

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.”⁹ 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 *Offenbahrung 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 doctetist, 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), *Offenbarung göttlicher Majestät* (cf. *supra*) and Julius Sperber (?–1616), *Exemplarischer Beweiss*, 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. Luppius 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” (*geheime 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 (*Offenbabrung 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 Renuus (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 Renuus, 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 Renuus 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 reine 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