

The Theosophical Current

A Periodization

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.¹ 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.² 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.³ Iamblichus (250–330) spoke of “the divinely inspired Muse” (*theosophos Mousê*); 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-Dionysius, we are hard put to distinguish among *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*,⁴ *theosophoi* thereby becoming, just as in the *Summa Philosophiae* attributed to Robert Grosseteste (1175–1253), merely another name for the authors of Holy Scripture.⁵

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 preferences. In the first case, one risks overlooking the subtle ties that 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 that would imply a doctrinal bias). Rather, I want mainly to draw attention here to the advantage of starting from empirical data⁶ and ask questions such as these: is it possible for an observer to draw some major trends from the myriad uses and meanings that 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 that 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 that pervade modern and contemporary Western culture. Two major forms appear to stand out: on the one hand, there is a single esoteric current among others⁷ which does not correspond to an official Society; on the other, there is an official Society that has given itself the title "theosophical" and simultaneously a programmed orientation. The first major form is an initially amorphous galaxy that began to acquire shape in the spiritual climate of late-sixteenth-century Germany, reaching such heights in the seventeenth 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 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; second, both claim to deal with "wisdom" or "knowledge" of "divine things," not from a theological perspective, but from a gnostic one. The gnosis in question—particularly the rapport and mediation that 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 sixteenth to the beginning of the seventeenth 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* (cf. *supra*, n. 2) Jean-Louis Siémons points out that at least twenty references to Boehme can be found in Madame 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 be dealing with another matter, one that is fraught with subjectivity and not without doctrinal undertones—it is no longer the discourse of the historian.

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 work:⁸ (I) From the end of the sixteenth century through the seventeenth, the development of a specific textual corpus that would 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 eighteenth 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-nineteenth century until the present.

I. THE BIRTH AND THE FIRST GOLDEN AGE OF THE THEOSOPHICAL CURRENT (END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY THROUGH THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY)

Its Genesis and Appearance

At the end of the fifteenth 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 Kabbalah, *magia* (as it was understood by Pico della Mirandola), and of course alchemy and astrology can be numbered among these currents. During the sixteenth century the Paracelsian current emerged, 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 that 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.” Heinrich Khunrath (1560–1605) was the author of, among other works, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (1595 and 1609), an alchemical-theosophical work that had considerable influence on most of the esoteric currents in the seventeenth 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 be known as “mystical theology,” from the title of a writing by Pseudo-Dionysius. 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 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 *Offenbarung 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. Second, that of the German heterodox Caspar Schwenckfeld (1490–1561), who, although a confirmed docetist, nonetheless elaborated a theory of the spiritual body (the *Geistlichkeit* or spiritual corporeity), an idea that would become central in theosophy. Third, 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* that in many aspects foreshadowed that of Boehme).¹⁰

With Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) the theosophical current acquired its definitive characteristics, the Boehmean 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, through which he gained at one stroke an intuitive awareness of the networks of correspondence and of the implications between the 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 sixteenth-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 Paracelsism. In any event, the Boehmean 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.

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, and so on; on Nature—whether eternal, intellectual, or material; and on Man—his origin, his place in the universe, his role in the workings of salvation, and so on. Essentially, it deals with the relations among these three. The three angles of this Triangle (God-Man-Nature) are in complex relationships with one another, a complexity made of dramatic processes, and they are in close relation to

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 (those which are found, for instance, 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 that theologians tend to rationalize or even pass over entirely in silence. Theosophy is a kind of theology of the image. One could almost speak here of a return to a multifaceted 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.¹¹

(c) *Direct Access to Superior Worlds*. Man possesses in himself a generally dormant but always potential faculty¹² to connect with directly, or to "plug into," 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*, 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 the relationship with mysticism; however, the mystic intends to abolish images whereas, to the contrary, for Boehme and his successors the image signifies accomplishment.¹³

Taken by themselves, these three traits are not outside the field of esotericism.¹⁴ None of them is peculiar to theosophy, but the simultaneous presence of all three in the very center of this field makes for the specificity of theosophical discourse. Moreover, the style of 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.

Here we might ask what, in the seventeenth century, favored 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 comprising the referential body noted above, which became specific toward the end of the fifteenth and sixteenth 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 that 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. Second, 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. Third, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, less than a 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; for example, Boehme was a scapegoat of the Lutheran minister in Goerlitz, and in other places people were fiercely orthodox. The same factors accounted for the appearance of the Rosicrucian current, also a recent arrival in the terrain of Western esotericism and with a reformist slant. In addition, one can observe that since the time of the Renaissance most esoteric thinkers were, 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 a 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 presented itself above all 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 gained starting from the concrete world, from the entire universe, whose "signatures" or hieroglyphs it is first a matter of deciphering.¹⁵ 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 that 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.

The First Corpus and the First Critical Discourses

By theosophical corpus of the seventeenth century, we understand an ensemble of texts which the theosophers themselves as well as nontheosophically 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" and "theosophy" are not always used. In any case, here I am providing a list of the seventeenth-century authors most frequently cited in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 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 whose works are known because of numerous editions and translations,¹⁶ 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 (1490–1584), *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 Bourignon (1616–1680), *Oeuvres* (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 that is attested to by the numerous illustrated alchemical books published all throughout the first half of the seventeenth 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 an attitude of either 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 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)¹⁷ 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 through 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).¹⁸ 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 Boehme at length, and also mentions Thomas Bromley, but like Colberg, he does not distinguish between these spiritual thinkers and mystics proper;¹⁹ although 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 seventeenth century, and will always remain so. At the dawn of the seventeenth century, "theosopher" was employed perjoratively. Thus, for Johann Reuchlin it designated a decadent scholastic, and for Cornelius Agrippa, a theologian who is a prodigious maker of syllogisms.²⁰ 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."²¹ 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 was often quoted. Here the term designates the *notitia gubernationis per angelos* and is associated with *anthroposophia*.²²

It was 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.²³ Accordingly, he declared that he was speaking as a theosopher, and one can see that his *Amphitheatrum*, 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 that Khunrath intended, which they did increasingly on account of the influence of the numerous reprints of the *Amphitheatrum*. Besides, the term *magia divina*, which was still a rival for *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 first decade of the seventeenth century on, 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 its use in a more vague sense still persisted.²⁴ In any case, around 1608–10, Khunrath's meaning was being used more and more, although some people still persisted in using the term in a less specific sense.

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.” And 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, meant to serve as a place for *theosophia*, presented here as a higher “contemplation” directed toward “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.²⁵ 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 seventeenth century proved to be an altogether decisive moment in the history of the word.

We should not be surprised that the word rarely appears, despite Khunrath's influence, in the writing 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 would powerfully contribute to 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.²⁶

When *Oedipus 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 violence to it—he assigned the word “theosophy”: a very important section of this enormous work is entitled “Metaphysical Theosophy or Hieroglyphic Theology.”²⁷ Kircher deals with the metaphysics of the Egyptians, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Neo-Platonism. And so, in a work which was able to find a large and enduring audience, Kircher once again gave the word one of its most generally accepted ancient meanings, that of divine metaphysics.

Later, 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 correspondence: *Erbauliche Theosophische Sendschreiben* (1700–1701). Around that time appeared a *Clavicula Salomonis et Theosophia Pneumatica* (Duisburg and Frankfurt, 1685), edited by A. Luppianus and inspired by the book *Arbatel*. It comes as no surprise that Daniel Georg Morhof (1639–1691), an author with esoteric leanings and a historian of literature and professor of oratory and poetry at Kiel, employed the word “theosophy” following Gichtel’s meaning. More favorably disposed toward 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, Iamblichus, Pseudo-Dionysius, 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 Nostradamus. The third is represented by Pico della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino, Johann Reuchlin, Cornelius Agrippa, Guillaume Postel, Thomas Campanella, and the magnetisers and alchemists.²⁸ Nevertheless, in Colberg’s *Platonic-hermetic Christianity* and in Arnold’s great *History* (cf. *supra*), the word is almost never used.²⁹ 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” (*gebeime Gottesgelehrtheit*) is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Arnold cited the use of the word in that sense by Pseudo-Dionysius (“the Trinity is the overseer of Christian theosophy or the Wisdom of God”), and commented that some Protestant theologians are not afraid of

using it³⁰—of course, in the sense of good theology. This is a far cry from the meaning used by Morhof.

II. THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD (FIRST HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)

Two Theosophical Families

In the first half of the eighteenth 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 seventeenth 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 that appears to qualify as traditional in that it is closely akin to the original Boehmean 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 Boehmean, 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’s writings and translations into English were reprinted from 1699 to 1720). This was also the period when Gichtel’s *Theosophia Practica* (1722), a fundamental theosophical work, appeared. *Le Mystère de la Croix* (1736) by the German Douzetemps was published, and so was *Explication de 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 that is rich in theosophical and quietist commentaries).

(2) The second was a tendency of the “magical” type, Paracelsian and alchemical in orientation, that was represented by four German authors: Georg von Welling (alias Salwigt, 1655–1727), *Opus mago-theosophicum et cabbalisticum* (1719, reprinted several 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 that characterized the theosophy of the beginning of the seventeenth century and which is also found in Gichtel. Of course we are dealing 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 that followed, this new corpus would serve less as a reference than would that of the periods which preceded it.

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)³¹ 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 professed 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 claims to know the nature of everything better than 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 pretends 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 the human being: the body, the soul, and the spirit.³²

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).³³ 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 then recalled the tripartite division proposed by Morhoff (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 and even less “theosophers”; they are only selling smoke.³⁴ 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 of the same family, are enveloped in the shadows and are hiding, said Buddeus, more than they are illuminating Nature’s secrets!³⁵

Jacob Brucker, or the First Systematic Description

Jacob Brucker (1696–1770), a pastor of Augsburg, can rightly be called the founder of the 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 twentieth 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 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 whom he called theosophers, and the “restorers of Pythagorean-Platonic-Kabbalistic philosophy”³⁶ 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 that 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 claim 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*.³⁷

The theosophers have a heated imagination and for the most part, a melancholic temperament. Claiming 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 mix Nature and grace, a direct and an indirect revelation.³⁸ 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.³⁹ Having a systematic mind himself, Brucker also complained that one could not find any doctrinal unity among the theosophers ("there are as many theosophical systems as there are theosophers")⁴⁰ 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 that 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 this universal spirit for magical ends; that is, with the aim of penetrating the mysteries of Nature, of acting on it 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).⁴¹ Brucker recognized that, contrary to the followers of Spinoza, theosophers do not conflate God and the world,⁴² but for all that, they are no less *aphilosophoi*; their theosophy is an *asophia*.⁴³

A few years after Brucker's book, Diderot's *Encyclopédie* devoted a twenty-six-page entry to *Théosophie*. Essentially, as Jean Fabre has shown, the author—

that is, Diderot himself—plagiarizes Brucker.⁴⁴ 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 seem to appear in other dictionaries of this period.

Nonetheless, the word “theosophy” enjoyed popularization around the same time that 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 ones, such as *Theosophic Room of the Marvels of the Superterrestrial King Magniphosaurus very much enamoured of the Incomparable Beauty of Queen Juno* (1709), or even *Theosophic Meditations of the Heart*, written by the grandfather of Goethe’s princely friend.⁴⁵ By giving his edition of Boehme’s complete works a title that 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 Boehmean corpus under the similar, but more eye-catching title of *Theosophia Revelata. Das ist: Alle Göttliche Schriften des 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 choral 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 philosophy.”⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

III. FROM PRE-ROMANTICISM TO ROMANTICISM, OR THE SECOND GOLDEN AGE

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-nineteenth century. Of course, such a renewal was connected with the recrudescence of all forms of esotericism, not a surprising occurrence in a period that 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 that 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. Second, 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.⁴⁸ 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. Third, 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 that exist in Nature—the main business being here to reconcile science and knowledge. On the other hand, experimental physics was popularized and introduced into the salons, in the form of picturesque experiments with electricity and with magnetism that were well suited for stimulating the imagination, because they hinted at the existence of a life or a fluid that traverses all the material realms. Eclecticism is inseparable from this third factor, and it is a trait that 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 became better known through translations), in ancient Egypt and its mysteries, in Pythagoreanism, in the ancient religions, and so on; and this, of course, outside the very field of esotericism proper.

Three Areas of the Theosophical Terrain

Within the theosophic scene that stretches over these eight-odd decades, one can distinguish three relatively different areas that 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 seventeenth century, that is to say, authors who are more or less Boehmean in outlook, even if they do not all claim allegiance with him. With the exception of Martinès 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 that 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, Martinès 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 1788–91—writings that neither he nor Pasqually had known. Henceforth, he occupied himself with being an interpreter of Boehme, by means of the translations that 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 justly be 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 that 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 that were instrumental in the Germans' rediscovery of the latter, to the point that 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* (1820–26). 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 (such as 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 important, we have Franz von Baader (1765–1841), a native of Munich, who stands out among all of the nineteenth-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 seine Offenbarungen in Natur und Geschichte* (1839) and *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). While 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.⁴⁹ This family of *Naturphilosophen* is exemplified by some celebrated people: Friedrich von Hardenberg (alias Novalis, 1722–1801); Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776–1810); Gotthilf Heinrich 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; 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 that 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 (e.g., *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 1770s 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 that 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 seventeenth century (viz., the triangle God-Man-Nature, the preeminence 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 because 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; that is, the alchemical dimension, so omnipresent in theosophy, is almost absent from his visionary conception. Here we find ourselves in a universe interconnected by innumerable correspondences, but finally, in a universe which is rather 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, such as 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 such as Baudelaire, Balzac, and so on.

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 that accompany the rituals. It is well known that the last third of the eighteenth century witnessed a rapid proliferation of initiatory organizations, particularly Masonic rites of higher grades (i.e., those that 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, *supra*), several of the more important ones should be mentioned here: the Rectified Scottish Order (much influenced by the theosophy of Martinès de Pasqually and Saint-Martin), which was created in Lyons around 1768 by Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730–1824), a close friend of Saint-Martin’s. This Regime propagated itself throughout Europe and Russia. 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.

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 volume, 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 nineteenth 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,” that is, “R. Lull, Paracelsus, Fludd, Jacob Boehme, J. B. Van Helmont, and Poiret,” people one ought to “treat like diseased persons rather than as votaries (*sectaires*).”⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ 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.⁵² Nevertheless, some authors, such as 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 “knowledge of a higher order.”⁵³

At the same time appeared an anonymous essay, entitled “Recherches sur la doctrine des théosophes” (published in 1807 in Saint-Martin’s *Oeuvres Posthumes*).⁵⁴ Written “by one of the friends” of the author, it was originally intended to serve as an introduction to those posthumous works.⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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 Vanhelmont, Adam Boreil, Bæhemius or Boheme, Poiret, Quirinus [sic], Kulman, Zuimerman, Bacon, Henri Morus, Pordage, Jeanne Léade, Léibnitz, Swedenburg, Martinez de Pasqualis, St. Martin, etc.*⁵⁷

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 religious texts.⁵⁸

A short time later, in 1810, in a book that enjoyed a wide and lasting audience (*De l’Allemagne*), Madame de Staël recalled the necessary distinction between the “theosophers; that is, those who are engaged in philosophical theology, such as Jacob Boehme, Saint-Martin, and so on, and mere mystics; the first attempt to penetrate the secrets of creation; the second are satisfied with their own hearts.”⁵⁹ And in his *Opuscules théosophiques*, Jean-Jacques Bernard thanked Madame de Staël for having cast “an approving glance at the

theosophical doctrine—thereby proving that she was able to appreciate it.⁶⁰ 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-Pétersbourg*, which had been published in 1822.⁶¹

If the word “theosophy” is seldom to be found in Baader’s writings,⁶² 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 can revive speculation—an undertaking that had already been attempted by Boehme—and thus to Baader “is due the merit of having brought theosophy back to a precise principle of knowledge and thereby given it a firm foundation.”⁶³ Franz Hoffman, whom we have already quoted, also used the term “theosophy,” but in a vaguer sense.⁶⁴ Julius Hamberger—another close disciple (cf. *supra*)—published an anthology entitled *Voices From the Sanctuary of Christian Mysticism and Theosophy*⁶⁵ in 1857, in which he presented, as announced in the title, texts from both tendencies, but without trying to distinguish one from the other theoretically. The book of Rudolf Rocholl (a more indirect disciple), *Contributions to a History of German Theosophy*,⁶⁶ also attested to the vogue of the word for describing this current from the middle of the nineteenth century. In his book, Rocholl much discussed the Jewish Kabbalah, and while citing the Christian Kabbalah (e.g., Pico, Reuchlin) indirectly touched on modern esotericism (i.e., Agrippa, Paracelsus, Boehme, Gutmann, Sclaus, Baader) in enthusiastic terms. It was also at this time that Oetinger’s complete works were published in the form of a double series, one of which was precisely entitled *Theosophical Writings*, and that a high Masonic grade, that of “Theosopher Knight,” appeared in the Rite of Memphis.⁶⁷

IV. EFFACEMENT AND PERMANENCE (END OF THE NINETEENTH TO TWENTIETH CENTURIES)

Factors in the Dissolution

During the second half of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth 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

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 between occultism and theosophy is sometimes fluid—but 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 numbers, in the heart of this occultist current; for example, the Martinist order, which Papus founded in 1891 (he also devoted one work to Martinès 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 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 nineteenth 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 a particular myth on which one could exercise the creative imagination. At the same time that this partiality toward universality developed, the theosophical 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 that cannot be overemphasized. 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 rather many people. 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, undertakes the radical demolition of the Theosophical Society.⁶⁸ Obviously, in that book the traditional theosophical current only served as a foil: Guénon almost never mentioned it anywhere else, and probably did not know a great deal 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. 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” really designates a doctrine that was elaborated in the 1880s and 1890s). Nevertheless, there are some notable differences, underscored by the three points that have been enumerated. As its name⁶⁹ 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 of an absolutely universal eclecticism (e.g., the major works 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 that 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 about twenty times in her work (cf. *supra*, “Introduction”) and that alongside this name, we find under her pen other representatives of the classical theosophical current (such as Paracelsus, Khunrath, Van Helmont, et al.), these are nevertheless isolated figures in the midst of the enormous troupe 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.

A Discreet Presence

If the theosophical current strictly speaking remained alive, it has not been strongly represented. This is due in part to the reasons that 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 rightly appear to be a rival organization. It is that by virtue of its goals and its large membership, but its spirit is more nearly that of the traditional theosophical current.⁷⁰ The Steinerian corpus (we cite here only *Goethe als Theosoph*, 1904, and *Theosophie*, 1904) and its descendants certainly 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 Paracelsism, 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; they tended more toward 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 Majeurs 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-Édouard Chauvet (1885–1955) is the author of *Ésotérisme de la Genèse*, 1946–48. And Robert Amadou, whose works on the illuminism of the eighteenth century are authoritative. He is most notably a specialist on Saint-Martin and has a personal connection with the theosophical current.

New Perspectives on the Theosophical Current

If this current has ended up 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 historical and scholarly work as they have in our century. An abundant critical literature has seen the light of day. It is a literature that is rarely hostile to theosophy, now that we know enough to regard theosophy as an integral part of Western culture, and it is a literature⁷¹ that has been represented above all by the French. Auguste Viatte was the first to do groundbreaking work in the thorny area of illuminism and theosophy of the eighteenth century. Alexandre Koyré, Gerhard Wehr, Pierre Deghaye, and others as well have devoted a number of fundamental works to Boehme. Of 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 more recently 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 on Franz von Baader.

In Germany, in addition to Gerhard Wehr, an epigone and an excellent popularizer, the studies of Reinhard Breymayer 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 preeminent 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 deeply 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 scholarship and personal experience. His field was primarily that of Islam (Ismāʿīlīya, Shiʿism, Suhrawardī, Ibn ʿArabi, 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 ʿArabi*, 1958; *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection*, 1960; and *En Islam iranien*, 1971–72). Such a “comparative theosophy” depends in part on the recognition of the presence of that which Corbin took the felicitous initiative to call the *mundus imaginalis*, or “imaginal world,” a specific mesocosm situated between the sensible and intelligible worlds, a place where spirits become corporeal and 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.⁷² 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.”⁷³ 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 that 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" from the end of the nineteenth century until today, as it was in the first part of this work:⁷⁴ 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 religious feeling in the modern West, the fact remains that only the first has four centuries behind it. 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 work of periodization can perhaps provide some clues for anyone who might be tempted to carry out such a project.

NOTES

1. The present study is devoted not merely to the history of a trend of thought but also to the history of a specific word. It has been anticipated by other more concise articles I have published under the heading "Théosophie": in *Encyclopaedia Universalis* (vol. XV [Paris, 1973], pp. 1095 ff.), a text that must undergo heavy editing and improvement before being reprinted; in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*; and in *Dictionnaire critique de théologie* (cf. *infra*, note 73).

2. Jean-Louis Siémons, *Théosophia. Aux sources néo-platoniciennes et chrétiennes (II-VI^e siècles)*, Paris, Cariscript, 1988, 41 pp. James A. Santucci, "On *Theosophia* and Related Terms," *Theosophical History*, vol. II, no. 3 (July 1987), pp. 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), p. 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 Âge* (Paris, L'Âge d'homme, 1993): pp. 125–134.

3. J.-L. Siémons, *Théosophia*, p. 11 ff.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–18, 21–23, 26 ff. As regards John Scottus Eriugena, commentator of Pseudo-Dionysius (around 862), cf. more particularly Migne, *Patrologie latine*, vol. 122, p. 1171.

5. *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-Dionysius (Hugo of St. Victor, for instance) retain the word *theosophia*; after the Renaissance, *sapientia divina* is often substituted (cf. *infra*, n. 21).

6. I have proposed an approach to the concept of esotericism in the same way; cf. "Preface," above.

7. 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.

8. This periodization (in the sense of dividing and discussing this current in developmental periods) differs from the one suggested by Bernard Gorceix (*La Mystique de Valentin Weigel [1533–1588] et les origines de la théosophie allemande* [Université de Lille III, 1972], p. 455 ff., note): “A history of German theosophy (16th to 19th centuries) should distinguish three periods: the Boehmean period (Jacob Böhme, 1575–1624), foreshadowed by Valentin Weigel, by the ‘renaissance’ of Kabbalah and alchemy in the 16th century, by the Paracelsism of Gerhard Dorn; the period of the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century, around the figure of Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), a period which is contemporary with the Kabbalistic renewal in Knorr von Rosenroth (1636–1689) and the Swedenborgian movement, with Johann Albrecht Bengel, Johann Conrad Dippel, Philipp Matthaeus Hahn; the third period, the richest one, is that of mystical romanticism, announced by the French Illuminist movement, with Kircherger, Kleuker, Eckartshausen, Baader, etc.” It is possible to put things this way only if one chooses to end the “Boehmean period” early. I am rather inclined to consider the entire seventeenth 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 Kabbalah is indeed a kind of theosophy). Finally, the “Swedenborgian movement” began in the second half of the eighteenth century.

9. B. Gorceix, *La Mystique de Valentin Weigel*, p. 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.

10. The Paracelsian heritage is, however, not essential to Arndt; what is essential 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 des Annales*, no. 10, p. 16. Most of G. Dorn’s treatises were reprinted in the *Theatrum Chemicum*, in several editions (Ursel, 1602, Strasbourg, 1613 and 1659–61) which contributed to their fame. Boehme may have possibly known Dorn’s work through the *Theatrum*.

11. This accounts for the fact that theosophy is often better received within religions devoid of constraining dogmas. The Kabbalah of the *Zohar* is nothing other than a Jewish theosophy (cf. Gershom Scholem, *Les Grands Courants de la mystique juive* [Paris: Payot, 1960], p. 221 ff.) On theosophy and Islam, see below, “New Perspectives on the Theosophical Current.” 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 spec-

ulation; that is how the matter stands with Boehme, anyway. Theosophy is always, in one way or another, a theodicy of some kind and its constant aim is to exonerate God (I owe this last remark to Pierre Deghaye).

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

13. This world is imbued with the same nature as the *mundus imaginalis* mentioned by Henry Corbin in reference to Islamic theosophy (cf. *infra*, "New Perspectives on the Theosophical Current"). However, Boehme's Godhead can never become an object of knowledge, since it resides in a totally inaccessible light. As for its revelation through Nature, only the Man who is born from above is capable of receiving it. Boehme repeatedly quotes 1 Corinthians 2:14: "A man who is unspiritual does not receive the things of 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 essentially describes intradivine 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 of his own person. He presents himself mostly as a spectator of mysteries without necessarily getting back to his own self." And again: "For theosophy, and for related theologians, the fruit of our thought materializes under the visible symbolic form" (*ibid.*, p. 540).

14. At least the esoteric field as I have attempted to circumscribe it, is 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 self (and/or Nature)—transmutation; and (d) two secondary elements (notions of transmission and "concordance"). See *supra*, n. 6.

15. Contrary to F. A. Yates' statement (*The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 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-Dionysius. 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," pp. 57–137 in *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, no. 77, 1977: p. 80), also drew attention to the use of *pansophia*, as early as 1596, in a writing by the Polish hermeticist Bartholomäus Scleus: *Instanza Theologia Universalis*, reprinted in the *Theosophische Schriften* by the same author (Amsterdam, 1686, p. 181). During that precise period, *pansophia* evokes the overall concept of a wisdom obtained by divine illumination, in other words, theosophy, or else, wisdom attained through the light of Nature, also called *anthroposophia* (cf. also *infra*, n. 22). Gilly also noted the reappearance of *pansophia* in the very title of the Dutch

physician Henricus Van Heer's dissertation *Altus 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 the science of Nature in a general way by Henricus Nollus (*Physica Hermetica*, Frankfurt, 1619, p. 689). In his *Panosophia. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte der weissen und schwarzen Magie* (Berlin: Eric Schmidt, 1936, p. 392 ff.; 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. 210-221 in *Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft*, vol. 5, 1896, and K. Schaller, *Pan. Untersuchungen zur Comenius-Terminologie*, The Hague, 1958, pp. 14 ff.

16. 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* (2 vols., Göttingen, 1937-57). The relevant literature is still very abundant; among the best critical works, John Schultiz, *Jakob Boehme und die Kabbalah* (Frankfurt, 1933); Pierre Deghaye, *La Naissance de Dieu ou la doctrine de Jacob Boehme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1985).

17. Ehregott Daniel Colberg, *Das Platonisch-Hermetische Christenthum, begreifend die historische Erzählung vom Ursprung und vierley Secten der heutigen Fanatischen Theologie, unterm Namen der Paracelsisten, Weigelianer, Rosencreutzer, Quäcker, Böhmisten, Wiedertäufer, Bourgnisten, Labadisten und Quietisten*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1690 and 1691, reprinted in 1710).

18. Gottfried Arnold, *Unpartheyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, vom Anfang des neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 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* (Frankfurt, 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* (Frankfurt, 1702). As shown by this last title, theosophy is understood as *Gottesgelehrtheit*, that is, a mere form of theology.

19. Arnold does differentiate, however, between the "two theologies." Thus he writes 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. 598 ff.), he mentions as members of a similar intellectual family: Paracelsus, Weigel, Sperber, Scleus (Sclei), Georgi, the two Van Helmonts, John Scottus Eriugena, Postel, Bromley.

20. In his *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Dei*, Agrippa mentions the quarrels caused "*a recentioribus aliquot theosophistis, ac philopompis exercentur ad monem vanitatem*" on the basis of a badly translated Aristotle (the document has been published by Paola Zambelli, in *Testi umanistici su l'ermetismo* [Rome, 1955], p. 158). See also the letter to Erasmus of 13 November 1532, in *Opera*, vol. II, p. 1016: "*Coeterum, quod te scire volo, bellum mihi est cum Lovaniensibus Theosophistis.*"

21. François Secret has already called attention to this book; cf. "Du De Occulta Philosophia à l'occultisme du XIXe siècle," in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* (Paris:

P.U.F., vol. 186 [July 1974], p. 60. A new, expanded version of the same article appeared in *Charis. Archives de l'Unicorne*, no. I, Archè, Milan, 1988. The word has enjoyed a lasting favor in this sense. In Ficino's translations of the works of Porphyry and Iamblichus, as in those of 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 Étienne, in his *Thesaurus linguae Graecae*, gives *rerum divinarum scientia* (cf. C. Gilly, p. 88, in his article quoted above, n. 15).

22. *Arbatel. De magia veterum. Summum sapientiae studium*, Basel, 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 "*prudentia rerum humanum*." The *scientia mali* is again divided by two headings (*kakosophia* and *cacodaemonia*, also subdivided in their turn). The *Arbatel* was published by the Neo-Paracelsian Pietro Perna (on him and the book itself, see Carlos Gilly, article quoted above, n. 15). Peuckert thought the book to be "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* 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 was 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, n. 15, p. 188 of the second section (Text II, no. 79, 1979).

23. The caption of the engraving from the *Amphitheatrum* showing a tunnel, to which access is gained by seven steps, states that these symbolize the way of the "*Theosophicorum vere Philosophicam, filiorum Doctrinae . . . ut sophisticè non moriantur sed Theosophicè 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 Hylealischen, 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 Zeugnissen vieler Philosophischer guter Schrifften; aus (Gott Lob) unverrückter Vernunft: erfahrner Leute Cabbalischen Traditionen; Zum Theil auch beydes Theosophischer in Oratorio, und Naturgemäss-Alchymischer in Laboratorio, eygner Übungs Confirmation; und also aus dem rechten Grunde dess Liechts der Natur, nicht alleine Wahr sondern auch so viel ihre Eygenschafften Göttlicher und Natürlicher Geheimnissen in jetziger verkehrten Welt öffentlich an Tag zu bringen zu lassen Klar herfür gegeben*." Further, he says this about the "*Gott-Weislich Gelehrte*," that is, the erudite theosopher: "*Alleine der Gott-Weislich gelehrte und von dem Liecht der Natur erleuchte auch sich selbst recht erkennende Mensch kan Gott-weislich Naturgemäss und christlich 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 bujus, 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 zancken, 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 know nothing about it. Further on, p. 28 (pp. 26–27 in the 1708 edition) one finds: "Theosophicè, Gott-Weisslich (wann Gott der Höchste Jehovah, der Herr Herr will denn seine Gnade währet 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 Tränck aus Josephs Becher. Oder aber auch seine Natürlichen Signatura, das ist Bezeichnung welche auch eine Warbeits-Stimme und Geheimnis-reiche recht lehrende Rede Gottes mit uns aus der Natur durch die Creatur ist: oder auch aus Schriftlicher oder Mündlicher Anleitung und Unterweisung eines erfahren guten Lehrmeisters der von Gott disfalls zu Uns oder zu deme Wir gesenden werden."

24. 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 in n. 15. Let us also mention the *Rosarium Novum Olympicum S Benedictum. Per Benedictum Figulum; Vienbaviatem, Francum: Poëtam L. C. Theologum, Theosophum; Philosophum; Medicum Eremitam* (Basel, 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 *supra*, n. 21; cf. pp. 68 and 19, respectively). In 1620, Johann Arndt sent 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 translation (1644) by the Jesuit B. Cordevius of the *Mystic Theology* by Pseudo-Dionysius (cf. Migne, P.G., vol. 3, p. 998), following in the footsteps of John Scottus Eriugena. On the expression *magia divina* as a rival of *theosophia*, eventually to be almost completely supplanted by it (because the latter was considered less questionable, at least in Germany), cf. Carlos Gilly, p. 188 of the article quoted above, n. 15 (second section, 1979). Giordano Bruno makes use of *magia divina* as well as Patrizi (1593), Johann Georg Godelman (1601), and Campanella (1620); this expression was to be commented upon by Diderot (*Encyclopédie*, 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 *supra*, n. 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 *infra*, n. 30): all this bears no relation to our theosophers and testifies only to the double use of the word.

25. Haslmayr's book (*Antwort an die lobwürdige Brüderschaft 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 Dülman's edition, Stuttgart, Calwer Verlag, 1972, pp. 140–142): “De Theosophia: Hoc idem auditorium superiori adhuc contemplationi servit. Haec theosophia est, nihil humanae inventionis, indagatioisve 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 elevationem, 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 secunda 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. 363 ff. 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 promoventis 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 hostem intractabilem, et quod ad rem maxime facit, etiam Poetam” (pp. 23 ff.). Finally, in a fourth writing by Andreae entitled *De Curiositatis pernicio 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 insomnias, voces auguria, sortes ac omne genus false Divinitatis exiguntur fiuntque horrendae incantationes, in aliis supplicio digna, filiis tamen huius dubiae lucis, licita” (pp. 22 ff.). On this passage, see also R. Edighoffer, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 345, 363 ff., whom I hereby thank for calling my attention to these four extracts. I must add that, in the Rosicrucian wake, “theosophy” is sometimes used in 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, and Paracelsian philosophy and pansophy.

26. “Ich schreibe nicht heidnisch, sondern theosophisch, aus einem böheren Grunde als der äussere Werkmeister ist, und dann auch aus demselben” (*Aurora*, chap. 8, §56). The work was published in 1634. Boehme's treatises were first circulated as manuscript copies: during his lifetime *Der Weg zu Christo* was the only one to appear in print (1622), followed by *Aurora* (1634), *De Signatura rerum* (1645), *Mysterium Magnum* (1640), and so on. A Dutch translation by W. Van Beyerland of several of his works appeared in 1642, followed some twenty years later by John Sparrow's English

versions. The first complete edition in German by J. G. Gichtel (1682) was based on the manuscripts collected by Beyerland. It is interesting to try and assess the impact of such an editorial activity—in German and other languages—on the spread of the word “theosophy” during the seventeenth century. A close study of Buddecke’s bibliography (cf. *supra*, n. 16) goes a long way toward unearthing a rich store 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 were published later as *Theosophische Sendbriefe* in 1642 and 1658, edited by Abraham von Franckenberg (cf. Buddecke, I, p. 214). In English, the word made its first appearance (in the adjectival form, *theosophicall*) with the *Theosophicall Epistles* (Buddecke, II, p. 171) of 1645, which was also 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 *Theosophic Letters* (same year; Buddecke, II, pp. 61 ff.), 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). Little 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 Theosophiche of Godwijze Werken Van . . . Jacob Boehme*; cf. Buddecke, II, p. 5).

27. *Oedipi Aegyptiaci Tomi Secundi Pars Altera*, Rome, 1653, Classis XIII (pp. 497–546).

28. Daniel Georg Morhof, *Polybistor 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, chap. 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, geniis, 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.”*

29. Still, Arnold does quote the extract from the *Arbatel* in its German version (*Unpartheiische*, op. cit., I, p. 457).

30. *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 umgethet 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. I p. 18 qui fatetur, orthodoxis Patribus Theosophiam, dictam esse Theologiam) 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 oft er der zanksüchtigen und gantz ungöttl. Schul-Theologie beygeleget wird." In his *Impartial History* (part IV, sect. III, no. 18 and 19, ed. 1729, vol. II, pp. 1103 ff. and 1110–1142), 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 theosopher, but relatively unknown, suggests a beautiful definition of what he understands by *theosophus*, whom he compares to a bee: "Wer aller dinge zable, mass, gewicht, ordnung und ziel ihnen von Gott gegeben, gesetzt und beygeleget, recht im göttlichen 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 gehen" (p. 113, col. 1). A little further on, he writes in his rather flamboyant style: "Nun sind wir bis an die Apocalypsin kommen, welche denen, die in Pathmo mit Johanne exuliren, und von Gott in Geist erhöht, 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 sendbriefe wird geoffenbabret werden, dass sie als geistliche adler aufstiegen, und aller dinge penetralia intima bis ins centrum durchschauhen mögen, und also Theosophi per crucem et lucem, per ignem et spiritum werden, welche die Welt nicht kennen noch vertragen mag, weil sie mit Christo und Christus in ihnen kommen, ein licht und feuer zum gericht der welt anzuzünden, daran alles stroh sich selbst mit ihren verfolgern offenbahren, im rauch auffliegen und verbrennen muss" (p. 113, col. 2).

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

32. *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 confecerunt, inter quos praecipui sunt"—then Gentzken speaks of V. Weigel, the Rosy-Cross, Guttmann, Kulhmann, and goes on to add (p. 256): "Systema mysticae et theosophicae philosophiae exhiberi nequit, etenim cum hujus generis Philosophi non sanae rationis, sed tumultuariarum 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 ignobilius metallum in aurum commutare ac inde universalem praeparari medicinam posse*. (4) Tres esse hominum partes, corpus, animam, et mentem, etc.”

33. Johann Franciscus Buddeus, *Isagoge historico-theologica ad theologiam universam singulasque ejus partes*, Leipzig, 1727, vol. I. After reminding his reader of the use of “theology” in the sense of “theosophy,” which he finds in Francisco Iunius (*Liber de theologia*, chap. I, 18, already alluded to by Arnold, cf. *supra*, n. 30), Kilian Rudrauff (from Giessen, author of *Collegii philo-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).

34. *Ibid.*, p. 25: “Sunt vero etiam, qui nescio quae arcana et abscondita, tum theologia tum philosophica venditantes, theosophorum sibi nomen speciatim vindicant.” Then, after summing up Morhoff’s opinion (cf. *supra*, nn. 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 proteritis speciem quamdam ac pretium conciliaturi.”

35. *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 Gutbman, 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 reliquis 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.”

36. Jacob 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. chap. III: “Von den Theosophicis,” pp. 1063–1254. And *Historia critica philosophiae a tempore resuscitatarum in Occidente Literarum ad nostra tempora*, vol. IV (a volume of *addenda*: on theosophy, see pp. 781–797). Chap. III of vol. VI: “De Theosophicis,” pp. 644–750. Vol. IV, chap. IV, pp. 353–448: “De Restaurationibus Philosophiae Pythagoreo-platonico cabbalisticae” (on Christian Kabbalists and various writers: Pico della Mirandola, Reuchlin, Giorgi, Agrippa, Patrizi, Thomas Gale, Ralph

Cudworth, Henry More). Cf. appendix to chap. IV in vol. VI (1767), pp. 747–759. On the Jewish Kabbalah, cf. vol. II, pp. 916–1070. Vol. I, book II, chap. VII entitled *De Aegyptiorum . . .* (pp. 244–305); there, Brucker treats, among other subjects, Hermes Trismegistus and the *Corpus Hermeticum* (cf. particularly, pp. 252–268 and *passim*).

37. J. Brucker, *Kurze Fragen . . .*, op. cit., pp. 1065 ff. and *Historia . . .*, op. cit., “Von den Theosophicis,” p. 645. Citation of Boehme’s text, from *Aurora* (chap. III, §38 of *Aurora*): “*Num merke: Gleichwie vom Vater und Sohn ausgehet der Hl. Geist und ist eine selbständige Person in der Gottheit und wallet in dem ganzen Vater, also gehet auch aus den Kräften deines Herzens, Adern und Hirn aus die Kraft die in deinem ganzen Leibe wallet, und aus deinem Lichte gehet 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.*”

38. J. Brucker, *Kurze Fragen . . .*, op. cit., pp. 1063, 1244 ff.; *Historia*, op. cit., pp. 745 ff.

39. J. Brucker, *Historia*, op. cit., p. 749.

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

41. Ibid., pp. 747–749; J. Brucker, *Kurze Fragen . . .*, op. cit., pp. 1249–1252.

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

43. Ibid., p. 747.

44. *Encyclopédie*, vol. XVI, article “Théosophes,” 1758 and 1765, pp. 253 ff. Jean Fabre, “Diderot et les théosophes,” pp. 203–222 in *Cahiers de l’Association Internationale des études françaises*, no. 13, June 1961. Again in *Lumières et Romantisme*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1963, pp. 67–83.

45. Johann Friedrich 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 Oetinger’s thought would be 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, Corinthe (*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 befreien und im Gebet zum wahren Licht und himmlischer Ruhe 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.

46. P. Deghaye, op. cit. (cf. *supra*, n. 13), p. 439.

47. Ibid., p. 439, concerning a text of 1751, and pp. 440 ff.

48. 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.

49. 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.

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

51. In Friedrich Schiller, *Philosophische Briefe*, published in *Thalia*, 1787.

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

53. It would be of interest to devote a study to 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), vols. VI, XII, and XVIII (numerous notes written during the years 1800-1804).

54. "Recherches sur la doctrine des théosophes," in Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, *Oeuvres Posthumes*, Paris, 1807, vol. 1, pp. 145-190.

55. *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 did not want to deprive our readers of it."

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 150, 154.

57. *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 cabbalistica* (1517). François Georges is Giorgi, the author of *De Harmonia Mundi* (1525, followed in 1536 by his *Problemata*). Pico here represents a double orientation: the Christian Kabbalah (as in Reuchlin and Giorgi) and *magia* (as in Cornelius Agrippa). Thus, Rosicrucianism, Christian Kabbalah, and *magia* are found annexed by the author to "theosophy," just as Paracelsus is—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, Martinès de Pasqually and Saint-Martin, who indeed represent the theosophic current proper, there still remain four names which are interesting 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, antimechanist, 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," in many aspects, corresponds 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. Thus, 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 widespread than one believes, but very often it is varnished and, very often too, covered up, even mutilated, corrupted by additions that spoil it or make it less useful. By pointing to these traces of truth among the Ancients (or, more generally, in predecessors), one would extract gold from mud, the diamond from its mine, and light from darkness; and this would be, indeed, the *perennis quaedam philosophia*” (Leibniz, *Schriften*, ed. Gerhardt, vol. 3, pp. 624 ff., quoted by Rolf Christian Zimmerman—*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 opusculum. 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—also parallel—that of the “mystical philosophy,” which corresponds to a search for the “core” of all forms of Christian “mysticism.” There now remain two more names to examine: Boreel and Zimmermann. Both seem to testify to a particular familiarity of the anonymous author with Germanic spirituality. Information about Adam Boreel (1603–1667), a student of Hebrew influenced by Sebastian Franck, is given by Gottfried Arnold, his contemporary (in *Unpartheyische . . .*, cited *supra*, n. 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, chap. 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, in favor 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 Gottfried Arnold again informs us (in *Unpartheyische . . .*, quote *supra*, n. 17: cf. vol. II, part IV, sec. III, num. 18 §142; i.e., p. 1105 in the 1729 edition): “*astrologus, magus, cabalista*,” a preacher from Strasbourg, more or less a disciple of Boehme, who wrote under the pseudonym Ambrosius Sehmman. His name is also connected with the emigration to Pennsylvania of a group of some forty “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, *La Haute Science* series, 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 notice (pp. 43–58) in which, concerning Zimmermann, he hesitates between J. G. Zimmermann and the Swiss Jean-Jacques Zimmerman (1685–1756), the author of a book on Pythagoras. He thinks that “Bacon” is Roger Bacon.

58. *Recherches sur la doctrine des Théosophes*, op. cit., pp. 155–168. Concerning India (and such texts as the Mahabarata [*Mahābhārata*] and the Poupnekat [*Upanishads*], the latter from the *Vedas*) the anonymous author writes: “The Europeans, in seeing the relationship 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 to all the knowledge that they are studying; 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 distant from one another, must have the same principal character of truth” (pp. 167 ff.).

59. Madame de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, vol. II, Bruxelles, 1820 edition, chap. V (“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 in the word ‘mysticité’ is enclosed that 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 concern 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. 387–390), entitled “Des Philosophes religieux appelés Théosophes,” Madame de Staël resumes the distinction set forth in chap. V, 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 led solely 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’ have? 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, vol. V of Madame 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. 137–154 (“De l’esprit de secte en Allemagne”).

60. 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).

61. Joseph de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg* (Édition de Lyon, 1831), vol. II, p. 303 (11th discussion). First published in 1822, the book had been initially 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: “. . . I had occasion to declare that every true statement they made was nothing but the catechism obscured by strange words.”

62. In 1831, Baader wrote that the religious philosophy is not the *Weltweisheit* (the worldly wisdom, limited to “cosmosophy” and “physiosophy”) but that to which Saint Paul opposed it, namely, theosophy, or *Gottesweisheit* (God’s Wisdom). Cf. Franz von Baader, *Sämtliche Werke*, in the edition procured by Franz Hoffman (1851–60), vol. I, p. 323. In a note of comments to Johann Friedrich Kleuker’s *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” (vol. XII, p. 550; this concerned p. 255, lines 19–27 ff. 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, 1985).

63. 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 Wahrheit des Christenthums zu vertiefen gesucht und von diesem Standpunkte 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 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 Erkenntnissprincip zurückgeführt und dadurch derselben eine fest Grundlage gegeben zu haben” (p. 40). The whole passage cited here concerning *Verstandes-speculation* remains a matter of particular interest today. It would be of service to bring out a new edition and translation of the entire text by von Osten-Sacken (pp. 1–73, in XII).

64. Cf. especially V, p. lxxiii: Franz Hoffmann says that one can use “theosophy” in relation to Baader, in the sense that Carl Gustav Carus gives it (*Psyche. Zur*

Entwicklungsgeschichte der Seele, 2nd ed., 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, vaguer sense than it does for von Osten-Sacken.

65. 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), 2 vols. 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: "[einerseits 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 entgegenstrahlt, 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 erheischt" (p. iv). One thus finds in this anthology, besides persons who are mystics strictly speaking, 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, F. Schlegel, and G. H. Schubert. Each name presented is accompanied by an informative note, followed by a citation of one or more selected texts.

66. 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)*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1995), p. 386.

67. Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, *Sämtliche Schriften*, edited by Karl C. Eberhard Ehmann (Stuttgart, 1858-64). The first series (5 vols.) is dedicated to the homiletic writings; the second (6 vols.) 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.

68. René Guénon, *Le Théosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion* (Paris: Valois, 1921), pp. 1 ff. 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 are not claiming to give a complete list, but merely citing some of the better known names."

69. On the choice of "theosophy" by the founders of the Theosophical Society and the meaning that they gave this word, cf. James Santucci, "Theosophy, *Theosophia*," in *The American Theosophist*, Special Issue (Autumn 1987). By the same author and Jean-Louis Siémons, see the communications in *Politica Hermetica* (cf. *supra*, n. 2). Cf. also the article by John Algeo in *Theosophical History* (California State University, Fullerton), vol. IV, nos. 6–7, April–July 1993: pp. 223–229, p. 226. According to the testimony of Henry S. Olcott himself, the choice of the name of the T.S. was a random one; regarding the meeting of 18 October 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, 1st ed., 1895, vol. I, p. 132).

70. Such a kinship makes us wonder whether Rudolf Steiner would not have called his movement "Theosophical Society" had this name been still available.

71. On the authors mentioned here, see *Access to Western Esotericism*, SUNY Press, 1995, "A Bibliographical Guide to Research," pp. 297–348, and *infra*, p. 255.

72. This trait sheds partial light on the docetist orientation of Henry Corbin's thought and his lively interest in Swedenborg.

73. Several times I heard Corbin exclaim, as often in his courses at the Sorbonne as in private conversation: "Madame 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 Guénon's, and more open to the cultural, tended to lash out at the oppressors of symbolism and esotericism in general, rather than find fault with any one particular spiritual current or society of the spiritual kind.

74. 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 eighteenth century (with the notable exception of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*), and that it appeared more and more frequently beginning in the second half of the nineteenth 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. 548–562, Paris, Beauchesne, 1990) is one of the last two undertakings to date (i.e., 1998), at least to my knowledge, to have featured a long treatment of the word (by the author of the

present article; the other one is the *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, pp. 1135–1137 [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 serve to emphasize the esoteric flavor of the latter, or to suggest that basically there is but a 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 connecting Hinduism and Abrahamism. As a final reference, let us mention the interesting article by the philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenberger, “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, where the author deals with theosophy in its relation to theophanic experience and the symbolic imagination.

While this essay was being printed for its publication in French, James A. Santucci took a felicitous initiative: the preparation of a collective work in two volumes. Vol. I is devoted to the history of the “classical” theosophical current studied here, and vol. II to the history of the Theosophical Society. Both are divided into chapters, each of which is entrusted to one author. The aim is to present a chronological survey of both currents. This is being carried out under the direction of James A. Santucci as one of the activities of the program he is directing, entitled “Theosophy and Theosophic Thought” (which became in 1999 “Western Esotericism from the Early Modern Period”), within the American Academy of Religion. The collective work in two volumes is designed to be published by State University of New York Press.