



**SPIRITISM AND THE CENTURY OF THE LIGHTS:**  
the influence of the Enlightenment and 19th century science on Allan  
Kardec's work

***SPIRITISMO E O SÉCULO DAS LUZES:***  
*a influência do iluminismo e da ciência do século XIX em Allan Kardec*

***EL ESPIRITISMO Y EL SIGLO DE LAS LUCES:***  
*La influencia de la Ilustración y la ciencia del siglo XIX en Allan Kardec*

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**ABSTRACT**

At the very beginning of the 19th century, occurs the birth of the founder of Spiritism, the French educator Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, the civil name of Allan Kardec. He was born amidst a multitude of revolutionary ideas and thoughts resulting from the Enlightenment. This article aims to show the influence of the French Enlightenment and 19th-century science on his life and work, and consequently, it tries to clarify the environment in which Spiritism was coined. This intent will be achieved through bibliographic research in historical records and Kardec's work. To achieve this goal, we intend to point out the influences over the Spiritism of some thinkers, such as Franz Anton Mesmer, Auguste Comte, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and Francis Bacon. With this, we intend to show that, despite Kardec himself has attributed his work to the spirits, his intellectual baggage was fundamental in organizing the knowledge that was, according to his followers, being offered by the spirits, and how much this academic background facilitated its reception among those who received.

**Keywords:** *Spiritism. Enlightenment. Science in the 19th century. Allan Kardec.*

**RESUMO**

Logo no início do século XIX, em meio a uma profusão de ideias e pensamentos revolucionários resultantes do Iluminismo, é que ocorre o nascimento do fundador do Espiritismo o pedagogo francês Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, o nome civil de Allan Kardec. O objetivo desse artigo é demonstrar a influência do Iluminismo francês e da ciência do século XIX na sua vida e obra, e por consequência, compreender o ambiente em que foi formado o Espiritismo. Este intento será alcançado através de uma pesquisa bibliográfica junto a registros históricos e a própria obra de Kardec. Para alcançar tal objetivo, pretendemos pontuar as influências de pensadores como Franz Anton Mesmer, Augusto Comte, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Jean Jacques Rousseau e Francis Bacon nessa religião. Com isso pretendemos demonstrar que apesar do próprio Kardec atribuir sua obra aos espíritos, sua bagagem intelectual foi fundamental na organização do conhecimento que estava segundo seus fiéis sendo oferecido pelos espíritos e o quanto que essa bagagem acadêmica facilitou a sua recepção entre aqueles que o receberam.

**Palavras-chave:** *Espiritismo. Iluminismo. Ciência no século XIX. Allan Kardec.*

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**RESUMEN**

A principios del siglo XIX, en medio de una profusión de ideas y pensamientos revolucionarios derivados de la Ilustración, ocurre el nacimiento del fundador del Espiritismo, el pedagogo francés Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, de nombre civil Allan Kardec. El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar la influencia de la Ilustración francesa y de la ciencia del siglo XIX en su vida y en su obra y, en consecuencia, comprender el entorno en el que se acuñó el Espiritismo. Este propósito se logrará mediante una investigación bibliográfica con registros históricos y la obra del propio Kardec. Para lograr este objetivo, pretendemos señalar las influencias de pensadores como Franz Anton Mesmer, Auguste Comte, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Jean Jacques Rousseau y Francis Bacon en esta religión. Con ello pretendemos demostrar que, aunque el propio Kardec atribuyera su obra a los espíritus, su bagaje intelectual fue fundamental en la organización del conocimiento que, según sus seguidores, le ofrecían los espíritus y cuánto facilitaba este bagaje académico su recepción entre quienes lo recibían.

**Palabras Clave:** Espiritismo. Ilustración. La ciencia en el siglo XIX. Allan Kardec.

**1 INTRODUCTION**

In France, on April 18, 1857, the pedagogue Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail, known by the nom de plume Allan Kardec, released *The Spirits' Book*. He is called by some as the codifier of Spiritism and by others the founder of this religion. He was born amid a profusion of ideas and thoughts, results of the century of enlightenment<sup>1</sup>. In this article, we intend to show some of the influence of the French Enlightenment and the science of the 18th and 19th centuries in his life and work and, consequently, understand the environment in which Spiritism arises.

As a disciple of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Rivail had his education strongly rooted in the thoughts of the 18th century, a prelude to the consolidation of an intense rationalism in the 19th century. Besides this, the Protestant Reformation, the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution had a decisive influence on the thinkers of his time. All these ideas laid important foundations for social, philosophical, scientific and religious movements that have affected the religious thought of this time, with consequences to these days. The 19th century was so fertile in ideas, movements and talents, that it would be impossible in the few lines of this article to describe them all, but we will try to describe the sources that were crucial to Rivail, the man behind Allan Kardec.

These influences fall into two important branches for Rivail. The first was his own sociocultural environment, where the Christian religious culture was extremely present, Catholic while he was in France in his family circle, and Protestant in his academic circle in

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<sup>1</sup> This term has been used to describe trends in thought and literature in Europe and throughout America during the 18th century, preceding the French Revolution. It was employed by the writers of that period, who were convinced that they were emerging from centuries of obscurantism and ignorance into a new era, illuminated by reason, science, and respect for humanity.

Switzerland. These influences may have affected the trajectory of Rivail's thought as Kardec, who apparently went through a transformation of ideas around the concept and role of religion in the development of his works. The second aspect arises from his interaction with various thinkers of the time, as he became a respected pedagogue with several published works and who took part in various intellectual societies of his time (WANTUIL, 1984, p. 172).

He structured *The Spirits' Book* in an extremely didactic way, just as he did to his works as a pedagogue. He divided the book into four parts, each one later unfolded in a book of his work, as follows: a) from the part one, *First causes*, was written the book *Genesis, the Miracles and the Predictions according to Spiritism* ([1868] 1990)<sup>2</sup>; b) from the part two, *The spirit world or world of spirits*, was written *The Mediums' Book* ([1861] 1987); c) from the part three, *The moral laws*, was written *The Gospel According to Spiritism* ([1864] 2013a); d) from the fourth part, *The hopes and consolations*, was written *Heaven and Hell or The Divine Justice according to Spiritism* was written ([1865] 2013b). This structure, created as a didactic method, was structured according to the scientific method that we will explain ahead to present and organize his thoughts and the 'pirits' ideas. All this based on the thought and science of his time, which was particularly from the Enlightenment.

When we talk about Enlightenment, we normally remember France, but this movement was not an only French phenomenon, and was present in several parts of the world, especially in Germany, Scotland, the British colonies that would form the United States of America<sup>3</sup>, England, and Portugal. For the object of our study, we are particularly interested in the French Enlightenment, since *Liberty, Equality and Fraternit*" is also the title of one chapter of the book *Posthumous Works*, by Allan Kardec (2016, p. 211). In this chapter, retrieved<sup>4</sup> by P.G. Leymarie, the influence of the Enlightenment is clear, when Kardec says at the very beginning: "Liberty, equality, fraternity. These three words represent, by themselves, a program for an entire social order which would accomplish the most absolute progress of humanity, if the principle which they translate could receive full application." (KARDEC, 2016, p. 211). But besides this quote, we find several references by Kardec to these three principles of enlightenment mainly in the spiritist magazine, such as the one of April 1862 (p. 178) that says: "But, without displeasing the little Voltaires of our

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<sup>2</sup> The year in brackets refers to the original publication date of the book.

<sup>3</sup> The Enlightenment movement in the United States began just before its independence on July 4, 1776. (SOCIENTIFICA, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> The book *Posthumous Works* was a compilation of texts bequeathed by Allan Kardec made by one of the members of the Parisian Society for Spiritist Studies P. G. Leymarie.

time, youth will easily understand these three magic words: liberty, equality, fraternity.”

Through our master’s research, which led to the publication of our book *Kardec’s Search: Faith or Reason - A Busca de Kardec: Fé ou Razão* (BARROS, 2022) we highlight those influences that, in our opinion, were the most significant for Rivail, which are: 1) freedom of thought; 2) principles of equality and fraternity; 3) reason as a source of progress, 4) science as a means of supporting his ideas.

## 2 LIBERTY, EQUALITY AND FRATERNITY. THE SHOUTING FOR THE THOUGHT’S FREEDOM

Due to the winds of freedom that blew in Europe with the French Revolution<sup>5</sup>, with the weakening of monarchical absolutism of divine right and the privileges of the nobility’s birth that wield a social division, the foundations of bourgeois and capitalist society were strengthened to such an extent that the French movement influenced similar campaigns in Europe, as well as emancipation processes in North America. The shouts of freedom was sang in the Marseillaise tell us about this:

*Allons enfants de la patrie  
Le jour de gloire est arrivé  
Contre nous de la tyrannie  
L’étendard sanglant est levé  
L’étendard sanglant est levé  
Entendez-vous dans les campagnes  
Mugir ces féroces soldats  
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras  
Égorger vos fils, vos compagnes  
Aux armes, citoyens! Formez vos bataillons!  
Marchons, marchons  
Qu’un sang impur abreuve nos sillons!* (FRANCE, 1792)<sup>6</sup>

*Qu’un sang impur abreuve nos sillons!* – “*May impure blood water our fields!*”. That shows a willingness to go to the ultimate consequences for freedom, including of the thought’s freedom. The Marseillaise was composed by a young officer from Strasbourg under the

<sup>5</sup> It is important to point out that although strongly linked, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment are not the same thing. The Enlightenment movement precedes and was not concentrated in France, as we have previously highlighted. Here we are focusing only on the French events that influenced the French pedagogue Rivail (Allan Kardec).

<sup>6</sup> Let’s go children of the fatherland/ The day of glory has arrived! / Against us tyranny’s/Bloody flag is raised! / Bloody flag is raised! / In the countryside, do you hear/ The roaring of these fierce soldiers? / They come right to our Arms/ The book *Posthumous Works* was a compilation of texts bequeathed by Allan Kardec made by one of the members of the Parisian Society for Spiritist Studies P. G. Leymarie. To slit the throats of our sons, our friends!/ Grab your weapons, citizens! Form your battalions! /Let us march! Let us march! / May impure blood water our fields! (FRANCE, 1792)

original title of *Battle Hymn of the Army of the Rhine* and later entitled *Les Enfants de la Patrie* - The Children of the Fatherland, and became a national song in 1795, and was prohibited during the empire and, in 1879, recognized as the Anthem of the Third Republic. The French Revolution, in an eclectic alliance, brought together everything from the country folk, through the *sans-culottes* to the upper bourgeoisie, with each of these segments having different perceptions of this movement.

Because of the French Revolution, the *Declaration of the Human and of Civic Rights*, in French: *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen*, was promulgated in 1789 by the National Assembly:

The representatives of the French People, formed into a National Assembly, considering ignorance, forgetfulness or contempt of the rights of man to be the only causes of public misfortunes and the corruption of Governments, have resolved to set forth, in a solemn **Declaration, the natural, unalienable and sacred rights of man**, [...]

In consequence whereof, the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and **under the auspices of the Supreme Being**, the following Rights of Man and of the Citizen:

Article First - **Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on considerations of the common good.**

Article 2 - The aim of every political association is the preservation of the **natural and imprescriptible rights of Man**. These rights are **Liberty**, Property, Safety and Resistance to Oppression.

Article 3 - The principle of any **Sovereignty lies primarily in the Nation**. No corporate body, no individual may exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it.

Article 4 - **Liberty** consists in being able to do anything that does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of every man has no bounds other than those that ensure to the other members of society the enjoyment of these same rights. These bounds may be determined only by Law. [...]

Article 10 - No one may be disturbed on account of his opinions, **even religious ones**, as long as the manifestation of such opinions does not interfere with the established Law and Order.

Article 11 - **The free communication of ideas and of opinions is one of the most precious rights of man**. Any citizen may therefore speak, write and publish **freely**, except what is tantamount to the abuse of this liberty in the cases determined by Law (CCF, 1789, emphasis added, our translation)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Les représentants du peuple français, constitués en Assemblée nationale, considérant que l'ignorance, l'oubli ou le mépris des droits de l'homme sont les seules causes des malheurs publics et de la corruption des gouvernements, ont résolu d'exposer, dans une déclaration solennelle, les droits naturels, inaliénables et sacrés de l'homme, [...] En conséquence, l'Assemblée nationale reconnaît et déclare, en présence et sous les auspices de l'Être suprême, les droits suivants de l'homme et du citoyen.

Article 1er - Les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Les distinctions sociales ne peuvent être fondées que sur l'utilité commune.

Article 2 - Le but de toute association politique est la conservation des droits naturels et imprescriptibles de l'homme. Ces droits sont la liberté, la propriété, la sûreté, et la résistance à l'oppression.

Article 3 - Le principe de toute souveraineté réside essentiellement dans la nation. Nul corps, nul individu ne peut exercer d'autorité qui n'en émane expressément.

Article 4 - La liberté consiste à pouvoir faire tout ce qui ne nuit pas à autrui : ainsi, l'exercice des droits naturels de chaque homme n'a de bornes que celles qui assurent aux autres membres de la société la jouissance de ces mêmes droits. Ces bornes ne peuvent être déterminées que par la loi. [...]

This declaration makes a counterpoint to Monarchical Absolutism and to certain religious precepts of the time and is revolutionary in the proper sense of the word, in that it definitively transformed the position of the human being before society. Besides the intrinsic political issues that pit political powers against each other, it sets a precedent regarding religious thought. When it exposes *the natural, inalienable and sacred rights of Man*, an important paradigm imposed for centuries by the Catholic Church is broken, to place the human being in a prominent position in the world, more in line with Rousseau's thought that says that the human being is good in his natural state, that he carries within himself the germ of this goodness. (ROUSSEAU, 2004, p. 95).

It is important to note that this declaration, despite breaking with the paradigm of obedience to the Church, since sovereignty essentially lives in the nation, but does not break with divinity, since it declares that its terms are put "in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being" (CCF, 1789, our translation)<sup>8</sup>. It claims to be based on the constitution of the state, which must guarantee and preserve the happiness of the human being. Rubem Alves quotes Kant in his work saying that the Enlightenment allowed the birth of a new human being:

[...] it is a description of the new man he thought he saw being born. Free from the guidance of external forces, no longer submissive to any heteronomous power, this new man announces his banner: "Sapere Aude! Dare to know. Have the courage to use your reason". A new world opens up as permission and invitation. A free man is born with the courage to know and to dominate such a world. Fundamental transformation. From saint to scientist. (ALVES, 1984, p. 67).

Rubem Alves (1984), in his book *The Enigma of Religion*, states that "what is at stake is the assertion that the structures of thought and language that theism offered have collapsed. A certain vision of the universe has ended. A new way of thinking about life, of facing its problems" (ALVES, 1984, p. 60). With this new way of thinking, he also brings the thought of Feuerbach, who says: "Christianity has [...] long vanished, not only from the reason but from the life of mankind." (FEUERBACH, 1957, p. 24).

Amidst this opportunity for new thinking, Spiritism emerges, offering a different way of looking at the transcendent. Centered in Christianity, but with a distinct concept of God,

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Article 10 - Nul ne doit être inquiété pour ses opinions, même religieuses, pourvu que leur manifestation ne trouble pas l'ordre public établi par la loi.

Article 11 - La libre communication des pensées et des opinions est un des droits les plus précieux de l'homme : tout citoyen peut donc parler, écrire, imprimer librement, sauf à répondre de l'abus de cette liberté dans les cas déterminés par la loi."

<sup>8</sup> "[...]en présence et sous les auspices de l'Être suprême [...]."

this doctrine goes against an entire way of thinking, typical of its time, affirming that reason itself gives meaning to the existence of God.

For Kardec, Spiritism, in consonance with the Enlightenment thought, is not theocentric, but is centered in the human being's reason and it believes that the human being is responsible for his actions and should take responsibility for his/her actions, and, therefore, must use reason as a tool to understand the world in which he/she lives. Kardec understands that although the human being is rational and, therefore, responsible for what happens in his/her own life, he/she can also make mistakes and, with this, generate consequences for the world around him/her, for him/herself, and for society:

Those who consider their reason to be infallible are very close to error; even those whose ideas are highly erroneous are supported by their reasoning, and that is why they reject everything that appears impossible to them. Those who yesterday rejected the admirable discoveries that humanity is proud of today also followed their own judgment in doing so. What we call reason is almost always masked pride, and those who believe they are infallible place themselves on a par with God. Therefore, we will focus on those who are reasonable enough to suspend judgment regarding matters that they have not witnessed firsthand, and judging the future in the past's light, do not believe that humankind has yet reached its apogee or that nature has revealed the last page of her book to them (KARDEC, 2008, p. 38)

Based on this principle of the fallibility of the human being, Kardec judges his work unfinished. Based on the principle of uninterrupted progress, he reaffirms his faith in reason, saying that Spiritism does not have the last word, and that if there is any point in which science contradicts it, to opt for the scientific concept.

One final characteristic of the Spiritist revelation, [...] is that, being supported by facts, it cannot help but be **essentially progressive** like all the sciences of observation. By its essence, it is allied with science, which, being the exposition of the laws of nature through a certain order of facts, cannot be contrary to the will of God, the author of such laws. The discoveries of science glorify God rather than demean God. They destroy only what humans have built upon their erroneous ideas about God. Therefore, Spiritism establishes as an absolute principle only what has been showed by the evidence, or what has arisen logically from observation. Touching on all branches of social economics, to which it lends the support of its own discoveries, it will continue to assimilate all other progressive doctrines of whatever order they may be, which have reached the status of practical truths and which have exited the domain of utopia; otherwise, it would commit suicide. [...] Pressing forward with progress, Spiritism will never be surpassed, because if new discoveries were to show it to be in error on one point, it would change itself on that point. If a new truth is revealed, it accepts it. (KARDEC, 1990, p. 44, emphasis added).

Fully in line with the thought of freedom, Kardec makes the spiritist proposal a

secular<sup>9</sup> alternative, free of dogmas and impositions, in such a way that humanity is free to choose its belief and its God, and states that:

Spiritism is a moral doctrine that strengthens religious feelings in general and applies to all religions. It belongs to all of them and to none in particular. For that reason, Spiritism does not ask anyone to change his or her religion. Allows everyone to worship God their own way and observe those practices that satisfy their conscience since God gives more attention to the intention than to fact. Each person must attend the temple of their cult, [...] (KARDEC, [1862] 2007a, p. 62 e 63).

Pestalozzi's influence on Kardec's work is extremely significant. Just as Rosseau had a strong influence on the latter. Consequently, their influences on the work of the founder of Spiritism are easily identifiable.

The lights of liberty addressed in the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* shone much earlier. Jean Jacques Rousseau, one father of the French Enlightenment published, in April 1762, the work *Du Contrat Social ou Principes du droit politique*<sup>10</sup> and, a few weeks later, *Émile ou De l'éducation*<sup>11</sup>. These works were of fundamental importance for the foundation of Enlightenment thought. In the very first chapter of *The Social Contract*, Rousseau defines human beings are free, and that the social order is based on human conventions:

Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One man thinks himself the master of others, but remains more of a slave than they are. Where did this change come from? I don't know. Who legitimizes it? This question I believe I can solve. [...] But the social order is a sacred right, on which all other rights are based, a right that does not come from nature, but is based on conventions; before saying what these conventions are, I must state what I have just said. (ROUSSEAU, 2003, p. 23).

In this book, Rousseau argues that the State should exercise its role in an egalitarian way for human beings, in which everyone can, on a civil level, have the natural equality reestablished. But in addition to freedom, he proposes equality among beings. In the book

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<sup>9</sup> Here we are treating secularization in the sense of the counterposition that was made to the religious by the vision of science that the world was living at that time, questioning the formal authority of the Church. "Countless times before the Reformation, the boundary between the religious and the secular was redrawn; but the formal authority of the Church always remained preeminent. In the following centuries, with the triumphant rise of modern science, the modern mode of production, and the modern state, the churches themselves took a clear position about the need to distinguish the religious from the secular, shifting, as indeed they did, the weight of religion increasingly in the direction of the dispositions and motivations of the individual believer. Discipline (intellectual and social) would, in this period, gradually leave the religious space, giving way to 'belief,' 'conscience,' and 'sensibility.'"

<sup>10</sup> *The Social Contract' and Other Later Political Writings* (ROUSSEAU, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> *Emile, or On Education* (ROUSSEAU, 2004).

*Plato, Rousseau and the Total State*, Gilda Barros states that “While Plato clearly worships the idea of the superiority of the few over the majority, Rousseau insists on the equality of human nature. He wants to see it guaranteed by the expression of the general will, the formula of virtue” (BARROS, 1996, p. 163). In the development of the book *The Social Contract*, Rousseau (2003) discusses delicate issues such as property, which, in principle, would be the origin of inequality among men, to the extent that some would have usurped it from others. For him, the social contract, the title of his book, would be the solution that would be given by popular sovereignty, in which the collective will would establish the solutions for relations, and the fundamental point was equality among people, the will and the interest in the common good. “To find a form of society that defends and protects with all common force the person and property of each partner, and by which, each one uniting himself to all, he nevertheless obeys only himself and remains as free as before.” (ROUSSEAU, 2003, p. 31). With these statements, it was established that the sovereign would be the people and not the king, and the basis for fraternity was laid.

By rethinking these principles, Rousseau established an advanced vision when compared to his contemporaries, where he establishes a logic of freedom as an inalienable right and as an essential requirement of the very spiritual nature of the human being, in this manner, he took the thinking initiated by Renaissance humanism to its ultimate consequences.

In his book *Emilio*, Rousseau states that the human being is born good in his natural state, and that everything that resides in him depends on education, and that he can be shaped by those who raise him. Those who educate, according to Rousseau, have the power to corrupt. “All our wisdom consists of servile prejudices, all our customs are but subjection, embarrassment and constraint. [...] man, as long as he retains the human figure, will be chained by our institutions” (ROUSSEAU, 2004, p. 16). From the point of view of religion, the concept of natural goodness breaks directly with the Church's dogma of original sin, and the idea of men being in chains to institutions breaks not only with the State but also with the Church itself.

Despite never having met Rousseau personally, Pestalozzi became his disciple, defended and expanded his master's concepts in the field of education, in which the concept of natural goodness of the human being was expanded, saying that the human being is not only good in his natural state, but also bears within himself the germ of wisdom and virtue. Kardec consequently inherited this concept from his master. For Kardec, in his book *Posthumous Works*, he says that Fraternity,

[...] in the strict sense of the term, sums up all the duties of men, one toward the other. It means devotion, abnegation, tolerance, benevolence, indulgence. It is, by excellence, evangelical charity and the application of the maxim: "Proceed toward others as we would have others proceed toward us." The opposite of selfishness. Fraternity says, "One for all and all for one." Selfishness says, "Every man for himself." These two qualities being the negation of each other, it is as impossible for a selfish person to proceed fraternally toward his fellow men, as for a miser to be generous, as for an individual of small stature to reach that of another tall one.  
(KARDEC, 2016, p. 211)

Liberty, equality and fraternity, therefore, are the principles that were clearly marked throughout Allan Kardec's work. Besides the influences in the field of the formation of a free human being, Kardec was also strongly influenced in his work by the movements of reason and science.

### **3 THE REASON AS A SOURCE OF MANKIND'S PROGRESS: POSITIVIST THINKING AND SCIENTIFICISM**

In the 19th century there was an environment in which scholars believed that reason was the only way to explain the world around them, starting with Laplace's concepts of determinism or the positivist pedagogical thought of Auguste Comte, who stated "that all scientific and philosophical knowledge should aim at the moral and political improvement of mankind" (GADOTTI, 1997. p. 107). Under these influences, among others, Kardec wrote his Spiritist proposal. At a time when the search for the origins of life and mind was anxiously awakening, scholars such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber and Auguste Comte himself, had the desire to break with time and space to reach the limits and the beginnings of the visible universe:

[...] I don't want to recall all the important dates in the history of the scientific study of religion during the second half of the nineteenth century, so let us stop for a moment to examine the significance of this synchronicity between materialistic ideologies on the one hand and the growing interest in Eastern and archaic forms of religion on the other. One could say that the anxious search for the origins of Life and Mind, the fascination with the "mysteries of Nature," the impulse to penetrate and decipher the internal structures of Matter - all these longings and impulses denote a kind of nostalgia for the primordial, for the universal original *matrix*. Matter, Substance, represents the *absolute origin*, the beginning of all things: Cosmos, Life, Mind. There is an irresistible desire to break deeply through time and space to reach the limits and the beginnings of the visible Universe, and in particular to uncover the fundamental ground of Substance and the germinal state of Living Matter. From a certain point of view, to say that the human soul is ultimately a product of matter is not necessarily a humiliating statement. (ELIADE, 1989, p. 59).

As Eliade points out, at that time there was a desire to understand the material world

in which we lived and how this related to the origin of life. And it was at this time that the spiritualist phenomena appeared, in a context in which there were several scientific theories and conceptions. Among them, besides the already mentioned positivism, there were also Evolutionism, Darwinism and Marxism, which were strongly marked by the Enlightenment, as Mircea Eliade reinforces:

The spiritist phenomena are known since ancient times and have been interpreted differently by various cultures and religions. But the new and important element in modern spiritism is its materialistic perspective. First of all, there are now “**positive proofs**” of the existence of the soul, or rather of the *post-mortem* existence of a soul: strokes, tilting of the table, and sometime later, the so-called materializations (ELIADE, 1989, p. 61, emphasis added).

Herculano Pires (PIRES, 1975, p. 18) states that: “formed in the cultural tradition of the 18th century, heir of Francis Bacon, René Descartes and Rousseau, Allan Kardec clearly understood that the problem of his time rested on the question of method”. The method referred to by Herculano Pires corresponded to that of inductive experimentation for the investigation of the turning tables<sup>12</sup> phenomenon, of which Kardec himself states:

I made my first serious studies in Spiritism, still less due to the revelations than to the observations. I applied the **experimental method** to this new science as I had always done before then; I never formulated preconceived theories; I observed closely, comparing and **deducing** the consequences; I sought to go back to the causes from the effects through deduction, through the logical chain of facts, and did not accept an explanation as valid unless it could resolve all the difficulties of the issue. That is how I had always proceeded with my previous endeavors since I was fifteen or sixteen years old. From the very start, I grasped the gravity of the exploration I was going to undertake. I saw in these phenomena the key to the very obscure and controversial problem of humanity's past and future, the solution that I had sought for my entire life. It was, in a word, a complete revolution in my ideas and beliefs; hence, I had to act circumspectly and not lightly; I had to be positivistic and not idealistic to keep from allowing myself to become deluded. (KARDEC, 1989, p. 16, emphasis added).

Although Kardec was not a positivist, as many points of positivism are incompatible with Spiritism (INCONTRI, 2001, p. 67 to 71), the passage quoted above is the key to understanding its influence. When he says: “I had to act circumspectly and not lightly; I had to be positivistic and not idealistic”, he establishes one of the basic premises of positivism, which was that the “only method of knowledge is that of natural sciences, which stands out

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<sup>12</sup> Turning tables, talking tables, or table dancing is a practice in which participants sit around a table, place their hands on it, and wait for it to move to offer responses from the spirits, either by tapping or by indications of letters of the alphabet. Such practices were very popular in the 19th century. This phenomenon caught the attention of Rivail, who, in his turn, began to study it because he was a researcher of magnetism, also known as Mesmerism.

for the identification of causal laws and its dominion over facts”. (ARAÚJO, 2014, p. 94).

Kardec not only recognized the fundamental role of the positive method in the advancement and consolidation of modern science, as well as he developed procedures to employ such method in his studies of spiritist phenomena. When he stated been using the *experimentation method*, he was referring to the *inductive method* advocated by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), which foresaw that the formation of laws should go through the sieve of proposed empirical situations, in a sequential logic of hypothesis formulation and validation of its consistency. This process was named by Bacon as the *experimentation method*. This approach held a privileged place in the proposition of a scientific method based on the rationalization of procedures that were defined as the inductive and deductive methods.

The induction is a process of formulating statements from observations and data collection about the particular, contextualized in the experiment. Thus, once a problem is established, the scientist performs experiments that lead to careful observation, data collection, recording, and dissemination among other members of his community in an attempt to refine explanations for the phenomena underlying the problem under study (GIORDAN, 1999, p. 2). This method is the basis of the so-called inductivist science, which in Bacon’s words is summarized in the following statement:

There are and can be only two ways of searching into and discovering truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgment and to the discovery of middle axioms. And this way is now in fashion. The other derives axioms from the senses and particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all. This is the true way, but as yet untried. (BACON, p. 16, 1988).

The scientific method used by Kardec, therefore, was clearly the *method of experimentation* inherited from Francis Bacon, whose use corroborates with “a profoundly creative feeling, an absolute confidence in the edification and renewal of the world” (CASSIRER, 1966, p. 195, our translation)<sup>13</sup>. With a thought extremely connected to the innovations of his time, Kardec was inspired by logic and science to make his statements and studies.

One of the fundamental premises of that time was evolutionism, which inherited from the previous century this feeling of renewal and brought in its core the biological evolutionism of Darwin (1809-1882), the transformism of Lamarck (1744-1829), the social theories of Karl Marx (1818-1883), and the way of thinking of Rousseau, which was put into

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<sup>13</sup> [...] un sentiment profondément créatif, une confiance absolue dans l’édification et le renouvellement du monde.

practice by Pestalozzi, Rivail's master. The world, therefore, was awakening to evolutionism, which was born in the 18th century and consolidated in the 19th century, and that we can summarize in four basic characteristics: 1) evolution is present in the natural biological world and in human production; 2) evolution has a meaning, which can, if not determined, be predicted (Fichte, Comte, and Marx) or at least intelligible and thinkable (Spencer and Darwin<sup>14</sup>); 3) on the historical level, evolution closes in a cycle; 4) the individual is subject to a law that transcends himself and even determines himself (INCONTRI, 2001, p. 45).

Closely related to evolutionism, the scientism<sup>15</sup> in its turn, believes in the unconditioned possibility of being able to explain everything through science and thereby transform reality. The scientific method intends to embrace and unveil the entire structure of the world's reality from the Renaissance through the Industrial Revolution because of science, Bertrand Russell during the 20th century explains that:

The aim of the science is to discover, by means of observation and reasoning from this, first particular facts about the world, then laws, linking these facts to each other and allowing (in favorable cases) prediction of future events. Linked to this theoretical aspect of science is scientific technique, which uses scientific knowledge to produce conditions of comfort and luxury that were unrealizable, or at least much more expensive, in pre-scientific times. It is this last aspect that gives science so much importance, even in the eyes of those who are not scientists. (RUSSELL, 1971, p. 8).

There is here a duality that deals with the real world, set, finished and unchangeable, that can be studied and analyzed, of which we would be prisoners of its laws, and from which, on the other hand, several possibilities in favor of humanity can be extracted, in a progressive character. From it, new discoveries can be extracted that can bring unexpected applications, establishing a kind of faith, in which, for science, everything is possible, nothing would be limited. "Science aspires to embrace the entire knowledge of the world [...] Nothing that is susceptible to entering relationship with us is foreign to its domain. It is impossible, a priori, to point out its limits." (BOUTY, 1908, p. 21). Therefore, all phenomena, including the metaphysical, could be explained by science.

This is the scenario in which Kardec published *The Spirits' Book* on April 18, 1857, so

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<sup>14</sup> For Alfred Russel Wallace, coauthor of the theory of biological and spiritualistic evolutionism, "evolution has a purpose and does not occur from chance - the universe shows not only a design, but an intention." *The Last of the Great Victorians*, Special Interview with Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace (in: *The Millgate monthly*, Aug. 1912. Available at: <<https://people.wku.edu/charles.smith/wallace/S750.htm>>. Accessed 03 Nov. 2017).

<sup>15</sup> The term 'scientism' or 'scientificism' identifies the overwhelming conviction that human behavior and social coexistence can only be explained and guided by 'positive' science. Positivism, Spencerian evolutionism, Haeckelism and other monistic currents were examples of 'scientistic' thinking that was also characterized by the dogmatic and intolerant sectarianism of the adherents of each of the currents it encompassed in the late nineteenth century. (COLLICHIO, 1988, p. 17.)

successfully that it had to be reissued in 1860, corrected and considerably enlarged. Would the success of this edition have been a desire of the readers to have answered the questions pointed out by Mircea Eliade (1989): “the fascination with the ‘mysteries of Nature,’ the impulse to penetrate and to decode the internal structures of Matter - all these wishes and impulses denote a kind of nostalgia for the primordial, for the universal original matrix.”

#### **4 THE NATURAL SCIENCES OF THE 19TH CENTURY IN KARDEC’S WORK**

The study of the universe in which we live has always been the object of interest to scholars. In the 15th century, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) proposed one of the most controversial scientific theories about our universe at that time, the heliocentrism. Later, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), defended Copernicus’ ideas besides developing relevant points of physics; René Descartes (1596-1650), considered by some as the founder of Philosophy and modern Mathematics, Isaac Newton (1643-1727) the father of Classical Physics, and Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827) prominent scholar of Celestial Mechanics. We cite these only as examples of the available science, extremely prolific in Kardec’s time, in which significant advances were registered for the development of modern science. Important theories were developed regarding the functioning of the universe in which we live. Among these theories, one of the most prominent was the ether<sup>16</sup> and vacuum<sup>17</sup> theories, which were widely discussed in the 19th century.

Laplace considered that all the movements of humankind would be predictable if the information about the position, velocity, and initial direction of each atom were known, just as one can predict the movements of a snooker ball. This predictability of facts was called determinism. Through this logic, determinism was adopted as the basis of scientific assumption for all other sciences. Laplace believed bodies comprised tiny, perfectly homogeneous, solid, indestructible, eternal, and indivisible spheres. These particles would

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<sup>16</sup> The ether theory is the name given to the set of ideas produced mainly in the second half of the nineteenth century with the aim of giving a cohesive body to the physical theories existing until then. Although we can find strong traces of this theory since the thought of Isaac Newton (1642-1727), it was Hendrik Lorentz (1853-1928) and Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) the scientists who became known as its authors. Today the ether theory is seen as a mistaken approach to natural phenomena. It is no longer taught or defended as a physical theory, remaining only its great historical value, although modern physics is now reopening the discussion on this subject with new theories about "dark matter".

<sup>17</sup> The ether was proposed by ancient thinkers as being a subtle, imperceptible substance that would fill the entire space of the universe, as explained in the previous note, because a region where nothing exists, no matter whatsoever, was something unthinkable, it would be the non-being. From these thinkers, empty space, the vacuum, therefore, could not exist.

combine by affinity<sup>18</sup>. According to this theory, the entire universe outside of matter would be an immense and absolute void. This idea fell away when modern physicists looked at particles and other phenomena such as light and heat (FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 424). Today determinism and mechanicism are questioned by modern physics.

As great as the success of classical ideas was in interpreting interference phenomena, no less impressive is their inability to clarify the processes of emission and absorption of radiation. Here electrodynamics and classical mechanics failed utterly [...]. Finally, classical mechanics and statistics also failed to explain the laws of heat (or energy) radiation (BORN, 1971, p. 90).

As from the discussions about the issues of heat radiation and energy in general, the theory of wave propagation in the ether or electromagnetic field proposed by Maxwell gained strength, based on Faraday's experiments, in which context Einstein tells us that:

The only way out for us is to take for granted that space has the physical property of transmitting electromagnetic waves [...]. We can still use the word ether, but only to express some physical property of space. This word ether has changed its meaning many times with the development of science. At the moment, it no longer represents the medium formed of particles. Its history, by no means over, is continued by the theory of relativity. (EINSTEIN, 2008, p. 131).

Along this topic, while the validity or otherwise of the ether and vacuum theory proposed by Isaac Newton (1642-1727) it was also being discussed, the theory of animal magnetism created by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer arised (1734-1815). He argued it would be possible, among other phenomena, to develop healing through animal magnetism, through a process of natural induction from the magnetizer's state of health to the patient, promoting a faster evolution in the patient's natural healing process. He asserted that "well-directed animal magnetism is the general means of restoring altered harmony in all possible cases" (apud, FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 433). In Mesmer's studies there was nothing mystical and it was a strictly scientific treatment of the possible influences of the force of gravity on the natural cycles of human physiology in comparison with this influence on the tides<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The 19th century Chemistry conceived two atomic forces: cohesion and affinity. Cohesion would bind homogeneous molecules, such as the particles of gold, to each other, giving rise to the metal. Affinity, on the other hand, would be a combination attraction of heterogeneous molecules, such as the attraction of hydrogen and oxygen to form water. (FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 404).

<sup>19</sup> It is important to remember that from the point of view of science in general, Mesmer's theories are considered controversial, but Paulo Figueiredo, the author cited here, studies Mesmer from the point of view of Spiritism, and this would be questionable if we were not making an analysis in this article of the influence of the 19th century on Kardec. And he himself at several points in his work cites Mesmer and his theory of magnetism. In the *Revue Spirite* Mesmer has been quoted in Jan. 1864, Oct. 1864, May 1865 and Mar. 1867.

In 1774 he began his experiments with magnetism through passes with a 29-year-old lady named Esterlina and, from then on, he progressed in his technique, having success in hundreds of cases. He developed a theoretical basis about magnetism, carefully registering his results based on Physics, Physiology and Medicine. The success of his technique raised strong resistance in the medical class of the time. (FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 427-438).

The obstinate resistance that was opposed to this method at the beginning of its development did not discourage me from continuing my observations; the more I confirmed them through my previous conjectures, the more I strove to achieve the improvement of some physical knowledge, rectifying them, in order to elaborate the system about the internal mechanism of Nature, from which should arise a new knowledge about the conservation of health. (MESMER apud FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 430).

Although it has raised mistrust, from the medical class on the one hand, on the other it has aroused the interest of some, among them the theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater, friend and protector of Pestalozzi and later of Mr. Rivail.

One of the most significant points about Mesmer's research, which was called Mesmerism, was the conception of a general physical theory of the science of animal magnetism, which he called Universal Fluid. In this theory, he assumes that the theory of Laplace and Lavoisier was wrong, since "neither light, nor fire, nor electricity, nor magnetism, nor sound are substances, but effects of the motion of a several series of the universal fluid". (FIGUEIREDO, 2007, p. 529)

For Mesmer, from the solid matter, through the liquid, gaseous state, then the ether and other unknown phases, everything would be represented by the:

[...] existence of a universal fluid, which is the whole of all the series of matter divided by internal motion (that is, the motion of its particles among themselves). In this state, it fills the interstices of all fluids, in the same way as all solids contained in space. Because of it, the universe is fused and reduced to a single mass. (MESMER apud FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 436).

The cosmic fluid defined by Mesmer has a great analogy to the following description by Einstein: "Most of the energy is concentrated in matter, but the field surrounding the particle also represents energy. [...] We could therefore say: Matter is where the concentration of energy is large, and field where the concentration of energy is small." (EINSTEIN, 2008, p. 201).

The influence of the natural sciences of the 19th century is remarkable in Kardec's

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Kardec even states that: "magnetism and Spiritism are, in effect, two twin sciences" (KARDEC, RE: Jan/1869, p. 28).

work, and this is easy to verify, because he uses them as a reference throughout his work, particularly in the fifth book of his series, published on January 6, 1868, entitled *Genesis*. The very structure of *The Spirits' Book*, which comprises questions and answers, makes this influence clear, in that the questions were drafted by Kardec and the answers were attributed to the Spirits. The questions were structured in such a way as to develop and prove a line of reasoning by Kardec himself, and were based on the scientific, philosophical and religious knowledge of the time and on the author's background in these fields of knowledge.

Regarding sciences, for example, which is the point at issue in this topic, the influence of this knowledge is extremely significant, because without going into the merits of the answers given by the Spirits, we will find Kardec asking the same questions that the scientists of the time were elaborating, and for which, each in his own way, seeking the answers.

In the second chapter of his fundamental work, *The Spirits' Book*, Kardec asks some questions that meet the concerns of the scientists of that time:

Is ponderability an essential attribute of matter?  
Is matter made up of one or many elements?  
Where do the various properties of matter originate?  
Is the same elementary matter susceptible to experiencing all modifications and gaining all properties?  
Do molecules have a determined form?  
Does absolute vacuum exist anywhere in the universal space? (KARDEC, 2009, p. 76 -79).

In these questions, we see the need to identify the same points that were addressed by Laplace on the issue, of the ponderability of matter beyond those related to its composition. We also see the concern with the question of vacuum and ether. When he asks about the properties of matter and of what he calls *elementary matter*, which could gain various properties, he is referring to the questions of the ether and, more particularly, to the question of the universal fluid treated by Mesmer. Regarding the universal fluid, he even adopts this concept as one of the fundamental bases of his work.

[...] the universal fluid theory was proposed by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer as a paradigmatic alternative to physics suitable for explaining his theory, since it does not admit the substantialist hypothesis that was being incorporated into official science at his time. The dynamic or undulatory theory of the universal fluid, proposed by Mesmer, was thus adopted by the higher spirits in the works of the spiritist doctrine. In this way, we can gather in the sequence of pages of Kardec's work, quotations of the two theories, that of the *imponderable fluids* that he learned from physics textbooks, and that of the universal fluid proposed by Mesmer and developed by the spirits. Finally, as we shall see in *Genesis*, Kardec defined the second theory as the fundamental principle established by the agreement of the teaching of the superior spirits. (FIGUEIREDO, 2016, p. 408 a 409).

The influences of the Sciences that are present in a general way in Kardec's work, particularly Physics and Chemistry, are clearly established in the book *Genesis*, in its first part, from chapters IV to X, which deal, among others, with the following subjects: 1) the role of science in genesis; 2) space and time; 3) matter; 4) laws and forces; 5) primary creation; 6) universal creation; 7) suns and planets; 8) satellites; 9) comets; 10) the Milky Way; 11) fixed stars; 12) the deserts of space, 13) eternal succession of worlds. At the beginning of this first part, Kardec states:

People were unable to resolve the riddles of creation until the time in which the key was given by science. It was necessary that astronomy open the doors to infinite space to enable them to probe its depths; that, through the power of calculus, they could determine with strict precision the movement, position, volume, nature and role of heavenly bodies; that physics reveal to them the laws of gravity, heat, light and electricity; that chemistry teach them about the transformations of matter, and mineralogy the materials that make up the globe's crust; that geology teach them to read in the geological strata the globe's gradual formation. It behooved botany, zoology, paleontology and anthropology to initiate them into the filiation and succession of organically structured beings. With archeology, they could follow the footprints of humankind across the ages. In other words, by complementing one another, all the sciences were to bring their indispensable contingent to the understanding of the history of the world. In their absence, people had only their original theories as their guide. (KARDEC, 1990, p. 85).

Kardec's quotations regarding matter are particularly interesting, because they show that he relied on current physics, and that, besides questioning the ponderability of matter, they are closely connected with the ether and vacuum theories of his time, as he describes:

There is an ethereal fluid that fills space and penetrates bodies. This fluid is the ether or primitive cosmic matter, the generator of the universe and beings. Inherent to this ether are the forces that preside over the metamorphoses of matter, the immutable and necessary laws that govern the universe. These multiple forms, indefinitely varied according to the combinations of matter, localized according to masses and diversified in their modes of action, depending on the circumstances and conditions, are known on earth as gravity, cohesion, affinity, attraction, magnetism and electricity. The vibratory movements of this agent are known as sound, heat, light, etc. (KARDEC, 1990, p. 111).

Mesmer's influences on the Kardec's work go beyond the questions of the universal fluid, to the extent that he stated that "magnetism and Spiritism are, in effect, two twin sciences, which complete and explain each other by each other, and of the two, the one that does not want to stand still cannot reach its complement without leaning on its congener." (KARDEC, [1869] 2007b, p. 28).

Faced with all these observations, what about Kardec's claim that he says that his work belongs to the Spirits and not to himself? (KARDEC, 2008, p. 3).

## 5 FINAL REMARKS

It could be said upon reading these lines, that all that we have stated so far is a mistake, as in fact the work belongs to the spirits, and that the environment influence in which Spiritism was formed did not interfere in its content, as it would have been brought to the world by the *Superior Spirits*. The defenders of this idea will argue this, using Kardec's own words, who states that this doctrine is not his, but bequeathed by the spirits, as it is written in the subtitle of his basic work *The Spirits' Book*, which we can read:

PRINCIPLES OF THE SPIRITIST DOCTRINE concerning the immortality of the soul, the nature of spirits and their relationships with humankind, moral laws, the present life, the future life and the destiny of humanity – according to the teachings given by highly evolved spirits through several mediums – received and coordinated. (KARDEC, 2008, p. 3).

They will say that the result of the work was coined on the *Spiritual World* and that Kardec was merely conducted, and that whatever the medium in which the work appeared, its contents would be the same and would not be influenced by human beings on earth. And regarding these opinions, we have recourse to the arguments of C. P. Tiele, who deals with the question of the influence exerted by men of genius and/or the founders of religions in their development. He says:

But does this imply that they themselves are nothing out of the common, that, as Hegel teaches, they are mere “will-less tools in the hands of the world-spirit” so that, though they play an important part in the world's history, it is merely as actors, who have not written the drama themselves, or even as marionettes, moved by an invisible hand? Must we, [...] regard them as nothing but media, in which ideas, self-developing, are reflected, so that it is out of the question to speak of preeminent individuals or their influence on development? Or must we, reduce all originality and all genius to the gift of greater receptivity for the ideas of others, so that persons thus gifted are simply like men who stand a little higher than others, and who therefore merely receive the rays of light a little earlier than dwellers in the valley? Surely not! [...] It is their own will that actuates them, more powerfully and more truly than if they obeyed their lower inclinations, their love of ease and fear of man. The truth in whose service they enlist, whatever be its source, and however they have attained to it, has become their possession, and in following it and proclaiming it they listen solely to dictates of their own hearts. (TIELE, 2022, § 201)

The importance that will be given, therefore, to Kardec is closely related to interpreting facts, because this is what modifies the individual's perception and makes him “fill in the gaps in his understanding” with what he has of concrete, which is his personal reality. The difference between what is presented and what we perceive is what Edward

Schillebeeckx calls the “available or ideal referent” and that creates his experience from the images constructed with the marks of a specific culture, allowing the believer to enter relation with the “true referent” mediated by each person in his specific experience. In this way, according to Schillebeeckx, the various religious interpretations take shape, and: “the emergence of many religions can be explained [...] by the multiplicity of human experiences of the world and of man within specific experiences and various specific and diverse traditions of experience” (SCHILLEBEECKX, 1994, p. 34).

When studying Spiritism, it is important to evaluate what was Kardec’s role, because most of his followers call him the codifier, since they understand that what he did was to shape the rising doctrine. As we quoted earlier Eliade says that there was in the 19th century an “anxious search for the origins of Life and Mind, the fascination with the “mysteries of Nature,” the impulse to penetrate and decipher the internal structures of Matter - all these longings and impulses denote a kind of nostalgia for the primordial, for the universal original matrix” (ELIADE, 1989, p. 59). And we understand that not only Kardec was strongly influenced by this anxiety for the search of the origins, but the quick acceptance of *The Spirits’ Book* at its release denotes that the environment was favorable, and otherwise his work would not have continued until today.

Even if the spirits were exclusively responsible for the alleged success of the propagation of this idea, they would certainly take into account the environment and the time in which this doctrine was to be coined, looking for the appropriate means. We understand, then, that even there, everything that has been reported about the 19th century and the influences received by Kardec makes perfect sense. In this way we understand that both his intellectual baggage was fundamental in organizing the knowledge that was, according to his followers, being offered by the spirits, and that this academic baggage facilitated the insertion of these ideas in the environment in which they were received.

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