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and the Transformation of Traditions

edited by

Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss

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Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke
(1953-2012)

Contents

Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss	Introduction	9
I. Theosophical Transformations		
Julie Chajes	Construction Through Appropriation: Kabbalah in Blavatsky's Early Works	33
Isaac Lubelsky	Friedrich Max Müller vs. Madame Blavatsky: A Chronicle of a (Very) Strange Relationship	73
John Patrick Deveney	The Two Theosophical Societies: Prolonged Life, Conditional Immortality, and the Individualized Immortal Monad	93
Tomer Persico	A Pathless Land: Krishnamurti and the Tradition of No Tradition	115
II. Kabbalistic Appropriations		
Boaz Huss	"Qabbalah, the Theos-Sophia of the Jews:" Jewish Theosophists and their Perceptions of Kabbalah	137
Eugene Kuzmin	Maksimilian Voloshin and the Kabbalah	167
Andreas Kilcher	Kabbalah and Anthroposophy: A Spiritual Alliance According to Ernst Müller	197
Olav Hammer	Jewish Mysticism Meets the Age of Aquarius: Elizabeth Clare Prophet on the Kabbalah	223
III. Global Adaptations		
Shimon Lev	Gandhi and his Jewish Theosophist Supporters in South Africa	245

Victoria Ferentinou	Light From Within or Light From Above? Theosophical Appropriations in Early Twentieth-Century Greek Culture	273
Karl Baier	Theosophical Orientalism and the Structures of Intercultural Transfer: Annotations on the Appropriation of the <i>Cakras</i> in Early Theosophy	309
Massimo Introvigne	Lawren Harris and the Theosophical Appropriation of Canadian Nationalism	355
Helmut Zander	Transformations of Anthroposophy from the Death of Rudolf Steiner to the Present Day	387

Introduction

Julie Chajes and Boaz Huss

Appreciation of the historical importance of the Theosophical Society (henceforth, TS) and related movements is growing, and rightly so, yet the extent of theosophical influences can still be surprising, even to scholars in the field. The chapters of this volume contribute to our increasing recognition of the global impact of the TS and its ideas and illustrate lesser-known instances of theosophical appropriation around the world.

From its very beginning, the TS was an international movement. Its founders were an American lawyer and journalist, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907), an Irish-American lawyer, William Quan Judge (1851-1896), and a Russian occultist writer and adventurer, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891). Following its founding in New York in 1875, the TS soon became a worldwide organization. In 1879, its headquarters moved to India, first to Bombay, and later to Adyar, Madras. From the 1880's, theosophical lodges were established around the world: in America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Today, the movement has branches in about sixty countries. The first objective of the Society (as formulated in 1896) was "to form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color," and it was open to members of diverse religious, national, and ethnic backgrounds. The universalistic nature of the TS was expressed in its interest in different religious and esoteric traditions: first, in Western esoteric, ancient Egyptian, and Kabbalistic doctrines, and later, in Hindu and Buddhist ones. As a movement, Theosophy encouraged the comparative study of religion and integrated into its teachings concepts and themes derived from a large variety of contexts. Unlike other esoteric movements, the TS included many non-Christian and non-Western members from the outset. These members participated in theosophical adaptations and interpretations of their traditions. Despite these

interpretations being offered by adherents of the traditions themselves, they were usually predicated on a modern esoteric perspective, within a Western discursive framework. Theosophical appropriations had a considerable impact on the way different religious traditions were perceived in modern Western culture. In particular, they had a decisive and significant impact on new developments in, and transformations of, modern Kabbalistic, Hindu, and Buddhist currents.

The chapters that follow are the product of an international workshop held at Ben-Gurion University in December 2013, funded by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF) and the Goldstein-Goren Center for Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University. Scholars attended the conference from Israel, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Holland, the United States, Japan, and Sri Lanka. The workshop was part of a four-year research project funded by the ISF (Grant 774/10) on Kabbalah and the Theosophical Society.

As part of that project, we studied Jewish involvement in the TS, the formation of Jewish theosophical groups, and the adaptation and interpretation of Kabbalah by Jewish and non-Jewish theosophists. These topics were also central to the workshop, a centrality reflected in this volume, with its section on Kabbalistic appropriations. The workshop considered Judaism's often-ambivalent placement between the categories of "East" and "West" and the TS's role in the construction of modern Jewish and non-Jewish identities in relation to those categories, *inter alia*. Since we believe questions relating to Jewish theosophists and the appropriations of Kabbalah in the TS should be understood in wider context, the workshop also examined theosophical adaptations in other cultures and traditions as well, especially within Anthroposophy, which emerged directly from the TS.

The chapters in the volume examine intersections between theosophical thought with areas as diverse as the arts, literature, and poetry, scholarship, modern interpretations of Judaism and of Kabbalah, Orientalism, and politics, especially nationalism. How may we explain the extent of these theosophical influences? Although they are very different from one another, these chapters join each other in pointing towards congruencies between theosophical ideas and the cultural logic of a wide range of contemporary currents. In other words, we suggest that Theosophy was exceptionally successful (and influential) because

it was a key expression of some of the central cultural, intellectual, and political developments of the period. Yet, for all these congruencies between theosophical, artistic, literary, political and scholarly themes, there were also important differences and tensions. Max Müller's negative stance towards his theosophical admirer, Madame Blavatsky, and Gandhi's ambivalent attitude towards the TS (even though it had influenced him) are just two of the examples discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Outlines

The present volume includes thirteen chapters, each of them a fascinating case study of a theosophical appropriation of a different type and in a different context. They are divided into three thematic sections: *Theosophical Transformations*, *Kabbalistic Appropriations*, and *Global Adaptations*. The first section, *Theosophical Transformations*, focuses on the appropriations that took place in the early TS, especially in the thought of Madame Blavatsky.

In the opening paper, Julie Chajes discusses two of Blavatsky's early works that refer to Kabbalah: "A Few Questions to Hiraḥ" (1875) and *Isis Unveiled* (1877). The chapter elucidates Blavatsky's doctrines of Kabbalah in those texts, each of which have distinct emphases. In "A Few Questions," Blavatsky emphasized Rosicrucianism and Spiritualism, identifying Kabbalah with the current doctrines of the Theosophical Society: conditional immortality and metempsychosis. Blavatsky abandoned these doctrines in her later works. In "A Few Questions," she alluded to three main types of Kabbalah: An original, Oriental Cabala, its Jewish derivation, and the Rosicrucian Cabala, which drew on the Oriental and Jewish varieties. Blavatsky was influenced in her understanding of the Jewish Cabala by the work of the Polish Jewish scholar, Christian David Ginsburg (1831-1914), and many of her ideas about the Rosicrucian Cabala came from the work of the freemasonic writer Hargrave Jennings (1817-1890). Blavatsky brought these two sources—the work of a professional scholar and that of an amateur historian—together in her narrative.

Two years later, in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky postulated a Buddhist source for Kabbalah, a position unique to that work. The universalism

of her Kabbalah was now more pronounced, and her treatment of Kabbalistic doctrines much more detailed. In proposing a Buddhist source, she was influenced by C. W. King (1818-1888), an expert on gemstones who wrote a book about Gnosticism. Other sources cited in Blavatsky's discussions of Kabbalah include the early-modern Christian Hebraist and Kabbalist, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-1689), and the nineteenth-century French Jewish scholar, Adolphe Franck (1809-1893). Although Blavatsky does seem to have known Franck's renowned 1843 work on the Kabbalah in the original French, at least in part, her citations of Franck and of Knorr were derived largely second-hand through the works of the Boston lawyer, Samuel Fales Dunlap (1825-1905). One again, therefore, Blavatsky drew together an assortment of scholarly and non-scholarly influences.

In her narratives, Blavatsky drew on these diverse sources to affirm *Ain Soph* as the true source of the cosmos in explicit opposition to the idea that Jehovah was the creator. The true origin of the cosmos in *Ain Soph* was, Blavatsky claimed, attested in the Bible, and in philosophies and religions the world over from time immemorial, but only in their correct, Kabbalistic interpretations. Thus cast as the sole legitimate form of Biblical hermeneutics and as an ancient science, Kabbalah was used to attack the hegemony of the Catholic and Protestant Churches and the prepotence of "materialism," especially within the natural sciences. Kabbalah therefore empowered Blavatsky to pronounce boldly on the ongoing disputes arising from the baffling modern diversification of scientific and theological developments, attempting to lead all branches of human knowledge back to their claimed original integrity.

Blavatsky's Kabbalah, Chajes argues, was a modern form of Kabbalah. It incorporated numerous and diverse modern sources and it was related to modern discourses of religion, science, progression, and decline, and, importantly, to modernizing interpretations of Buddhism, Judaism, and Kabbalah. All of this was marshaled in the proposition of solutions to modern "problems" such as the "conflict" between religion and science and the perceived growth of nihilism. This discursive entanglement and integration of seemingly incongruous sources was of central importance to the shape modern (and post-modern) Kabbalah would come to take, both in subsequent theosophical literature and in

the myriad of theosophically influenced movements within New Age and alternative spirituality.

In the following chapter, Isaac Lubelsky charts the relationship between Madame Blavatsky and the renowned German-born Oxford Orientalist, Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900). Blavatsky's references to Müller are often mentioned in passing in accounts of her sources, but this is the first detailed exploration of this topic, looking at the relationship from both sides. For Blavatsky's part, she revered Müller as a scholar and quoted his works in corroboration of her theories both in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*. Müller began with a curious and relatively friendly attitude towards the Theosophists but it cooled over time, ending in explicit dislike. In Lubelsky's account, other characters play minor but important roles in the ongoing drama of Blavatsky vs Müller: Henry Olcott, Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), Annie Besant (1847-1933), Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840-1921).

Considering Blavatsky's two major works alongside Müller's article "Comparative Mythology" (1856) and his 1892 *Gifford Lectures*, later published as *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (1893), Lubelsky highlights the common ground, as well as the antagonism between the two authors. Commonalities include their related (yet differing) images of "Aryan" India as a land of pristine and ancient wisdom as well as the concrete political influence Müller and the Theosophists enjoyed on the subcontinent. In his documentation of this unique relationship between the philologist and the matriarch of the "New Age," Lubelsky deepens our understanding of intersections between scholarship and occultism in the nineteenth century as well as the reception of Theosophy among some of Blavatsky's contemporaries.

In the third chapter, John Patrick Deveney clarifies the nature of early Theosophy vis a vis what the Society became from the 1880's onwards, arguing that the differences between the two are so great that we are justified in speaking of two Theosophical Societies. Redressing an unfortunate under-acknowledgement of the nature of early Theosophy in the scholarly literature, Deveney analyses Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* as well as her early articles and letters. He also considers the writings of other central early theosophists, such as Damodar Mavalankar (b.

1857), William Quan Judge, Albert Rawson (1829-1902), and Colonel Olcott. These demonstrate, Deveney argues, that the Society as established in 1875 was devoted to practical occult work, and specifically to the development of the ability to project the astral double. This ability was considered an indication of the fusion of the student's "individuality" with their "divine spirit" to create an "individualized" entity capable of surviving death. The early theosophists attempted to prolong life long enough to achieve this goal and to that end they instituted a number of rules, including temperance, fasting, and some form of sexual abstinence. A system of three degrees was established to indicate the student's progress. From the 1880's, these practical, magical, and occult aims were downplayed, discouraged, and even condemned by the theosophical mahatmas as "selfish." Blavatsky began to describe the individual as the "false personality." Rather than teaching that this individual could become immortal, she now taught that after death it disintegrated and that the only human principles to survive (*atma*, *buddhi*, and part of *manas*) do not constitute the individual who desires immortality here and now, but rather are impersonal in character. The failure of the Theosophical Society to produce the practical occult instruction they had promised and the change in the Society's teachings prompted some theosophists to look elsewhere, for example to the occult movements the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor and the Golden Dawn. The Theosophical rejection of individual immortality was also one of the principle elements that led to the anti-Blavatskyan Christian Theosophical current.

Deveney's clarification of the Society's early teachings and change of doctrinal direction is important when considering the issue of theosophical appropriations because to a significant extent, the "two Societies" must be considered separately in terms of their influences and legacies. The first Society was the heir of ideas associated with the Rosicrucians and with Cagliostro (1743-1795), the Italian mage who spread a system of practical occultism across Europe. An heir of this early type of Theosophy was American New Thought. Like Cagliostro, New Thought teachers taught some form of occult sexual practice. This may have involved the retention or ingestion of semen, and was predicated on the idea that sexual energy made psychic and spiritual development possible. This idea was an open secret,

Deveney argues, known to all in the quarter century before World War I. Although Deveney does not attribute explicitly sexual practices to Blavatsky and her followers, the early theosophists were well aware of a connection between sexual energy and the achievement of conditional immortality. Whatever the details of the practical work they pursued, Deveney concludes, it is clear that there was such work, focused on lengthening life and developing an individualized monad capable of surviving death. This was later concealed and (almost) forgotten.

In Chapter Four, Tomer Persico argues that Krishnamurti's famous dissolution of the Order of the Star in 1929—including his abandonment of the role of messiah assigned to him by Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater (1854-1934)—did not represent his negation of religious tradition or the establishment of new one, but rather his embrace of an existing current: the "Tradition of No Tradition" with roots stretching back to Protestant Pietism and articulated most clearly by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). In his writings, Emerson rejected ritual and tradition and articulated a perennialist view of religious truth, positions that are uncannily close to Krishnamurti's later statements. Persico considers the biography of Krishnamurti (1895-1986), including his native Brahmanism, his "discovery" by Leadbeater, his Theosophical training, and his brother's tragic and traumatizing death. Examining Krishnamurti's writings closely, Persico demonstrates a continuity in his thinking despite his apparent doctrinal *volta face*. Indeed, iconoclastic elements had always been present in Krishnamurti's thought to some extent, alongside a certain ambivalence towards Theosophical teachings. Persico highlights Krishnamurti's time in England and France, but especially in America, as formative in the development of his thought. It was after this period abroad that Krishnamurti's criticism of Theosophy intensified, his latent iconoclastic tendencies consolidated, and he fully and publicly turned away from Theosophy towards the position exemplified so eloquently by Emerson: the Tradition of No Tradition.

The second section of the volume, entitled *Kabbalistic Appropriations*, deals with various theosophical transformations of Kabbalah, a theme already introduced in Chajes's paper. As Boaz Huss explains in the first chapter of this section, many theosophists of Jewish origin studied Kabbalah, translated kabbalistic texts, and published articles and books about Kabbalah, in which they created

theosophically inspired modern forms of Kabbalah. Huss redresses a lack of academic research on these Jewish theosophists, and offers a preliminary survey of the biographies and literary contributions of key Jewish figures in theosophical centers around the world—Europe, America, the Middle East, China, India, and South Africa—from the foundation of the Society in 1875 into the third decade of the twentieth century. He considers the formation of Jewish theosophical groups, especially the Association of Hebrew Theosophists, founded in Adyar in 1925 following the Jubilee Congress of the Theosophical Society. He also tells the story of another (controversial) Jewish theosophical group, founded in 1926 in Basra, Iraq, by Kaduri Ani and his supporters, which included around 300 families. The members of this Jewish community were excommunicated because of involvement with Theosophy and they established their own congregation until the ban was finally lifted a decade later, when they were reabsorbed into the wider community.

Huss surveys the numerous books and articles of Jewish theosophists, demonstrating that overall, Jewish theosophists had greater access to primary texts of Kabbalah than did non-Jewish theosophists, and some even had enough knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic to prepare their own translations. Nevertheless, their knowledge of primary sources was limited and even those who did have some language skills largely based themselves on secondary literature, including Western esoteric, theosophical, and academic texts. Thus, the Jewish theosophists emphasized kabbalistic themes that were close to Theosophy (such as reincarnation and the divine origin of the human soul) but ignored Jewish kabbalistic notions that were incompatible with Theosophy (such as the theurgic import of the Jewish commandments and the unique status of Jewish souls). The Jewish theosophists believed Kabbalah reconciled Judaism and Theosophy, and saw themselves as having a double mission: to increase knowledge about Judaism, especially Kabbalah, amongst theosophists, and to help Jews to better understand Judaism, through Theosophy. Although influenced by Blavatsky, unlike her, they presented Kabbalah as unequivocally Jewish and as a force for the renewal of Judaism.

Huss situates these Jewish-theosophical interpretations of Kabbalah within a wider current of modern Jewish interest in Kabbalah,

demonstrating that some of the basic assumptions of the Jewish theosophists about the nature and significance of Kabbalah resemble the perceptions of modern scholars of Kabbalah. Their positive re-evaluation of Kabbalah took place within the framework of a neo-Romantic and Orientalist fascination with the “mystic East” that often intersected with Jewish nationalism and which portrayed Kabbalah as Jewish “mysticism.”

Developing the discussion of Kabbalah and Theosophy, Eugene Kuzmin’s chapter is the first academic study of the place of Kabbalah in the thought of the renowned Russian poet, literary critic, and painter, Maksimilian Voloshin (1877-1932). A polymath and highly original thinker whose life and work spanned the Silver Age through the Soviet Era, Voloshin’s poetry and prose contain numerous references to Kabbalistic works and principles, as well as to Voloshin’s wider occult and philosophical ideas. Kuzmin analyses several key texts (including poems and letters), identifying Kabbalistic references and themes, and exploring their sources in contemporaneous literature on the Kabbalah. Although Voloshin had an interest in Hebrew and Judaism, he was primarily influenced by the occultist versions of Kabbalah that have roots in the Christian Kabbalah of the early-modern period. In particular, Kuzmin explores the influence of Eliphas Levi (1810-1875), Madame Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) and Antoine Fabre d’Olivet (1767-1825). He demonstrates how Voloshin’s texts contained elements drawn from these authors, but that Voloshin was guided in his interpretations by an ideologically based sense of freedom that was the outcome of his perspectives on the unique roles of the artist and the initiate. Kuzmin’s chapter provides a fascinating glimpse into some of the adaptations of Kabbalah by Russian intelligentsia, contributing to our understanding of some of the religious aspects of Silver Age, but especially Soviet culture, during which religion was officially repressed.

Andreas Kilcher’s chapter also discusses the thought of a Kabbalistically inspired intellectual, the Austrian Zionist, Ernst Müller (1880-1954), who, despite his participation in circles that included many well-known figures, is himself relatively obscure. Kilcher focuses on the alliance between Kabbalah and Anthroposophy as understood by Müller. In *A History of Jewish Mysticism* (1946), Müller’s conclusion was in sharp contradiction to Gershom Scholem’s, as published in

Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism just four years previously. Scholem (1897-1982) understood Kabbalah as essentially Jewish, whereas Müller saw it as universal, especially when interpreted through Theosophy and Anthroposophy. Müller was introduced to Rudolph Steiner around 1909, in Vienna. He considered Steiner's new vision of Theosophy (which would be institutionalized as Anthroposophy just three-four years later) as much closer to the Judeo-Christian tradition than the Eastern-oriented Theosophy of Blavatsky. Müller's perspective on Anthroposophy reflected Steiner's own assessment that Anthroposophy would recover the true, mystical, "old Hebrew" understanding of the scriptures. Although Steiner referred to Kabbalah relatively infrequently, Müller took Steiner's ideas and constructed a more elaborate alliance between Anthroposophy and Kabbalah (especially the *Zohar*). He was helped by his friend, Hugo Bergmann (1883-1975), who, like Müller, was a Zionist with anthroposophical leanings. Kilcher's chapter analyzes Müller's anthroposophical perspectives on Kabbalah, including how they were revealed in his studies and translations of the *Zohar*. He concludes with an analysis of Gershom Scholem's critique of Müller's attempted alliance, which Scholem saw as fragile.

In the final chapter of this section, Olav Hammer discusses theosophical appropriations of Kabbalah in the writings of the leader of The Summit Lighthouse, Elizabeth Clare Prophet (1939-2009). He demonstrates how information taken from a spectrum of sources (ranging from older and newer Kabbalah scholarship to occultist works) was adduced by Prophet as support for doctrines of a fundamentally theosophical nature. Beginning with an introduction to the establishment of the Summit Lighthouse Movement—one of the most controversial theosophically derived movements of the twentieth century—Hammer discusses some of Prophet's central doctrines and their Theosophical bases. Some of the Theosophical influences were direct but some were indirect, such as those mediated by another theosophically inspired religious leader: Alice Bailey (1880-1949). Summit Lighthouse teachings include such Theosophical staples as the chakras, karma, reincarnation, the Masters, and a septenary spiritual anthropology, as well as doctrines derived from Christianity and other sources. Elizabeth Clare Prophet combined all these elements in a perennialistic vision. Hammer focuses in detail on Prophet's book, *Kabbalah: Key to Your*

Inner Power (1997). He considers the place of distinctive Kabbalistic terminology such as *Ain Soph*, the *sephirot*, and the *shekhinah* as well as the importance of Kabbalah in Prophet's presentations of ethics, gender polarity, spiritual progress, and human occult physiology.

The third and final section of the volume, *Global Adaptations*, opens with Shimon Lev's chapter, which brings together a range of secondary and primary sources, to explore the relationships between Mohandas Gandhi (1883-1944) and his Jewish-theosophist supporters in South Africa. Lev begins with a biography of the main founder of the Johannesburg theosophical lodge, the English Jew Louis W. Ritch (1868- 1952), before focusing in greater depth on the lives and theosophical connections of three more English Jews: Henry Polak (1882-1959), Gabriel Isaac (1874-1914), and William M. Vogl, as well as the German Jew, Hermann Kallenbach (1871-1945). Lev discusses the political activism of these Jewish theosophists, their involvement in the *satyāgraha* struggle and their friendships with Gandhi, which were often very close. Lev highlights the tension between South-African Jewish identification with the ruling white elite and Jewish critique of that establishment, speculating about a self-perception shared between Jews and Indians as "Oriental" immigrants in South Africa. He notes the appeal of a Theosophical Society that enabled the exploration of unorthodox ideas but which, at the same time, did not require the abandonment of Jewish identity.

Gandhi's own involvement with Theosophy is also considered, especially his membership of the Esoteric Christian Union established by Anna Bonus Kingsford (1846-1888) and Edward Maitland (1824-1897). Lev notes Gandhi's selective intake of theosophical notions, his adoption of the ideas of brotherhood, universalism, and spiritual development (as representative of what he saw as "practical" Theosophy) but his rejection of what he deemed "formal" Theosophy, which he described as "humbug" involving an unfortunate search for occult powers. Although Gandhi discouraged his Jewish-theosophist friends from participating in the Society formally, it was the theosophical notion of brotherhood, Lev argues, that was a motivating factor in both his— and their— political activism in the context of South-African racial discrimination.

Moving from Africa to Europe, in her chapter on theosophical appropriations in early-twentieth-century Greek culture, Victoria Ferentinou argues for a greater appreciation of the importance of theosophical syncretism in the history of modern Greece. She focuses on five case studies of Greek intellectuals and artists who integrated theosophical themes into their work: the journalist, politician, and academic, Platon Drakoulis (1858-1934), the poets, Kostis Palamas (1859-1943) and Angelos Sikelianos (1884-1951), and the painters, Frixos Aristeus (1879-1951) and Konstantinos Parthenis (1878-1967). Ferentinou charts the gradual institutionalization of Theosophy in Greece, with the establishment of the first lodge in 1876 and the proliferation of Theosophy in the 1920's. As she argues, the early reception of Theosophy in Greece is a complicated and sensitive matter and must be framed in the interplay of nationalist politics, identitarian discourses, Greek Orthodoxy, and secularism during the early-twentieth century. Of central importance was the negotiation of Greece's unique identity vis a vis consolidation of its position as a progressive European nation, as well as its struggle to expand its borders, all the time subject to influences perceived as conflicting: West vs. East; secularism vs. Christianity; modernization vs. tradition. Within this context, there was considerable ambivalence towards Theosophy, which drew criticism from the Orthodox Church as well as the scientific community.

A central theme in Ferentinou's analysis is the notion of "occultist Orthodoxy," first coined by Palamas, and which was part of a wider Helleno-Christian synthesis central to nationalist narratives. This was expressed in art and ideology, especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Occultist Orthodoxy, Ferentinou argues, was neither homogeneous nor always religious, but chiefly cultural. It involved Greek intellectuals' adaptation and fusion of ideas drawn from occultism (including Theosophy) with their visions of Hellenism, Paganism, Christianity, and other elements. An understanding of the contours of occultist Orthodoxy and its place in the history of modern Greece can help explain the unique character of individual theosophical syntheses and their ambiguous relationships with wider European culture. Greek intellectuals often desired closer ties with modern Europe, but also had an attachment to Orthodoxy and the idea of "the East." The reassessment Ferentinou proposes as a basis for analyzing these writings and artworks

provides us with a more workable theoretical framework than those hitherto proposed by scholars of modern Greece. It illuminates identitarian and nationalist discourses and the interactions between heterodoxy and Christian Orthodoxy at the same time as it elucidates intersections between Theosophy and Greek modernity.

Moving now to Asia in our tour of global theosophical adaptations, Karl Baier's chapter reveals the Theosophical Society to have been a significant influence in the popularization of the *cakras* from the late-nineteenth century onwards. Baier considers the earliest and most intense period in the history of the appropriation of the *cakras* by the Society. He discusses pre-modern conceptualization of the *cakras*, demonstrating the differences between these complex and historically contingent Asian systems and the modern, recognizable depiction of the *cakras*, which derives largely from the *Ṣatcakranirūpaṇa* (Description of the Six Centers) by the sixteenth-century Bengali tantric, Pūrṇānanda, first published in Sanskrit and Bengali in 1858.

Baier then moves on to theoretical considerations, arguing that the history of Theosophy in South Asia is not one that documents the interactions of representatives of more-or-less well-defined traditions, but rather a history of complex reciprocal processes of transculturation involving protagonists of cultures-in-the-making. He outlines the processes involved in such transculturation, including what he terms "welcoming" and "releasing" structures. The welcoming structures involved in the theosophical appropriation of the *cakras* included Orientalist concepts of "selfness" and "otherness." Baier draws on Gerd Baumann's theorization of Orientalism as a grammar of identity/alterity based on "reversed mirroring," arguing that this paved the way for the theosophical reinterpretation of the *cakras* as part of the perennial ancient wisdom, confirmed by post-materialistic science.

A second welcoming structure was the result of previous Euro-American-Asian cultural transfers, in particular those involving Romantic-influenced images of the "mystic East" to be found in works such as Joseph Ennemoser's *Geschichte der Magie* (1819), Godfrey Higgins *Anacalypsis* (1833), Louis Jacolliot's *Le Spiritisme dans le monde, L'initiation et les sciences occultes dans l'Inde et chez tous les peuples de l'antiquité* (1875), and Hargrave Jennings's *Indian Religions*,

or *Results of the Mysterious Buddhism* (1858). As part of their assimilation of the *cakras*, the theosophists had to overcome the negative image of Tantra (to which the *cakras* are closely related) that was pervasive in the literature of Orientalism and Hindu reform movements (such as Dayānanda Sarasvatī's Arya Samaj). Baier highlights the important role of the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra*, probably written in eighteenth-century Bengal, and which bridged the gap between tantrism and the Hindu Renaissance. Negative attitudes towards Tantra were reappraised in the Society following the publication of an article in *The Theosophist* by the anonymous "Truthseeker," initiating a series of contributions about tantrism and yoga practices written by South Asian members. "Vedantic Raj Yoga Philosophy" was written by Sabhapaty Swami, published as a booklet by the Society, and advertised in *The Theosophist*. It taught a modern hybrid form of *cakra* meditation different to that of Pūrṇānanda's influential *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa*. The *Ṣaṭcakranirūpaṇa* itself was introduced to the theosophists in articles by the knowledgeable Bengali Baradā Kānta Majumdār, who later went on to assist Sir John Woodroffe (aka Arthur Avalon, 1865-1936), author of the highly influential work *The Serpent Power* (1918). Ultimately, pro-tantric theosophical figures such as Majumdār overcame the anti-tantric perspective of those such as Dayānanda Sarasvatī, convincing the leaders of the Theosophical Society of the value of Tantra. Nevertheless, Blavatsky accommodated both positive and negative views of Tantra by proposing the existence of both a "black" and a "white" Tantra, analogous to her dualism of black and white magic.

Another welcoming structure in the theosophical reception of the *cakras* involved perceived convergences between the *cakras* and pre-existing cultural elements, especially those deriving from Mesmerism, for example, the notion of the "solar plexus." Mesmeric images of the body were used for the interpretation of yogic practices, which facilitated the integration of the *cakras* and *kuṇḍalinī* into the evolving theosophical worldview. The final welcoming structure that Baier identifies is the enrichment that the theosophists expected from the appropriation

of the *cakras*. This enrichment involved the hope for a more detailed understanding of the subtle body, and for a more precise conceptualization of the theory and practice of astral projection, a point that ties in with Deveney's arguments in his chapter about the importance of such practices in the early TS.

Returning to the theme of theosophical nationalism discussed in Victoria Ferentinou's paper, but now in the context of twentieth-century Canada, Massimo Introvigne discusses the celebrated Canadian artist and theosophist, Lawren Harris (1885-1970). Introvigne charts Harris's life and relationships with numerous spiritually minded collaborators, his involvement with the Theosophical Society, and his ideas about "theosophical art." Introvigne focuses on the ways in which Harris's ideas about art and Theosophy converged with his Canadian nationalism, influenced by an existing tradition that drew on a Romantic valorization of the unique Canadian topography. Despite Blavatsky's teaching that a new sub-race would emerge in the US, Harris believed that Canada would be the true location, and he differentiated between the ethos of Canada (associated with its special natural environment, as well as art, and culture) and the ethos of the United States (associated with business and a lack of spirituality). Harris viewed his renowned depictions of the Canadian wilderness, and his work in general, as truly "theosophical art." He insisted that a work of theosophical art must not transport its audience outside of itself to the "subject" of the painting, but rather draw the audience into the art itself, to enjoy a unitive, spiritual experience. Harris described this process through reference to the theosophical concept of *buddhi*. Despite his explicit rejection of symbolism, Harris depicted *buddhi* as part of his painting representing the three theosophical principles, *atma*, *buddhi*, and *manas*. Nevertheless, Harris denied any attempt to depict Theosophical doctrines and refused to accept any symbolic interpretation of his work. Rather, in his elaborations of the meaning of theosophical art, he argued that his paintings were intended to provide a divine experience of beauty and of essential forms, which was an end in itself. Harris's perspective was part of his broader ascetic aestheticism, which included a sexually-abstinent marriage to his second wife, Bess, the attempt to eradicate all personality in art and an emphasis on impermanence that was

influenced by Buddhism, mediated by Theosophy. Harris's views, Introvigne argues, constitute just one interpretation among many of what it means to be a theosophist and produce "theosophical art." They demonstrate that Blavatsky's ideas about aesthetics and art were sufficiently equivocal to lead theosophist-artists in quite different philosophical and aesthetic directions, and that they could easily be combined with other discourses, such as nationalist ones.

Our final stop on the tour of global theosophical adaptations is Germany. In his chapter on the transformations of Anthroposophy from the death of Rudolph Steiner to the present day, Helmut Zander considers Steiner's life and legacy, focusing on the various practical applications of Anthroposophy that are popular in Germany as well as internationally: Waldorf schools, anthroposophical medicine, anthroposophical farming methods, and many more. Zander considers the various conflicts that have arisen within and in relation to the Anthroposophical Society, such as the "discovery" of Steiner's ideas on race and the challenges posed by increasing historical-critical enquiry into Steiner's life and works. Considering the internationalization of Anthroposophy, Zander discusses *Kfar Raphael* ["the village of the archangel Raphael"], an anthroposophical community in Beer Sheva, Israel, which provides a home and employment for adults with special needs. Zander concludes his chapter by considering the "self-defeating success" of the proliferation of the practical applications of Anthroposophy, exploring how the Society might respond to the numerous practical and intellectual challenges it faces in a twenty-first-century world marked by individualism and pluralization.

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Introduction

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Victoria Ferentinou is assistant professor at the University of Ioannina, Greece, where she teaches courses on art theory and history of art. She obtained an MA in Archaeology at the University of London and a MA in Modern Art and Theory at the University of Essex. She received her PhD in art history and theory from the University of Essex. Funded

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Introduction

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A Pathless Land: Krishnamurti and the Tradition of No Tradition

Tomer Persico

“...old Custom, legal Crime
And bloody Faith, the foulest birth of Time.”
Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte
Percy B. Shelley

Spanning the larger part of the twentieth century, the biography of Jiddu Krishnamurti¹ (1895-1986) seems like a tale told by the fireplace, fit for a book of ancient legends, or, as some would insist, a new testament. Diverging from the course his mentors planned for him, the guru who refused to be a guru is revered by many in the contemporary Western spiritual milieu. It seems that his very reluctance to play the part designed for him, as well as his personal rebellion against the authority of his guides and supervisors, only endear him all the more to those who see him as a great spiritual teacher. What was the point at which Krishnamurti's life fundamentally changed its course and what happened to him at that time? In this chapter, I analyze the crisis that led Krishnamurti not only to depart from the Theosophical Society's leadership but also to change the character of his spiritual path and teachings radically. I will present not only the biographical forces that led Krishnamurti to that moment but also the social and ideational preconditions that allowed him to adopt a completely divergent religious worldview, one opposite in many ways to the one in which he had been raised.

Krishnamurti did not form an entirely new spiritual path. Rather, it is precisely because he was a runner in a centuries-old relay race that his teachings would find so many receptive hearts and minds. I will

¹ Krishnamurti is the given name, “Jiddu,” the surname, but for convenience, I will follow the convention of referring to him as “Krishnamurti.”

term the path he adopted the “Tradition of No Tradition.”² The Tradition of No Tradition has its origins in pietistic Protestantism, first forming in Europe and then emigrating, as it were, to North America, there coming to its full form. Krishnamurti was far from the first to propose the “Tradition of No Tradition,” although he was certainly among those who, in the twentieth century, presented it in its most explicit form.

Let us begin, then, at the moment when Krishnamurti completed his transformation from a shy, passive, and introverted would-be-messiah to an outspoken and iconoclastic spiritual teacher, a teacher in the Tradition of No Tradition. It was on the morning of 3 August 1929, when, at a gathering of The Order of the Star at Ommen, Holland, and before an array of Theosophical leaders, including the movement’s head, Annie Besant, that Krishnamurti declared “We are going to discuss this morning the dissolution of the Order of the Star.”³ Those were his first words that morning. He then began to tell a parable, about

How the devil and a friend of his were walking down the street, when they saw ahead of them a man stoop down and pick up something from the ground, look at it, and put it away in his pocket. The friend said to the devil, “What did that man pick up?” “He picked up a piece of Truth,” said the devil. “That is a very bad business for you, then,” said his friend. “Oh, not at all,” the devil replied, “I am going to let him organize it.”⁴

Organizing the truth, Krishnamurti tells us, makes it useless. From that preface, Krishnamurti then moved on to the words that have been given almost a mythological stature by his followers:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized;

2 I am influenced here, in both form and content, by Jeffrey Kripal’s *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (2007).

3 J. Krishnamurti Online site, <http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/about-krishnamurti/dissolution-speech.php> [accessed 11 February 2016].

4 Ibid.

nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path.⁵

This is the essence of the Tradition of No Tradition: a complete and utter rejection of all religious and spiritual traditions and organizations. It is an uncompromising dismissal of all ritual and dogma and in Krishnamurti's case, of all spiritual and meditative practices too. Krishnamurti was adamant in his refusal to provide any system or technique for meditation, much less any religious dogma. Already in 1927, two years before his famous renunciation, he insisted to a group of Theosophy students that he would not prescribe any "system" of meditation and that each must walk the path independently (Williams 2012: 1527).⁶ In the 1930's Krishnamurti developed what would become his signature phrase, "choiceless awareness." In his public talks in 1936, he first used the term to mean a non-judgmental, unassuming, and un-anticipating state of mindfulness. Krishnamurti used the phrase in his writing for the first time in his 1954 book, *The First and Last Freedom*.⁷ It was thereafter used extensively by Krishnamurti, who insisted that it was the only practice, or rather non-practice, that was needed for true freedom, and indeed the only one sanctioned by him. Reading his books and published talks, one gets the impression that Krishnamurti went out of his way to emphasize the worthlessness and indeed the danger of any tradition or meditative practice. Thus, in his talks of 1954, he stated that what is required is "the removal of the condition, of the dust of tradition, of superstition, of cultural influences," because "through tradition, the mind becomes an instrument which merely functions in the groove of imitation" (1991b: 95, 101). In 1956, he asserted, "Tradition inevitably cripples and dulls the mind" (1991c: 11). In 1969, he told Swami Venkatesananda, a prominent disciple of Sivananda Saraswati, "Any discipline, any practice [...]"

5 Jayakar 1987: 78.

6 Williams quotes the December 1927 issue of the journal, *The Order of the Star*, which includes a talk by Krishnamurti held in Castle Eerde, Ommen, that year. This reference appears only in the Kindle (revised) edition of his book, and the reference here is to the Kindle location.

7 Krishnamurti stated, "awareness is choiceless" in one of his 1933 talks (2007: 47), but in his 1934-1935 talks he does not use the phrase, and talks only of "constant awareness" (1991a).

makes my mind more narrow, limited and dull [...] I am questioning the whole approach of system and method towards enlightenment” (1973: 136). In 1971, he insisted, “One has to dispose of the system one has been offered: Zen, Transcendental Meditation, and various things that have been brought over from India and Asia [...] A system implies practice, following, repetition [...] so one has to dispose entirely of all systems” (ibid. 77). In 1978, he met with the eminent Buddhist monk and scholar, Walpola Rahula, and insisted that “there is no system” for meditation, and that “modern gurus,” including Zen masters and Tibetan Lamas, are propagating an erroneous spiritual path (2005: 154-155). In 1981 he again flatly invalidated any form of meditative method: “No system, no method, no practice will ever lead to truth” (1983: 27). His negation of all spiritual techniques was adamant up to and including in his final talks in 1985.

As stated earlier, I propose this unyielding, iconoclastic, and total denial of any form of tradition, ritual, or method is not unique to Krishnamurti’s thinking and is not his own innovation, but rather a tradition in itself. Krishnamurti was no more than the latest link in a long line of forerunners. Before I say a few words about that, however, I would like to examine Krishnamurti’s biography in order to discuss the path that led him to his famous speech and to the dissolution of the Order of the Star.

As is well known, Krishnamurti was “discovered” by Charles Leadbeater as a child on the shores of Adyar, near Madras. An Anglican priest before he became a Theosophist, Leadbeater rose quickly within the Theosophical hierarchy, and despite accusations of illicit sexual conduct, remained Annie Besant’s associate and close confidante. One spring day in 1909, while heading for an evening swim, he spotted Krishnamurti with his younger brother Nityananda, and was impressed by his “causal body,” or aura, a “radiant glob of flashing colors” (Vernon 2000: 5). Krishnamurti was thereafter groomed by the Theosophists to become the “vehicle” for the next “World Teacher,” a metamorphosis that would entail his being inhabited by Maitreya, the future Buddha of this world, according to Buddhist eschatology. For the Theosophists, Maitreya would be the current “Master” in charge of humanity’s spiritual welfare. (Vernon 2000: 38). The process of preparation for this transformation included a special diet and

indoctrination in Theosophical lore and meditation practice (Vernon 2000: 57).

While Leadbeater valued the young man for his “emptiness” (Vernon 2000: 52), we must not forget that Krishnamurti was raised as a Telugu Vaishnavite Brahmin, and thus until the age of 14, when he was adopted by the Theosophists, was both well-learned and thoroughly-practiced in the theology and rituals of his status, pertaining mainly to rules of cast and purification (Vernon 2000: 27-28; Williams 2004: 19).⁸ In fact, Krishnamurti observed the rules of his cast even after he was in the hands of Leadbeater, and continued to do so until Leadbeater received direct messages from the Masters commanding their termination, causing resentment among traditional Brahmins (Vernon 2000: 57-59; Williams 2004: 35-38).

We know that Krishnamurti accepted the existence of the Masters, as well as general Theosophical metaphysics, because he portrayed the process leading to his spiritual realization as involving a close relationship with them. As early as 1910, the year his first text, *At the Feet of the Master*, was introduced to the members of the Theosophical Society, he was regarded as having an intimate connection with the Masters. Of course, even if he did write the booklet himself,⁹ testimonies of an adolescent totally enveloped by the Theosophical structure can and should be taken *cum grano salis*. But we cannot as easily dismiss Krishnamurti’s reports of dialogues with higher beings in later years, while he was with his brother and friends at the cottage in Ojai, California. We have, for example, a testimony that on the 5 October 1922 Krishnamurti informed his brother Nityananda and others there that “a great visitor” would be coming to the house that evening. Secluding himself in a room, Krishnamurti was then heard talking to someone not seen by the others, promising secrecy and apologizing for his

8 Williams quotes an article published in the Aug-Sep 1928 issue of *The Australian Theosophist* by Balfour Clarke, a Theosophist who had played a role in the initial negotiation with Krishnamurti’s father, Narianiah, concerning his and his younger brother’s adoption by the Society.

9 Though Krishnamurti never denied writing the short tractate, doubts have been cast on his authorship. I hold that he wrote at least part of the text, as he himself stated (Landau 1953: 262), and did certainly influence its contents. For the debate concerning this point see Vernon 2000: 61-63.

clumsiness. After some sort of ceremony was conducted, Nitya and Rosalind Williams entered the room and saw him talking to what appeared to be a number of invisible beings (Vernon 2000: 123-124; Lutyens 1999: 45). Even in 1925, four years before his famous abdication speech, Krishnamurti continued to believe he was getting messages from an arcane hierarchy. On 4 February 1925, he wrote to his brother that he had meetings on the astral plane with Lord Maitreya and with an even greater power, Mahachohan, who promised him that Nitya would recover from his tuberculosis (Vernon 2000: 147).

What changed, then? When did Krishnamurti lose faith in the Masters, and indeed in the whole metaphysical system of the Theosophical Society? Did something happen between February 1925 and August 1929 that shook up Krishnamurti's world, transforming his worldview? I suggest the answer is no, and that a process more complex and subtle was at the heart of the change. Certainly, reasons for Krishnamurti's disconnection from the Masters can be found in the extreme disappointment he felt when Nitya died in November 1925. Biographers usually ascribe Krishnamurti's disenchantment to Nitya's death and the failure of the Masters to protect him, as disappointment led to disillusionment, signaling a fresh start and a new way for Krishnamurti. Thus, Christine Williams writes that Krishnamurti "had unbounded faith in the Masters' powers to prolong Nitya's life," and that although Krishnamurti had been "going through major changes in his outlook for some years, at variance with the orthodoxy of the Theosophists, [...] now [i.e., after Nitya's death] the turmoil would increase" (Williams 2004: 148, 149). Roland Vernon believes his brother's death was the beginning of Krishnamurti's break with the dogmatic structure of Theosophy, and writes that after Nityananda's death "The ideological edifice in which he had come to believe [...] now began to crumble" (Vernon 2000: 152). Mary Lutyens thinks likewise and observes, "from that time onwards Krishnamurti seems to have lost all faith in the Masters as presented by Leadbeater" (Lutyens 1999: 60). Pupul Jayakar states that with his brother's death Krishnamurti's "belief in the Masters and the hierarchy had undergone a total revolution" (Jayakar 1987: 71).

Though the shock of his brother's death was certainly severe, I believe it would be wrong to assume that the Masters' broken promise

was the reason for Krishnamurti's change of worldview and teaching. For one, there is no reason Nitya's death could not have been given a theodicyal explanation. After the event, two leading figures in the Theosophical Society, George Arundale (later the president of the Society) and James Wedgwood justified Nitya's death by blaming Krishnamurti's lack of faith in them (Arundale and Wedgwood) (Lutyens 1999: 60; Vernon 2000: 151). Before his death, Krishnamurti had *himself* accused Nitya of being ill for lack of faith in the Masters (Vernon 2000: 147). There is no reason this line of thought could not have been continued.

It is also unfounded to claim that the Theosophical Society's theological structures were simply obsolete and that a retreat from them was the inevitable consequence of a new generation of Theosophical teaching or of a man trying to tailor his teachings to the tastes of the public. We know that another Theosophical apostate, Rudolph Steiner, continued to develop a theological system of the same metaphysical genre, and that his Anthroposophical movement became quite popular. Krishnamurti could certainly have done the same.

Another explanation for Krishnamurti's transformation is that Krishnamurti's own mystical experiences changed his worldview.¹⁰ Here again, I think great care should be taken. There is great methodological danger in ascribing ideational development to religious and spiritual experiences. People do change their view of life after specific experiences (hence the phrase "life-changing experience"), but to presume to explain the change retrospectively by pointing to experience, certainly without any testimony from the subject him or herself, borders on the irresponsible. Experiences are always subject to interpretation, and interpretation is always subject to cultural and social trends.

Rather than trying to find an explanation in an experience (traumatic or mystical), we should seek our answer in Krishnamurti's society and culture. What I would like to suggest is that Krishnamurti's change of worldview was, in essence, his turning from one cultural and religious

10 I heard this from a well-known scholar of religion.

tradition to another, indeed, that he would become the heir not to the Theosophical path, but to a different one. It would be a tradition that was a better fit for his personal convictions, since, notwithstanding the evidence brought above, Krishnamurti was always ambivalent towards Theosophical lore and the hierarchy of the Masters. Leaving that heritage behind, Krishnamurti would adopt another, a tradition that developed in the modern West quite some time before Krishnamurti—or the Theosophical Society—were born. I call this tradition the “Tradition of No Tradition.”

The “Tradition of No Tradition” is based on two principal assumptions: a perennialist view of religious truth, and the complete rejection of ritual and technique within the religious life. The first is a prerequisite that lays the ground for the logical possibility of the second: only if all religions hold, or are manifestations of, the same truth, and point to the same reality, can we in effect discard their specific cultural structures and frameworks the moment we know that truth or reality—or the perennial way towards it. If the soul is one and the same, the fact that bodies are different is negligible. Indeed, it can be understood that the diverse types of flesh *must* be disposed of to get to the universal spirit.

Adopting this perennial view was easy for Krishnamurti. For one, it is one of the fundamental principles of Theosophy. In her first major work, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), H. P. Blavatsky herself wrote that “Truth remains one, and there is not a religion, whether Christian or heathen, that is not firmly built upon the rock of ages—God and immortal spirit” (Blavatsky 2006: 420).¹¹ In the first issue of the Society’s official publication, *The Theosophist*, Theosophy is defined as “the archaic Wisdom-Religion, the esoteric doctrine once known in every ancient country having claims to civilization” (Blavatsky 1879). One must

11 See also Blavatsky’s words in her 1889 book, *The Key to Theosophy*: “The ‘Wisdom-Religion’ was one in antiquity; and the sameness of primitive religious philosophy is proven to us by the identical doctrines taught to the Initiates during the MYSTERIES [sic], an institution once universally diffused. [...] The WISDOM-RELIGION [sic] was ever one, and being the last word of possible human knowledge, was, therefore, carefully preserved.” (Blavatsky 1889: 5, 7).

also add that such a view is not strange to Krishnamurti's indigenous Hinduism—the *Rig Veda* sloka, *Ekam Sat Viprāha Bahudhā Vadanti* (“To what is one, sages give many a title”) is widely known.¹²

But how do we explain the rejection of all ritual and technique? Krishnamurti certainly was not taught this by his Theosophical foster parents. Such an idea, notwithstanding contemporary interpretations of them, is also not found amongst the central schools and denominations of the Hindu philosophies and religions. The Theosophical Society certainly did not endorse it. I would like to suggest the possibility that Krishnamurti encountered it in the West and that since it fit certain latent convictions of his own, gradually adopted it. While further research is needed to identify the exact points of Krishnamurti's contact with such ideas, I would like to briefly present their origins in the West.

In short, the Tradition of No Tradition began with the Reformation and the Protestant rejection of Catholic ritual and church mediation. Of course, early versions of Protestantism had their own share of ritual, but the principles they championed would eventually challenge the very idea of ritual. For one, the emphasis on the complete infinite and transcendental nature of God seemed to relativize and minimize the mediatorial role of the church (Janz 2004). The emphasis on faith alone (*sola fide*) made all “works,” that is, moral and ritualistic actions, redundant. “And if he has no need of works,” writes Luther, “neither has he need of the [Religious] law; and, if he has no need of the law, he is certainly free from the law” (*Concerning Christian Liberty*, 1520). Even the sacraments lost some of their standing. They were taken to be not only contingent, but sometimes completely useless. Luther, in his *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) had reduced genuine sacraments to “baptism and the bread” only, but for Zwingli (*An Exposition of the Faith*, 1530) no sacraments were needed for redemption, as they were but symbols of divine grace (Stephens 2004). Calvin (*Consensus Tigurinus*, 1549) was of a similar opinion (Steinmetz 1995).

Depreciating the role of the church, good works, and the sacraments and diminishing their collective and individual value went along a

12 *Rig Veda*, Book I, Hymn 164, Verse 46. Griffiths trans. 1889: 292.

general disregard for ceremony and ritual—certainly with rites associated with “magic” (Taylor 2007: 239). These were also associated with the iconoclastic desire to erase any and every iconic representation of the divine. The potential for the shedding of all “outer” displays of faith was evident to Luther’s contemporaries (Gillespie 2008: 111). By the time of George Fox in the second half of the seventeenth century, this would develop into the bare and wordless ceremony of the Quakers. Fox would lay stress on inner experience alone. In his autobiography, he wrote that it was only after he had “forsaken the priests” that he found Christ, and that he had known he was saved not from any objective source, but “experimentally” (Fox 1919: 82).

Fox himself was part of the Pietistic revival movement that swept through Europe from the late-seventeenth century. The Pietists were Lutherans that were not satisfied with the “fleshly”—i.e. bodily, as opposed to spiritual—worship of the contemporary Lutheran Church (as one of their most prominent leaders, Philip Jacob Spener, called it).¹³ In their efforts to renew the true “spiritual” faith, they devalued ritual and dogma (which, for them, were “works” that cannot save us) and emphasized subjective religious experience (Erb 1983). As such they rejected attempts by Lutherans and Calvinists to defend their paths through scholastic acrobatics, and dismissed religious dogma as redundant. It might be said that the Pietists “out-Luthered” Luther, as part of a recurring pattern within Christian history of attempts to regenerate the Church by turning away from formal structures and towards subjective experience. The Pietists in Germany had equivalents in the Quietists of France, Spain, and Italy, and the Quakers of England. These experience-emphasizing creeds were developed further in the forming states of The New World, and are succeeded today by the evangelical churches, for which “heartwork can be taken to imply that there is no need for efficacious ritual and institutional mediation” (Martin 2005: 6).

Of course, these Christians were definitely not perennialists, and were quite sure that theirs was the only way to salvation. But the turn inward towards subjective experience lends itself easily to a perennialist view, since subjective experience of the divine can be had, or at least

13 Quoted in Hallbrooks 1983: 219.

reported to be had, by anyone. If sacraments and dogma do not really matter, why question the authenticity of the spiritual experiences of people of other faiths? What was needed for that next step was the undermining of metaphysical truth, made possible by the Enlightenment, in the eighteenth century. Henceforth, religious dogma would not only be seen as the more superficial part of religion (true in itself but liable to be an obstruction to “real” spirituality) but as unproven and improvable, or even just plain nonsense. The subversion of metaphysics began with the Deists, who advocated a Christianity free from “mystery,” that is, without any miraculous, magical, and supernatural folklore and dogma. Theologians like Matthew Tindal and John Toland would, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, strip Christianity of those perceived elements to make it a “natural religion” requiring neither revelation nor a divine savior. All that was not rational would be jettisoned for the greater glory of God, for it was perceived as a form of irreverence towards the divine to believe that It would debase Itself in order to present humanity with a religion founded on the pyrotechnics of miracles and principals that cannot be rationally understood (Taylor 1989: 234-284; 2007: 221-269). It was a short step from these ideas to Kant’s “universal religion of Reason.”

The idea of a “natural religion” subject to reason lay behind the establishment of the first Unitarian congregations in England, organized in the late-eighteenth century by Theophilus Lindsey and Joseph Priestley. Priestly, the renowned scientist and inventor, published *An History of the Corruptions of Christianity* in 1782, a book in which he endorsed a rational and “natural” religion, free of metaphysical paradoxes like the Trinity, disparaging Catholic “bodily exercises,” and advocating “*inward purity*, distinct from all ritual observances” (Priestly 1817: 355, italics in original).

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, and under the influence of Romanticism, religion’s retreat into interior life now made it less “fleshly,” protecting it from Reason’s razor-sharp critique. Subjective experience would now become the last place that Reason could not reach, and therefore, it was towards subjective experience that many would turn (Cassirer 1968: 176-177; Berger 1980: 30-43).¹⁴ For some

14 Peter Berger (1980: 63) finds a clear manifestation of this strategy in

nineteenth-century thinkers, religion had become no more than an experience, a special type of feeling. And if religion was just a feeling, must we not acknowledge that non-Christians have truthful religions as well? We know that pagans have religious experiences (perhaps even more intense ones than Christians do). If religion is made into “religious experience” we must admit that true religion is a universal phenomenon, and religious experience its perennial essence, source, and goal. If that is accepted, with a push from analytic and empirical thought, the next step can be the rejection of dogma and ritual as completely redundant. As stated earlier, the perennial stance is a prerequisite that lays the ground for the logical possibility of the rejection of religious forms.

This process was encapsulated pointedly by the former Pope, Benedict XVI, who during a formal visit to the United States spoke on the topic of globalization, and said that secular ideologies, “in alleging that science alone is ‘objective’ relegate religion entirely to the subjective sphere of individual feeling [...] The result is seen in the continual proliferation of communities which often eschew institutional structures and minimize the importance of doctrinal content for Christian living.”¹⁵ With that, of course, comes the increased legitimization of other forms of worship.

This very short exposition in the history of ideas does not pretend to *prove* Krishnamurti was influenced by these Western currents of thought, but rather suggests that such an interpretation is a viable—and in my opinion, preferred—alternative to the explanations mentioned above for his change of worldview. To add a final note to my alternative analysis, I would like to present what is, in my view, the last stage of development in the Tradition of No Tradition.

This final link, leading directly to Krishnamurti, was made in the nineteenth century by a Unitarian minister. Already suspicious of dogma and irrationalism, this Unitarian left his church in search of a purer, less encumbered spiritual life. “I have sometimes thought,” he wrote, “that in order to be a good minister, it was necessary to leave the

Schleiermacher’s theology, which safeguarded religion by redefining it: it was not a belief in ritual, but a certain feeling (Berger 1980 118; Eisen 1987: 310).

15 Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, St. Joseph’s Parish, New York, Friday,

ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age, we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers.”¹⁶ This man was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who with some friends (among them, Henry David Thoreau), founded in 1836, the Transcendental Club, which might be christened as the first fully-fledged manifestation of the Tradition of No Tradition.¹⁷ That same year, Emerson published *Nature*, a theological tractate in which he presented a form of pantheistic spirituality. He called for a different approach to life, one that can be found not in organized religion but in many different and inspiring examples of the human spirit:

The traditions of miracles in the earliest antiquity of all nations; the history of Jesus Christ; [...] the miracles of enthusiasm, as those reported of Swedenborg, Hohenlohe, and the Shakers; many obscure and yet contested facts, now arranged under the name of Animal Magnetism; prayer; eloquence; self-healing; and the wisdom of children (Emerson 1836: 90).

The perennial view is here clearly added to the turn away from tradition and ritual. Two years later Emerson gave his famous Divinity School Address to the Harvard Divinity School. There he spoke of a “religious sentiment” that:

Lies at the foundation of society, and successively creates all forms of worship [...] All the expressions of this sentiment are sacred and permanent in proportion to their purity. The expressions of this sentiment affect us more than all other compositions. The sentences of the oldest time, which ejaculate this piety, are still fresh and fragrant. This thought dwelled always deepest in the minds of men in the devout and contemplative East; not alone in Palestine, where it reached its purest expression, but in Egypt, in Persia, in India, in China.¹⁸

Emerson talked about a sentiment common to all religious expression

18 April 2008, Vatican Internet site, <http://goo.gl/9UqyGd> [accessed 11 February 2016].

16 Quoted in Sullivan 1972: 6.

17 Other well-known proponents of the Tradition of No Tradition are Walt Whitman, Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts and Eckhart Tolle.

(different only, perhaps, in the level of its purity) and that creates all forms of worship. But if so, knowing this sentiment, are forms of worship still needed? Emerson thought not:

The Puritans in England and America, found in the Christ of the Catholic Church, and in the dogmas inherited from Rome, scope for their austere piety, and their longings for civil freedom. But their creed is passing away, and none arises in its room. [...] We have contrasted the Church with the Soul. In the soul, then, let the redemption be sought. Wherever a man comes, there comes revolution. The old is for slaves. When a man comes, all books are legible, all things transparent, all religions are forms. *He* is religious. [...] Once [you] leave your own knowledge of God, your own sentiment, and take secondary knowledge, as St. Paul's, or George Fox's, or Swedenborg's, and you get wide from God with every year this secondary form lasts, and if, as now, for centuries,—the chasm yawns to that breadth, that men can scarcely be convinced there is in them anything divine. Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation Wesleys and Oberlins, Saints and Prophets. Thank God for these good men, but say, "I also am a man." Imitation cannot go above its model. [...] Yourself a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost,—cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with Deity.¹⁹

Reading Emerson Divinity School Address we cannot but recall Krishnamurti's abdication speech, which includes the very same ideas and admonitions.²⁰ Krishnamurti thus wholly and happily adopted the

18 Quotes from the Divinity School Address are from <http://www.emersoncentral.com/divaddr.htm> [accessed 11 February 2016].

19 Ibid.

20 Here again are some similar passages from the speech: "I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. [...] Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path. [...] A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organize it. If you do, it becomes

Tradition of No Tradition formulated fully by Emerson. Indeed, Emerson, who Sydney Ahlstrom calls “the theologian of [...] ‘the American Religion’” (quoted in Bloom 1992: 42),²¹ and whom Harold Bloom dubs the “ultimate American ancestor” of “New Age fantasies” (1992: 182), was the father of a broad tradition of contemporary spirituality in the United States. Along with Thoreau and Whitman, he is responsible for articulating and legitimizing a genre of New Age religion that became widely popular after the 1960’s, mainly in the United States (Kripal 2007: 8-9). Krishnamurti had picked up a few of its tenets and on those rocks, he built his particular church.

Writing about the transformations that led the Christian world from the Reformation to the 1960’s counter culture, David Martin writes (1978: 17): “The Christian notion that all may be saved has crossed with the eastern concept of pantheistic union and with the notion of the natural pre-social goodness of man to produce the idea that all men may be mystics provided they reject society and socialization.” I would add that the eastern concept of pantheistic union could not have been adopted so heartily were it not for the undercutting of theological metaphysics and the idea of a transcendent God by the Enlightenment. The rejection of all “works” and “law,” however, is indeed fundamental to this social, religious, and cultural direction. “The modern extension of the Reformation”, writes Martin, “has become just a celebration of faith with no *object* of faith” (Martin 1978: 64).

Let us now get back to Krishnamurti, and observe signs that indicate his preferences, idiosyncratic ideational inclinations which would be further emphasized as he grew older and which led him, during the last years of the 1920’s, to abandon Theosophical metaphysics and teach the Tradition of No Tradition. There is cause to believe that Krishnamurti was never totally taken in by Theosophical metaphysics. As early as 1910, in *At the Feet of the Master*, one can find statements

dead, crystallized; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others. [...] Truth cannot be brought down, rather the individual must make the effort to ascend to it. You cannot bring the mountain-top to the valley. If you would attain to the mountain-top you must pass through the valley, climb the steeps, unafraid of the dangerous precipices.”

21 That “American Religion” is characterized, writes Bloom, by “freedom from mere conscience; reliance upon experiential perception; a sense of power; the

about how people “invent ways for themselves which they think will be pleasant” (Alcyone [n.d.]: 8), how one must learn “to think for himself” and avoid superstition (Ibid. 21), and how when one’s eyes open, old beliefs and ceremonies might suddenly seem “absurd” (Ibid. 48). These tendencies evolved as the years went by. After a short visit to London in 1911, Krishnamurti returned in January 1912 and spent the next ten years in the West (England, France, and the United States), before he visited India in 1921. I suggest that these years, during which he studied under Western tutelage (among other things, trying unsuccessfully to get into Oxford and Cambridge universities), were formative for his theological views. Near the end of this period, during the summer of 1920, he told Lady Emily Lutyens that he did not “care a damn” about the Masters (Lutyens 1999: 28), that the Theosophical scene is “damned rot” (Lutyens 1999: 29) and observed that “when the most critical moment comes, Theosophy and all its innumerable books don’t help” (Vernon 2000: 96). At a conference of the Order of the Star in the East in July 1921, he responded to an attempt by Leadbeater to establish rituals for the Order by condemning ritual (Vernon 2000: 101). In 1922, he wrote Lady Emily that “devotional stuff” goes “against his nature,” and that thus, he is “not fit for this job” (Vernon 2000: 108), i.e., becoming a “vehicle” for the next “World Teacher.” The continuing process could be observed with Krishnamurti’s emphasis on freedom from tradition in his teachings from 1925 up to 1927 (Vernon 2002: 161, 171, 172, 180).

I suggest, then, that from early on, Krishnamurti was ambivalent towards the metaphysical and ritualistic dimension of the spiritual path he was driven into, an ambivalence that probably grew during his stay in Britain and mainly in the US. There he found other voices that supported his own inclination towards the Tradition of No Tradition. His brother’s tragic death certainly played a part in his continuing distancing from the Theosophical metaphysical structure, but not as a revolutionary event. Rather, it was another push in a direction he was already inclined to move in, on ideational tracks that had been laid during his stay in the West. The formation of a new worldview could not have been the result of a single incident, but rather the result of a long process, a process involving the formation of a mental and spiritual home in a new tradition, one that any single event could only bring

him closer to. Krishnamurti fully embraced his new worldview in 1929, at the gathering of The Order of the Star at Ommen, Holland. There, in essence, he testified to a conversion: he had rejected his old faith and embraced a new one. Neither understanding a new and unheard-of truth nor rejecting all religious traditions, Krishnamurti had moved from one modern conception of true, perennial, eternal spirituality to another. Once he formally and unequivocally divorced himself from the Theosophical Society, his former ambivalence turned into ruthless, even dogmatic rejection of all religious beliefs and practices, forming yet another link in the now established Tradition of No Tradition.

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