated in a sect. According to them the only mysteries are those of feeling applied to religion, and feeling is at once what is most clear, most simple, and most inexplicable. However, we must make the distinction between the *theosophers*; that is to say, those who occupy themselves with theology, such as Jacob Boehme and Saint-Martin, *etc.*, and the simple mystics; the first want to penetrate the secret of creation, the second want to be led by their own heart”. And in Chapter VII (same edition, pp. 387-90), titled “Des Philosophes religieux appelés Théosophes”, Mme de Staël resumes the distinction proposed in Chapter 5, and she writes: “In affirming the spirituality of the soul, not only has Christianity led souls to believe in the unlimited power of religious or philosophical faith, but the revelation has appeared to some people as a continual miracle which can be renewed within each of them, and some have sincerely believed that a supernatural divination was accorded them, and that in them a truth was manifested of which they were more witnesses than inventors” (p. 388). She then proceeds to devote a few lines to Boehme and his translator, Saint-Martin (p.389), and she compares the “spiritualist philosophers” (theosophers) with “materialist philosophers”. The former “declare that what they think has been revealed to them, while philosophers in general believe themselves uniquely led by their own reason; but since both groups aspire to understand the mystery of mysteries, at this lofty altitude what significance do the words ‘reason’ and ‘madness’ hold? Why stigmatize with the term ‘insane’ those who think they find deep wisdom in enthusiasm?” (p. 390). See also, for interesting variations of these texts, tome V of Mme de Staël’s works, in the critical edition procured by the Countess Jean de Pange and Simone Balayé (Paris: Hachette, 1960), particularly pp. 126-136 (“Des Philosophes religieux appelés Théosophes”) pp. 137-54 (“De l’esprit de secte en Allemagne”).

having cast “an approving glance at the theosophical doctrine—thereby proving that she was able to appreciate it”<sup>60</sup>. The said *Opuscules* are a collection of texts written by Bernard, who frequently quotes Saint-Martin, Swedenborg and Joseph de Maistre. The latter also spoke of Saint-Martin whom he saw as “the most learned, wise and elegant of modern theosophers”, in his *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, which had been published in 1822<sup>61</sup>.

If the word “theosophy” is rarely to be found in Baader’s writings<sup>62</sup>, his immediate disciples made wide use of it. Above all, Friedrich von Osten-Sacken, in a long presentation of Baader and Saint-Martin, wrote that “the theosophic current constitutes the golden thread stretching alongside the speculation of understanding, that traverses the history of modern philosophy, from the time of the Reformation”. Modern philosophy, even the Hegelian type, is not capable of seizing the depths of Spirit and Nature, only theosophy is able to revive speculation—an undertaking which had already been attempted by Boehme—and thus to Baader “is due the merit to have brought theosophy back to a precise principle of knowledge and given it thereby a firm foundation”<sup>63</sup>. Franz

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<sup>60</sup> Anonymous (Jean-Jacques Bernard), *Opuscules théosophiques, auxquels on a joint une défense des soirées de Saint-Petersbourg; par un ami de la sagesse et de la vérité* (Paris, 1822).

<sup>61</sup> Joseph de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* (Edition de Lyon, 1831), vol II, p. 303 (11th discussion). First published in 1822, the book had first been conceived as early as 1810. In the same discussion (p. 302), while speaking about the *Illuminati* (i.e. about theosophers like Saint-Martin, whom he knew), he wrote: “Often. . . I had occasion to declare that every true statement they made was nothing but the catechism obscured by strange words”.

<sup>62</sup> In 1831, Baader wrote that the religious philosophy is not the “*Weltweisheit*” (the worldly wisdom, limited to “cosmology” (“*cosmosophie*”) and “physiosophy” (“*physiosophie*”), but that to which Saint Paul opposed it, viz. theosophy, or “*Gottesweisheit*” (God’s Wisdom). Cf. Franz von Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, in the edition procured by Franz Hoffman (1851-1860), I, 323. In a note of comments to Johann Friedrich Kleuker *Magikon*, published in 1784, Baader writes: “*Die Kirchenväter Tertullian, Tatian, etc., waren allerdings von der Kabbala berührt, die Verwandtschaft des Neuplatonismus mit der Kabbala ist nicht zu leugnen und man kann mit Grund die christliche Theosophie eine erweiterte, bereicherte und (christlich) modificirte Kabbala nennen*”. (XII, 550; this concerned p. 255, lines 19-27f. of *Magikon*. In his *Fermenta Cognitionis*, published from 1822 to 1825, Baader wrote (in the sixth notebook of his *Fermenta Cognitionis*): “J. Boehme’s Theosophie beruht ganz auf dem Evangelium Johannis I. 1-44” (II, 402). There exists a French translation of *Fermenta Cognitionis* by Eugène Susini (Paris: Albin Michel, in the series *Bibliothèque de l’Hermétisme*, 1985; cf. Book VI, § 7, p. 224).

<sup>63</sup> Friedrich von Osten-Sacken, in his introduction to Book XII (1860) of the edition procured by Franz Hoffmann, pp. 16,40 writes: “*die Verstandes-Speculation [konnte] sich nicht dazu erheben, die Tiefe der Theosophie zu erfassen.—Wir müssen diese daher als eine ganz besondere, eigenthümliche Strömung der geistigen Entwicklung betrachten. Während die Verstandes-Speculation in eigener Autonomie ihre Systeme gebaut hat, so hat die Theosophie, von einer religiösen Erkenntniss ausgehend, sich stets in die absolute Wabreit des Christenthums zu vertiefen gesucht und von diesem Standpuncte aus einer christlichen Speculation reiche Elemente geboten. Je mehr desshalb ein tieferer Blick in den Gang der neueren Speculation uns erkennen lässt, dass diese Verstandesoperation nicht im Stande ist, die Tiefen des Geistes und der Natur zu erfassen und dass dieser Formalismus in seiner Consequenz zu einem vollständigen Bruch mit unserem tieferen Sein geführt hat, um so mehr thut es Noth, unsere Aufmerksamkeit auf eine Richtung zu lenken, die dazu berufen scheint, eine Regeneration der Speculation zu erzeugen. Diese Richtung einer theosophischen Anschauungsweise zieht sich gleich nach der Reformation durch die deutsche Wissenschaft und wird in der grossartigsten Weise repräsentirt durch*

Hoffman, whom we have already quoted, also used the term ‘theosophy,’ but in a vaguer sense<sup>64</sup>. Julius Hamberger—another close disciple (*cf. supra*)—published an anthology entitled *Voices From the Sanctuary of Christian Mysticism and Theosophy*<sup>65</sup> in 1857, in which he presented, as announced in the title, texts from both tendencies, but without trying to theoretically distinguish one from the other. The book of Rudolf Rocholl (a more indirect disciple), *Contributions to a History of German Theosophy*<sup>66</sup> also attested to the vogue of the word from the middle of the 19th century for describing this current. In his book, Rocholl talked a lot about the Jewish Kabbalah, and while citing the Christian Kabbalah (*e.g.*, Pico, Reuchlin) indirectly touched on modern esotericism (*i.e.*, Agrippa, Paracelsus, Boehme, Gutmann, Scleus, Baader) in enthusiastic terms. It was also at this time that Oetinger’s complete works were published in the form of a double series,

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*Jakob Böhme*” (p. 17). “Man kann freilich Franz Baader unter den Philosophen als unsystematisch bezeichnen, dagegen muss man ihm das grosse Verdienst vindiciren, die Theosophie auf ein bestimmtes Erkenntnisprincip zurückgeführt und dadurch derselben eine fest Grundlage gegeben zu haben (p. 40). The whole passage cited here concerning *Verstandesspeculation* remains a matter of particular interest today. It would be of service to bring out a new edition and translation of the entire text of von Osten-Sacken (pp. 1-73, in XII).

<sup>64</sup> *Cf.* especially V, p. LXXIII: Franz Hoffmann says that one can use “theosophy” *apropos* of Baader, in the sense which Carl Gustav Carus gives it (*Psyche. Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele*, second edition, p. 73), when he explains that true philosophy could not be anything but theosophy; because if the divine, the origin of all things, is God, a profound knowledge can have no other object than the divine. Here we see that for Hoffmann the word “theosophy” retains a more general, more vague sense than it does for von Osten-Sacken.

<sup>65</sup> Julius Hamberger, *Stimmen aus dem Heiligthum der christlichen Mystik und Theosophie. Für Freunde des inneren Lebens und der tiefen Erkenntnis der göttlichen Dinge gesammelt und herausgegeben* (Stuttgart, 1857), two volumes. In his short preface (two pages), Hamberger declares having given up distinguishing mysticism from theosophy: “*Es war nicht thunlich, die Mystiker von den Theosophen zu trennen, indem ja so manche Mystiker zugleich Theosophen sind, sondern sie folgen sich, ohne Scheidung, meist in chronologischer Reihe, im zweiten Theile aber mehr nach ihrer innern Verwandtschaft zusammengeordnet. Noch weniger war eine Zusammenstellung nach den Materien in systematischer Ordnung möglich, indem ein und derselbe Abschnitt nicht selten mehr als einen bedeutenden Punkt zum Gegenstande hat*” (p. iv). He nevertheless ends this preface by the words here: “[*einanderseits lässt sich*] der Mystik die Kraft nicht absprechen, denjenigen welche überhaupt ein ernstes Verlangen nach Einigung ihres Gemüthes mit der Gottheit in sich tragen, den Aufschwung zu derselben wesentlich zu erleichtern, und da uns andererseits in der Theosophie ein Licht entgegenschimmert, welches, wenn man ihm nur weiter und weiter nachzugehen sich entschliessen kann, die christliche Lehre in einer Klarheit und Bestimmtheit erkennen lässt, wie sie die gegenwärtige Verwirrung der Begriffe in der That gebieterisch erbeisbet” (p. iv).

It is in this way that one finds in this anthology, besides persons who are strictly speaking mystics, authors such as Paracelsus, Postel, Arndt, Boehme, Pordage, A. Bourignon, Oetinger, Philipp Matthäus Hahn, Johann Michael Hahn, Jung-Stilling, Saint-Martin, Dutoit-Membrini, Eckartshausen, Baader, Johann Friedrich von Meyer, and even Franz Hoffmann. One also finds there for the first time that a true anthology of theosophy has seen the day! Finally, one finds also some romantic *Naturphilosophen* such as F.J.W. Schelling, Fr. Schlegel, and G.H. Schubert. Each name which is presented is accompanied by an informative note, followed by a citation of one or more selected texts.

<sup>66</sup> Rudolf Rocholl, *Beiträge zu einer Geschichte der Theosophie. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung auf Molitor’s Philosophie der Geschichte* (Berlin, 1856). For a bibliography on R. Rocholl, *cf.* Gerhard Wehr, *Esoterisches Christentum (von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, second edition (Stuttgart, Kleht-Cotta, 1995), p. 386.

one of which was precisely entitled *Theosophical Writings*, and that a high Masonic grade, that of “Theosopher Knight”, appeared in the Rite of Memphis<sup>67</sup>.

## **IV) Effacement and Permanence (end of the 19th – 20th century)**

### **A) Factors in the Dissolution**

During the second half of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, the so-called occult movement appeared, which sought to combine into one single worldview the findings of experimental science and the occult sciences cultivated since the Renaissance. The movement also wanted to demonstrate the emptiness of materialism. Its domain essentially remained on that of the “second causes”, but its propensity for eclecticism caused it to touch on a number of different fields, including the various branches of esotericism, particularly theosophy and pansophy. This is why the boundary line between occultism and theosophy is sometimes fluid—only sometimes. This is the case with Barlet (the pseudonym of Albert Faucheux, 1838–1921) and Papus (the pseudonym of Gérard Encausse, 1875–1916). This is also why some initiatic societies with truly theosophical inspiration flourished, albeit in limited number, in the heart of this occultist current; for example, the Martinist Order which Papus founded in 1891 (he also dedicated one work to Martines de Pasqually and another to Saint-Martin). As its name indicates, this Order was inspired by Saint-Martin and in that sense it was also close to the Rectified Scottish Rite (*cf. supra*), which had always been and continues to be widely practiced in Freemasonry.

Extending beyond the domain of occultism strictly speaking, the quest for one “primordial” Tradition overarching all of the other traditions of humanity was favored by a better knowledge of the Orient and by the appearance of comparative religions in the universities; in the last part of the 19th century, this quest for a “mother Tradition” became an obsession among a number of representatives of esotericism. It carries the risk of causing one to turn away from the privileged attachment to one tradition or to one particular myth on which one could exercise the creative imagination. At the same time that this partiality towards universality developed, the theosophical

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<sup>67</sup> Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, *Sämtliche Schriften*, edited by von Karl Chr. Eberhard Ehmann (Stuttgart, 1858-64). The first series (five volumes) is dedicated to the homiletic writings; the second (six volumes) is dedicated to theosophical writings, among which are *Lebrtafel* (1763), *Swedenborg* ((1765), *Biblisches und Emblematisches Wörterbuch* (1776), *etc.* On the grade of Theosopher Knight in Masonry, *cf.* Karl R.H. Frick, *Licht und Finsternis* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt), 1978, vol. II, p. 197. And yet shortly thereafter it is again in a very general but precise and not at all esoteric sense that the Italian philosopher Antonio Rosmini-Serbati (1797-1855) employs “*teosofia*” in his *Teosofia* (posthumous, 2 vols., Turin, 1859) and distinguishes (*cf.* especially vol. I., p. 2) two areas in metaphysics, namely, psychology and theosophy. The author declares that he is inspired by Saint Augustine who reduced philosophy to two fundamental areas: the knowledge of the soul and the knowledge of God.

current dried up. Guénonism, that is to say the thought of René Guénon (1886–1951), and the numerous discourses that it has inspired ever since, played a role here—a role which cannot be over-emphasized. Guénon himself was not interested in the western theosophical corpus (were it only because of its Germanic roots) nor in the various forms of western hermeticism. But Guénonian thought has become synonymous with esotericism in the minds of a rather large public. To the best of my knowledge the single text in which Guénon portrayed modern western theosophy in positive terms consists of only four lines and is found in a book which, as it turns out, happened to be presented as an enterprise dedicated to a radical demolition of the Theosophical Society<sup>68</sup>. Obviously, in that book the traditional theosophical current only served as a foil: Guénon almost never mentioned it anywhere else, and was probably hardly knowledgeable about it.

The birth of the Theosophical Society was contemporaneous with that of the occultist current into which this Society plunges part of its roots. According to the wishes of its founders (H.P. Blavatsky, 1831–1891; H.S. Olcott, 1832–1907; and W.Q. Judge, 1851–1896), it responded to a triple goal: *a*) to form the nucleus of a universal brotherhood; *b*) to encourage the study of all religions, of philosophy, and of science; and *c*) to study the laws of Nature as well as the various psychic abilities of human beings. No more than the theosophical current which we have been examining here, the T.S. does not have, any more than the theosophical current examined here, an official doctrine to which its members are supposed to subscribe (although what H.P.B. called “theosophy” designates really a doctrine which was elaborated in the 1880s and 1890s). Nevertheless, there are some notable differences, underscored by the three points which have been enumerated. As its name<sup>69</sup> and point ‘*a*’ (*supra*) indicate, this is a formally constituted society. It places itself outside all religions (and therefore, outside the three Abrahamic religions), not only beyond the confessional framework of formal religions (although point ‘*b*’ *supra* speaks only of encouraging the study of religions). Finally, it is limited, at least theoretically (point ‘*c*’), to the “second causes”. This said, such a huge program

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<sup>68</sup> René Guénon, *Le Théosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (Paris: Valois, 1921), pp. 1f: All traditional Western theosophy, “the basis of which is always Christianity”, is represented by a certain group of authors of whom he gives a succinct list: “Such as, for example, doctrines like those of Jacob Boehme, Gichtel, William Law, Jane Leade, Swedenborg, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, and Eckartshausen: we do not purport to give a complete list, we limit ourselves to citing some of the better known names”.

<sup>69</sup> On the choice of “Theosophy” by the founders of the Theosophical Society and the meaning which they gave to this word, cf. James Santucci, “Theosophy, *Theosophia*” in *The American Theosophist*, Special Issue (Autumn 1987). By the same author and by Jean-Louis Siémons, see the communications in *Political Hermetica* (cf. *supra*, note 2). Cf. also the article by John Algeo in *Theosophical History* (California State University, Fullerton), vol. IV, no. 6-7, April-July 1993: p. 223-29, p. 226. According to the testimony of Henry S. Olcott himself, the choice of the name of the T.S. was a random one; *apropos* the meeting of October 18, 1875, he wrote: “The choice of a name for the Society was, of course, a question for grave discussion in Committee. Several were suggested, among them, if I recollect right, the Egyptological, the Hermetic, the Rosicrucian, *etc.*, but none seemed just the thing. At last, in turning over the leaves of the Dictionary, one of us came across the word “Theosophy”, whereupon, after discussion, we unanimously agreed that was the best of all; since it both expressed the esoteric truth we wished to reach and covered the ground of Felt’s methods of scientific research” (H.S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, Adyar, The Theosophical Publishing House, 1974, first edition, 1895, vol. I, p. 132.)

of an absolutely universal eclecticism (*e.g.*, the major works which it has created, starting with those of H.P. Blavatsky herself), testify to a propensity to integrate all forms of religious and esoteric traditions, and thereby also to integrate the referential corpus of the theosophical current, to which is due the aforementioned honor of having given its name to this vortex which tends to co-opt it, to swallow it up. But this remains a propensity, as if the T.S. had the feeling that it is dealing here with a foreign body which is difficult to assimilate. Here once again the notion of a referential corpus shows itself to be operative: if it is true that H.P. Blavatsky cited Boehme dozens of times in her work (*cf. supra, Introduction*) and that alongside this name, we find under her pen other representatives of the classical theosophical current (like Paracelsus, Khunrath, Von Helmont *et alii*); these are nevertheless isolated figures in the midst of the enormous troop of personalities that H.P.B. went in search of in every corner of the world. Finally, it is striking that certain of the best historians within this Society are today again inclined to hold firmly that these two ensembles—the theosophical current, and the Theosophical Society—are essentially one and the same thing, the current being considered as a particular case of theosophy among others, and indeed, the teaching of the Society being supposed to provide one or more denominators common to all of them (a “*theosophia perennis*” of some sort). Now, that *theosophia perennis* could not be defined in a doctrinal fashion without danger of becoming just one religious creed among others; it therefore would fall under the heading of subjectivity. But a subjectivity “illuminated” by the study of all the religions of the world—in that, perhaps, lies the positive, fruitful contribution of the Theosophical Society.

## **B) A Discreet Presence**

If the theosophical current strictly speaking remains alive, it has not been strongly represented. This is due in part to the reasons which have just been set forth. In any case, there was nothing comparable with the preceding period. Some names emerge here and there which merit being cited in this brief account. Among the Russians there were especially, Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900), *Conférences sur la théantropie*, 1877–81, *La Beauté de la Nature*, 1889, and *Le sens de l’amour*, 1892–94; Serge Boulgakov (1877–1945), *The Wisdom of God*, 1937 and *Du Verbe Incarné*, 1943; and finally, Nicolas Berdiaev (1874–1945), *Études sur Jacob Boehme*, 1930 and 1946. Their work is traversed by a sophiological inspiration, even though the thought of Boulgakov does not follow from esotericism directly.

The Anthroposophical Society, a schism of the Theosophical Society, was founded in 1913 by the Austrian Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925), and because of its title can appear to be simply a society concurrent with the Theosophical Society. It is that by virtue of its goals and its large membership, but its spirit is more nearly that of the traditional theosophical current<sup>70</sup>. The Steinerian corpus (we cite here only *Goethe als Theosoph*, 1904 and *Theosophie*, 1904) and its descendants certainly

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<sup>70</sup> Such a kinship makes us wonder if Rudolf Steiner would not have called his movement “Theosophical Society” had this name been still available.

represent an original orientation inside the theosophical current, but this new corpus—quantitatively the most important of the period—drew on its predecessors, particularly on Paracelsianism, Rosicrucianism, pansophy, and a theosophizing *Naturphilosophie*. If Steiner was a genuinely visionary theosopher, perhaps the first in Germany since the period of Romanticism, this is not the case of those who followed him; those tended more towards being synthesizers and harmonizers, although they were writers whose thought was creative and strong, for example, Leopold Ziegler (1881–1958), *Ueberlieferung*, 1948 and *Menschwerdung*, 1948. In the French language we note a Russian of Baltic German origin, Valentin Tomberg (1901–1973), whose *Méditations sur les Arcanes Majeur du Tarot* (written directly in French, published first in German in 1972) is a book which any student can use to begin the study of western esotericism in general and theosophy in particular. Auguste-Edouard Chauvet (1885–1955) is the author of *Esotérisme de la Genèse*, 1946–48. And Robert Amadou, whose works on the Illuminism of the 18th century are authoritative. He is most notably a specialist on Saint-Martin and has a personal connection with the theosophical current.

### **C) New Perspectives on the Theosophical Current**

If this current has ended up by being confined to the dimensions of a small river, it could be said in response that the representatives of theosophy had never before been made the object of as much scholarly work as they have in our century. An abundant critical literature has seen the light of day. It is a literature which is rarely hostile to theosophy, now that we know enough to regard theosophy as an integral part of western culture, and it is a literature which has been represented above all by the French. Auguste Viatte was the first to do ground breaking work in the thorny area of Illuminism and theosophy of the 18th century. Alexandre Koyré, Gerhard Wehr, Pierre Deghaye, and others as well have devoted a number of fundamental works to Boehme. On the immediate disciples of Boehme we must call attention to the works of Serge Hutin and Bernard Gorceix (the latter is also the author of an important thesis on Weigel), and to those, more recent, of Arthur Versluis. Numerous monographs and papers often unexpectedly reveal hitherto little known aspects of the theosophical terrain, for example, the writings of Jacques Fabry on Johann Friedrich von Meyer and those of Jules Keller on Frédéric Rodolphe Salzmänn, or of Eugène Susini, a great pioneer in this field, who has produced in-depth studies of Franz von Baader.

In Germany, in addition to Gerhard Wehr, an epigone and an excellent popularizer, the studies of Reinhard Breyer on Oetinger and on some other authors of this movement are characterized by erudition and thoroughness. Prior to these writers, Ernst Benz (1907–1978) produced an abundant bibliography (notably on Swedenborg and Jung-Stilling) and was the pre-eminent German specialist of this current. Benz took part in the Eranos group in Ascona (Switzerland), which occasioned the eclectic *Eranos Jahrbücher* (1933–88) containing a certain number of interesting articles about the theosophical current.

The reputed Islamicist, Henry Corbin (1903–1978), who was also a member of the Eranos group, was loosely interested in western theosophy, particularly in Swedenborg and Oetinger. Perhaps

no other contemporary scholar has done as much as Corbin to locate Abrahamic theosophy in the heart of a research program comprised of diversified erudition and personal experience. His field was primarily that of Islam (Ismacilyya, Shi'ism, Suhrawardi, Ibn 'Arabi, *etc.*), but among his credits he merits recognition for having been the first to reveal to the West a corpus which until that time had not been known to us, and at the same time, to have laid the foundations for a “comparative theosophy” of the three great religions of the Book (*cf.*, for example, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, 1958; *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection*, 1960; and *En Islam iranien*, 1971–72). Such a “comparative theosophy” depends in part on a recognition of the presence of that which Corbin took the fortuitous initiative to call the ‘*mundus imaginalis*,’ or “imaginal world”, a specific mesocosm situated between the sensible and intelligible worlds, a place where the spirits become corporeal and the bodies become spiritualized. The three constituents of western theosophy, presented above (the triangle God-Man-Nature, the primacy of the mythic, and direct access to the superior worlds) are present also in Arabic and Persian theosophy. But a difference exists between both theosophies. Namely, the Islamic one is permeated by dramatic scenarios to a lesser extent than the first, and there Nature also takes a less prominent place<sup>71</sup>. However, the three branches of the Abrahamic tree constituted (at least in theosophical matters—Kabbalah, Christian theosophy, and Islamic theosophy) something like an organic whole for Corbin. He always sought—at least in his works—not to go beyond this triple tradition by venturing into a different and more “extreme Orient”<sup>72</sup>. By the same token, the theosophical current has now become the object of still another kind of attention. A meditation on this or that text in the theosophical corpus may occasion a reflection of a kind which is at once philosophical and scientific. Thus, for example, reading Boehme recently inspired quantum physicist Basarab Nicolescu with creative intuitions which might serve as the point of departure for a new philosophy of Nature (*La Science, le Sens et l'Évolution: essai sur Jakob Boehme*, 1988).

This is not the place to draw up a list of the different uses made of the word “theosophy” since the end of the 19th century until today, as it was in the first part of this article<sup>73</sup>: the word is now employed mostly for designating either the current that has been examined here or the teachings of the Theosophical Society. And if either one holds any interest for the historian of ideas and religiosity in the modern West, the fact remains that only the first has four centuries behind it.

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<sup>71</sup> This trait sheds partial light on the docetist orientation of Henry Corbin's thought and his lively interest in Swedenborg.

<sup>72</sup> Many times I have heard Corbin exclaim, for example, in his courses at the Sorbonne, or on the occasion of private conversations: “Mme Blavatsky confiscated, stole the word from us!” (*i.e.*, the word ‘theosophy’); but he never denigrated the teachings of the Theosophical Society or of its founders. His spirit, less sectarian than that of Guénon, and more open to culture, tended to lash out rather at the oppressors of symbolism and of esotericism in general, more than to find fault with this or that spiritual current or society of the spiritual kind.

<sup>73</sup> The entry “Theosophy” in dictionaries and encyclopedias deserves being made the object of a special analysis. We have seen that it is practically absent throughout the entire 18th century (with the notable exception of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*),

Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, a general history of the theosophical current has never been written, and so it is my hope that this essay of periodization can perhaps provide some clues for anyone who might be tempted to carry out such a project.

**Antoine Favier**

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and that it appeared more and more frequently beginning in the second half of the 19th century, when its presence became almost obligatory. (See, for example, p. 28 in *Real. Encyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. XVI [Gotha, 1962] and the interesting article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1983 edition) by Carl T. Jackson.) The *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité ascétique et mystique* (fasc. 96-98, pp. 548-62, Paris: Beauchesne, 1990) is one of the last two undertakings to date (*i.e.*, 1998), at least to my knowledge, to have welcomed a long treatment of the word (by the author of the present article; the other one is the *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, p. 1135-37 [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998]—that article by the same author). Finally, we add that the rather felicitous expression “*theosophia perennis*”, copied from the expression “*philosophia perennis*”, can function to emphasize the esoteric flavor of the latter, or to suggest that at bottom there is but one single theosophy, diversely manifested in many currents. It is in this “unifying” sense that Mircea Eliade employs the term: in his review “Some Notes on *Theosophia Perennis: Ananda Coomaraswamy and Henry Corbin*”, in *History of Religions*, Vol 19, No. 2 (November 1979; August 1979-May 1980): pp. 167-176. With Coomaraswamy, we enter the domain of far eastern traditions; under the pen of Eliade, “*perennis*” becomes a bridge which connects Hinduism and Abrahamism. As a final reference, let us mention the interesting article by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, “La pluralità delle figure teofaniche (Esperienza e significato dell’immagine)”, pp. 95-119 in *Dalla Sofia al New Age* (edited by the Centro Aletti), Roma, Lipa Srl., 1995, in which the author deals with theosophy in its relation to theophanic experience and symbolic imagination.

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