

What interests the historian of religions the most is the resurgence of a certain esoteric tradition among a number of European scholars and thinkers who represent many illustrious universities. One is reminded of analogous events in the scholarly and academic milieux of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁰

II: MODERN THEOSOPHY

Sydney Ahlstrom writes, "Theosophy took shape in America as a specific organized religion in 1875, with the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York."⁷¹ This is, from the point of view of modern Theosophists, a mistake: they assert that modern Theosophy is not a religion, despite the common proclivity of scholars to stuff it into such a comfortable pigeonhole. From the very beginning of the Theosophical Society, repeated declarations from its leaders have restated this fact: Modern Theosophy is not a religion. Blavatsky, on the first page of her *Key to Theosophy*, in fact the first line on the page, declares that theosophy is not a religion. "Enquirer: Theosophy and its doctrines are often referred to as a newfangled religion. Is it a religion? Theosophist: It is not. Theosophy is Divine Knowledge or Science." And H. S. Olcott, in his inaugural address as the first president of the Society in 1875, claims it was a "noncommittal society of investigation," a body of "investigators, of earnest purpose and unbiased mind, who study all things, prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good," as opposed to religions that have "dogmas to impart, which under our by-laws we have not." Each international president has asserted the same fact, the latest being no exception: One-hundred five years and six presidents after Olcott, Radha Burnier, the latest in this company, stated in her first inaugural address, "The Theosophical Society is neither a church nor a sect. It has no belief to offer, no opinions or authority to impose."⁷²

Yet, in the face of these repeated and unambiguous assertions to the contrary by modern Theosophists, scholars of religious studies still persist in labeling the Theosophical Society a religion, perhaps for the reason that it is something of an anomaly within religious studies and too difficult to "categorize" in any other way. The modern Theosophical Society is in fact comprised of the religious from every major world faith, with no exceptions. The Society's records show Christians, Par-

sis, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, and Muslims; these are in addition to agnostics, pure scientists, and holders of a variety of philosophical perspectives with no avowed "religious" overtones. The single requisite for membership in the modern Theosophical Society is sympathy with—and not belief in—the Society's three declared objects,⁷³ which hardly comprises in their view sufficient foundation for a religion in the normal or accepted sense.

However, the Theosophical Society can be studied as a religion, though this does not make it one. This appears to be where sociologists of religion, especially, get matters confused. One can point to certain of Paul Tillich's criteria for religion—"ultimate concern" for example—and apply them to the Theosophical Society; one can see various forms of ritual or quasi-ritual behavior (Robert Ellwood, for instance, sees the theosophical lecture as ritual); one can observe specific modes of personal (sociological) interaction among members, and so on. These and similar criteria, it should be pointed out, apply as well to the Cousteau Society or Common Cause, but do not make them religions. The perspectives that might be brought to bear on the Theosophical Society from the Max Weber-Ernst Troeltsch-Joachim Wach line of thought regarding the study of *religions* are highly problematic, due to the continuous and insistent claims of modern Theosophists themselves, the inclusive and "open forum" structure of the organization, and by the heterogeneity and antidogmatic nature of the membership. Even by the currently popular definition of religion that Clifford Geertz has established, modern Theosophy is not a religion. In Geertz's "Religion as a Cultural System,"⁷⁴ the very first of the five-point definition—a religion is "a system of symbols"—at once precludes Theosophy, since no "system of symbols" exists in it, but rather all hieratic symbols everywhere in all cultures at all times.

Few would disagree that modern Theosophy as it appears via the medium of the Theosophical Society began with Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–91). She was the impetus of the whole movement, and her books and collected writings, which comprise around eighteen tomes, serve as the doctrinal core of modern Theosophy. About her life there is much divergence of opinion, and much is unclear. Referring to the period 1849–1872, Bruce Campbell correctly states, "There is no reliable account of the next twenty-five years of Helena Blavatsky's life."⁷⁵ As interesting as are the details and questions of Blavatsky's life and antecedents, the problem has been thoroughly treated elsewhere and more

than once. Furthermore, it is only tangential at best to the thesis under consideration here, so for these reasons it must be bypassed. What is germane to the issue here are two data: First, that which has already been stated; that is, Blavatsky was the prime mover in the creation of the Theosophical Society and consequently modern Theosophy as a restatement of theosophia via her published doctrinal corpus and commitment to the movement. Second, her use of the terms *occult* and *occultism* is significant. And this usage is significant for reasons beyond the fact that this work deals with questions of terminology. Blavatsky has been severely criticized in the past for promulgating "occultism," but what she meant by the term and what her detractors understood by it were usually two different things altogether.

The popular conception of the occult and occultism is miasmatic, a murky stew of black magic, witchcraft, Satanism, horror movies, fortune telling, and the like. Of these arts Blavatsky was the severe critic par excellence, and more vituperous, ironically, than her critics were of her for promulgating "occultism." To Blavatsky, "Occultism embraces the whole range of psychological, physiological, cosmical, physical, and spiritual phenomena. From the word *occultus*, hidden or secret."⁷⁶ Her perspectives did admit to the "dark" side of the "Occult Sciences," just as she divided magic into *theurgia* and *göetia*, "white" and "black" magic, respectively. But more often than not in her writings, Blavatsky capitalized the term and used it in its theosophical or spiritual sense. She repeatedly distinguished between Occultism and Occult Sciences using precisely those terms; the former was solely benign, and the latter was dual, containing a positive and negative expression, as did magic.

In a book entitled *Practical Occultism*, Blavatsky's definition of Occultism becomes unequivocally clear. She writes there that "Occultism differs from Magic and other secret sciences as the glorious sun does from a rush-light, as the immutable and immortal Spirit of Man—the reflection of the absolute, causeless and unknowable ALL—differs from the mortal clay—the human body." If this somewhat overstated simile leads one to suspect a synonymy of Occultism with theosophy, the second citation confirms the suspicion: "Let them know at once and remember always, that *true Occultism or Theosophy* is the 'Great Renunciation of SELF,' unconditionally and absolutely, in thought as in action."⁷⁷ Thus another term is added to the list of synonyms: Guénon means by metaphysic and Primordial Tradition what Coomaraswamy means by philosophia perennis what Blavatsky means by The-

osophy and Occultism—an interdependent group of absolute and essential first principles. Unquestionably each meant something more, and the arrangement or order of the first principles would not necessarily have been agreed to by these three, but the overriding factor that allows synonymy is the content of these principles, whose examination will follow presently.

Neither the biography of Blavatsky nor the detailed history of the Theosophical movement since 1875 has any place in this work. Both have been treated in a huge corpus of material, which includes accounts from the extremely tendentious to the extremely calumnious, and some in between. In fact, it would be more helpful to the interested student of this history to list the significant bibliographies rather than attempt a list of single works.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, for the sake of convenience and for those who are totally unfamiliar with the history of the movement, the chronological high points of the Society's history follow:

- 1874: Blavatsky and Henry Olcott (cofounder of the Society and president from 1875 to his death in 1907) meet in Chittendon, Vermont, while investigating the paranormal phenomena at the Eddy farm.
- 1875: With Blavatsky, Olcott, and William Q. Judge as principal catalysts, the Theosophical Society is founded on November 17 after a series of lectures and meetings on Occultism.
- 1878: Two principal founders, Blavatsky and Olcott, after deciding to reestablish in India, depart for Bombay.
- 1882: The Society purchases a small estate in Adyar, a suburb of Madras, for their international headquarters, where it is still located.
- 1885: Publication of the "Hodgson report"—*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Volume II, 1885, pp. 201–400—under the title "Report of Phenomena Connected with Theosophy." This report, based on questionable evidence, ostensibly confirms allegations of fraud by Blavatsky instigated by Emma Coulomb and the Madras Christian College, and seriously afflicted the reputations of both Blavatsky and the Society.
- 1888 (1): Blavatsky, having left India for good, publishes *The Secret Doctrine*, her magnum opus.

- 1888 (2): On October 9, the “Esoteric School of Theosophy” is formed, an event whose significance is usually underrated by historians of the movement but one which is to set the tone of the Society’s activity until the second half of the twentieth century.
- 1891: H. P. Blavatsky dies on May 8, an event that begins a series of internal disputes and reverberations destined to shake the foundations of the Society.
- 1895: One of these disputes leads to the secession of the American Section, under William Q. Judge, from the parent Adyar Society—first and most profound of the splinter movements.
- 1907: H. S. Olcott dies and Annie Besant is elected the new international president of the Society.
- 1912: C. W. Leadbeater discovers Jeddu Krishnamurti, a South Indian Brahmin boy of twelve, and alleges that he is to become a new World Teacher—that is, Messiah. In the wake of this discovery the whole trend of modern Theosophy is bent—primarily by Besant—toward this new Teacher. Because the Theosophical Society per se had by its own bylaws to remain neutral, the Order of the Star in the East (OSE) is formed as the vehicle for the dissemination of his teachings. Not all agreed, however; Rudolf Steiner was ousted as president of the German Section of the Society over the issue, and eventually began his own Anthroposophical Society.
- 1925: In my view, perhaps the darkest hour in the Society’s history, when G. S. Arundale—who would become the next international president after Besant—and his colleagues announce the list of chosen “apostles” for the new Messiah of whom most are members of this clique, and proclaim these revelations at Huizen, the site of a theosophical center in Holland.
- 1929: J. Krishnamurti renounces his role as the new Messiah, disbands the OSE, and in so doing literally shatters the seventeen-year crescendo of expectation for the new Messiah and disorients the aged Annie Besant and a huge portion of the Society’s membership.

1933: Annie Besant dies, followed by C. W. Leadbeater several months later, and George Arundale is elected president of a Society considerably different from the one begun by Blavatsky and Olcott—one whose existence is marked by more devotion and also moderation, with little of the notoriety, or interaction and disputation with the avant garde of scholars and thinkers, of the early days.

It should be noted that the history of modern Theosophy comprises more than the history of the Theosophical Society in the Olcott, Besant, Arundale, et al. succession. The Theosophical movement begun by Blavatsky split several times, forming splinter groups, among them the Point Loma group and the United Lodge of Theosophists, each of which has its own unique history. Beyond this “splintering” process, though, were other existing groups and trends of thought that were heavily influenced by the Theosophical movement. Ancillary organizations to the Theosophical Society, like the Liberal Catholic Church and the Co-Masonic Order, were results of the usurpation of the preexisting doctrines of these groups by the Theosophical worldview. The Irish literary renaissance was influenced by Theosophists William Butler Yeats and A. E. (George W. Russell). Ambrose Bierce believed modern Theosophy was significant enough a force to lampoon in his *The Devil's Dictionary* (1906), describing it as “An ancient faith having all the certitude of religion and all the mystery of science.” The world of science had its members in the early years of the movement in Thomas A. Edison, Camille Flammarion, Alfred R. Wallace, Sir William Crookes, and C. C. Massey. In the arts and music the influence was felt via the works of Piet Mondrian, Wassily Kandinsky, and Paul Klee; the music world had a Theosophical analogue in Aleksandr Scriabin. Among other spiritual and metaphysical groups the impact of the Theosophical movement was even greater: The Arcane School of Alice Bailey, the Anthroposophical Society of Rudolf Steiner, the “I Am” movement of the Ballards, the Rosicrucian Fellowship of Max Heindel, the Astarra Foundation of the Chaneyes, and the “nonorganization” or teachings of Krishnamurti all had direct and intimate involvement with the Theosophical movement prior to their own autonomous developments.

To the extent that the modern Theosophical movement helped introduce and popularize Oriental religion and philosophy to the West,

the influence is at once inestimable and agreed upon, as the early Orientalist Max Müller points out. With regard to its impact or influence on the arts and sciences, on culture and world thought, modern Theosophy has been far more effective than might be indicated by the members claimed for it within the various groups that espoused its principles. To this assertion even the impartial historians agree: J. Stillson Judah claims a large influence for modern Theosophy, and observes that "it is not quite correct to regard their force as that of many small, unimportant, individualistic sects or cults, but rather as that of one movement with many expressions."⁷⁹ Campbell states that "Indeed, the theosophical Society . . . was to have significant effects both East and West on religion, politics, culture, and society."⁸⁰ Ellwood declares simply that "Theosophy has had a significant general influence on this century."⁸¹ And, speaking of the tendency of some historians to omit the "context and conditions" of their subjects, Santucci asserts that "To a degree, such omission has minimalized the impact of the Theosophical Society on popular culture, the arts, and political activism."⁸²

COOMARASWAMY AND MODERN THEOSOPHY

It often surprises people familiar with his writings to discover that Ananda Coomaraswamy was a member of the Theosophical Society. Roger Lipsey devotes a paragraph in his biography to Coomaraswamy's involvement with some of the leaders of the Society, but does not mention the fact that he was a member. One wonders if Lipsey did not know, or if he knew and did not say. He committed himself only to saying that "The serious concern of Theosophists with Indian religion, as well as their nationalist activity, attracted Coomaraswamy at this time, although in later years he mistrusted Theosophy and insisted on the necessity of learning directly from the sources of religious knowledge."⁸³

Coomaraswamy joined the Society in 1907 at the age of twenty-nine years; his diploma of membership is dated January 20 of that year, and his membership was sponsored by Annie Besant and W. A. English, the latter being a worker with Henry S. Olcott for the revivification of Buddhism and Buddhist education in Ceylon. A little over a year prior to joining the Society, Coomaraswamy had helped form and become president of the Ceylon Reform Society, whose function was to

encourage Sinhalese culture in Ceylon relative to the arts, dress, custom, and so on. This venture, was, in fact, part of the broad revitalization begun by Olcott in 1880 when he was invited to the island by the chief monks to help restore Sinhalese Buddhism and Buddhist education. It was almost customary for members of the old Buddhist families of the island, by the year 1900, to become members of the Theosophical Society, since so much of the work of reestablishing Sinhalese Buddhism and Buddhist education was carried out under the auspices of Theosophical Society auxiliary groups. Coomaraswamy no doubt felt himself compelled to support the Theosophical Society since under its aegis Olcott had done so much for Ceylonese culture and religion. But his reasons for joining were obviously for more than supportive reciprocity: it was in the milieu of modern Theosophy that he (like Guénon) had his first glimpse of metaphysics, since his time previous to that had been occupied with geology. It was thus in the Theosophical Society that he got his metaphysical "start," and throughout the course of his life he was never able to denounce completely or condemn the Society—as Guénon did—though he disagreed with some of what he described as "caricatures" of Eastern thought that he believed the Society disseminated.

Coomaraswamy's involvement in the Ceylon Reform Society was only the beginning of his lifelong struggle to bring the integrity and beauty of Eastern art and culture to the attention not only of Western peoples, but to the modernized Easterners as well. This struggle led him into the national *swadeshi* movement in India where he became an intimate part of the Tagore circle and worked in collaboration with Western admirers of Eastern art, like E. B. Havell, Sir William Rothenstein, Roger Fry, and W. R. Lethaby. Additionally, he published two significant works in this area at that time: *Essays in National Idealism* appeared in Ceylon in 1909, and *Art and Swadeshi* appeared in India in 1911. But this activity was not unconnected with modern Theosophy. Lipsey writes that in 1907 "He met the leaders of the Theosophical Society in Benares and Madras—at least Annie Besant and Bhagavan Das, who concerned themselves with Indian religious thought but were also extremely active in the nationalist movement.⁸⁴ Bhagavan Das remained a friend of Coomaraswamy's, and in 1916, when Coomaraswamy was faced with leaving England, he tried through Das to obtain an appointment on the faculty of Benares Hindu University, founded by Annie Besant some years ear-

lier. Bhagavan Das writes that “He [Coomaraswamy] came to Benares again in 1916, I believe. He wanted very much to get a post in the Benares Hindu University as Professor of Indian Art and Culture. But it was not possible to get him one. So he went back to U.S.A. where he had already been appointed as curator at the Boston Museum.”⁸⁵ Beyond his membership, friendships, and *swadeshi* associations with the Theosophical Society, Coomaraswamy also published in Theosophical journals and presses. In the years 1909 and 1910, he published several short articles in *The Theosophist*; in 1923 he published a book through the Theosophical Publishing House at Adyar entitled *An Introduction to Indian Art*; in the Summer 1946 number of *Main Currents in Modern Thought* he published a paper entitled “Gradation, Evolution, and Reincarnation.”⁸⁶

In a footnote to “Gradation, Evolution, and Reincarnation,” Coomaraswamy claims the paper “summarizes a position” outlined in his more scholarly work entitled “On the One and Only Transmigrant.” This summarization in *Main Currents in Modern Thought* epitomizes his relation or association to the Theosophical movement in his later years. He stood strongly against what he perceived to be the conception of Theosophists on the idea of reincarnation, and seldom mentioned Theosophy other than in this context of disagreement on reincarnation. But unlike Guénon, his criticisms were gentle, even patiently didactic. He spoke, for example, of the problematic interpretation of Indian religions through “theosophists by whom the doctrines have been caricatured with the best intentions and perhaps even worse results,” and elsewhere of reincarnation specifically, lamenting that “the belief of modern scholars and theosophists is the result of an equally naive and uninformed interpretation of texts.”⁸⁷ It was largely for these reasons that he—and Guénon—avoided using the term theosophy, and substituted *philosophia perennis* or primordial Tradition. Regardless of terminology, it seems evident that the first principles of Blavatsky’s Theosophy inspired Coomaraswamy’s own first principles of *philosophia perennis*, and that he is indebted to modern Theosophy for the early formulation of his own metaphysical worldview. Other scholars have noted the similarity—and indebtedness—as well. Professor Floyd H. Ross, for instance, writes, “Theosophists generally have always claimed to find a unity underlying the mystical traditions of mankind,” and “so have modern scholars like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.”⁸⁸

GUÉNON AND MODERN THEOSOPHY

“In this century there have been several attempts to make this idea [Traditional wisdom] respectable. Philosophers like René Guénon, students of religion like Mircea Eliade and Henry Corbin, and poets like Kathleen Raine have argued movingly for the transmission of knowledge within closed groups.” So writes James Webb in *The Harmonious Circle*. But following this sentence is a more significant one: “What is true is that twentieth-century Traditionalists—whether phony or sincere—rely much more than they like to admit on the revival of occultism which took place during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.”⁸⁹ One only need examine the esoteric milieu of Paris in 1906 to verify this statement with respect to Guénon. Chapter 2 of Waterfield’s *René Guénon and the Future of the West* provides a good account of Guénon’s debut into French esotericism by becoming a protégé of Gérard Encausse (“Papus”), who was a co-founder of the Theosophical Society in France and a correspondent of H. P. Blavatsky. Waterfield states there that the modern Theosophical movement was “the main vehicle for the dissemination of the idea that secret wisdom was available from the East, and its teachings were no doubt one element amongst those that led Guénon to study Eastern philosophy and religion.” Guénon was later to split with Papus, as Papus had earlier done with Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society, but there can be little doubt that Guénon’s initial introduction to esotericism through his membership in Papus’s Faculté des Sciences Hermétique in 1906 was thoroughly imbued with the theosophical legacy of Blavatsky. Indeed, his professed familiarity with the Theosophical Society would appear to have been more than informal for Guénon to have written such a lengthy book debunking it, as he later did.

Guénon devotes several monographs and sections of books to blasting the Theosophical movement. The major one is *Le Théosophisme: Histoire d’une pseudo-religion*, first published in 1921. That year, relative to works in print, was a busy one for Guénon, as he published *Introduction générale à l’étude des doctrines hindoues* in 1921 as well; its third chapter was entitled “Le Théosophisme.” In the January–February and May–June numbers of *la Revue de Philosophie* he again published “le Théosophisme,” and in the July number of the same journal he published “Théosophisme et Franc-Maçonnerie,” followed by publication of “le Théosophisme” in the November and December

1925 issues of *Le Voile d'Isis*. By that time his fulminations against Theosophy seem to have attrited, though all throughout his later writings he would occasionally take a swipe at the Theosophical movement, seeing in it a totally corrupt expression of perennial first principles. The content and tone of all this writing varies little from the initial barrage of obloquies in his book-length work *Le Théosophisme*.

The essence and whole plan of attack of this work can be distilled to one clause, found on page 302 of *Le Théosophisme*. There he wrote that “we will add that the best means to combat theosophism is, in our opinion, to expose its history just as it is.”⁹⁰ Hence the “histoire” in the title, which points to a profound inconsistency in Guénon’s oeuvre. Guénon repeatedly criticizes the “historical method,” as we have seen, as being fatuous and irrelevant, yet he undertakes to refute modern Theosophy not on the merits (or demerits) of the principles that it espouses, but on “son histoire telle qu’elle est” (“its history just as it is”). And in this instance, Guénon should have stuck to his metaphysical or principial method and left the historical method that he eschews to historians. The book is full of historical inaccuracies, and uses assumptions for facts at every turn.⁹¹ This might explain why of Guénon’s seventeen book-length works, *Le Théosophisme* is one of the few that has not yet been translated into English, and further why the editors of Éditions Traditionnelles in their 1965 second edition of the book decided to add a full sixty-five pages of (equally problematic) “Notes Additionnelles de la second édition” (pp. 311–376). Guénon was at his best when articulating the profound metaphysical principles of the primordial Tradition in his trenchant style, but he was at his worst when attempting to debunk other esoteric or spiritualist movements and organizations using the historical method which he himself held in such contempt.

One does not have to read very far into the work to find oversights and serious distortions. On the first page of chapter 1, Guénon states that Blavatsky was born in 1831, which is true, but omits the day of birth. The very first “additional” note gives the *day* of her birth because “we were not able to find the exact date at the time of the first edition,” the “we” (*nous*) presumably being Guénon. Yet on the very first page in Herbert G. Whyte’s biography of Blavatsky, *H. P. Blavatsky: An Outline of Her Life*, published in London in 1909, twelve years prior to Guénon’s first edition of *Le Théosophisme*, the day of her birth is given. On the third page, Guénon tries to establish hypocrisy or inconsistency by showing that Mrs. Besant, who propounded

esoteric Christianity in her later years, was once quoted as having stated the necessity of “above all to combat Rome and its priests, to fight wheresoever against Christianity and chase God from the skies.” This is doubtless true, and Guénon cites the reference as an address to a congress of Free Thinkers in Brussels in 1880. What he fails to mention, however, is that this is a full decade *before* Mrs. Besant ever encountered the Theosophical movement, that she had recently undergone an unsuccessful marriage and subsequent divorce from an Anglican cleric, and that the socialist, Fabian Society, free-thought milieu in which she then found a home, was openly hostile to religions and ecclesiastical bureaucracies. Guénon’s implication is that one cannot alter one’s view of religion—radically or otherwise—in thirty years’ time without being hypocritical or inconsistent, an ironic implication that has some bearing on his own views of Buddhism. One could multiply such examples endlessly.

But this is not intended to be a review of *Le Théosophisme*. The point is that Guénon chose an historical vehicle, and not a principial vehicle, to criticize modern Theosophy. He does give a brief outline of the “essential” doctrines of modern Theosophy in chapter 11 of *Le Théosophisme*—namely, “Principaux points de l’enseignement théosophiste”—but most are points at which he is at variance, and not one single similarity of teaching is shown between his view of Traditional first principles and Theosophic first principles. Moreover, he cites only Blavatsky’s *Key to Theosophy*, and never there mentions her *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine*. Were Guénon to have explicated the essential similarity of principles in both systems, it would have defeated his argument that the doctrines espoused by modern Theosophy were entirely bogus. His repugnance toward modern Theosophy is a blind spot in Guénon’s worldview, for while there are certainly misinterpretations and ill formulations of Traditional principles on the part of some Theosophists, the promulgators of modern Theosophy were neither intentionally nor wholly corrupt as he seems to think, and there are innumerable more points of agreement between Tradition and modern Theosophy, as we shall presently see, than he was ever willing to admit.

We have seen that Marco Pallis, in contrasting Guénon to Coomaraswamy, is reluctant to endorse Guénon’s capacity for scholarship. Whitall Perry, though an admirer of Guénon, has sufficient objectivity to address Guénon’s factual carelessness directly, and discusses the possible causes of this problem: “The factual errors referred to may be

an indirect consequences of Guénon's inborn metaphysical wisdom: his certitude about principles left him somewhat careless regarding the pedestrian but inescapable requirements of scholarship."⁹² Similarly, Eliade writes that "contrary to René Guénon or other contemporary 'esotericists,' Coomaraswamy developed his exegesis without surrendering the tools and methods of philology, archeology, art history, ethnology, folklore, and history of religions."⁹³ Curiously, Eliade also asserts, relative to *Le Théosophisme*, that it is an "erudite and devastating critique," and a "learned and brilliantly written book."⁹⁴ With this we cannot agree. Yet one should not, on the basis of one ill-conceived "history," suspect all of Guénon's metaphysical work or thought. Regardless of this one work, the profound metaphysical insight and raw perspicacity of Guénon far outweigh his more problematic material, and the positive effect of his sagacity cannot be overestimated within the sphere of Traditional metaphysics. Elsewhere, Eliade describes Guénon's doctrine as "considerably more rigorous and more cogent than that of the occultists and hermeticists" (e.g., Eliphas Levi, Papus, St. Martin, and others) who preceded him, and with this statement we do agree. It is to the first principles of the primordial Tradition, and to those of the *philosophia perennis* and theosophy as well, that our attention will now be focused.