

**Philosophy**  
**Philosophy and Theosophy: An Introduction**  
**Notes for class at the Theosophical Society in America**  
**November 1, 2008**

**A. Philosophy**

- I. Philosophy requires certain moods to be accessible
  - 1. Wonder. Starting point in classical Greece. The rational attitude emerging from the mythical
  - 2. (Faith). Temporary setback into the mythical realm during Christian middle ages. Philosophy shackled by being the ‘handmaiden’ of theology
  - 3. Doubt. Increasingly shedding any and all authority during the Renaissance. Picking up where the Greeks left off
  - 4. Anxiety. Confronting the nothingness generated by doubt. Existential Angst regarding the meaning of one’s existence
  
- II. The 3 realms of Plato’s philosophy (which is still holding):
  - 1. The Good. Ethics
  - 2. The Beautiful. Esthetics
  - 3. The Truth. Epistemology and Logic
  - 4. The One as underlying principle. (Later the Holy)
  
- III. Schematic rendition of Aristotle’s 5 distinctive ways of being-true  
 (*Per* Heidegger, schematized by T. Kisiel. See separate, more complete quadrant)

<i>Nous</i> (reason) Pure apprehension Pertaining to principles	World	Soul
Eternities <i>Theoria</i> IN-spective	<i>Episteme</i> Knowledge / science Laws of nature $E=mc^2$	<i>Sophia</i> Pure understanding Laws of the soul Karma & reincarnation
Change <i>Praxis</i> CIRCUM-spective	<i>Techne</i> Know-how Coping with the world <i>Savoir fair</i> iPhone	<i>Phronesis</i> Prudence Coping with life <i>Savoir vivre</i> Relationships

- IV. Philosophy as queen of all sciences
  - 1. Historically speaking it is often reasoned that out of philosophy came all other sciences
    - a. Mathematics, logic, astronomy and history in Greece
    - b. Natural sciences in the Renaissance
    - c. Chemistry in 18<sup>th</sup> century
    - d. Psychology and sociology in 19<sup>th</sup> century
  - 2. This happened when a field with its own subject-matter and method of investigation could stand on its own (matured paradigm)

3. This is probably too logo-centric and exoteric. Modern doubt either suppressed, or did not understand, the historical role played by esoteric groups in the coming into being of the sciences and philosophy itself (*vide* the Orphites and Thorndyke's research)
  4. Therefore the esoteric component in Aristotle's *Sophia* has to be restored
- V. Intermezzo: executing a philosophical thought on the basis of the experience of the philosophical question regarding causality:
1. Posing a philosophical question verbally: What is causality?
  2. Acknowledging that we are intimately familiar with the concept and experience of causality in daily live, but that the answer "It's obvious, not?" will not do.
  3. Deepening the question by suspending any and all answers that already imply an understanding of causality like in science, theology or daily live: What causes causality? is the wrong question
  4. Deepening the question by getting into the right attitude of either (or combination):
    - a. Wonder: What the heck is causality????
    - b. Doubt: Any and all explanations have to be rejected. I have to start all over again
    - c. Anxiety: I anxiously care about the question "What is causality?" as it relates to the question about the meaning of my existence: Am I merely a play ball of the law of causality, a transmission point in the complex chain of causes and effects?
  5. Possible answers:
    - a. Hume: The notion of causality comes out of habit. If B follows A, then habitually one might think that A causes B
    - b. Kant: Causality is experienced as too necessary; it can't be a habit. It is the way we organize phenomenal experience. Impossible to determine if noumenal reality (independent of experience) is causal.
    - c. Merleau-Ponty: We pre-verbally, implicitly, tacitly understand causality as it inheres in our lived body. Based on a more philosophical notion of experience, time and the 'lived body,' which the scientific paradigm cannot provide.

## **B. Theosophy**

- I. Contemplation and meditation as the moods that give access to the divine realm, from which, or out of which, divine wisdom (theosophy) might originate.
  1. Through the opening of the faculty of clairvoyance
  2. Through connection to, and instruction by, meta-empirical beings
  3. Through intuitive insights into the essential structures of the conscious universe
- II. *Per* the Encyclopaedia Britannica "Theosophy, those forms of philosophic and religious thought [including moods, attitudes and experiences] which claim a special insight into the divine nature and its constitutive moments or processes. Sometimes this insight is claimed as the result of the operation of some higher faculty or some supernatural revelation to the individual; in other instances the theosophical theory is not based upon any special illumination but is simply put forward as the deepest speculative wisdom of its author. But in any case it is characteristic of theosophy that it starts with an explication of the divine essence and endeavors to deduce the phenomenal universe from the play of forces within the divine nature itself."

- III. Academic understanding (*per* Faivre) of Western Esotericism, of which Theosophy is a part and temporary summation, through 6 characteristics (1-4 essential; 5 & 6 non-essential):
1. The use of correspondences to illustrate the relationship between all parts of the visible or invisible universe, a principle frequently stated as “that which is above is like that which is below; that which is below is like that which is above,” or the macrocosm is mirrored in the microcosm and vice versa.
  2. The perception of nature as a living, intelligent organism, relevant to the spiritual process and having the potential to act as a revealing agency.
  3. The use of imagination, symbols, images and other mediating techniques to establish cognitive and visionary rapport with otherwise invisible dimensions.
  4. Reference to the process of transmutation, or the radical change in self or substance from a common to a high quality.
  5. The practice of establishing concordance, or the finding of commonalities between different traditions, for the purpose of gaining greater insight and disclosing an underlying tradition common to all doctrines.
  6. Recognition of the transmission process, in which authentic spiritual information is passed on from master to pupil or disciple.

Though different scholars contest these characteristics, they seem to be the starting point for any academic discussion.

- IV. Current self-understandings of *Theosophia*
1. Static: the hidden Wisdom-Religion of all ages, underlying all sciences, religions and philosophies
  2. Dynamic (historical): “to gather the oldest tenets together and to make of them one harmonious and unbroken whole.”
  3. Dynamic (contemporary): the ongoing gathering and synthesis of science, philosophy and theology (See below)
  4. Developed, guarded and seeded into civilization by a brotherhood of sages and seers since time immemorial and transmitted by an unbroken chain of Mahatmas and initiates
  5. Its One Fundamental Law:
    - i. “The radical unity of the ultimate essence of each constituent part of compounds in Nature - from star to mineral atom, from the highest Dhyān Chohan to the smallest infusorium, in the fullest acceptance of the term, and whether applied to the spiritual, intellectual or physical worlds - this unity is the one fundamental law in Occult Science.” (SDI:120)
  6. Its Four Basic Ideas (Bowen):
    - i. The FUNDAMENTAL UNITY OF ALL EXISTENCE. ... Fundamentally there is ONE Being. The BEING has two aspects, positive and negative. The positive is Spirit, or CONSCIOUSNESS. The negative is SUBSTANCE, the subject of consciousness.
    - ii. THERE IS NO DEAD MATTER. Every last atom is alive. It cannot be otherwise, since every atom is itself fundamentally Absolute Being.
    - iii. Man is the MICROCOSM. As he is so, then all the Hierarchies of the Heavens exist within him.
    - iv. The Great Hermetic Axiom. It really sums up and synthesizes all the others: As is the Inner, so is the Outer; as is the Great, so is the Small; as it is above, so it is below; there is but ONE LIFE AND LAW; and he that worketh it is ONE.

## C. The Relationship

### I. Relationship of 2 Sophias: Philo-sophia & Theo-sophia:

Simple 2-column Version

Category	Philosophia	Theosophia
Meaning	Love of wisdom	Divine wisdom
Wisdom	Exoteric, rational	Esoteric, mystical
Realm	Transcendental	Metaphysical
Tendency	Doubt	Faith
Preference	Phenomenology	Theosophy
Method	Eidetic insights	Metaphysical experiences
	Phenomenological	Empirical & intuitive
Subject	Transcendental <i>a priori</i> possibility conditions; enabling structures	<i>A posteriori</i> description of metaphysical phenomena and their explanation
	Foundation	Super-structure
	Origins	Ultimates
Relationship	Metaphysically neutral	Transcendentally clarified
Examples	Transcendence	Initiation
	Decadence	Sinking into the astral
	Deficiency of Being	Negative Karma
	Call of conscience	Higher Self or Guru
Poortman	Crown of science	Ideology / worldview
	Phil. trumps Theosophy	Not yet entirely proven

N.B.: The above comparison is premised on the phenomenological understanding of philosophy and its methods and subject matter. The pivotal point here to understand is that phenomenology investigates the essential, underlying, enabling structures and dynamics of consciousness, which comprise the transcendental possibility-conditions of any and all experiences whatsoever, be they mundane, scientific or religious. As such these investigations are metaphysically neutral as they are not dependent on any metaphysical tradition and make no value judgments regarding them. The phenomenology of religion merely clarifies the essential, underlying structures of religious experiences, practices and theologies while deliberately suspending questions relating to their validity and value.

When, for example, it investigates the experience of constituting a ‘sacred object, place, epoch or person,’ as found in any religious tradition, it is interested in the “how” or “mode of actualization” of such an experience and it is, again, deliberately, not interested in the specific, historical “what” or content of such experiences. It will make no difference here whether to start one’s investigation with Jesus, Buddha or Blavatsky; or Jerusalem, Bodhigaya or Adyar; or the cross, Buddha’s tooth or HPB’s ring. They all share the essential structure of constituting a sacred something. Furthermore the investigation neither will make a judgment whether the sacred in-itself or *as such*, is something subjective, objective or mystical. In other words, the question regarding the ontological status of the ‘sacred’ is also suspended. The aspect of the sacred which such investigation is interested in, is the sacred as experienced, not the sacred as such.

This endeavor has to be differentiated, because it appears to be closely congruent, from one of Theosophy’s major agenda points, i.e. the investigation of the essence of religion common to all and, based on that, their reconciliation. Both seem to aim at the understanding of the underlying essence of religion. The difference though is that phenomenology aims at the essence of the

experience of religious experiences while suspending any and all questions of validity and value, and Theosophy aims at the essence of the content of religious experiences and takes a broad-minded position regarding their validity and value. In this way, coming back to sacred objects and the like, Theosophy will validate and accept most religions' sacred items as an essential component of religion and will view them therefore as real and valuable contact points between the really existent divine and the human and will make judgments regarding their relative efficacy. Phenomenology suspends all that.

This doesn't mean that there is no mutually fruitful relationship between both research attitudes, though Theosophy can learn more from phenomenology than other way around. For example, phenomenology can help to clarify the structure of religious experience with the effect that anyone in any tradition can purify his religious experiences by understanding and getting rid of erroneous interpretations of these experiences. And Theosophy, in its mode of trying to understand other people's religious traditions, can incorporate the very subtle insights into religious experiences developed by phenomenology as structural templates by which to see other people's religious experiences as variations on certain essential themes, like the above-mentioned constitution of sacred objects.

## II. Relationship of 2 Sophia's: Philo-sophia & Theo-sophia:

Complex Quadrant Version: Esoteric / Exoteric & A priori / A posteriori Map

	<b>Esoteric (Theosophical)</b>	<b>Exoteric (Scientific &amp; Religious)</b>
	-The inner/occult side -Gnosis -Clairvoyance -Mysticism	-The outer/public side -Faith/Belief -Observation -Ritualism
<b>A priori (Phenomenological)</b> -Possibility conditions -Before experience -Eidetic intuition -Implicit understanding -Hermeneutics	-Enabling structures of Gnostic, clairvoyant and mystic experiences  Rudolph Steiner (?) J.J. Poortman Hans Jonas Frithjof Schuon (?) Huston Smith (?) Gerda Walther	-Enabling structures of scientific and religious experiences  Immanuel Kant Edmund Husserl Martin Heidegger Paul Tillich Krishnamurti
<b>A posteriori (Empirical)</b> -Hypotheses -After experience -Scientific insight -Explicit interpretation -Apophantics	-Esoteric explanations / descriptions of diverse phenomena  H.P. Blavatsky C.W. Leadbeater Geoffrey Hodson	-Scientific and Theological explanations / descriptions of diverse phenomena  Ken Wilber Rene Descartes

III. Dynamic, contemporary, ongoing gathering and synthesis of science, philosophy and religion in a) their mutual relationships and b) appropriated into Theosophy:

1. The big 3 components:
  - a. Science (Quantum, 'new' sciences, transpersonal psychology, genetics)
  - b. Philosophy (phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism)
  - c. Religion (New Age, Wicca, New Religious Movements)
2. The big 3 investigating themselves:
  - a. Scientific investigation of science (history, psychology and sociology of science)
  - b. Philosophy of philosophy or Philosophy *as such* (= philosophy. Only philosophy investigates its own foundations)
  - c. Religious interpretation of religion (going native as one investigates a religion. From the *etic* to the *emic* attitude)
3. The big 3 applied to each other:
  - a. Philosophy of science or Science *as such* (investigating the transcendental necessary possibility conditions of science and/or its conceptual foundations. Philosophy as the summation and crown of science)
  - b. Philosophy of religion or Religion *as such* (investigating the transcendental necessary possibility conditions of religion, its conceptual foundations and foundational experiences)
  - c. Scientific investigation of philosophy (history, psychology and sociology of philosophy. Feminist, non-western and Marxist critiques)
  - d. Scientific investigation of religion (history, psychology and sociology of religion)
  - e. Religious interpretation of philosophy (Philosophy as a spiritual-transformational practice. See Indian philosophies. "Understanding the world as God understands it")
  - f. Religious interpretation of science (science as a spiritual-transformational practice. "Seeing the mind of God in action through science")
4. At the core the "harmonious and unbroken whole" of the three components of philosophy, science and religion in the "Scientific Wisdom-Religion", a.k.a. Theosophy

