

# Gnosis

**Gnosis** is the common Greek noun for knowledge (γνώσις, *gnōsis*, f.).<sup>[1]</sup> The term is used in various Hellenistic religions and philosophies.<sup>[2][3]</sup> It is best known from Gnosticism, where it signifies a knowledge or insight into humanity’s real nature as divine, leading to the deliverance of the divine spark within humanity from the constraints of earthly existence.<sup>[3][2]</sup>

## Contents

### Etymology

#### Judeo-Christian usage

Hellenistic Jewish literature

New Testament

In the writings of the Greek Fathers

In Eastern Orthodox thought

#### Gnosticism

#### See also

#### References

#### Sources

## Etymology

*Gnosis* is a feminine Greek noun which means "knowledge".<sup>[4]</sup> It is often used for personal knowledge compared with intellectual knowledge (εἶδειν *eídein*), as with the French *connaître* compared with *savoir*, the Spanish *conocer* compared with *saber*, the Italian *conoscere* compared with *sapere*, or the German *kennen* rather than *wissen*.<sup>[5]</sup>

A related term is the adjective *gnostikos*, "cognitive",<sup>[6]</sup> a reasonably common adjective in Classical Greek.<sup>[7]</sup> Plato uses the plural adjective γνωστικοί – *gnostikoi* and the singular feminine adjective γνωστικὴ ἐπιστήμη – *gnostike episteme* in his *Politikos* where *Gnostike episteme* was also used to indicate one's aptitude. The terms do not appear to indicate any mystic, esoteric or hidden meaning in the works of Plato, but instead expressed a sort of higher intelligence and ability analogous to talent.<sup>[8]</sup>

Plato The Statesman 258e

— Stranger: In this way, then, divide all science into two arts, calling the one practical (*praktikos*), and the other purely intellectual (*gnostikos*). Younger Socrates: Let us assume that all science is one and that these are its two forms.<sup>[9]</sup>

In the Hellenistic era the term became associated with the mystery cults.

*Gnosis* is used throughout Greek philosophy as a technical term for experience knowledge (see gnosiology) in contrast to theoretical knowledge or epistemology. The term is also related to the study of knowledge retention or memory (see also cognition), in relation to ontic or ontological, which is how something actually is rather than how something is captured (abstraction) and stored (memory) in the mind.

Irenaeus used the phrase "knowledge falsely so-called" (*pseudonymos gnosis*, from 1 Timothy 6:20)<sup>[10]</sup> for the title of his book *On the Detection and Overthrow of False Knowledge*, that contains the adjective *gnostikos*, which is the source for the 17th-century English term "Gnosticism".

# Judeo-Christian usage

---

## Hellenistic Jewish literature

The Greek word *gnosis* (knowledge) is used as a standard translation of the Hebrew word "knowledge" (דַּעַת da'ath) in the Septuagint, thus:

	<div>The Lord gives wisdom [<i>hokhma</i>] (<i>sophia</i>), from his face come knowledge [<i>da'ath</i>] (<i>gnosis</i>) and understanding [<i>tevuna</i>] (<i>synesis</i>)"</div>
	<div>— Proverbs 2.6</div>

Philo also refers to the "knowledge" (*gnosis*) and "wisdom" (*sophia*) of God.<sup>[11]</sup>

## New Testament

Paul distinguishes "knowledge" (*gnosis*) and "knowledge falsely so-called" (*pseudonymos gnosis*).

## In the writings of the Greek Fathers

The fathers of early Christianity used the word "knowledge" (*gnosis*) in the New Testament to mean spiritual knowledge or specific knowledge of the divine. This positive usage was to contrast it with how gnostic sectarians used the word. This positive use carried over from Hellenic philosophy into Greek Orthodoxy as a critical characteristic of ascetic practices, through St. Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hegesippus, and Origen.

Cardiognosis ("knowledge of the heart") from Eastern Christianity related to the tradition of the staretz and in Roman Catholic theology is the view that only God knows the condition of one's relationship with God.<sup>[12][13]</sup>

## In Eastern Orthodox thought

Gnosis in Orthodox Christian (primarily Eastern Orthodox) thought is the spiritual knowledge of a saint (one who has obtained theosis)<sup>[14]</sup> or mystically enlightened human being. Within the cultures of the term's provenance (Byzantine and Hellenic) *Gnosis* was a knowledge or insight into the infinite, divine and uncreated in all and above all,<sup>[15]</sup> rather than knowledge strictly into the finite, natural or material world.<sup>[16]</sup> Gnosis is transcendental as well as mature understanding. It indicates direct spiritual, experiential knowledge<sup>[17]</sup> and intuitive knowledge, mystic rather than that from rational or reasoned thinking. Gnosis itself is gained through understanding at which one can arrive via inner experience or contemplation such as an internal epiphany of intuition and external epiphany such as the Theophany.

In the *Philokalia*, it is emphasized that such knowledge is not secret knowledge but rather a maturing, transcendent form of knowledge derived from contemplation (*theoria* resulting from practice of *hesychasm*), since knowledge cannot truly be derived from knowledge, but rather, knowledge can only be derived from *theoria* (to witness, see (vision) or experience).<sup>[18]</sup> Knowledge, thus plays an important role in relation to *theosis* (deification/personal relationship with God) and *theoria* (revelation of the divine, vision of God).<sup>[19]</sup> Gnosis, as the proper use of the spiritual or noetic faculty plays an important role in Orthodox Christian theology. Its importance in the economy of salvation is discussed periodically in the *Philokalia* where as direct, personal knowledge of God (noesis; see also Noema) it is distinguished from ordinary epistemological knowledge (episteme—i.e., speculative philosophy).

# Gnosticism

---

Gnosticism originated in the late first century CE in nonrabbinical Jewish sects and early Christian sects.<sup>[20]</sup> In the formation of Christianity, various sectarian groups, labeled "gnostics" by their opponents, emphasised spiritual knowledge (*gnosis*) of the Divine spark within, over faith (*pistis*) in the teachings and traditions of the various communities of Christians.<sup>[21]</sup> Gnosticism presents a

distinction between the highest, unknowable God, and the demiurge “creator” of the material universe. The Gnostics considered the most essential part of the process of salvation to be this personal knowledge, in contrast to faith as an outlook in their world view along with faith in the ecclesiastical authority. They were regarded as heretics by the Fathers of the early church.

# See also

- Aseity
- Chaos magic
- Enlightenment
- Fana (Sufism)
- Gnosis (chaos magic)
- Gnossiennes
- Gnosticism
- Gnosticism in modern times
- Ilm, Islamic concept of knowledge and gnosis
- Irfan and Shiism
- Hans Jonas
- Jnana
- Kundalini
- Neoplatonism and Gnosticism
- Kurt Rudolph
- Satori
- Valentinus (Gnostic)
- Samael Aun Weor

# References

- Stanley E. Porter; David Yoon (2016). *Paul and Gnosis* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=Cc0JDAAAQBAJ&pg=PA9>). BRILL. p. 9. ISBN 978-90-04-31669-0.
- Kurt Rudolph (2001). *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=3XxxkESCWz4C>). A&C Black. p. 2. ISBN 978-0-567-08640-2.
- Gnosticism (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/gnosticism>), Encyclopædia Britannica
- Liddell Scott entry (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=gnwsis&la=greek#lexicon>) γνῶσις, εως, ἥ, A. seeking to know, inquiry, investigation, esp. judicial, “τὰς τῶν δικαστηρίων γ.” D.18.224; “τὴν κατὰ τοῦ διαιτητοῦ γδεetr.” Id.21.92, cf. 7.9, Lycurg.141; “γ. περὶ τῆς δίκης” PHib.1.92.13 (iii B. C.). 2. result of investigation, decision, PPetr.3p.118 (iii B. C.). II. knowing, knowledge, Heraclit.56; opp. ἀγνοσίη, Hp. Vict.1.23 (dub.); opp. ἀγνοια, Pl.R.478c; “ἡ αἰσθησις γ. τις” Arist.GA731a33: pl., “Θεὸς γνῶσεων κύριος” LXX 1 Ki.2.3. b. higher, esoteric knowledge, 1 Ep.Cor.8.7,10, Ep.Eph.3.19, etc.; “χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν νοῦν, λόγον, γνῶσιν” PMag.Par.2.290. 2. acquaintance with a person, πρὸς τινα Test. ap.Aeschin.1.50; “τῶν Σεβαστῶν” IPE1.47.6 (Olbia). 3. recognizing, Th.7.44. 4. means of knowing, [“αἱ αἰσθήσεις] κυριώταται τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα γ.” Arist.Metaph.981b11. III. being known, γνῶσιν ἔχει τι, = γνωστόν ἐστι, Pl.Tht.206b. 2. fame, credit, Hdn.7.5.5, Luc.Herod.3. IV. means of knowing: hence, statement in writing, PLond.5.1708, etc. (vi A. D.). V. = γνῶμα, Hsch. s. h. v.
- Pagels, Elaine (1995). *The Origin of Satan*. Allen Lane, The Penguin Press. p. 167.
- LSJ entry (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=gnwstikos&la=greek#lexicon>) γνωστ-ικός, ἥ, όν, A. of or for knowing, cognitive: ἡ -κῆ (sc. ἐπιστήμη), theoretical science (opp. πρακτική), Pl.Plт.258b.c., etc.; τὸ γ. ib.261b; “ἐξεις γ.” Arist.AP0.100a11 (Comp.); “γ. εἰκόνες” Hierocl.in CA25p.475M.: c. gen., able to discern, Ocell. 2.7. Adv. “-κῶς” Procl.Inst.39, Dam.Pr.79, Phlp.in Ph.241.22.
- In Perseus databank (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/wordfreq?lang=greek&lookup=gnwstiko%2Fs>) 10x Plato, Cratylus, Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman 2x Plutarch, Compendium libri de animae procreatione + De animae procreatione in Timaeo, 2x Pseudo-Plutarch, De musica
- Cooper and Hutchinson. "Introduction to Politikos." Cooper, John M. & Hutchinson, D. S. (Eds.) (1997). Plato: Complete Works, Hackett Publishing Co., Inc. ISBN 0-87220-349-2.
- Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 12 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921. (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0172:text=Stat.:section=258e>)
- feminine nominative adjective (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=yewdw%2Fnumos&la=greek&prior=yewdw/motos>)

11. New Testament studies: Society for New Testament Studies - 1981 "see also the more extensive analysis of gnosis in Philo by Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spatantiker Geist* 11/1"
12. Donald K. McKim, *Westminster dictionary of theological terms*, 1996, p. 39
13. A concise dictionary of theology by Gerald O'Collins, Edward G. Farrugia pg 130 Publisher: T. & T. Clark Publishers (August 30, 2004) ISBN 978-0-567-08354-8 [1] ([https://books.google.com/books?id=jQooODXx-2wC&pg=PA130&dq=cardiognosis+Orthodoxy&hl=en&ei=6KPdTdbSK4bn0QG\\_vuTtDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=jQooODXx-2wC&pg=PA130&dq=cardiognosis+Orthodoxy&hl=en&ei=6KPdTdbSK4bn0QG_vuTtDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q&f=false))
14. "Spiritual knowledge is the state of spiritual **theoria**, when one sees invisibly and hears inaudibly and comprehends incomprehensibly the glory of God. Precisely then comprehension ceases and, what is more, he understands that he does not understand. Within the vision of the uncreated Light man also sees angels and Saints and, in general, he experiences communion with the angels and the Saints. He is then certain that resurrection exists. This is the spiritual knowledge which all the holy Prophets, the Apostles, Martyrs, ascetics and all the Saints of the Church had. The teachings of the Saints are an offspring of this spiritual knowledge. And, naturally, as we said earlier, spiritual knowledge is a fruit of the vision of God. "THE ILLNESS AND CURE OF THE SOUL" Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos [2] ([http://www.pelagia.org/htm/b05.en.the\\_illness\\_and\\_cure\\_of\\_the\\_soul.04.htm#kno1](http://www.pelagia.org/htm/b05.en.the_illness_and_cure_of_the_soul.04.htm#kno1))
15. St. Symeon the New Theologian in *Practical & Theological Discourses*, 1.1 The *Philokalia* Volume Four: When men search for God with their bodily eyes they find Him nowhere, for He is invisible. But for those who ponder in the Spirit He is present everywhere. He is in all, yet beyond all
16. Faith And Science In Orthodox Gnosiology And Methodology by George Metallinos "The scientist and professor of the knowledge of the Uncreated, in the Orthodox Tradition, is the Geron/**Starets** (the Elder or Spiritual Father), the guide or "teacher of the desert." The recording of both types of knowledge presupposes empirical knowledge of the phenomenon. The same holds true in the field of science, where only the specialist understands the research of other scientists of the same field. The adoption of conclusions or findings of a scientific branch by non-specialists (i.e. those who are unable to experimentally examine the research of the specialists) is based on the trust of the specialists credibility. Otherwise, there would be no scientific progress. The same holds true for the science of faith. The empirical knowledge of the Saints, Prophets, Apostles, Fathers and Mothers of all ages is adopted and founded upon the same trust. The patristic tradition and the Church's Councils function on this provable experience. There is no Ecumenical Council without the presence of the glorified/deified (theoumenoi), those who see the divine (this is the problem of the councils of today!) Orthodox doctrine results from this relationship." University of Athens - Department of Theology (<http://www.psyche.gr/Metallinos.htm>)
17. The *Philokalia* Volume Four Palmer, G.E.H; Sherrard, Philip; Ware, Kallistos (Timothy). ISBN 0-571-19382-X, glossary, pg 434, Spiritual Knowledge (γνῶσις): the knowledge of the intellect (q.v.). As such, it is knowledge inspired by God, as **insight** (noesis) or **revelational**, **intuitive** knowledge (see **gnosiology**) and so linked with **contemplation** and immediate spiritual perception.
18. Glossary of terms from the *Philokalia* pg 434 the knowledge of the intellect as distinct from that of the reason(q.v.). Knowledge inspired by God, and so linked with contemplation (q.v.) and immediate spiritual perception.
19. The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, SVS Press, 1997. (ISBN 0-913836-31-1) James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2002. (ISBN 0-227-67919-9) pg 218
20. Magris 2005, p. 3515-3516.
21. *The Social World of the First Christians* (1995) ISBN 0-06-064586-5, essay "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism" by Bentley Layton [3] ([https://books.google.com/books?id=GC4vwTXJSaMC&pg=PA106&dq=Layton,+Bentley.+%22Prolegomena+to+the+Study+of+Ancient+Gnosticism&hl=en&ei=2q7dTd3LJcra0QHd7bmyCg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Layton%2C%20Bentley.%20%22Prolegomena%20to%20the%20Study%20of%20Ancient%20Gnosticism&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=GC4vwTXJSaMC&pg=PA106&dq=Layton,+Bentley.+%22Prolegomena+to+the+Study+of+Ancient+Gnosticism&hl=en&ei=2q7dTd3LJcra0QHd7bmyCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=Layton%2C%20Bentley.%20%22Prolegomena%20to%20the%20Study%20of%20Ancient%20Gnosticism&f=false))

# Sources

- Magris, Aldo (2005), "Gnosticism: Gnosticism from its origins to the Middle Ages (further considerations)", in Jones, Lindsay (ed.), *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Religion*, MacMillan

Retrieved from "https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Gnosis&oldid=920735560"

**This page was last edited on 11 October 2019, at 14:46 (UTC).**

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

