

## THE ESOTERIC THOUGHTS: A PHILOSOPHY OF THE OCCULT

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### Abstract

This work examines the meeting point of philosophy, religion, and occultism, with particular attention to the esoteric ideas that have shaped both ancient civilizations and contemporary spiritual practice. It explores fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the structure of the universe, and the meaning of human existence, approaching these themes through the lens of inner or hidden knowledge. Drawing from a wide range of philosophical and religious traditions- including Greek philosophy, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Igbo Traditional Religion, and Christianity- the study highlights the often-overlooked mystical and symbolic dimensions within these systems. Central to the discussion is the argument that occultism, Astrology, divination, necromancy etc., despite being widely misunderstood and stigmatized, constitutes a serious and coherent field of inquiry. When approached critically and historically, it offers valuable insights into human consciousness, spiritual development, and humanity's enduring search for the divine.

### Introduction

The philosophy of esotericism (from the Greek *esoterikos*, meaning "inner" or "within") refers to a broad range of spiritual and philosophical traditions that emphasize "hidden" knowledge. Unlike mainstream religions or sciences, which are often "exoteric" (accessible to the public), esotericism focuses on truths that are believed to be accessible only through internal experience, specialized study, or spiritual initiation. Esoterists believe that humans can access higher realms of reality through intermediate (tools) such as symbols, rituals, spirits, or creative imagination -this is not imaginary in the sense of being fake; rather, it is a focused mental faculty used to perceive spiritual truths. Occult philosophical root is grounded in the search for hidden laws that govern the relationship between the human mind, the stars, and the divine. While esotericism is the "inner" spiritual path, occult philosophy is the operating manual for how that spiritual reality interacts with the physical world.

In 16<sup>th</sup> century, Agrippa (1993) in his work, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, divided the universe into three levels, each with its own "science". The first is the elemental world (natural magic), which has to do with the study of "occult virtues" of physical things like herbs, water, fire, ether, stones, and animals. It states that objects have hidden powers (like a magnet's pull) that can be harnessed. The second is the Celestial world (Astrology) which is the study of how planets and numbers influence the physical life viewing mathematics and geometry as a "bridge" between the physical and the spiritual. Lastly, the intellectual/Divine world known as *Theurgy*. Theurgy is a type of magic. It consists of a set of magical practices performed to evoke beneficent spirits in order to see them or know them or in order to influence them. For instance, by forcing them to animate a statue, or inhabit a human being (such as a medium, hypnosis), or to disclose mysteries. This is the highest level involving communication with angels, spirits or the divine mind to achieve spiritual purification and enlightenment. (<https://g.co/gemini/share/750fba1719c1>).

In esoteric philosophy, the Divine is understood not merely as a transcendent, external deity but as an all-pervading, immanent principle that underlies existence. Esoteric traditions such as Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Theosophy describe the Divine as an ineffable source from which all levels of reality emanate in hierarchical order. This source is often referred to as the Absolute, the One, or the Logos, emphasizing unity beyond form and duality (Blavatsky, 1888; Plotinus, trans. 1991). Rather than being fully apprehended through rational thought or dogma, the Divine is approached through inner knowledge (gnosis), intuition, and symbolic understanding. Esoteric teachings maintain that the Divine manifests through successive planes of existence- spiritual, mental, and material- each reflecting aspects of the original unity while appearing increasingly differentiated (Faivre, 1994). Thus, divinity is both transcendent, beyond human comprehension, and immanent, present within nature and the human soul itself.

### The Roots of Esotericism: Ancient Wisdom Traditions

Esotericism, broadly understood as the study of spiritual and philosophical traditions concerned with hidden knowledge and inner transformation, can be traced back to the earliest civilizations. These traditions sought not only to explain the visible world but also to uncover the deeper spiritual forces believed to govern the universe and humanity's place within it. Faivre (1994) in his work *Access to Western esotericism*, describes esotericism as a mode of thought characterized by a fascination with the invisible, the symbolic, and the sacred, aiming at direct insight into spiritual realities rather than purely rational explanation.

Ancient Egypt offers one of the earliest examples of a highly developed esoteric worldview. Egyptian spirituality emphasized ritual, symbolism, and the afterlife as essential components of cosmic order. Through sacred rites, myth, and hieroglyphic symbolism, practitioners sought alignment with divine principles and spiritual

regeneration (Hornung, 2001). Closely associated with this heritage is the *Emerald Tablet* attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, a foundational text of Hermeticism. Its teachings articulate the principle of correspondence and outline a path of spiritual transformation through inner knowledge and mastery of cosmic laws (Trismegistus, 2000).

Burkert (1987) in his work, *Ancient Mystery Cults* reveals that in ancient Greece, esoteric thought found expression in mystery traditions such as the Orphic and Eleusinian rites, which emphasized initiation, secrecy, and personal transformation. These traditions held that profound spiritual truths could only be grasped through ritual participation and symbolic experience rather than public instruction. Central to later Greek esotericism was the concept of theurgy, as explained above and understood as the use of sacred ritual and symbolic action to elevate the soul and commune with divine realities. Iamblichus (1988) regarded theurgy as a disciplined spiritual science capable of restoring humanity's connection with the divine.

Similarly, ancient Indian traditions, particularly those found in Vedic and Tantric thought, placed strong emphasis on spiritual discipline and self-realization. These systems explored the relationship between ultimate reality, known as Brahman, and the individual self, or Atman, asserting their fundamental unity (Raju, 1985). Through practices such as meditation, mantra, and ritual, seekers aimed to transcend ignorance and realize this inner truth. Such teachings reflect a deeply esoteric understanding of consciousness and liberation.

In ancient Persia, Zoroastrianism developed a distinctive esoteric framework centered on cosmic dualism and moral responsibility. The religion emphasized the ongoing struggle between truth and falsehood, light and darkness, with Ahura Mazda representing the supreme divine principle of order and wisdom. This ethical and metaphysical dualism would later influence Western religious and esoteric thought, particularly in its symbolic understanding of good and evil.

The Chinese Taoist tradition also contributed significantly to esoteric philosophy through its focus on harmony, balance, and alignment with the natural order. The Tao, understood as the ultimate and ineffable source of all existence, cannot be grasped intellectually but must be realized through simplicity, inner cultivation, and attunement to the rhythms of nature. Taoist practices reflect a subtle esotericism grounded in lived experience rather than doctrinal structure.

In Africa, indigenous spiritual systems such as Igbo, Yoruba and ancient Egyptian traditions emphasize ritual, divination, and communion with spiritual forces as essential paths to knowledge. The Yoruba concept of the Orishas represents dynamic spiritual powers that mediate between the divine and human realms, guiding moral life and spiritual development (Idowu, 1962; Abimbola, 1976). Arazu (2008) cited the two volumes of Prof Anenechukwu Umeh (1997) on *After God is Dibia* where he discussed about the concept of *dibia* as esoteric intersection of science, religion, cultural traditions, beliefs, art, and philosophy in African as it relates to global ethical values and moral keys to developing a morally sound community of persons. It encompasses diverse, often hidden, spiritual systems blending traditional beliefs (ancestor, nature, reincarnation, divination), focusing on inner truths. These traditions demonstrate that esoteric knowledge has long been preserved through oral transmission, ritual practice, and symbolic systems beyond written texts.

Collectively, these ancient wisdom traditions laid the foundations for Western esotericism by shaping ideas about spiritual initiation, symbolic knowledge, and the transformative potential of hidden wisdom. Their enduring influence reflects humanity's persistent desire to understand the deeper dimensions of existence and to access forms of knowledge that transcend ordinary perception (Faivre, 1994).

### **The Science of the Occult**

The science of the occult refers to the systematic exploration and practical application of hidden laws believed to govern consciousness, nature, and the cosmos. Esoteric philosophy often presents occultism as a form of proto-science or trans-science, one that operates beyond the limits of empirical measurement while maintaining internal coherence and experiential validation. Foundational principles such as correspondence, vibration, and analogy suggest that all levels of reality are interconnected and mirror one another in meaningful ways (Agrippa, trans. 1993). In practice, occult science involves disciplined inner experimentation through methods such as meditation, ritual, visualization, and ethical self-regulation, all intended to produce consistent and transformative changes in consciousness. While modern scientific inquiry prioritizes objectivity and reproducibility, occult science emphasizes subjective experience and initiation as necessary conditions for accessing higher forms of knowledge. As Steiner (2004) argues, certain truths require transformed modes of perception rather than detached observation. This distinction does not imply an inherent conflict between science and occultism but instead reflects differing assumptions about how knowledge is acquired and verified.

### **Occult Practices of Magic, Ritual, and Initiation**

Occult practices occupy a vital place in esoteric philosophy as practical means through which individuals seek to engage the hidden dimensions of reality. Within this context, magic is not understood as superstition or illusion but as a disciplined practice involving the conscious direction of subtle forces through intention, symbolism, and the principle of correspondence that links different planes of existence (Agrippa, trans. 1993). Esoteric traditions maintain that the universe is structured according to meaningful relationships between the spiritual, mental, and material realms, and magic operates by working within these relationships.

Ritual, functions as a structured and symbolic language through which practitioners align themselves with cosmic and spiritual principles. By employing sacred words, gestures, rhythms, and consecrated objects, rituals create a space in which the inner world of consciousness can resonate with higher realities. Rather than being empty formalities, these actions are believed to shape awareness, discipline the will, and open pathways to spiritual insight. Through repetition and symbolic depth, ritual becomes a bridge between the visible and invisible aspects of existence.

Initiation represents the most transformative dimension of occult practice. It marks a passage in which esoteric knowledge is not merely taught but lived and internalized through experience. Initiatory rites are designed to awaken dormant spiritual faculties and to guide the individual through distinct stages of inner development. These rites often symbolize a process of death and rebirth, signifying the shedding of the profane or ego-bound self and the emergence of a higher state of awareness (Eliade, 1958). Taken together, magic, ritual, and initiation function as interrelated tools for spiritual ascent, emphasizing ethical discipline, responsibility, and inner preparation as essential safeguards against misuse.

### **The Role of the Adept- Masters, Magicians, and Gurus**

Within esoteric philosophy, the figure of the adept holds a central and respected position as one who has attained advanced spiritual understanding through sustained discipline, initiation, and direct inner experience. Depending on cultural and doctrinal contexts, adepts may be referred to as masters, sages magicians, or gurus, yet they all share a common purpose: guiding others toward deeper levels of spiritual awareness. In the Igbo cosmology, *dibia* is portrayed as an adept who bridges the gap between the physical and material worlds, possessing deeper knowledge of herbs, divination, advisor for physical ailments, life guidance, rituals and sacrifices for the well being of the community. (Arazu, 2008). In Western esoteric traditions, the adept is often depicted as a magician who has mastered the subtle laws that govern the relationship between spiritual and material realms. Through knowledge of symbolism, correspondence, and will, such figures are believed to work consciously with both inner and outer forces (Faivre, 1994). According to Eliade (1958), in Eastern traditions, the guru represents realized wisdom embodied in a living teacher, emphasizing personal transmission and experiential insight rather than purely intellectual instruction. Across traditions, esoteric philosophy maintains that genuine adepthood is not defined by secret knowledge alone but by profound ethical refinement and psychological transformation. The authority of the adept rests not on institutional position but on spiritual attainment, often recognized through initiatory lineages, lived example, and demonstrable insight (Blavatsky, 1888).

### **The Path of Initiation**

Initiation within esoteric philosophy represents a structured path of spiritual awakening marked by progressive stages of discipline, purification, and insight. Initiatory systems are designed to prepare individuals for deeper levels of understanding by cultivating moral integrity, mental clarity, and emotional balance. Practices such as meditation, ascetic discipline, prayer, mantra recitation, and ritual participation serve as practical tools for aligning consciousness with higher spiritual realities (Eliade, 1958). Initiation is frequently expressed through symbolic narratives of death and rebirth, signifying the dissolution of ego-centered identity and the emergence of a transformed self. Unlike exoteric religious participation, which often emphasizes communal belief and outward conformity, esoteric initiation is fundamentally experiential and inward, demanding personal commitment, perseverance, and inner work (Guénon, 1927/2001). The initiatory path is rarely linear; instead, it unfolds in cycles of illumination, trial, and integration, reflecting the dynamic nature of spiritual growth.

### **The Mystical Dimension Christianity**

Esoteric Christianity seeks to uncover the inner and mystical dimensions of Christian doctrine that lie beneath its outward, institutional expressions. Rather than rejecting orthodox belief, it reinterprets Christian symbols and narratives as expressions of universal spiritual truths. From this perspective, the life and teachings of Christ are understood not only as historical events but also as symbolic representations of spiritual initiation and inner transformation. Concepts such as the Logos, the Kingdom of God, and resurrection are interpreted as metaphysical realities accessible through inner awakening rather than solely as future promises or external occurrences (Mead, 1907).

Esoteric Christian traditions, including Gnosticism (belief in dualistic worldviews of spiritual realm and material world often seen as corrupt and evil. According to gnosticism, *Demiurge* is a subordinate deity who creates the material world and is often portrayed as ignorant or malevolent responsible for the flawed and suffering-filled

nature of the material existence) and various strands of Christian mysticism, emphasize direct knowledge of God through inner experience, often described as Christ-consciousness. This state represents the realization of the divine principle within the human soul. The crucifixion is frequently interpreted as the voluntary sacrifice of the lower self - dominated by ego and material attachment - while the resurrection symbolizes spiritual regeneration and conscious union with the Divine (Boehme, 2006). In this understanding, salvation is not a single event secured through belief alone but an ongoing inner process of transformation. Christ thus serves not only as a savior figure but also as the archetype of the awakened human being, embodying the spiritual potential inherent in all humanity.

### **Esotericism in the Modern World**

In the modern world, esotericism continues to exert a quiet but persistent influence, even within societies shaped by secularism and scientific rationalism. The growing interest in mindfulness practices, alternative spiritualities, depth psychology, and holistic approaches to healing reflects a renewed engagement with esoteric ideas, often reframed in psychological or therapeutic language. These contemporary expressions suggest that, despite technological advancement, many individuals remain deeply concerned with questions of meaning, identity, and transcendence. Esoteric philosophy offers interpretive frameworks for addressing such concerns, particularly in a cultural landscape increasingly marked by fragmentation and existential uncertainty. Although traditional initiatory structures have largely declined, modern esotericism tends to emphasize individual exploration and creative synthesis, blending insights from both Eastern and Western traditions. While critics argue that this democratization risks weakening discipline and depth, it also demonstrates the adaptability and enduring relevance of esoteric thought in responding to modern spiritual needs (Heelas, 1996). In this sense, esotericism persists as an alternative way of knowing—one that challenges reductionist views of reality and affirms the transformative potential of inner knowledge.

### **The Ancient Roots of Philosophy**

The Western philosophical tradition is commonly traced to ancient Greece, where the term *philosophia*, meaning “love of wisdom,” is attributed to Pythagoras. Early thinkers such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus laid the foundations for systematic reflection on the nature of reality, change, and the underlying principles of the cosmos. Their inquiries represented more than abstract speculation; they marked an early attempt to discern the order and meaning embedded within the universe. These foundational reflections would later provide fertile ground for the development of esoteric interpretations that sought to move beyond surface appearances toward deeper metaphysical truths.

### **Duality and Transcendence**

From an esoteric standpoint, the human condition is defined by duality and the potential for transcendence. Human beings are seen as microcosms reflecting the macrocosm, composed of both spiritual and material elements. This dual nature creates an inner tension between the higher self, associated with spirit and consciousness, and the lower self, associated with ego, desire, and material attachment (Steiner, 1994). Esoteric philosophy interprets human suffering as a consequence of ignorance of one’s true spiritual nature rather than merely moral failure. The purpose of human existence, therefore, is not salvation through external means but self-realization through inner transformation. Transcendence is achieved by harmonizing these dual aspects through discipline, ethical purification, and spiritual insight, allowing the individual to awaken to their divine origin and destiny. This process is often gradual and cyclical, involving repeated experiences of death and rebirth, whether interpreted symbolically, psychologically, or cosmologically.

### **A Hidden Tradition (The Occult)**

Beyond the sphere of public doctrine and exoteric teaching lies the occult, a body of esoteric knowledge traditionally preserved through secrecy, symbolism, and initiation. The occult does not reject reason or philosophical inquiry; rather, it extends them into realms believed to lie beyond ordinary perception. As Dion Fortune observed, occult science begins where conventional science reaches its limits, addressing dimensions of reality accessible only through disciplined inner development. In this sense, occultism represents a complementary mode of understanding, one that seeks to integrate intellect, intuition, and experience.

### **Practical Applications of Esoteric Knowledge**

Esoteric traditions are not solely concerned with abstract metaphysics; they also offer practical methods for personal transformation and spiritual growth. Practices such as ritual magic, meditation, and contemplative discipline are understood as tools for refining consciousness and accessing deeper levels of awareness. Through these practices, individuals are believed to engage the symbolic structures of the psyche and the cosmos, gradually awakening to their latent spiritual capacities. The initiate, guided by esoteric insight, seeks not escape from the world but a more conscious and meaningful participation in it.

### **The Great Unmanifest- The Source of all existence**

At the heart of esoteric philosophy lies the concept of the Great Unmanifest, the absolute and ineffable ground

from which all existence arises. This principle transcends name, form, and conceptual limitation, existing prior to manifestation and differentiation. Across traditions, it appears under various designations such as the Absolute, the One, Nirguna Brahman, or the Godhead, all emphasizing its transcendence beyond duality and qualification (Shankara, trans. 1978). Esoteric teachings describe the Great Unmanifest not as emptiness but as infinite potentiality, containing all possibilities in a latent state. Through processes of emanation or projection, this unmanifest source gives rise to the manifested worlds while remaining unchanged in its essential nature (Blavatsky, 1888). Because it lies beyond the reach of sensory perception and rational thought, the Great Unmanifest can only be approached through contemplative realization, symbolic understanding, and inner transformation. From this perspective, spiritual realization involves a gradual reorientation of consciousness away from transient forms toward direct awareness of this primordial source of being.

### **Oriental Perspectives- Zoroastrianism and Hinduism**

In the East, philosophical and religious traditions developed alongside similarly profound concerns. In ancient Persia, Zoroaster articulated a vision of reality shaped by moral and cosmic dualism, emphasizing the ongoing struggle between truth and falsehood, light and darkness. This worldview deeply influenced later religious and esoteric systems by framing human existence as an active participation in a cosmic drama. In India, Hindu philosophical traditions explored reality through concepts such as *maya*, the principle of illusion, and *samsara*, the cyclical process of birth and rebirth. These teachings invited individuals to look beyond appearances and recognize the deeper unity underlying existence, offering a sophisticated understanding of consciousness and liberation.

### **The Concept of *Maya* (The Illusion of Separation)**

The concept of *maya* holds a central place in esoteric philosophy and Eastern metaphysical traditions, particularly within Advaita Vedanta and related mystical systems. *Maya* is understood as the cosmic principle through which unity appears as multiplicity, giving rise to the experience of separation and diversity within the manifest world. Rather than suggesting that the world is entirely unreal or meaningless, esoteric philosophy interprets *maya* as a form of relative reality—one that conceals ultimate truth by presenting transient phenomena as independent and self-sustaining (Deutsch, 1973). Through the operation of *maya*, the One appears as many, shaping dualistic perception and the sense of individuality that defines ordinary human experience.

This perceived separation plays a significant role in the formation of attachment, ignorance, and suffering, as consciousness becomes increasingly identified with the body, the ego, and material conditions (Eliade, 1958). Yet esoteric traditions emphasize that liberation does not require the rejection of the world or withdrawal from lived experience. Instead, it involves developing discernment—the ability to perceive the world in its proper relationship to the Absolute. When *maya* is gradually transcended through knowledge (*jnana*), meditation, or initiatory insight, the individual begins to recognize the unity that underlies all apparent diversity. In this state of realization, the self is understood not as a separate entity but as fundamentally identical with the Great Unmanifest, the source of all existence (Shankara, trans. 1978). *Maya*, therefore, is not merely a force of deception but a necessary condition for manifestation itself, providing the contrast through which awakening and spiritual insight become possible.

### **Embracing the Mystery**

As this exploration of esoteric thought draws to a close, it becomes clear that the pursuit of wisdom is not a destination but a lifelong journey. Esoteric philosophy and the occult traditions offer more than hidden doctrines; they provide paths of inquiry, transformation, and self-discovery for those willing to look beyond surface appearances. These teachings invite seekers to engage the mystery of existence with humility, discipline, and openness, recognizing that deeper truths often reveal themselves gradually and through lived experience. To step onto this path is to embrace uncertainty as well as insight, and to acknowledge that the unknown is not something to be feared, but a doorway to deeper understanding. The question that remains is not whether the mysteries exist, but whether one is prepared to seek them.

### **Philosophy as Rational Inquiry into Ultimate Reality**

Philosophy may be described as the disciplined and rational inquiry into ultimate reality. It seeks to address fundamental questions concerning life, the universe, and existence as a whole. Across history, every culture and civilization has developed basic assumptions, beliefs, and interpretive frameworks through which reality is understood. While all human beings think, not all thinking is systematic, critical, or methodologically rigorous. Philosophy distinguishes itself by training the human mind to reason logically, coherently, and critically, thereby enabling the individual to examine foundational questions in a structured and reflective manner (Russell, 1945).

By “ultimate questions” philosophers refer to those inquiries beyond which no further questioning seems possible, such as: What is life? What is matter? What is the universe? What is the nature of the human person? What is reality? Does God exist, and if so, what is the nature of the divine? These questions transcend immediate empirical observation and invite deeper reflection on meaning, purpose, and being itself (Stumpf & Fieser, 2008).

The term *philosophy* is derived from Greek roots and is traditionally attributed to the Greek sage Pythagoras, who is said to have coined the expression *philia tēs sophias*, meaning “love of wisdom” (Guthrie, 1962). This

designation underscores the philosophical attitude as one of humble pursuit rather than the possession of absolute knowledge. Long before Socrates emerged as a central figure in Greek philosophy, several thinkers—collectively known as the Pre-Socratic philosophers—were already engaged in rational speculation about the nature of reality. Thales of Miletus (c. 7th–6th century BCE) proposed that water was the fundamental substance underlying all change in the universe. Anaximenes (c. 588–524 BCE) suggested air as the primary principle, while Heraclitus (c. 540–475 BCE) identified fire as the basic element of reality. Anaximander (c. 610–547 BCE), on the other hand, posited an indeterminate and boundless principle, the *apeiron*, as the source of all things (Kirk, Raven, & Schofield, 1983). These early thinkers shared a common concern: to explain the cosmos not through myth but through rational principles.

Heraclitus of Ephesus is especially notable for his doctrine of perpetual change. He argued that reality is characterized by constant flux or becoming, famously asserting that one cannot step into the same river twice, since both the river and the individual are continually changing. Although human perception tends to impose stability on the world, Heraclitus maintained that change is the most fundamental feature of reality (Barnes, 1982). Beyond Greece, philosophical inquiry also developed in ancient Persia. Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, founded the religious-philosophical system known as Zoroastrianism or *Mazdeism* around the 8th century BCE. One of the central concerns of Persian thought was the problem of evil: how to account for suffering, misfortune, sickness, premature death, moral wickedness, and natural disasters within the structure of reality. Zoroastrianism addressed this problem by positing two ultimate and opposing principles—*Ahura Mazda*, the force of goodness and light, and *Angra Mainyu*, the force of evil and darkness (Boyce, 2001).

Within this dualistic framework, human history is interpreted as the arena of an ongoing cosmic struggle between good and evil. Moral evil arises from the free choices of rational agents, while physical evil is attributed to destructive cosmic forces. This worldview profoundly influenced later religious and philosophical systems, including Manichaeism, which adopted a similar metaphysical dualism (Russell, 1945). Philosophy, therefore, emerges as humanity's sustained effort to understand ultimate reality through reasoned inquiry. From early cosmological speculation to ethical and metaphysical reflection, philosophical thought represents the human desire to move beyond myth, tradition, and unexamined belief toward a deeper, more coherent understanding of existence.

### **Religious Philosophy and Human Reason in Western Religious Thought**

In the history of human thought, religion initially served as the primary framework through which fundamental questions about life, the universe, and existence were addressed. In ancient India, religious tradition provided authoritative answers to such questions until certain reflective priests and thinkers began to critically examine the foundations of inherited beliefs and ritual practices. Moving beyond unquestioning acceptance of tradition, they employed reason and introspection to reinterpret religious data, giving rise to what later developed as Brahmanism or Hindu philosophy (Radhakrishnan, 1951). At the center of this philosophical system lies the concept of *Brahman*, the ultimate principle or first cause, which may be broadly understood as the absolute reality or God. Within this framework, Brahman alone is ultimately real, while all phenomenal existence is regarded as *maya*, an appearance or illusion that obscures true reality.

This worldview teaches that existence is cyclical in nature. Upon death, the life principle or soul (*atman*) is believed to undergo rebirth in accordance with the doctrine of *samsara* or metempsychosis - the transmigration of souls (Flood, 1996). Reincarnation is often perceived as a form of bondage or suffering, from which liberation is sought. Through ascetic discipline, moral self-control, and spiritual practice, the individual strives to escape this cycle and attain *moksha* or *nirvana*, understood as liberation from the evils of worldly existence and rebirth. Practices such as meditation, contemplation, trance, and ecstatic experience are highly valued within Hinduism, and the systematic methods developed to achieve these states are collectively known as yoga (Eliade, 1958). Through sustained yogic practice, the aspirant seeks ultimate freedom from the cycle of reincarnation.

Philosophy, however, is fundamentally concerned with seeking answers to basic and ultimate questions through the disciplined use of human reason. While religions often claim that the creator of the universe has revealed truths directly to chosen individuals, such claims invite rational examination by sincere seekers of knowledge. Historical religious texts, including the Bible and the Qur'an, present accounts of divine revelation that offer answers to questions about reality and existence. Yet it would be philosophically unsound for any tradition to assume that human reason has been entirely unaided by the Creator at any point in history or across cultures. To make such a claim would be to presume to speak conclusively on behalf of God, a position that exceeds the limits of both reason and humility.

The Hebrew Old Testament presents a distinctive approach to the enduring problem of good and evil. It asserts that an infinitely good Creator is the source of all that is good, while evil arises from human disobedience rather than divine intention. The creation narrative describes the universe as emerging “very good” from the creative act

of God (Genesis 1:31, New Revised Standard Version). Evil is introduced into human history through the disobedience prompted by the serpent, traditionally identified as the devil- a fallen angel portrayed in later texts such as the Book of Job as an adversary of humanity, yet still counted among the “sons of God” (Job 1:6). In later biblical reflection, and partly to avoid the strict dualism associated with Zoroastrianism, the Old Testament affirms God’s ultimate sovereignty by portraying Him as lord over both prosperity and calamity (Isaiah 45:7).

Christian philosophy further develops the relationship between divine revelation and human reason by emphasizing the transformative role of the Holy Spirit. Christianity teaches that the Spirit bestows gifts that elevate human intellect beyond the limits of ordinary cognition, particularly the gifts of wisdom and understanding. In Hebrew Kabbalistic tradition, an esoteric school of Jewish thought, these intellectual-spiritual faculties are referred to as *Hochmah* (wisdom) and *Binah* (understanding) (Scholem, 1974). History - both sacred and secular- records individuals whose lives exemplify extraordinary depth of wisdom and moral insight, such as Socrates in ancient Greece and Mahatma Gandhi in modern India. These examples suggest that the activity of the divine Spirit is not confined by time, culture, or religious boundaries.

Nevertheless, the task of acquiring wisdom and understanding through disciplined effort remains an essential responsibility of humanity. While extraordinary inspiration may occur, intellectual and moral development generally requires sustained study and reflection. Humanity is not exempt from the labour of discovering the laws and principles embedded within creation. In antiquity, figures such as sages, poets, prophets, and priests served as guides in this pursuit of wisdom. According to Plato, Socrates held that certain individuals possess a natural aptitude for abstract thought, enabling them to apprehend universal ideas without reliance on sensory images (Plato, trans. 1997). These individuals were capable of contemplating forms such as beauty, goodness, and justice - what later philosophers, including Kant, would describe as categories of understanding.

Plato further maintained that the purpose of formal education was to identify and cultivate such gifted minds, enabling them to sustain higher levels of abstract reasoning and contemplation. Through engagement with the realm of ideas, which may be regarded as the spiritual dimension of reality, these individuals could apprehend cosmic harmony and wisdom and thereby introduce greater order and justice into human society.

Philosophy remains an ongoing and dynamic enterprise, continually enriched by successive generations of thinkers. Many disciplines now classified as empirical sciences- such as physics, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics - originated as branches of philosophical inquiry into the nature and laws of reality. Plato himself held that the study of physics was a necessary preparation for metaphysics, the philosophical investigation of being and ultimate causes. Consequently, a solid grounding in the empirical sciences provides a valuable foundation for philosophical reflection. Every science ultimately culminates in a philosophy of that science, and philosophical thought is continually stimulated by advances in human knowledge. As understanding of the self and the universe deepens, philosophical interpretations of reality become more refined, and the intuitions of disciplined and gifted thinkers grow ever more profound.

## **The Occult**

### **Occultism as Esoteric Knowledge and Practice**

There exists a body of knowledge and practice that, for lack of a more precise term, has come to be known as *occultism*. The word is derived from the Latin *occultus*, meaning hidden, covered, or veiled. Occult knowledge is traditionally understood as knowledge concealed from the uninitiated or the profane, not because it is irrational or sinister, but because it requires a certain moral, intellectual, and spiritual preparation to be properly understood and applied (Butler, 1959). Unfortunately, the term *occult* has acquired negative connotations in popular discourse, obscuring the fact that occultism represents a highly developed and systematized discipline involving both theory and practice. For this reason, insiders often prefer the designation *esoteric science* in order to distinguish it from *exoteric* knowledge, which is openly taught in formal institutions of learning.

A central principle within esoteric traditions is the necessity of discretion and secrecy. One of the most frequently cited justifications for this principle is attributed to Jesus Christ, who warned against casting pearls before swine and repeatedly emphasized secrecy regarding spiritual mysteries (Mark 4:11–12). Even within his circle of twelve apostles, Jesus maintained an inner group of three, underscoring the graded transmission of knowledge. Such examples suggest that secrecy is not accidental but intrinsic to the responsible handling of transformative knowledge.

As a theoretical system, occultism is often referred to as *esoteric philosophy*, while its practical dimension is known as *ritual magic*. In this inquiry, reference is made to well-known adepts of both Eastern and Western esoteric traditions. Dion Fortune, for instance, authored over twenty works on occult philosophy, while H. P. Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* (1888/1974) remains a foundational text in modern esotericism. Both figures were not only prolific writers but also practicing adepts and founders of occult fraternities.

According to Fortune (1930),

“occult science begins where natural science ends,” a claim that parallels the scope of metaphysics within philosophy. While the subject matter of occult science overlaps with that of metaphysics, the methodologies differ. Occult science employs not only the ordinary senses but also latent human faculties, which are gradually awakened through disciplined training. These faculties enable the practitioner to apprehend realities beyond sensory perception and, under strict ethical constraints, to interact with them. Occult philosophy resists the tendency to reduce God to a distant abstraction or a purely speculative concept. Instead, it locates the divine within the inner being of humanity, viewing both the individual and the universe as expressions of divine thought. From this perspective, human beings are sustained by the divine mind and derive their existence from what is described as God’s creative power. Humanity is thus understood as an emanation from the divine source - “light from light,” a spark of divinity rather than a radically separate creation. This conception extends to the universe itself, which Fortune famously described as “a concept in the mind of a Great Entity” (Fortune, 1930).

By “Great Entity,” occult philosophy refers to a cosmic consciousness implied by a worldview that attributes self-awareness, in varying degrees, to all levels of existence, from atoms to galaxies. Accusations of pantheism are of little concern to occultists, who regard such criticisms as arising from narrowly trained logic unable to transcend dualistic categories. Matter, in this framework, is not opposed to spirit but represents a denser manifestation of a single underlying reality. Consequently, occultism rejects both unexamined religious faith and purely materialistic science as incomplete approaches to understanding the universe (Jones, 1971).

Jones (1971) characterizes occult investigation as a *superphysical science* that emerges in reaction to both blind faith and materialistic reductionism. While demanding rigorous conceptual clarity and open-minded inquiry, occultism rests upon a fundamentally Platonic emphasis on the *idea* or *concept* as the organizing principle through which reality becomes intelligible and subject to conscious direction.

Dion Fortune’s cosmogony provides a useful illustration of esoteric metaphysics. She posits, first, the existence of the *Great Unmanifest*, conceived as an infinite reservoir of latent force underlying all existence and corresponding, at the exoteric level, to the concept of God. Second, she describes an outpouring of this latent force in a directed and limited stream, analogous to energy. Third, she explains the formation of matter as the result of intersecting lines.

### **Esoteric Terminology and the Language of Hidden Knowledge**

Every belief system and every body of knowledge constitutes an integrated whole whose parts cannot be fully understood in isolation. This principle applies especially to esoteric traditions, where terminology functions symbolically and contextually rather than in a purely literal sense. The concept of the Divine, for example, is conceived differently in occult philosophy than in conventional religious practice. For the occultist, the Divine is understood as a universal reality apprehended by human beings across cultures, epochs, and spiritual traditions. Both religion and occultism address this apprehension of the divine, yet they do so with different emphases.

Religion, in its various manifestations, typically stresses the transcendence of God and seeks to establish a personal *I-Thou* relationship between humanity and the divine (Buber, 1958). Occultism, by contrast, emphasizes the immanence of divinity in nature and especially in the human being. Its primary concern is not worship alone but transformation - encouraging individuals to live and act in accordance with their intrinsic divinity. The foundational moral imperative of occultism is encapsulated in Jesus’ declaration, “I have said, you are gods” (John 10:34, New Revised Standard Version), a statement that implies the ethical and spiritual obligation summed up in the maxim: *Human being, know yourself*.

### **Karma, Tarot, and Astrology**

The concept of *karma* is another cornerstone of occult philosophy. Derived from Sanskrit, one of the oldest Indo-European languages, karma refers not merely to moral retribution but to a law of cause and effect governing consciousness across lifetimes. In esoteric systems such as the Tarot, karma is symbolically represented as a limiting yet educative force shaping human destiny.

In *Arcanum Tertium* of the Tarot, karma is described as the cumulative record of a soul’s incarnations, shaping future circumstances while preserving free will within defined limits (Case, 1947). Alongside Tarot, astrology constitutes another major field of occult study, influencing both scholarly literature and everyday language. Popular astrology, found in newspapers and social discourse, represents only a simplified expression of a far more complex symbolic science.

Occultism, therefore, is not a marginal curiosity but a pervasive influence embedded in culture, language, religion, and psychology. As such, educators and scholars alike must engage seriously with its terminology if they are to understand the symbolic foundations of human thought and spiritual aspiration.

### **Language, Experience, and Esoteric Expression**

Throughout history, individuals and cultures have attempted to communicate ideas and experiences acquired through occult or mystical practices. However, language as a medium of communication has intrinsic limitations, particularly when applied to transcendent or non-ordinary states of consciousness. A frequently cited example

within esoteric discourse is the mystical experience of Paul of Tarsus. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows... and he heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4, NRSV).

Within occult interpretation, such an experience would be understood as an instance of consciousness operating outside the dense physical body. Adepts, according to esoteric tradition, may choose to articulate such experiences selectively, recognizing that words themselves can function as instruments of power capable of producing constructive or destructive effects. When an individual consciously employs such power, they move beyond the category of mystic and enter that of magician or initiate. Unfortunately, terms such as *magician*, *witch*, or *wizard* have been burdened by centuries of persecution and prejudice, obscuring their original esoteric meanings.

### **Magic, Secrecy, and Ritual Practice**

A lot of books on occultism employs terminology that may appear forbidden or unsettling to the uninitiated. The term *magic* is used in esoteric philosophy in sense that surprised newcomers. In esoteric philosophy, magic does not refer to superstition or illusion but to the disciplined application of subtle laws governing consciousness and reality. As W. E. Butler (1959) explains:

“Magic has lain so long under a cloud of superstition, ignorance, and fear on the one hand, and on the other been obscured by a smoke-screen of secrecy engineered by those by those who feared loss of power and prestige if the subject was brought into the light, ... that it is very difficult for the average writer to do more than give a general outline of the subject” (p. 9).

For Butler, magic is effectively synonymous with occultism. He further addresses the question of secrecy in esoteric orders, noting that while much information is publicly available in books and manuscripts, the true object of secrecy lies in the *pattern* or structured synthesis of that information (Butler, 1959). It is this pattern that enables effective ritual and is therefore guarded.

A useful analogy is found in the Roman Catholic Mass. The text of the Canon can be read by any literate person, yet when enacted ritually by an ordained priest, it is believed to produce specific spiritual effects described by Catholic theology as *ex opere operato*- that is, efficacy resulting from the performance of the ritual itself. In such cases, the materials used, the qualifications of the officiating priest, the prescribed gestures, and the surrounding atmosphere are all essential. These elements together constitute ritual, a practice as ancient as humanity itself.

Butler (1959) further explains that ritual patterns are protected because thought itself is a formative power. In magical lodges, constructive visualization is employed to generate defined thought-forms. Based on repeated clairvoyant observation, occult traditions hold that these forms can be strengthened or disrupted by external mental interference, hence the necessity of secrecy.

Comparable laws are observed in indigenous African traditions, such as Igbo rainmaking rites and the practices of *dibia* (traditional healers). From an occult perspective, even the sacraments of Christian churches may be understood as forms of ritual magic. The challenge, therefore, lies not in rejecting the term *magic* but in rescuing it from the semantic distortion it has suffered over centuries.

### **The Magus, the Initiate, and the Esoteric Lineage**

This semantic discomfort is evident in biblical translation. In the Gospel of Matthew, the visitors from the East who honor the newborn Jesus are commonly rendered as “wise men.” However, the original term *magoi* is the plural of *magus*, meaning magician or occult adept (Matthew 2:1). While magi were indeed wise, the reluctance to use the term *magician* reflects historical prejudice rather than textual accuracy.

The magician is often referred to instead as an *initiate*. Dion Fortune’s *The Training and Work of an Initiate* (1930) and Butler’s *The Magician: His Training and Work* (1959) address the same subject from different perspectives. Similarly, Eliphas Lévi (Alphonse Louis Constant), a former Roman Catholic deacon turned occult adept, produced one of the most influential works in Western esotericism, *Transcendental Magic* (Lévi, 2009). H. P. Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* (1888 / 1974) further established esoteric philosophy as a subject worthy of sustained scholarly attention.

### **The Qabalah and Western Esoteric Cosmology**

Israel Regardie occupies a central place in modern occultism, particularly for his role in popularizing the Hebrew Qabalah. This ancient Jewish esoteric system presents a symbolic map of both the human being (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm). Central to the Qabalah is the *Tree of Life*, a glyph composed of ten *Sephiroth* (emanations) through which divine energy manifests.

For pedagogical purposes, the Tree of Life is sometimes likened to a musical octave. The esoteric student visualizes the Sephiroth, identifies them with inner psychological and spiritual states, and traces consciousness from the physical plane back to its divine source. Through this process, the individual comes to understand both personal constitution and the cosmic archetype known as *Adam Kadmon* (Regardie, 1935).

Qabalistic doctrine teaches that emanation precedes creation, creation precedes formation, and formation precedes the physical world. Human beings exist simultaneously across these unseen levels, though most remain conscious

only of the material plane. Foundational texts in this tradition include Fortune's *The Mystical Qabalah* (1935), Butler's *Magic and the Qabalah* (1952), Regardie's *The Tree of Life* (1935), and Schaya's *The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah* (1971).

### Conclusion

This study has examined the intricate relationship between philosophy, religion, and occultism, demonstrating that esoteric thought constitutes neither a marginal curiosity nor a deviation from rational inquiry, but rather a persistent and meaningful dimension of humanity's search for ultimate reality. Across cultures and historical periods, human beings have sought to understand existence not only through external observation and doctrinal belief, but also through inner experience, symbolic interpretation, and disciplined transformation. Esotericism emerges within this broader intellectual and spiritual landscape as a mode of inquiry that complements rational philosophy and religious faith by addressing dimensions of reality that resist purely empirical or literal explanation.

By tracing esoteric ideas through ancient wisdom traditions- Greek philosophy, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, African indigenous religions, and Christianity- this work has shown that hidden or inner knowledge has consistently played a formative role in shaping metaphysical reflection, ethical systems, and spiritual practice. Concepts such as emanation, duality, *maya*, initiation, and the microcosm- macrocosm correspondence recur across traditions, suggesting a shared human intuition about the layered structure of reality and the transformative potential of consciousness. These recurring patterns support the view that esotericism represents a perennial dimension of thought rather than an isolated historical phenomenon.

The examination of occultism as esoteric knowledge and practice further challenges popular misconceptions that associate it exclusively with superstition, irrationality, or moral danger. When approached critically and historically, occultism reveals itself as a disciplined system that integrates metaphysical theory, ethical responsibility, and practical methods of inner development. Ritual, symbolism, and secrecy are shown not as arbitrary features, but as functional elements designed to safeguard transformative knowledge and ensure its responsible application. In this sense, occultism parallels philosophy and science in its commitment to coherence and method, even while operating within a different epistemological framework.

Equally significant is the role of human reason within religious and esoteric contexts. Rather than opposing revelation or mystical experience, reason functions as a necessary instrument for discernment, interpretation, and integration. The history of religious philosophy demonstrates that faith and reason need not be antagonistic; instead, they can serve as complementary avenues through which humanity engages the mysteries of existence. Esoteric Christianity, in particular, illustrates how symbolic and mystical interpretations can deepen rather than undermine theological understanding, presenting spiritual salvation as an ongoing process of inner transformation. In the modern world, where scientific rationalism and secularization often dominate intellectual discourse, the continued relevance of esoteric philosophy lies in its capacity to address questions of meaning, identity, and transcendence that remain unresolved by material explanations alone. Contemporary interest in mindfulness, depth psychology, holistic spirituality, and symbolic systems reflects a renewed engagement with esoteric themes, albeit in adapted forms. This persistence suggests that the esoteric impulse responds to enduring human needs rather than transient cultural trends.

The meeting point of philosophy, religion, and occultism reveals a rich and complex tradition of inquiry oriented toward both understanding and transformation. Esotericism invites a re-evaluation of knowledge itself, challenging reductionist assumptions and affirming that reality may be approached through multiple, complementary modes of knowing. To engage seriously with esoteric thought is not to abandon reason, but to expand its horizon- recognizing that the deepest truths about existence may require not only critical analysis, but also inner discipline, symbolic insight, and experiential realization. In the end, the value of this inquiry lies not merely in what it explains, but in how it invites humanity to rethink its place within the cosmos and its relationship to the divine.

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