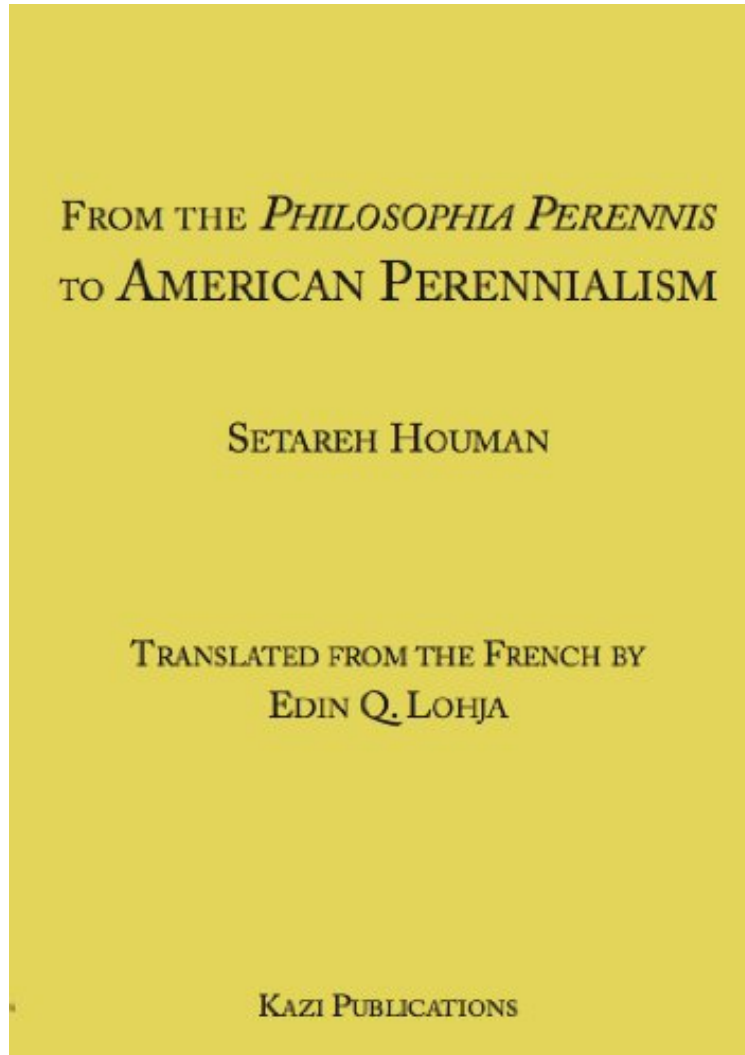


(Download ebook) From the Philosophia Perennis to American Perennialism

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Setareh Houman

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Setareh Houman : From the Philosophia Perennis to American Perennialism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised From the Philosophia Perennis to American Perennialism:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. From Traditionalism to PerennialismBy A ReaderThis is in effect two books in one: a history of the idea of a Perennial Philosophy, and a study of its development in the USA, with special reference to the academic scene. The first part traces the philosophia perennis from its reappearance at the Renaissance, through the discovery of the Orient in the Enlightenment, the German romantics, American Transcendentalists, 19th century occultism, and the Theosophical Society. While Traditionalists tend to spurn H.P.

Blavatsky, Houman points out that all the French occultists, including the young Ren Guon, were indebted to her movement for the publication of the traditional texts of India and the revivification of Hermetic philosophy. Houman also includes Edouard Schur as a proto-perennialist whose popular work *The Great Initiates* provided the clearing-house by which Theosophical ideas were made acceptable to the Traditionalist mentality. Houman then summarizes the life and work of two sources of the Traditionalist current in the 20th century: Ren Guon, who recast the Perennial Philosophy in terms appropriate for the Kali Yuga, and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, the art-historian and authority on comparative metaphysics. Coomaraswamy surpassed Guon in erudition and in aesthetic sensibility. Although his rejection of the modern world was no less decided than Guon's, he paid little attention to mystifications like Agarththa, the conspiracies of the Counter-Initiation, or the polemic against Theosophy. Instead, his emphasis was on the convergence of all symbols, rites, and religions at a metaphysical summit where all distinctions vanish. The third major Traditionalist of the early twentieth-century, Julius Evola, receives only passing mention in Houman's book because he had virtually no influence on the Americans. European Traditionalism came to them in part through Mircea Eliade, the historian of religions who, as Houman documents, underplayed or even disguised his debt to Evola and Guon, and far more decidedly through Frithjof Schuon. Houman's account of Schuon's life and work is more than twice the length of that in the standard work on the Traditionalists: Mark Sedgwick's *Against the Modern World*. She lets the reader decide from the literary evidence whether Schuon continued, amplified, or perverted the current into which Guon and the Sufis had introduced him. It does seem that while Guon insisted that esotericists also follow an orthodox exoteric religion, Schuon did nothing of the kind; and whereas Guon censured the mixing of traditions, Schuon made his own blend of Islamic, Christian, and Native American practices. The entry of esotericism, in its Traditionalist mode, into the American Academy of Religion set off debates that fill the remainder of Houman's book. One of these in the late 1980s pitted Stephen Katz, who held all spiritual experience to be culturally conditioned, against Huston Smith as defender of its transcendence of religious differences. In 1989 Len Bowman, Sheldon Isenberg, and Tyson Anderson turned their analytic skills on various problems raised by Traditionalist claims, and James Cutsinger answered them all in comparable depth. The whole episode now has the flavor of a period piece, yet at the time issues of real importance were at stake. The first generation of Traditionalists had taken on modernism as a symptom of the Kali Yuga and an enemy to humanity. Now it was the turn of postmodernism. Houman then brings the story of the American Traditionalists, now self-styled Perennialists, up to the present. She gives thumbnail sketches of the second generation of scholars, sorting them into Nasrians (followers of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, including Laleh Bakhtiar, Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, Wolfgang Smith, John Ahmed Herlihy, Joseph Lombard, William A. Graham), Schuonians (including James Cutsinger, Patrick Laude, Mark Perry, William Chittick, Barry McDonald, Michael Oren Fitzgerald) and Coomaraswamians (Roger Lipsey, William Quinn, Rama Coomaraswamy). The few American Guonians, too, receive their due (Samuel D. Fohr, Charles Upton, Lee Penn), as do the relevant publishers and journals, both print and online. This, together with the Bibliography, is an invaluable collection of sources, some of them very obscure. It also reveals that in the well-integrated world of Humanities and Religious Studies, every one of the Perennialists is male. Like the fictitious writer of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, who showed Europeans the hidden truths about themselves, this Iranian scholar sees her subject with a clarity and detachment denied to insiders. The result is a gift of self-knowledge to Perennialists and a permanent contribution to the history of ideas. Note: The above is based on a longer review of the original French edition, in *Theosophical History*, Vol. XV, No.1 (2011). 4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A very good book! By Sandra Miller A great book, written by talented scholar S. Houman, for anyone who wants to acquire more knowledge on the philisophia perennis' history in the United States. Well documented and enjoyable to read, this book provides a rigorous analysis and a critical insight on the subject. A must-read book for anyone interested on the subject.

The search for an eternal wisdom of divine origin, transmitted from the very dawn of humanity, but fragmented and partially lost, is a recurring theme in the history of Western esotericism. This theme was most notably expressed at the beginning of the 20th century by a form of thought called Traditionalism, above all from the moment that the French author Ren Guon became its spokesman with his anti-modernist writings. The term Perennialism, however, refers more specifically to the form this thought has taken in the United States, as represented primarily by Frithjof Schuon and his followers, namely, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Huston Smith, and a second generation of writers such as James Cutsinger. Frithjof Schuon is regarded as the thinker who gave perennialist philosophy its definitive synthesis, and as the first perennialist to assume an initiatory function. Founder and spiritual master of a Sufi order in the United States, Schuon based his perspective on the intellect and on the nature of things, and he oriented his own teaching toward an esoterism per se, personified by the Virgin Mary. The idea of religio perennis or sophia perennis, a set of metaphysical principles revealed by heaven and partially restored by each genuine founder of a new religion, became, in Schuon's metaphysics, the transcendent unity present in the essential core of every religion. This metaphysical view and the spiritual method introduced by Schuon were adapted by two of his followers, the Iranian professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an authority in Islamic Studies, and the American scholar Huston Smith, who specialized more in transpersonal experiences. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy is an independent figure among American perennialists, but shares their

perspective. This new meaning of esoterism, in contrast to esotericism, applies to certain currents in Western culture that are historically related and show certain similarities, and that point toward a religionist approach to the study of religions an approach that is often criticized in academic circles.

After an introductory section devoted to the roots of North American perennialism from the Renaissance to modern Theosophy and the work of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy through the romantic quests and transcendentalists of light from the East the author presents the history of the current itself in the United States from the mid-20th century to today. She describes its various manifestations, in both academic and artistic circles, and outlines the debates that have been raised and continue to be raised. Finally, she highlights some problematic aspects, subjecting them to questions from an historical-critical perspective. Houman's book is a richly documented contribution, a qualitatively stimulating study. It reflects not only on North American culture and civilization in particular, but also on an important aspect of the contemporary philosophical landscape in general. Her precision of articulation is enhanced by clear and elegant language throughout. This work is a must for anyone interested in the study of this subject from the perspective of philosophical thought. Well organized, based on solid research, and written in an easy-to-read style, this is the first study not only to locate the United States in the perennialist movement, but also to analyze, in detail, its vision of the world. While the literature on perennialism tends mostly to be marked by a partisan and apologetic spirit, Dr. Houman approaches this subject in a spirit that combines generosity and respect for rigor. I heartily recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand this important trend in modern and contemporary spirituality. Wouter J. Hanegraaff --

From the original French Edition of *From Philosophia Perennis to American Perennialism* The author's Professor: Antoine Faivre (1934). Professor of Germanic Studies at the University of Bordeaux, then of Rouen, from 1972 to 1991. In 1979, appointed to the chair of History of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe at the cole Pratique des Hautes tudes (Department of Sciences Religieuses, Sorbonne), where he is Professor Emeritus since 2002. Four appointments as Visiting Professor at the University of Berkeley (Religious Studies and Germanistics) in the 1980s. Another area of his competency bears on Epistemology and Historical Comparativism in Religious Studies. Author of: *Kirchberger et l' Illuminisme du XVIIIe sicle* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1965); *Eckartshausen et la thosophie chrtienne* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1969); *Mystiques, Thosophes et Illumins au sicle des Lumires* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1977); *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy* (Albany [NY], SUNY Press, 1993); *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany [NY]: S.U.N.Y., 1994); *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus* (Grand Rapids [Mi]: Phanes Press, 1995); *Philosophie de la Nature (Physique sacre et thosophie, XVIII-XIX sicles* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996); *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition* (Albany [NY]: S.U.N.Y., 2000); *L sotrisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012, 5th ed. Translated as *Western Esotericism. A Concise History*, Albany [NY]: S.U.N.Y., 2011). Editor of the series (45 volumes published since 1977) *Cahiers de l' Hermtisme* and *Bibliothque de l' Hermtisme* (Paris: Albin Michel / Dervy). Co-editor: with Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Roelof van de Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach) of the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Leiden etc.: E.J. Brill, 2005); with Wouter J. Hahnegraaff and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke of *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*. And co-editor of several collective volumes (mostly Proceedings of conferences) on the study of Western esotericism. Formely member of the European Editorial Board of the journal *Religion*, and of the Steering Committee of the Western Esotericism Group of the American Academy of Religion. --From the Author

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About the Author Setareh Houman is an Iranian independent researcher. She has studied Philosophy at the University of Paris-IV (Sorbonne), and at the cole Pratique des Hautes tudes (Department of Religious Studies,

Sorbonne) from which she received her doctorate in 2006. Among her publications: *A Book: Nietzsche* (2005, in Iranian), *Translations (into Iranian): of Sarah Kaufman's Camera Obscura de L'idologie* (2001), of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Loge de la Philosophie* (1998). The present work, originally a doctoral dissertation (prepared under the supervision of Antoine Faivre), is an expanded version of the book published in French in 2010.