

## Origins of Modern Spirituality

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### Introduction to Spiritualism

By 1853, when the popular song Spirit Rappings was published, Spiritualism was an object of intense curiosity. Spiritualism is a religion founded in part on the writings of the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). It is theistic, postulating a belief in God, but the distinguishing feature is belief that spirits of the dead can be contacted, either by individuals or by gifted or trained "mediums", who can provide information about the afterlife.

Spiritualism developed in the United States and reached its peak growth in membership from the 1840s to the 1920s, especially in English-language countries. By 1897, it was said to have more than eight million followers in the United States and Europe, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes.

The religion flourished for a half century without canonical texts or formal organization, attaining cohesion by periodicals, tours by trance lecturers, camp meetings, and the missionary activities of accomplished mediums. Many prominent Spiritualists were women. Most followers supported causes such as the abolition of slavery and women's suffrage. By the late 1880s, credibility of the informal movement weakened, due to accusations of fraud among mediums, and formal Spiritualist organizations began to appear. Spiritualism is currently practiced primarily through various demoninational Spiritualist Churches in the United States and United Kingdom.

### Theism

Most Spiritualists believe in a monotheistic, omnibenevolent God, akin

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۱. سطح ۲، مجتمع آموزش عالی امام خمینی، ملیت پاکستانی.

to Christianity. The Spiritualists' National Union's first principle is "the fatherhood of God".

### **Mediumship and Spirits**

Spiritualists believe in communicating with the spirits of discarnate humans. They believe that spirit mediums are humans gifted to do this. They believe that spirits are capable of growth and perfection, progressing through higher spheres or planes. The afterlife is not a static place, but one in which spirits evolve. The two beliefs - that contact with spirits is possible, and that spirits may lie on a higher plane - lead to a third belief, that spirits can provide knowledge about moral and ethical issues, as well as about God and the afterlife. Thus many members speak of spirit guides — specific spirits, often contacted, relied upon for worldly and spiritual guidance.

Spiritualism was equated by some Christians with witchcraft. This United States 1865 broadsheet also condemned spiritualism's links to abolitionism and blamed it for causing the Civil War.

### **Compared with other religions**

#### **Christianity**

As spiritualism emerged in a Christian environment, it has features in common with Christianity, ranging from an essentially Christian moral system to liturgical practices such as Sunday services and the singing of hymns. Nevertheless, on significant points Christianity and Spiritualism are different. Spiritualists do not believe that the works or faith of a mortal during a brief lifetime can serve as a basis for assigning a soul to an eternity of Heaven or Hell; they view the afterlife as containing hierarchical "spheres", through which each spirit can progress. This concept is related to the Catholic idea of Purgatory. Spiritualists differ from Protestant Christians in that the Judeo-Christian Bible is not the primary source from which they derive knowledge of God and the afterlife: for them, their personal contacts with spirits provide that.

#### **Indigenous religions**

Animist faiths, with a tradition of shamanism and spirit contact, are similar to Spiritualism. In the first decades of the movement, many mediums claimed contact with Native American spirit guides, in apparent acknowledgment of these similarities. Unlike animists, however, spiritualists speak of the spirits of dead humans and do not espouse a belief in spirits of trees, springs, or other natural features.

## **Islam**

Within Islam, certain traditions, notably Sufism, consider communication with spirits possible. Additionally, the concept of Tawassul recognises the existence of good spirits on a higher plane of existence closer to God, and thus able to intercede on behalf of humanity.

## **Hinduism**

Hinduism, though heterogeneous, shares with spiritualism a belief in the existence of the soul after death. But Hindus differ in that they believe in reincarnation and hold that all features of a person's personality are extinguished at death. Spiritualists maintain that the spirit retains the personality it possessed during human existence.

## **Spiritism**

Spiritism, the branch of Spiritualism developed by Allan Kardec and found in mostly Latin countries, has emphasised reincarnation. According to Arthur Conan Doyle, most British Spiritualists of the early 20th century were indifferent to the doctrine of reincarnation, few supported it, while a significant minority were opposed, since it had never been mentioned by spirits contacted in séances. Thus, according to Doyle, it is the empirical bent of Anglophone Spiritualism — its effort to develop religious views from observation of phenomena — that kept spiritualists of this period from embracing reincarnation.

## **Occult**

Spiritualism also differs from occult movements, such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn or the contemporary Wiccan covens, in that spirits are not contacted to obtain magical powers (with the exception of power for healing). For example, Madame Blavatsky (1831–91) of the Theosophical Society only practiced mediumship to contact powerful spirits capable of conferring esoteric knowledge. Blavatsky did not believe these spirits were deceased humans, and held beliefs in reincarnation different from the views of most spiritualists.

## **Origins**

Spiritualism first appeared in the 1840s in the "Burned-over District" of upstate New York, where earlier religious movements such as Millerism, Seventh-Day Adventism, and Mormonism had emerged during the Second Great Awakening.

This region of New York State was an environment in which many thought direct communication with God or angels was possible, and that God would not behave harshly for example, that God would not condemn unbaptised infants to an eternity in Hell.

### **Swedenborg and Mesmer**

The onlookers' excitement is palpable as the Mesmerist induces a trance. Painting by Swedish artist Richard Bergh, 1887.

### **Emanuel Swedenborg.**

Franz Mesmer. In this environment, the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and the teachings of Franz Mesmer (1734-1815) provided an example for those seeking direct personal knowledge of the afterlife. Swedenborg, who claimed to communicate with spirits while awake, described the structure of the spirit world. Two features of his view particularly resonated with the early spiritualists: first, that there is not a single hell and a single heaven, but rather a series of higher and lower heavens and hells; second, that spirits are intermediates between God and humans, so that the Divine sometimes uses them as a means of communication. Although Swedenborg warned against seeking out spirit contact, his works seem to have inspired in others the desire to do so.

Mesmer did not contribute religious beliefs, but he brought a technique, later known as hypnotism, that it was claimed could induce trances and cause subjects to report contact with supernatural beings. There was a great deal of professional showmanship inherent to demonstrations of Mesmerism, and the practitioners who lectured in mid-19th-century North America sought to entertain their audiences as well as to demonstrate methods for personal contact with the Divine.

Perhaps the best known of those who combined Swedenborg and Mesmer in a peculiarly North American synthesis was Andrew Jackson Davis, who called his system the Harmonial Philosophy. Davis was a practicing Mesmerist, faith healer and clairvoyant from Poughkeepsie, New York. His 1847 book, *The Principles of Nature, Her Divine Revelations, and a Voice to Mankind*, dictated to a friend while in a trance state, eventually became the nearest thing to a canonical work in a Spiritualist movement whose extreme individualism precluded the development of a single coherent worldview.

### **Reform-movement links**

The Fox sisters. Spiritualists often set March 31, 1848, as the beginning of their movement. On that date, Kate and Margaret Fox, of Hydesville, New York, reported that they had made contact with the spirit of a murdered peddler. What made this an extraordinary event was that the spirit communicated through rapping noises, audible to onlookers. The evidence of the senses appealed to practically minded Americans, and the Fox sisters became a sensation.

Amy and Isaac Post, Hicksite Quakers from Rochester, New York, had long been acquainted with the Fox family, and took the two girls into their home in the late spring of 1848. Immediately convinced of the genuineness of the sisters' communications, they became early converts and introduced

the young mediums to their circle of radical Quaker friends.

It therefore came about that many of the early participants in Spiritualism were radical Quakers and others involved in the reforming movement of the mid-nineteenth century. These reformers were uncomfortable with established churches, because they did little to fight slavery and even less to advance the cause of women's rights.

Women were particularly attracted to the movement, because it gave them important roles as mediums and trance lecturers. In fact, Spiritualism provided one of the first forums in which U.S. women could address mixed public audiences.

Cora L. V. Scott. The most popular trance lecturer prior to the U.S. Civil War was Cora L. V. Scott (1840–1923). Young and beautiful, her appearance on stage fascinated men. Her audiences were struck by the contrast between her physical girlishness and the eloquence with which she spoke of spiritual matters, and found in that contrast support for the notion that spirits were speaking through her. Cora married four times, and on each occasion adopted her husband's last name. During her period of greatest activity, she was known as Cora Hatch.

Paschal Beverly Randolph. Another famous woman spiritualist was Achsa W. Sprague, who was born November 17, 1827, in Plymouth Notch, Vermont. At the age of 20, she became ill with rheumatic fever and credited her eventual recovery to intercession by spirits. An extremely popular trance lecturer, she traveled about the United States until her death in 1861. Sprague was an abolitionist and an advocate of women's rights.

Yet another prominent spiritualist and trance medium prior to the Civil War was Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–75), an African-American "Free Man of Color," who also played a part in the Abolition movement. Nevertheless, many abolitionists and reformers held themselves aloof from the movement; among the skeptics was the eloquent ex-slave, Frederick Douglass.

### **Believers and skeptics**

Frank Podmore, ca. 1895. In the years following the sensation that greeted the Fox sisters, demonstrations of mediumship (séances and automatic writing, for example) proved to be a profitable venture, and soon became popular forms of entertainment and spiritual catharsis. The Foxes were to earn a living this way and others would follow their lead. Showmanship became an increasingly important part of Spiritualism, and the visible, audible, and tangible evidence of spirits escalated as mediums competed for paying audiences. Fraud was certainly widespread, as independent investigating commissions repeatedly established, most notably the 1887 report of the Seybert Commission. In a few cases, fraud practiced under the guise of Spiritualism was prosecuted in the courts.

Harry Price, 1922. Prominent investigators who exposed cases of fraud came from a variety of backgrounds, including professional researchers

such as Frank Podmore of the Society for Psychical Research or Harry Price of the National Laboratory of Psychical Research, and professional conjurers such as John Nevil Maskelyne. Maskelyne exposed the Davenport Brothers by appearing in the audience during their shows and explaining how the trick was done. During the 1920s, professional magician Harry Houdini undertook a well-publicised crusade against fraudulent mediums. Throughout his endeavors, Houdini remained adamant that he did not oppose Spiritualism itself, but rather the practice of deliberate fraud and trickery for monetary gain.

William Crookes. Photo published 1904. Despite widespread fraud, the appeal of Spiritualism was strong. Prominent in the ranks of its adherents were those grieving the death of a loved one. One well known case is that of Mary Todd Lincoln who, grieving the loss of her son, organized séances in the White House which were attended by her husband, President Abraham Lincoln. The surge of interest in Spiritualism during and after the American Civil War and World War I was a direct response to the massive casualties.

In addition, the movement appealed to reformers, who fortuitously found that the spirits favored such causes du jour as equal rights. It also appealed to some who had a materialist orientation and rejected organized religion. The influential socialist and atheist Robert Owen embraced religion following his experiences in Spiritualist circles.

Many scientists who investigated the phenomenon also became converts. They included chemist and physicist William Crookes (1832–1919), evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913) and Nobel-laureate physiologist Charles Richet. Other prominent adherents included journalist and pacifist William T. Stead (1849-1912) and physician and author Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). Pioneering American psychologist William James studied spiritualism, publishing supportive conclusions. The séances of Eusapia Palladino were attended by investigators including Pierre and Marie Curie.

### **Unorganized movement**

The movement quickly spread throughout the world; though only in the United Kingdom did it become as widespread as in the United States. In Britain, by 1853, invitations to tea among the prosperous and fashionable often included table-turning, a type of séance in which spirits would communicate with people seated around a table by tilting and rotating the table. A particularly important convert was the French pedagogue Allan Kardec (1804-1869), who made the first attempt to systematise the movement's practices and ideas into a consistent philosophical system. Kardec's books, written in the last 15 years of his life, became the textual basis of Spiritism, which became widespread in Latin countries. In Brazil, Kardec's ideas are embraced by many followers today. In Puerto Rico, Kardec's books were widely read by the upper classes, and eventually gave birth to a movement known as Mesa Blanca (White Table).

Middle-class Chicago women discuss Spiritualism (1906). Spiritualism was mainly a middle- and upper-class movement, and especially popular with women. U.S. spiritualists would meet in private homes for séances, at lecture halls for trance lectures, at state or national conventions, and at summer camps attended by thousands. Among the most significant of the camp meetings were Camp Etna, in Etna, Maine; Onset Bay Grove, in Onset, Massachusetts; Lily Dale, in western New York State; Camp Chesterfield, in Indiana; the Wonewoc Spiritualist Camp, in Wonewoc, Wisconsin; and Lake Pleasant, in Montague, Massachusetts. In founding camp meetings, the spiritualists appropriated a form developed by U.S. Protestant denominations in the early nineteenth century. Spiritualist camp meetings were located most densely in New England and California, but were also established across the upper Midwest. Cassadaga, Florida, is the most notable spiritualist camp meeting in the southern states.

A number of spiritualist periodicals appeared in the nineteenth century, and these did much to hold the movement together. Among the most important were the weeklies *The Banner of Light* (Boston), *The Religio-Philosophical Journal* (Chicago), *Mind and Matter* (Philadelphia), *The Spiritualist* (London), and *The Medium* (London). Other influential periodicals were the *Revue Spirite* (France), *Le Messenger* (Belgium), *Annali dello Spiritismo* (Italy), *El Criterio Espiritista* (Spain), and *The Harbinger of Light* (Australia). By 1880, there were about three dozen monthly spiritualist periodicals published around the world. These periodicals differed a great deal from each other, reflecting the great differences among Spiritualists. Some, such as the *British Spiritual Magazine* were Christian and conservative, openly rejecting the reform currents so strong within Spiritualism. Others, such as *Human Nature*, were pointedly non-Christian and supportive of socialism and reform efforts. Still others, such as *The Spiritualist*, attempted to view spiritualist phenomena from a scientific perspective, eschewing discussion on both theological and reform issues.

The movement was extremely individualistic, with each person relying on her own experiences and reading to discern the nature of the afterlife. Organisation was therefore slow to appear, and when it did it was resisted by mediums and trance lecturers. Most members were content to attend Christian churches, and particularly Universalist churches harbored many Spiritualists.

As the movement began to fade, partly through the bad publicity of fraud accusations and partly through the appeal of religious movements such as Christian Science, the Spiritualist Church was organised. This church can claim to be the main vestige of the movement left today in the United States.

### **Other mediums**

Eusapia Palladino, Warsaw, 1893. William Stainton Moses (1839–92) was an Anglican clergyman who, in the period from 1872 to 1883, filled 24

notebooks with automatic writing, much of which was said to describe conditions in the spirit world.

London-born Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–99) moved to the United States in 1855 and was active in spiritualist circles as a trance lecturer and organiser. She is best known as a chronicler of the movement's spread, especially in her 1884 *Nineteenth Century Miracles: Spirits and their Work in Every Country of the Earth*.

Julian Ochorowicz. Eusapia Palladino (1854-1918) was an Italian Spiritualist medium from the slums of Naples who made a career touring Italy, France, Germany, Britain, the United States, Russia and Poland. Her stratagems were unmasked on several occasions, though some investigators, including Nobel laureate scientists, credited her mediumistic abilities.

One believer was the Polish psychologist Julian Ochorowicz, who in 1893 brought her from St. Petersburg, Russia, to Warsaw, Poland. He introduced her to the novelist Boleslaw Prus, who participated in her séances and incorporated Spiritualist elements into his historical novel *Pharaoh*.

Ochorowicz studied as well, 15 years later, a home-grown Polish medium, Stanisława Tomczyk.

### **After the 1920s**

Main articles: Spiritualist Church, Spiritualists' National Union, Survivalism (life after death), and Spiritualist Association of Great Britain

After the 1920s, Spiritualism evolved in three different directions, all of which exist today.

### **Syncreticism**

The first of these continued the tradition of individual practitioners, organised in circles centered on a medium and clients, without any hierarchy or dogma. Already by the late 19th century spiritualism had become increasingly syncretic, a natural development in a movement without central authority or dogma. Today, among these unorganised circles, spiritualism is not readily distinguishable from the similarly syncretic New Age movement. These spiritualists are quite heterogeneous in their beliefs regarding issues such as reincarnation or the existence of God. Some appropriate New Age and Neo-Pagan beliefs, whilst others call themselves 'Christian Spiritualists', continuing with the tradition of cautiously incorporating spiritualist experiences into their Christian faith.

Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes.

### **Spiritualist Church**

Main articles: Spiritualist Church, Spiritualists' National Union, and Spiritualist Association of Great Britain

The second direction taken has been to adopt formal organisation, patterned after Christian denominations, with established creeds and

liturgies, and training requirements for mediums. In the United States the Spiritualist churches are primarily affiliated with the National Spiritualist Association of Churches, and in the U.K. with the Spiritualists' National Union, founded in 1901. Formal education in spiritualist practice emerged in 1920, continuing today with the Arthur Findlay College at Stansted Hall. Diversity of belief among organised spiritualists has led to a few schisms, the most notable occurring in the U.K. in 1957 between those who held the movement to be a religion sui generis (of its own with unique characteristics), and a minority who held it to be a denomination within Christianity. The practice of organised Spiritualism today resembles that of any other religion, having discarded most showmanship, particularly those elements resembling the conjurer's art. There is thus a much greater emphasis on "mental" mediumship and an almost complete avoidance of the miraculous "materializing" mediumship that so fascinated early believers such as Arthur Conan Doyle.

### **Survivalism**

The third direction taken has been a continuation of its empirical orientation to religious phenomena. Already as early as 1882, with the founding of the Society for Psychical Research, secular organisations emerged to investigate spiritualist claims. Today many persons with this empirical approach avoid the label of "spiritualism," preferring the term "survivalism." Survivalists eschew religion, and base their belief in the afterlife on phenomena susceptible to at least rudimentary scientific investigation, such as mediumship, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, electronic voice phenomena, and reincarnation research. Many Survivalists see themselves as the intellectual heirs of the spiritualist movement.

### **Spiritualism and Spiritism**

Beliefs Core beliefs: Theism · Survivalism · Mediumship · Séances · Spiritual Healing · Variant beliefs: Reincarnation · Christianity · New Age  
 Important Figures Emanuel Swedenborg · Franz Mesmer · Fox sisters · Eva Carrière Andrew Jackson Davis · Cora L. V. Scott · Achsa W. Sprague · Paschal Beverly Randolph · Emma Hardinge Britten · Allan Kardec · Camille Flammarion · William Stainton Moses · Robert Owen · Arthur Conan Doyle · W. T. Stead · Chico Xavier · Helen Duncan · Doris Stokes · Colin Fry · Danielle Egnew · Derek Acorah · "Margery" · Harry Houdini  
 Other History of Spiritism · Spiritist doctrine · Spiritualist Church · List of Spiritualist organizations · National Spiritualist Association of Churches · Spiritualists' National Union · Spiritualist Association of Great Britain · Spiritualism in fiction · Theatrical Séances

## **Theism**

### **List of belief systems**

Deity (Divinity · Numen · Male · Female) · Singular God (Existence · Gender) · Binitarianism · Deism · Dystheism · Henotheism · Kathenotheism · Nontheism · Monolatrism · Monotheism · Mysticism · Panentheism · Pandeism · Pantheism · Polydeism · Polytheism · Spiritualism · Theopanism Religion portal

### **Theological thought**

Acosmism · Agnosticism · Animism · Antireligion · Atheism · Deism · Determinism · Dualism · Esotericism · Gnosticism · Humanism · Krishnaism · Libertarianism · Monism · Monotheism · Mysticism · New Age · New Thought · Nondualism · Pandeism · Pantheism · Polytheism · Theism · Thelema · Theosophy · Transcendentalism · more

### **Secular spirituality**

Secular spirituality as a cultural phenomenon refers to the adherence to a spiritual ideology without the advocacy of a religious framework. Secular spirituality in principle might embrace many of the the same types of practices as religious spirituality, but the motivation is different. Clearly, since belief and dogma are absent, the emphasis is likely to be on practice rather than belief and on the inner life of the individual rather than on a relationship to a spiritual being or beings. Proponents make a case for a form of secular spirituality in which the motivation is simply to live happily, which demonstrates how such a motivation can lead to a spiritual life based on the development of qualities very like those prized by many religions.

### **Liberal religion**

Liberal religion is a religious tradition which embraces the theological diversity of a congregation rather than respecting any single creed, authority, or writing. Because it may draw resources from many traditions, it cannot normally be characterized as Christian, Jewish, or any particular religious faith. Theologian James Luther Adams defined the "five smooth stones of liberalism" as:

Revelation and truth are not closed, but constantly revealed.

All relations between persons ought ideally to rest on mutual, free consent and not coercion. Affirmation of the moral obligation to direct one's effort toward the establishment of a just and loving community. Denial of the immaculate conception of virtue and affirmation of the necessity of social incarnation. Good must be consciously given form and power within history. The resources (divine and human) that are available for achievement of meaningful change justify an attitude of ultimate (but not

necessarily immediate) optimism. There is hope in the ultimate abundance of the Universe.

A religious liberal has been defined as follows:

“ To be a liberal according to my favorite scripture, Merriam-Webster, is to be open minded, is to be free from the constraints of dogmatism and authority, is to be generous and to believe in the basic goodness of humankind. Religion is defined as that which binds us back or reconnects us to that which is ultimately important. Thus religious liberals are those that are connected, through generosity and openness, to the most important aspects of life. And there in lies the challenge. If we are open minded and not bound by authority who or what decides those matters of ultimate importance? ”

Unitarian Universalist minister Kimi Riegel, *What is Liberal Religion?*

### **Naturalistic spirituality**

Naturalistic Spirituality is a term for a variety of philosophical beliefs which pertain to the human experience of the numinous. Chief among modern forms of naturalistic spirituality is Naturalistic Pantheism (for example as found in the World Pantheist Movement), but the term may also apply to the beliefs of some pagans, many Taoists, some Buddhists, a number of Hindus, and a variety of non-affiliated independent thinkers who base their spiritual experience directly on Nature itself rather than traditional deities and the supernatural.

Naturalistic Spirituality (NS) is chiefly concerned with finding ways to access traditional spiritual feelings without the inclusion of elements incompatible with science and a broad naturalism. Adherents believe that Nature, in all its diversity and wonder, is sufficient unto itself in terms of eliciting the intellectual and emotional responses associated with spiritual experience, and that there is no need for faith in the traditional anthropomorphic concept of 'god' and similar ideas.

Although the overall movement toward these attitudes remains relatively small and loosely organized, various forms of Naturalistic Spirituality have existed since time immemorial, with philosophical Taoism and similar Eastern nature-mysticisms being perhaps the most notable example. At present, there is a growing interest in actively embracing Naturalistic Spirituality as a rational alternative in a modern world which many feel is losing belief in more traditional spiritual avenues. The recent rapid growth of pantheism (particularly of an avowedly naturalistic variety) is one example of this trend.

Adherents of NS are generally atheistic and scientifically-oriented in most aspects, with their primary difference from other hardline naturalists being their belief that the abandonment of superstition does not necessarily entail the abandonment of spirituality. To NS adherents, the intellectual and emotional experience of something greater than oneself is seen as a phenomenon of enduring value, a positive facet of the human condition to

be preserved even while we purge ourselves of so much that has traditionally accompanied it. Despite the pervasive misunderstanding associated with the term 'mysticism,' a number of NS adherents would describe themselves as mystics in terms of the insight that ultimately, we are all part of an interconnected whole, that which we describe as Nature. Although it is not unique to the worldview described here, many would argue that it is this common "monistic insight," stripped of any extraneous elements, which underlies all forms of Naturalistic Spirituality.

Crucial challenges for the NS movement currently involve developing and promulgating a naturalistic understanding of the somewhat ambiguous terms 'spirituality' and 'mysticism' as well as several other terms traditionally laden with superstitious and/or supernatural connotations, as well as addressing the issue of whether or not it is desirable to organize a cohesive community of adherents through which to advance ideas critical in achieving mainstream acceptance of the worldview.

### **Secularism**

George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906), British writer who coined the term "secularism." Secularism is generally the assertion that governmental practices or institutions should exist separately from religion or religious belief. Alternatively, it is a principle of promoting secular ideas or values in either public or private settings over religious ways of thought.

In one sense, secularism may assert the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and freedom from the government imposition of religion upon the people, within a state that is neutral on matters of belief, and gives no state privileges or subsidies to religions. (See also Separation of church and state and *Laïcité*.) In another sense, it refers to a belief that human activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be based on evidence and fact rather than religious influence.

The purposes and arguments in support of secularism vary widely. In European laicism, it has been argued that secularism is a movement toward modernization, and away from traditional religious values. This type of secularism, on a social or philosophical level, has often occurred while maintaining an official state church or other state support of religion. In the United States, some argue that state secularism has served to a greater extent to protect religion from governmental interference, while secularism on a social level is less prevalent. Within countries as well, differing political movements support secularism for varying reasons.

The term "secularism" was first used by the British writer George Holyoake in 1846. Although the term was new, the general notions of freethought on which it was based had existed throughout history. In particular, early secular ideas involving the separation of philosophy and religion can be traced back to Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and the Averroism school of philosophy. Holyoake invented the term "secularism" to describe his views of promoting a social order separate from religion, without

actively dismissing or criticizing religious belief. An agnostic himself, Holyoake argued that "Secularism is not an argument against Christianity, it is one independent of it. It does not question the pretensions of Christianity; it advances others. Secularism does not say there is no light or guidance elsewhere, but maintains that there is light and guidance in secular truth, whose conditions and sanctions exist independently, and act forever. Secular knowledge is manifestly that kind of knowledge which is founded in this life, which relates to the conduct of this life, conduces to the welfare of this life, and is capable of being tested by the experience of this life."

Barry Kosmin of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture breaks modern secularism into two types: hard and soft secularism. According to Kosmin, "the hard secularist considers religious propositions to be epistemologically illegitimate, warranted by neither religion nor experience." However, in the view of soft secularism, "the attainment of absolute truth was impossible and therefore skepticism and tolerance should be the principle and overriding values in the discussion of science and religion."

### **Secular ethics**

George Holyoake's 1896 publication *English Secularism* defines secularism as:

Secularism is a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on considerations purely human, and intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable. Its essential principles are three: The improvement of this life by material means. That science is the available Providence of man. That it is good to do good. Whether there be other good or not, the good of the present life is good, and it is good to seek that good.

Holyoake held that secularism and secular ethics should take no interest at all in religious questions (as they were irrelevant), and was thus to be distinguished from strong freethought and atheism. In this he disagreed with Charles Bradlaugh, and the disagreement split the secularist movement between those who argued that anti-religious movements and activism was not necessary or desirable and those who argued that it was.

### **Arguments for and against secularism**

Proponents of secularism have long argued that the general rise of secularism in all the senses enumerated above, and corresponding general decline of religion in secular states, is the inevitable result of the Age of Enlightenment, as people turn towards science and rationalism and away from religion and superstition.

Opponents argue that secular government creates more problems than it solves, and that a government with a religious (or at least not a secular) ethos is better. Some Christian opponents contend that a Christian state can give more freedom of religion than a secular one. For evidence, they cite

Norway, Iceland, Finland and Denmark, all with constitutional links between church and state and yet also recognized as more progressive and liberal than some countries without such a link. For example, Iceland was among the first countries to legalise abortion, and the Finnish government provides funding for the construction of Mosques. Some cite the counterexample of the Netherlands and, more recently, Sweden, it being both a secular state and socio-politically progressive although having disestablished its state church in 2000.

Proponents of secularism also note that the Scandinavian countries are socially among the most secular in the world, with particularly low percentages of individuals who hold religious beliefs. Recently this argument has been debated publicly in Norway where movements sought to disestablish the state's Lutheran church.

Some modern commentators have criticized secularism by conflating it with anti-religious, atheistic, or even satanic belief systems. The word secularism itself is commonly used as a pejorative by religious conservatives in the United States. Pope Benedict XVI has declared ongoing secularization to be a fundamental problem of modern society, and has made it the goal of his papacy to counteract secularism and moral relativism. Though the goal of a secularist state is to be religiously neutral, some argue that it is repressive of some aspects of religion. Ostensibly, it is equally repressive toward all religions in order to equally protect all from interference by others.

Some political philosophies, such as Marxism, generally hold that any religious influence in a state or society is negative. In nations that have officially embraced such beliefs, such as the former Eastern European Communist Bloc countries, the religious institution was made subject to the secular state, in the public interest. Freedom to worship was subject to licensure and other restrictions, and the doctrine of the church was monitored to assure conformity to secular law, or even the official public philosophy. In the Western democracies, it is generally agreed that these policies contravened full freedom of religion.

Some secularists believe that the state should be kept entirely separate from religion, and that religious institutions should be entirely free from governmental interference. Churches that exercise their authority completely apart from government endorsement, whose foundations are not in the state, are conventionally called "Free" churches.

Some secularists would allow the state to encourage religion (such as by providing exemptions from taxation, or providing funds for education and charities, including those that are "faith based"), but insist the state should not establish one religion as the state religion, require religious observance, or legislate dogma.

## Goals of Spirituality

### Simple living

Simple living (or voluntary simplicity) is a lifestyle individuals choose to minimize the 'more-is-better' pursuit of wealth and consumption. Adherents may choose simple living for a variety of reasons, such as spirituality, health, increase in 'quality time' for family and friends, stress reduction, personal taste or frugality. Others cite socio-political goals aligned with the anti-consumerist movement, including conservation, social justice and sustainable development. According to Duane Elgin, "we can describe voluntary simplicity as a manner of living that is outwardly more simple and inwardly more rich, a way of being in which our most authentic and alive self is brought into direct and conscious contact with living."

Simple living as a concept is distinguished from those living in forced poverty, as it is a voluntary lifestyle choice. Although asceticism may resemble voluntary simplicity, proponents of simple living are not all ascetics.

### History

The recorded history of voluntary simplicity, often associated with asceticism, begins with the Shramana traditions of Iron Age India. Buddha and biblical nazirites (notably John the Baptist) were early ascetics. Various notable individuals have claimed that spiritual inspiration led them to a simple living lifestyle, such as Francis of Assisi, Ammon Hennacy, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

Epicureanism, based on the teachings of the Athens-based philosopher Epicurus, flourished from about the fourth century BC to the third century AD. Epicureanism upheld the untroubled life as the paradigm of happiness, made possible by carefully considered choices and avoidances. Specifically, Epicurus pointed out that troubles entailed by maintaining an extravagant lifestyle tend to outweigh the pleasure of partaking in it. He therefore concluded that what is necessary for happiness, bodily comfort, and life itself should be maintained at minimal cost, while all things beyond what is necessary for these should either be tempered by moderation or completely avoided.

In North America, religious groups including the Shakers, Mennonites, Amish, and some Quakers have for centuries practiced lifestyles in which some forms of wealth or technology are excluded for religious or philosophical reasons. For more information about Quaker simplicity see *Testimony of Simplicity*.

Henry David Thoreau, a naturalist and author, is often considered to have made the classic non-sectarian statement advocating a life of simple and sustainable living in his book *Walden* (1854).

In Victorian Britain, Henry Stephens Salt, an admirer of Thoreau, popularised the idea of "Simplification, the saner method of living" Other

British advocates of the simple life included Edward Carpenter, William Morris and the members of "The Fellowship of the New Life." C.R. Ashbee and his followers also practiced some of these ideas, thus linking Simple Life ideas with the Arts and Crafts movement.

British novelist John Cowper Powys advocated the simple life in his 1933 book *A Philosophy of Solitude*.

George Lorenzo Noyes, a naturalist, mineralogist, development critic, writer, and artist, is known as the thoreauvian of Maine. He lived a wilderness lifestyle, advocating through his creative work a simple life of sustainable living and his spiritual reverence for nature.

During the 1920 and 1930s, the Vanderbilt Agrarians of the Southern United States advocated a lifestyle and culture centered upon traditional and sustainable agrarian values as opposed to the progressive urban industrialism which dominated the Western world at that time.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, a number of fairly prominent modern authors articulated both the theory and practice of lifestyles of this sort, among them Gandhian Richard Gregg, economists Ralph Borsodi and Scott Nearing, anthropologist-poet Gary Snyder, and utopian fiction writer Ernest Callenbach. Gregg wrote a book entitled *The Value of Voluntary Simplicity* (1936) and many decades later Duane Elgin wrote the highly influential book *Voluntary Simplicity* (1981). There are eco-anarchist groups in the United States and Canada today promoting lifestyles of simplicity. In the United Kingdom, the Movement for Compassionate Living was formed by Kathleen and Jack Jannaway in 1984, to spread the vegan message and promote simple living and self-reliance as a remedy against the exploitation of humans, animals, and the Earth.

## **Practice**

Some people practice voluntary simplicity to reduce need for purchased goods or services and, by extension, reduce their need to sell their time for money. Some will spend the extra free time helping family or others. During the holiday season, such people often perform alternative giving. Others may spend the extra free time to improve their quality of life, for example pursuing creative activities such as art and craft.

Another approach is to look very fundamentally at the whole issue of why we need to buy and consume so many resources for a good quality of life. Though our society often seeks to buy happiness, materialism very frequently fails to satisfy, and may even increase the level of stress in life. It has been said that "the making of money and the accumulation of things should not smother the purity of the soul, the life of the mind, the cohesion of the family, or the good of the society."

The 'grassroots' awareness campaign, National Downshifting Week (UK) (founded 1995) encourages participants to positively embrace living with less. Campaign creator, British writer and broadcaster on downshifting and sustainable living, Tracey Smith says, "The more money you spend, the

more time you have to be out there earning it and the less time you have to spend with the ones you love". National Downshifting Week encourages participants to 'Slow Down and Green Up' and contains a list of suggestions for Individuals, Companies and Children and Schools to help them lean towards the green, develop corporate social responsibility in the workplace and create eco-protocols and policies that work alongside the national curriculum, respectively.

Another key practice is the adoption of a simplified diet. Diets that may simplify domestic food production and consumption include raw veganism and the Gandhi diet.

### **Spiritual capital**

This article or section includes a list of references or external links, but its sources remain unclear because it lacks inline citations.

You can improve this article by introducing more precise citations where appropriate.

Spiritual capital is the newest concept among the four basic forms of capital - material capital (or financial capital), intellectual capital, social capital and spiritual capital. It is a term with various definitions, while most scholars define spiritual capital as what makes life meaningful. Some scholars equal spiritual capital to religion capital, that is, the power and influence produced by religion belief and practice.

1 Definitions

2 Measurements

### **Definitions**

A widely used definition is that of Metanexus Institute, which defines spiritual capital as "the effects of spiritual and religious practices, beliefs, networks and institutions that have a measurable impact on individuals, communities and societies". Another general definition is what offered by A Liu that defines spiritual capital as the power, influence and dispositions created by a person or an organization's spiritual belief, knowledge and practice.

### **Measurements**

Spiritual capital is measured at three levels - individual level, organizational level and national level. The method of Danah Zohar measures spiritual capital at the individual level, that is, to measure spiritual intelligence with a psychometrics approach. Many management consultants measure organizational spiritual capital in a way similar to that of social capital. A Liu uses a composite index approach and has developed the spiritual capital index to measure spiritual capital of countries.

### **Meaning of life**

Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going? is

Paul Gauguin's interpretation of the question.

The meaning of life is the philosophical concept about the purpose and significance of human existence. It is the subject of much philosophical and scientific study, and much theological speculation. It can include a range of questions such as: Why are we here? What is the nature of reality? and What is the value of life?

Western philosophy from the time of Plato, focused on the happiness which could be achieved through the use of reason. Philosophers such as Aristotle, and schools such as the Stoics and Epicureans, sought to find the meaning of life in the right reason that would result if humans lived according to their own nature and that of the universe. Modern philosophy has produced a wider range of views. Nihilism claims that the universe has no meaning; Singularitism puts forward the idea that human endeavour to reach the singularity is most important (see Singularitism Existentialism focuses on the meaning that people create for their own lives; and Logical positivism doubts whether the question is even meaningful. For Pragmatists, the practical, useful understanding of life is more important than searching for an abstract Truth; and Humanists believe that the happiness of a person is inextricably linked to the well-being of humanity.

There are many religious answers to the meaning of life. The Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) posit an omnipotent, transcendent God, who has been disclosed through revelation. The purpose of life is to serve God as revealed by the religion, which may determine one's afterlife. Indian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, typically see the soul as eternal, being reincarnated from body to body, a process which is governed by the karma of the deeds we perform in our lifetimes. The goal is to free the soul from reincarnation, achieving release, or union with the supreme soul. Chinese religions, such as Taoism and Confucianism, focus on the Tao, the cosmic principle underlying the universe, offering a path for a person to follow.

Science can describe the empirical facts of human existence. The universe's origin in the Big Bang, and the origin of life, at least demonstrate our place within the universe. The evolution of biological life shows that a primary function of life is the propagation of one's genes. Researchers in psychology study the factors which can make us thrive and lead to contentment in our lives. Neuroscience examines consciousness through the workings of the brain and its neurons; and some see in quantum theory an explanation of the process of free will as an alternative to determinism.

More prosaic views on the meaning of life include trying to realize one's potential and ideals; to seek wisdom and knowledge; to do good deeds; or to enjoy living. It is possible that the meaning of life is too profound to be known and understood; or that there is no point to life, and that is exactly

what makes it so special.

### **Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is the process of ceasing to feel resentment, indignation or anger for a perceived offense, difference or mistake, or ceasing to demand punishment or restitution. This definition, however, is subject to much philosophical critique. Forgiveness may be considered simply in terms of the person who forgives, in terms of the person forgiven and/or in terms of the relationship between the forgiver and the person forgiven. In some contexts, it may be granted without any expectation of compensation, and without any response on the part of the offender (for example, one may forgive a person who is dead). In practical terms, it may be necessary for the offender to offer some form of acknowledgment, apology, and/or restitution, or even just ask for forgiveness, in order for the wronged person to believe they are able to forgive.

Most world religions include teachings on the nature of forgiveness, and many of these teachings provide an underlying basis for many varying modern day traditions and practices of forgiveness. However, throughout the ages, philosophers have studied forgiveness apart from religion. In addition, as in other areas of human inquiry, science is beginning to question religious concepts of forgiveness. Psychology, sociology and medicine are among the scientific disciplines researching forgiveness or aspects of forgiveness. The Prodigal Son is a well known instance of such teaching and practice of forgiveness. Some religious doctrines or philosophies place greater emphasis on the need for humans to find some sort of divine forgiveness for their own shortcomings, others place greater emphasis on the need for humans to practice forgiveness between one another, yet others make little or no distinction between human and/or divine forgiveness.

### **Esotericism**

Esotericism or, more neatly, Esoterism, the holding of esoteric opinions, derives from the Greek ἐσωτερικός (esôterikos), a compound of ἔσω (esô): "within", thus "pertaining to the more inward", mystic. Its antonym is exoteric.

Esoteric knowledge is that which is available only to a narrow circle of "enlightened", "initiated", or specially educated people. Esoteric items may be known as esoterica. In contrast, exoteric knowledge is knowledge that is well-known or public; or perceived as informally canonic in society at large.

In Western, English-speaking societies today, the term, "esotericism," is not necessarily used in the sense of mystical knowledge or practice, but has come informally to mean any perception or knowledge that is difficult to

understand or remember, such as theoretical physics, or else that which pertains to the minutiae of a particular discipline, such as "esoteric" baseball statistics.

### Origins

Plato, in his dialogue *Alcibiades* (circa 390 BC), uses the expression *ta esô* meaning «the inner things», and in his dialogue *Theaetetus* (circa 360 BC) he uses *ta eksô* meaning «the outside things». The probable first appearance of the Greek adjective *esôterikos* is in Lucian of Samosata's "The Auction of Lives", § 26 (also called "The Auction of the Philosophical Schools"), written around AD 166.

The term esoteric first appeared in English in the 1701 *History of Philosophy* by Thomas Stanley, in his description of the mystery-school of Pythagoras; the Pythagoreans were divided into "exoteric", (under training), and "esoteric" (admitted into the "inner" circle).

### Connotations

"Esotericism" sometimes suggests an additional element of initiation. Another possibility is that such knowledge may be kept secret not by the intention of its protectors, but by its very nature—for example, if it is accessible only to those with the proper intellectual background.

### History

Esotericism is not a single tradition but a vast array of often unrelated figures and movements.

The Roman Empire had several mystery religions which emphasized initiation. Some saw Christianity, with its ritual of baptism, as a mystery religion. The terms "Gnosticism" and "Gnosis" refer to a family of religious movements which claimed to possess secret knowledge (*gnosis*). Another important movement from the ancient world was Hermeticism or Hermetism.

The Ismaili Muslims also stress a distinction between the inner and the outer. It is believed that spiritual salvation is attained by receiving the 'Nur' (light) through the esoteric, that is, spiritual search for enlightenment.

While many esoteric subjects have a history reaching back thousands of years, these have generally not survived as continuous traditions. Rather, they have benefited from various antiquarian revival movements. During the Italian Renaissance, for example, translators such as Ficino and Pico della Mirandola turned their attention to the classical literature of neo-Platonism, and what was thought to be the pre-Mosaic tradition of Hermeticism.

In the 17th century, European esotericism was reformulated as Rosicrucianism, and later entered various strands of Freemasonry. In the 19th century, a notable French revival in turn gave way to the Theosophy of H. P. Blavatsky. In the 20th century, Theosophy was reformulated by Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater, Alice Bailey, Rudolf Steiner and many others. Theosophy is also considered a major influence on the many current varieties of esotericism in metaphysical organizations, "Ascended Master Activities", and within the New Age groups. Anthroposophy, a synthesis of Western esoteric traditions and Theosophy founded by Rudolf Steiner in the early part of the 20th century, stimulated developments in education, agriculture, and medicine.[5] Yet another notable esoteric strain stems from the teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky.

### **Hermeticism**

This article is about the magical and religious movement stemming from the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus. For other uses of the term "Hermetic", see Hermetic.

Hermes Trismegistus depicted in a medieval rendering. Hermeticism is a set of philosophical and religious beliefs based primarily upon the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, who is put forth as a wise sage and Egyptian priest, and who is commonly seen as synonymous with the Egyptian god Thoth. These beliefs have influenced Western magic traditions and held great influence during the Renaissance.

In Islam, the Hermetic cult was accepted in 830 CE as being the Sabians mentioned in the Qur'an.

### **Terminology**

The term Hermetic is from medieval Latin *hermeticus*, in English attested since the 17th century as the adjective to Hermeticism (as in "Hermetic writers", Franz Bardon) The synonymous *Hermetical* also occurs in the 17th century.

### **History**

#### **Late Antiquity**

Further information: Hellenistic religion and Decline of Hellenistic polytheism

In Late Antiquity, Hermetism emerged in parallel with Gnosticism, Neoplatonism and Early Christianity, "characterized by a resistance to the dominance of either pure rationality or doctrinal faith"

The books now known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* were part of a renaissance of syncretistic and intellectualized pagan thought that took place around the 2nd century. Other examples of this cultural movement would include Neoplatonist philosophy, the Chaldaean Oracles, late Orphic and

Pythagorean literature, as well as much of Gnosticism.

The extant Greek texts dwell upon the oneness and goodness of God, urge purification of the soul, and defend pagan religious practices, such as the veneration of images. Many lost Greek texts, and many of the surviving vulgate books, contained discussions of alchemy clothed in philosophical metaphor. And one text, the Asclepius, lost in Greek but partially preserved in Latin, contained a bloody prophecy of the end of Roman rule in Egypt and the resurgence of pagan Egyptian power.

The predominant literary form is the dialogue: Hermes Trismegistus instructs a perplexed disciple on some point of hidden wisdom.

### **Renaissance**

After centuries of falling out of favor, Hermeticism was reintroduced to the West when, in 1460 CE, a man named Leonardo brought the Corpus Hermeticum to Pistoia. He was one of many agents sent out by Pistoia's ruler, Cosimo de'Medici, to scour European monasteries for lost ancient writings.

In 1614 CE Isaac Casaubon, a Swiss philologist, analyzed the Hermetic texts for linguistic style and claimed that the Hermetic writings attributed to Trismegistus were not the work of an ancient Egyptian priest but in fact dated to the Christian Era. Walter Scott places their date shortly after 200 CE, while Sir W. Flinders Petrie places them between 200 and 500 BCE. Plutarch's mention of Hermes Trismegistus dates back to the first century CE, and Tertullian, Iamblichus, and Porphyry are all familiar with Hermetic writings.

In 1945 CE, Hermetic writings were among those found near Nag Hammadi, in the form of one of the conversations between Hermes and Asclepius from the Corpus Hermeticum, and a text about the Hermetic mystery schools, On the Ogdoad and Ennead, written in the Coptic language, the last form in which the Egyptian language was written.

### **Hermeticism as a religion**

Not all Hermeticists take a religious approach, some consider it to be a philosophical system only. In Hermetic religion the supreme Deity, or Principle, is referred to variously as 'God', 'The All', or 'The One'. Many Hermeticists also align their beliefs and mystical ideas with other religions, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, mainstream Paganism, or Islam. Many hold that all great religions have equivalent mystical truths at their core, and that all religions share an understanding of esoteric tenets with Hermeticism.

Tobias Churton, scholar of obscure religious movements, states that "the Hermetic tradition was both moderate and flexible, offering a tolerant philosophical religion, a religion of the (omnipresent) mind, a purified perception of God, the cosmos, and the self, and much positive encouragement for the spiritual seeker, all of which the student could take

anywhere."

### **Religious and philosophical texts**

Though many more have been falsely attributed to the work of Hermes Trismegistus, Hermeticists commonly accept there to have been forty two books to his credit. However, most of these books are reported to have been destroyed when the Great Library of Alexandria was razed. There is some debate as to who destroyed the library. See Great Library of Alexandria for more information.

There are three major works which are widely known texts for Hermetic beliefs:

The Corpus Hermeticum is the body of work most widely known and is the aforementioned Greek texts. These sixteen books are set up as dialogues between Hermes and a series of others. The first book involves a discussion between Poimandres (also known as Nous and God) and Hermes, supposedly resulting from a meditative state, and is the first time that Hermes is in contact with God. Poimandres teaches the secrets of the Universe to Hermes, and later books are generally of Hermes teaching others such as Asclepius and his son Tat.

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus is a short work which coins the well known term in occult circles "As above, so below." The actual text of that maxim, as translated by Dennis W. Hauck is "That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracle of the One Thing." The tablet also references the three parts of the wisdom of the whole universe, to which Hermes claims his knowledge of these three parts is why he received the name Trismegistus (thrice great, or Ao-Ao-Ao meaning "greatest"). As the story is told, this tablet was found by Alexander the Great at Hebron supposedly in the tomb of Hermes.

The Kybalion: Hermetic Philosophy, is a book published in 1912 CE anonymously by three people calling themselves the "Three Initiates". Many of the Hermetic principles are explained in the book.

The three parts of the wisdom of the whole universe

One account of how Hermes Trismegistus received the name "Trismegistus," meaning "Thrice Great," is because, as he claims in The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, he knows the three parts of the wisdom of the whole universe. The three parts of the wisdom are alchemy, astrology, and theurgy. Marsilio Ficino's opinion was that "they called him Trismegistos because he was the greatest philosopher and the greatest priest and the greatest king." Another explanation, in the Suda (10th century), is that "He was called Trismegistos on account of his praise of the trinity, saying there is one divine nature in the trinity." This last is an example of how Hermes Trismegistus was adopted by Christianity to serve its own particular purposes.

Alchemy - The Operation of the Sun - is not simply the changing of

physical lead into physical gold. It is an investigation into the spiritual constitution, or life of matter and material existence through an application of the mysteries of birth, death and resurrection. The various stages of chemical distillation and fermentation, among them, are aspects of these mysteries, that, when applied quicken Nature's processes in order to bring a natural body to perfection. This perfection is the accomplishment of the Magnum opus (Latin for Great Work).

Astrology - The Operation of the Moon - Hermes claims that Zoroaster discovered this part of the wisdom of the whole universe, astrology, and taught it to man. In Hermetic thought, it is likely that the movements of the planets have meaning beyond the laws of physics and actually holding metaphorical value as symbols in the mind of The All, or God. Astrology has influences upon the Earth, but does not dictate our actions, and wisdom is gained when we know what these influences are and how to deal with them.

Theurgy - The Operation of the Stars - There are two different types of magic, according to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Apology, completely opposite of one another. The first is γοητεα, Goëtia, black magic reliant upon an alliance with evil spirits (i.e. demons). The second is Theurgy, divine magic reliant upon an alliance with divine spirits (i.e. angels, archangels, gods).

Theurgy translates to "The Science or art of Divine Works" and is the practical aspect of the Hermetic art of alchemy. Furthermore, alchemy is seen as the "key" to theurgy, the ultimate goal of which is to become united with higher counterparts, leading to the attainment of Divine Consciousness.

### **Hermetic beliefs**

Hermeticism encompasses both panentheism and Monistic-polytheism within its belief system, which teaches that there is The All, or one "Cause", of which we, and the entire universe, are all a part. Also it subscribes to the notion that other beings such as gods and angels, ascended masters and elementals exist in the Universe.

### **Classical elements**

The four classical elements of earth, water, air, and fire are used often in alchemy, and are alluded to several times in the Corpus Hermeticum.

### **As above, so below**

The Magician displaying the Hermetic concept of "as above, so below." Occultists of the 18th and 19th centuries have speculated that Tarot may be based on The Book of Thoth. These words circulate throughout occult and magical circles, and they come from Hermetic texts. The concept was first laid out in The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, in the words "That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above, corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracles of

the One Thing."

In accordance with the various levels of reality: physical, mental, and spiritual, this relates that what happens on any level happens on every other. This is however more often used in the sense of the microcosm and the macrocosm. The microcosm is oneself, and the macrocosm is the universe. The macrocosm is as the microcosm, and vice versa; within each lies the other, and through understanding one (usually the microcosm) you can understand the other.

### **Reincarnation**

There are mentions in Hermeticism about reincarnation. As Hermes states:

"O son, how many bodies we have to pass through, how many bands of demons, through how many series of repetitions and cycles of the stars, before we hasten to the One alone?" Some say this refers to the various rebirths in one's spiritual nature, rather than the physical body.

### **Morality, good and evil**

Hermes explains in Book 9 of the Corpus Hermeticum that Nous brings forth both good and evil, depending on if he receives input from God or from the demons. God brings good, while the demons bring evil. Among those things brought by demons are: "adultery, murder, violence to one's father, sacrilege, ungodliness, strangling, suicide from a cliff and all such other demonic actions."

This provides a clearcut view that Hermeticism does indeed include a sense of morality. However, the word good is used very strictly, to be restricted to use to the Supreme Good, God. It is only God (in the sense of the Supreme Good, not The All) who is completely free of evil to be considered good. Men are exempt of having the chance of being good, for they have a body, consumed in the physical nature, ignorant of the Supreme Good.

Among those things which are considered extremely sinful, is the focus on the material life, said to be the only thing that offends God: "As processions passing in the road cannot achieve anything themselves yet still obstruct others, so these men merely process through the universe, led by the pleasures of the body."

It is troublesome to oneself to have no "children". This is a symbolic description, not to mean physical, biological children, but rather creations. Immediately before this claim, it is explained that God is "the Father" because it has authored all things, it creates. Whether father or mother, one must create, do something positive in their life, as the Supreme Good is a "generative power". The curse for not having "children" is to be imprisoned to a body, neither male (active) nor female (thoughtful), leaving that person with a type of sterility, that of being unable to accomplish anything.

### **Creation legend**

The tale is given in the first book of the Corpus Hermeticum by God's Nous to Hermes Trismegistus after much meditation. It begins as the ALL creates the elements after seeing the Cosmos and creating one just like it (our Cosmos) from its own constituent elements and souls. From there, the ALL, being both male (Divine Father) and female (Universal Mother), holding the Word (the logos), gave birth to a second Nous, creator of the world. This second Nous created seven powers, or deities, (often seen as Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Sun and the Moon) to travel in circles and govern destiny.

The Word then leaps forth from the materializing elements, which made them unintelligent. Nous then made the governors spin, and from their matter sprang forth creatures without speech. Earth then was separated from Water and the animals (other than Man) were brought forth from the Earth.

The Supreme Nous then created Man, androgynous, in his own image and handed over his creation. Man carefully observed the creation of his brother, the lesser Nous, and received his and his Father's authority over it all. Man then rose up above the spheres' paths to better view the creation, and then showed the form of the ALL to Nature. Nature fell in love with it, and Man, seeing a similar form to his own reflecting in the water fell in love with Nature and wished to dwell in it. Immediately Man became one with Nature and became a slave to its limitations such as gender and sleep. Man thus became speechless (for it lost the Word) and became double, being mortal in body but immortal in spirit, having authority of all but subject to destiny.

The tale does not specifically contradict the theory of evolution, other than for Man, but most Hermeticists fully accept evolutionary theory as a solid grounding for the creation of everything from base matter to Man.

### **Hermetic brotherhoods**

Hermeticism, being opposed by the Church, became a part of the occult underworld, intermingling with other occult movements and practices. The infusion of Hermeticism into occultism has given it great influence in Western magical traditions. Hermeticism's spiritual practices were found very useful in magical work, especially in Theurgic (divine) practices as opposed to Goëtic (profane) practices, due to the religious context from which Hermeticism sprang forth.

Using the teachings and imagery of the Jewish Kabbalah and Christian mysticism, Hermetic Theurgy was used effectively and in a context more easily understood by Europeans in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

A few primarily Hermetic occult orders were founded in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. Hermetic magic underwent a 19th century

revival in Western Europe, where it was practiced by people such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Aurum Solis, Ragon, Kenneth M. Mackenzie, Eliphas Lévi, Frederick Hockley, William Butler Yeats, and Arthur Machen. An example of a society existing as recently as the 1960s would be the Sacred Fraternity of the Cross.

### **Rosicrucianism**

This article or section may contain original research or unverified claims.

Please improve the article by adding references. See the talk page for details. (September 2008). Rosicrucianism was a Hermetic/Christian movement dating back to the 15th century. It is believed to have ceased to exist sometime during the 19th century, though some claim it merely fell into complete secrecy. It consisted of a secretive inner body, and a more public outer body under the direction of the inner body.

This movement was symbolized by the rose (the soul) and the cross (the body of 4 elements). In other words, the human soul crucified on the cross of the material plane. This may be similar to the Egyptian use of the ankh.

The Rosicrucian Order consisted of a graded system (similar to The Order of Freemasons) in which members moved up in rank and gained access to more knowledge, for which there was no fee. Once a member was deemed able to understand the knowledge, they moved on to the next grade.

There were three steps to their spiritual path: philosophy, qabalah, and divine magic. In turn, there were three goals to the order: 1) the abolition of monarchy and the institution of rule by a philosophical elect, 2) reformation of science, philosophy, and ethics, and 3) discovery of the Panacea.

The only sources dating the existence of the Rosicrucians as far back as the 17th century are three German pamphlets: the Fama, the Confessio Fraternitatis, and Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz. [40] Some scholars believe these to be hoaxes, and that antedating Rosicrucian organizations are the first appearance of any real Rosicrucian fraternity.

### **Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn**

Unlike the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was open to both sexes, and treated both as equal. The order was a specifically Hermetic society, teaching the arts of alchemy, qabalah, and the magic of Hermes along with the principles of occult science. Israel Regardie claims that there are many orders, who know what they do of magic from what has been leaked out of the Golden Dawn, by what he deems "renegade members."

The order maintained the tightest of secrecy by severe penalties for loose lips. Overall, the general public was left oblivious to the actions and even existence of the Golden Dawn, making the policies a success. This secrecy was broken first by Aleister Crowley, in 1905, and later by Israel Regardie himself in 1940, giving a detailed account of the order's teachings to the general public.

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