THE THEOSOPHICAL MOVEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE LEGITIMATION OF THE DISPUTABLE AND THE ENTRENCHMENT OF THE DISREPUTABLE

by

ARNOLD KALNITSKY

Submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

in the subject of

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: DR H C STEYN

APRIL 2003

CONTENTS

Preface …….. ix

Chapter 1: Introduction: Methodological Issues and Thematic Categories ……. 1

1.1 Explanation of Terms and Parameters of This Study …… 1

1.2 Methodological Issues ……...… 8

1.2.1 Methodological Issue 1 – Questions Surrounding the Classification of Theosophy as a Subject of Religious Studies ……..….. 8

1.2.2 Methodological Issue 2 – The Rationale for Classification as a Sub-Genre of Esoteric Studies and The Importance of Madame Blavatsky ….. 13

1.2.3 Methodological Issue 3 –The Treatment of the Premises of Occultism ……..… 16

1.2.4 Methodological Issue 4 – Interpreting the Theosophical Historical Record ….. 18

1.2.5 Methodological Issue 5 – The Utility of Sociological Analyses ……..… 21

1.2.6 Methodological Issue 6 – The Importance of Psychological Considerations ..… 23

1.2.7 Methodological Issue 7 – Dynamics of the Structured Empathy Approach …… 24

1.2.8 Methodological Issue 8 – Textual Analysis as a Means of Explication ……..… 25

1.2.9 Methodological Consideration 9 – Theosophy's Philosophical Perspective ….. 26

1.3. Thematic Categories …… 28

1.3.1 Thematic Category 1 – Intentionality and Motivation …….. 28

1.3.2 Thematic Category 2 – The Nature of Worldviews ……..… 29

1.3.3 Thematic Category 3 – Blavatsky's Treatment of the Categories of Knowledge ……. 29

1.3.4 Thematic Category 4 – The Importance of Experience as a Legitimating Factor ……... 29

1.3.5 Thematic Category 5 – The Masters as Authoritative Sources and Paradigmatic Ideals ….……...…. 30

1.3.6 Thematic Category 6 – Blavatsky's Major Literary Legacy – the Formal Entrenchment of the Theosophical Vision ……..……..…. 31

1.3.7 Thematic Category 7 – Historical and Sociological Dynamics ……... 31

1.4 Survey of Literary Resources ……... 32

1.5 Importance of This Study ……. 43

Chapter 2: Motivational Factors ……. 46

2.1 Introduction to Chapter Two …… 46

2.2 Motivational Relevancy ……...…. 47

2.3 Blavatsky's Role According to Theosophists ……..…. 50

2.4 Analysis of Theosophical Society Rules and By-Laws ……... 52

2.5 Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *What are the Theosophists?* ……..…. 65

2.6 Conclusion of Chapter Two ……..…… 75

Chapter 3: Worldview Structures and Historical Considerations ……... 79

3.1 Religions, Philosophy and Science - The Theosophical Need for a Synthesis ……..... 79

3.2.1 Worldview construction: General Considerations of Social Dynamics …….. 82

3.2.2 Ascendant and Alternative Configurations …….. 84

3.2.3 Sophisticated and Pre-Theoretical Forms of Knowledge, and the Basis of Authority ……...…… 86

3.2.4 The Rationale for Blavatsky's Choice of Types of Knowledge ……..…… 92

3.3.1 Sorokin's Differentiation of the Truths of Faith, Reason, Sense ……..…… 94

3.3.2 Burtt's Distinction of the Modes of Intuitionalism, Rationalism, Empiricism ……...…. 97

3.3.3 Comparison of the Two Approaches to Knowledge ……...…. 103

3.4.1 An Overview of Traditional Christianity in the Nineteenth Century – Conflict Between Religion and Science ……..… 105

3.4.2 An Overview of Traditional Christianity in the Nineteenth Century – Protestant and Catholic Stances ……..… 106

3.5.1 An Overview of Traditional Philosophical Schools and Trends in the Nineteenth Century – the Idealist Orientation ……..…… 108

3.5.2 An Overview of Traditional Philosophical Schools and Trends in the Nineteenth Century – Non-Idealist Perspectives ……..… 110

3.6.1 An Overview of Science in the Nineteenth Century – Permeation of Materialism ……..…. 111

3.6.2 An Overview of Science in the Nineteenth Century – Two Emerging Themes ……... 113

3.7.1 An Overview of Alternative Esoteric Sources of the Nineteenth Century – The Ideas of Progress and the Non-Rational Accessible to Blavatsky ……... 114

3.7.2 An Overview of Alternative Esoteric Sources of the Nineteenth Century – Western Influences ……. 117

3.7.3 An Overview of Alternative Esoteric Sources of the Nineteenth Century – Eastern Influences ……..….. 124

Chapter 4: Blavatsky's Theosophical Legitimation of the Three Categories of Knowledge ……. 128

4.1 Introduction to Chapter Four ……...…….. 128

4.2 Religion as a Category of Knowledge: Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Is Theosophy a Religion?* ……... 129

4.3 Philosophy as a Category of Knowledge: Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Philosophers and Philosophicules* ……..…… 147

4.4 Science as a Category of Knowledge: Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Occult or Exact Science*? ……..... 155

4.5 Summation of Chapter Four: The Dual Interpretations of Each Category ……...… 166

Chapter 5: The Significance of Experience in the Theosophical Worldview ….... 168

5.1. The Importance of Experience in Justifying Theory ……..168

5.2. Blavatsky: Experience and Leadership Reinforcement ……. 169

5.3. Blavatsky: First Impressions and the Mystique of Power ……. 173

5.4. Blavatsky: Problematical Issues in Evaluating Biographical Facts ….…….. 177

5.5. The Relevance of Altered States of Consciousness as a Premise …….……. 180

5.6. Gowan's Taxonomy of the States of Consciousness …….…… 182

5.7. Blavatsky's Extraordinary Experiences Classified ……...…… 186

5.8. Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Occultism Versus the Occult Arts* …..……..… 200

5.9. The Influence of Blavatsky's View of Supersensory Experience on Theosophy ……..…… 215

Chapter 6: The Importance of the Idea of the Masters …….. 218

6.1 Introduction to the Idea of the Masters as Legitimating Authorities ……..… 218

6.2 Origins of the Idea of the Masters – Controversies and Theories …….. 222

6.2.1 Theory 1 – the Linear Narrative as Primarily Historical Fact – the Orthodox Theosophical Position ……...… 222

6.2.2 Theory 2 – Historical Figures Known to Blavatsky as Disguised Models – Johnson's Contention ……..…… 227

6.2.3 Theory 3A – Intentionally Created Fictional Figures – Controversies Surrounding the Hodgson Report …… 234

6.2.4 Theory 3B – Unintentionally Projected Psychological Figures – Consideration of Archetypal, Neo-Jungian, and Evans' Perspectives …… 247

6.2.5 – Origins of the Idea of the Masters – An Integrated Theory …… 253

6.3 The Functional Utility of the Idea of the Masters …….. 255

6.3.1 The Idea of the Masters and Internal Organisational Authority - Themes Discerned in *The Mahatma Letters* …… 255

6.3.2 The Idea of the Masters and the Creation of an Idealised Role Model …….. 256

6.4 Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Mahatmas and Chelas* …… 266

6.5 The Legitimating Significance of the Idea of the Masters ……. 270

Chapter 7: An Examination of Blavatsky's Major Literary Works ……..… 272

7.1 The Importance of Accessible Literary Representations of the Theosophical Worldview ……... 272

7.2 Blavatsky's Books – The Embedding of Charisma and the Evocation of Emotion ……. 274

7.3.1 *Isis Unveiled* - Controversies and Circumstances Surrounding its Composition ……..…… 278

7.3.2 *Isis Unveiled* - Deconstructive and Reconstructive Objectives - Challenges to Religion and Science and the Legitimation of the Esoteric Perspective ……..…… 290

7.3.3 *Isis Unveiled* – An Overview of Thematic Contents and Points of Emphasis ……. 292

7.4.1 *The Secret Doctrine* – Its Esteemed Status as Blavatsky's Magnum Opus …... 301

7.4.2 *The Secret Doctrine* – Compositional Mystique and *The Stanzas of Dzyan* ……. 303

7.4.3 *The Secret Doctrine* – An Overview of Thematic Contents and Points of Emphasis ……..… 307

7.5.1 *The Voice of the Silence* – Its Specialized Objective and Unique Format ……. 321

7.5.2 *The Voice of the Silence* – Compositional Factors ……. 322

7.5.3 *The Voice of the Silence* - An Overview of Thematic Contents and Points of Emphasis ……. 322

7.6 Blavatsky's Major Books – Their Qualified Influence on Posterity …….. 329

Chapter 8: Historical and Sociological Analysis of The Early Theosophical Movement …… 331

8.1.1 Blavatsky as Initiator of the Modern Theosophical Movement ……..… 331

8.1.2 Olcott and the Charisma of Office ……..… 333

8.1.3 Blavatsky's Charismatic and Authoritative Leadership Qualifications – Conformity to the Taxonomy of the Shaman ……. 334

8.2.1 Early Theosophical Society Membership …….. 342

8.2.2 Olcott and Blavatsky's Leadership of the Theosophical Society …….. 344

8.2.3 Theosophical Society Organisational Dynamics ……... 351

8.2.4 Problems of Succession and the Criterion of Masterly Sanctification …….. 353

8.2.5 Leadership Dispute and Conflicting Endorsements …….…….. 354

8.2.6 The Veneration of Blavatsky and the Basis of "Blavatskyism" …… 355

8.2.7 The Besant-Leadbeater Faction ……. 357

8.2.8 Schism and Division – The Judge Secession ……. 359

8.2.9 Legitimation of the Besant-Leadbeater Rationale ……. 361

8.3. Sociological Classifications ……... 364

8.3.1 Sociological Definitions of Religious Movements – Introduction …… 364

8.3.2 Church, Cult, Sect, New Religious Movement – Points of Theosophical Conformity …… 365

8.3.3 Typecasting of Theosophical Followers …… 369

8.3.4 Further Refined Definitions and Points of Theosophical Conformity – Excursus Religion, Gnostic Sect, Alienation, Counterculture, Psychic Deprivation, Client Cult, Prototype NRM, Cosmological Communion …… 372

Chapter 9: Summation and Conclusion …… 384

Bibliography …… 405

Preface

This thesis has been the culmination of thirty years of study and reflection on issues pertaining to the field of Religious Studies. After acquiring BA (Hon) and MA degrees from Concordia University of Montreal, Canada in The History and Philosophy of Religion during the decade of the nineteen seventies, a career path was taken in private business and in pursuing creative endeavours. However, interest in familiar academic areas of study has always remained exceedingly high. Particularly, issues dealing with the sociologies of religion and knowledge, the various forms of esotericism, Hellenistic thought, and broader cultural and philosophical topics.

Interest in theosophical subject matter dates back to my first few years as an undergraduate student, although primarily as a private activity rather than as an academic topic. In the process of seeking out supplementary literature while working on a research project, I was informed about a library belonging to the Montreal lodge of the Theosophical Society. After a cordial initial visit and generous access to their library, curiosity and a desire to explore and debate new ideas led to an ongoing informal relationship as a guest and observer. For about three years I periodically attended official meetings, participated in study groups, discussions, and lectures. During this period, a thorough familiarity with the field of theosophical history and literature was obtained, as well as much anecdotal information acquired by way of conversation and verbal commentary. As an outside observer, it was possible to objectively note the organisational procedures and understand much of the rationale that inspired commitment and continued belief. Although this relationship was entirely informal without any ulterior motives or objectives, serious reflection and spirited discussion helped solidify my impressions and memories. Despite subsequent exploration of many similar topics and themes during my student years, this personal familiarity and background with theosophy was never utilised for academic purposes. Thus, one of the appeals in now choosing this topic was to revisit a field of interest once explored in some depth, but examined from a more mature and disciplined perspective.

Although many years have past since my first foray into the discipline of Religious Studies, the enduring influence of past professors from Concordia University

must be acknowledged. These include Fred Bird, Charles Davis, John Rossner, Michel Despland, Sheila McDonough, and David Miller. And finally, without the encouragement and patience of my wife Christine, this undertaking would never have reached fruition.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Methodological Issues and Thematic Categories

1.1 Explanation of Terms and Parameters of This Study

The wording of the title, "*The Theosophical Movement of the Nineteenth Century: the Legitimation of the Disputable and the Entrenchment of the Disreputable"* is suggestive, implicit with issues we will examine in the substance of this work. Before we begin though, we must proffer a rationale for choosing and using these terms. To avoid ambiguity and minimise misconception, it seems reasonable to state our intentions at the outset. Following this we will examine some of the inherent methodological issues, which must be taken into account when dealing with theosophical materials. We shall conclude this opening chapter by outlining the thematic areas this study will encompass, followed by a brief survey of relevant literature, and our reasons for choosing this field of study as our topic of interest.

The modern theosophical movement is the object of our attention.[1] Defining the parameters of this movement for our purposes requires an unavoidable bracketing out of both early pre-nineteenth century proto-foundational roots as well as most twentieth century history. Those areas will be discussed in due course tangentially where applicable, but won't be the major focus of our study. Thus our historical scope will primarily focus on the period between 1875 when the Theosophical Society was formed, and 1907, when Annie Besant was elected President. We will concentrate particularly on

[1] The word "theosophy" is a translation from the Greek, meaning "divine wisdom." It was introduced in the third century and is credited to the Neo-Platonist Ammonious Saccas. Subsequently, individuals with mystical and gnostic inclinations adopted the term sporadically, most notably Pseudo-Dionysus in the sixth century, Jacob Boehme in the early seventeenth century, and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin in the late eighteenth century. In searching for an appropriate name for their fledgling organization in 1875, Charles Sotheran, one of the original members, came upon the word "Theosophy" while thumbing through the pages of a dictionary. The organization was then named the Theosophical Society. In subsequent written usage, there is no strict consistency about capitalisation or small case lettering of the words "theosophy," "theosophist," or "theosophical." There are discrepancies, which appear from writer to writer. Capitalisation usually signifies special respect or importance, a differentiation based on personal considerations or patterned after other familiar examples. In the writings of Madame Blavatsky, "Theosophy" and other derivations are often capitalised wherever used. To avoid confusion, we shall only use capitalisation when referring to the specific organisational entity, the Theosophical Society. For normal written usage, such as in "theosophical movement," "theosophical ideas," and so on, we shall stick with the non-capitalised forms. However, in quotes and citations there will be an inconsistency dependent on the practice of the specific writer.

the theosophical movement as it coalesced and took form primarily under Madame Blavatsky in the late nineteenth century. We also will follow the movement past her lifetime into the early twentieth century and the first organisational crisis of succession, noting the conflicting claims to authoritative status by those vying for the Presidency of the Theosophical Society.

However, before discussing the theosophical movement, the consideration of worldview form, function and content becomes an important prefatory issue. We must establish a prior theoretical foundation for our interpretation of the theosophical worldview in relation to historical and sociological processes. The types of traditional mindset of a society, ways of perceiving the world, choice of evaluative criteria and so on are culturally created and transmitted. The emergence of the Theosophical Society in the nineteenth century can only be understood fully by recognising that it appeared as a protest against conventional and habitual ways of envisioning reality.

It can therefore be said that our study most properly pertains to the developmental process underlying the unique body of ideas and beliefs constituting the theosophical worldview during its formative years. Rather than simply describing or evaluating theosophical doctrine, or exclusively tracing historical events, we have opted to examine how the initial theosophical worldview of the late nineteenth century coalesced and took its specific unique form. We shall try to identify and analyse the discrete and essential constituent elements that collectively contributed to the emergence of this unified, coherent, encompassing way of envisioning reality.

The formal theosophical worldview was explicitly created to provide an alternative to the dominant Western mainstream orientations represented through the institutions of religion, philosophy, and science. These, as conventionally recognised, were felt by Madame Blavatsky and her supporters to be severely demeaning of the intrinsic spiritual dignity of humankind and bereft of their potential worth and value. Thus the theosophical system of ideas, beliefs, objectives, and ideals was crafted to be both a critique of mainstream traditions of truth and knowledge as well as a more intellectually appealing and emotionally satisfying plausible alternative, positing what was believed to be a superior and more accurate esoteric representation of reality. It can therefore be recognised as being forged through a dialectic in which the vision articulated

by Blavatsky and shared by her sympathisers inevitably and necessarily was shaped and structured in light of contemporary sentiments, standards, and expectations. No matter how radical the theosophical worldview may have been, it yet could only aspire to legitimacy by confronting established tradition rather than ignoring or minimising the apparent differences.

What we are dealing with are the dynamics of this confrontational process. While Madame Blavatsky and the other theosophical leaders were attempting to debunk and refute the visions of reality represented through mainstream institutions of knowledge, they yet were painstakingly attempting to attain legitimacy by providing rehabilitated, revised, and renewed content felt to be more accurate and meaningful. This "esoteric" orientation reflected a positive valuation and promotion of occult and mystical principles and beliefs, and characterised the theosophical perspective on reality. This process of simultaneous critique and constructivism was an ongoing phenomenon, most clearly identifiable in a few critical areas intrinsic to theosophical worldview formation. We have isolated these and categorised them as the fields of motivational relevancy, synthetic knowledge, extraordinary experience, supernatural authority, and sacred text equivalency. As well, it is important to note that worldview formation is more than the pure representation of the visions or insights of individuals, and involves many social factors. Ideas and beliefs do not exist in isolation. It is necessary to examine the significant events that transpired during our time frame of theosophical history in light of familiar sociological terms. This allows a broader overview of the personal and social dynamics underlying the formation of the early theosophical worldview. Thus what our study will emphasise are the significant elements of the attempted legitimation process and the efforts to construct what was intended to be a consensually preferable alternative vision of reality.

Having delineated some of the preliminary parameters of our approach to the theosophical movement, we must now continue to clarify our title description. This entails firstly explaining our use of the term "legitimation." We will interpret it as a socially oriented process of explanation, rationalisation, and justification of encompassing belief and ideational systems. Berger expresses a more concise sociological view.

> By legitimation is meant socially objectivated knowledge that serves to explain the social order. [2]

In our examination of the theosophical movement, we will focus on the process whereby certain types of purported extrasensory, non-rational, numinous and mystical forms of experience and related types of knowledge were subject to an intended rehabilitation process. These varieties of abnormal, unusual, normally inexplicable phenomena, and systems of knowledge dependent on their credibility, were consensually evaluated as dubious, disputable, disreputable, by the authoritative representatives of the dominant institutions of legitimation, such as the Christian Church and the most prestigious schools of empirical science. The theosophical intention was to try and apply a different set of evaluative and interpretive criteria, to attain a new legitimacy and dignity for ideas and experiences mostly dismissed contemptuously or ignored as unworthy of serious consideration. These efforts aimed at reclaiming paranormal and mystical phenomena as actual and factual, natural manifestations of latent human experiential capacities. In attempting to rehabilitate, revise, reformulate ideas and beliefs mostly discredited in the late nineteenth century, theosophical theoreticians essentially were trying to strip away what they felt were the accumulation of centuries of accrued superstition and misconception. The successful accomplishment of that objective would validate the inclusion of such premises in wider social discourse, even if just as plausible hypotheses. By achieving these ends, such disputable content could then be at least somewhat legitimated into "socially objectivated knowledge" presented as an alternative to the dominant prevalent religious, philosophical, and scientific worldviews of the time.

From the theosophical position, those types of extraordinary experience were presented as sources of credible cognitive knowledge, albeit uncommon and atypical. However, when filtered through mainstream nineteenth century Western categories of interpretation, were simply considered dubious, suspect, deceptive, and at best, "disputable." As were the cosmological and anthropological schemas propagated in theosophical teachings. The theosophical movement was animated by a desire to "explain the social order" in the widest sense, and reality itself, in a radically different

[2] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969, p. 29.

way than prevailed through the primary institutions of legitimation (mainly the consensus opinions of the socially entrenched religious, philosophic and scientific status quo). Though fully cognisant of the disputability of its doctrines and claims, the theosophical leaders insisted on the validity of their vision, and were fully committed to the worldview so represented.

In attempting to prepare, shape, and articulate a view of reality incorporating disputable claims about the potentials of human experience and of knowledge about the hidden workings of the universe, the theosophical theoreticians, proselytisers, and supporters entered the fray in a conflict of ideas. Their movement was not the only one of its type in that social milieu, but it was certainly the most conceptually comprehensive and ambitious. And its dominant leader, spiritual inspiration, and ideational source, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) was in the forefront of the battle. As an icon and figurehead of this alternative way of representing reality, her own personal behaviour and history became subjects of public curiosity and scrutiny. By force of her charismatic personality, confrontational and argumentative persona, exotic life of adventure, and alleged participation in a variety of extrasensory episodes, she was often classified as "disreputable" in the larger social environment. Essentially, the perceived private and personal, as well as the public and professional aspects of her life were open to incessant criticism and judgment. To those who thought her a charlatan, opportunist, dilettante, immoral reprobate, her reputation was predominantly and irrevocably negative. For those who trusted the validity of her position and thought favourably (or at least neutrally) of her as a person, the view of her disreputability was muted or rejected. Her personal flaws were considered unavoidable "karmic" by-products of the important role she held as prophetic disseminator of a spiritually oriented vision. Where critics saw delusion, deception and manipulation, supporters saw exceptional and unusual qualities, supported with a supernatural rationale to justify what may have seemed unsettling to outsiders. Where supporters attributed contradictory, inconsistent, intimidating behaviour and opinion to Blavatsky's "colourful personality," critics saw a more cynical and self-serving attitude in operation.

However, Blavatsky's disreputability was not confined to the domain of public opinion. Besides undertaking the daunting task of constructing an unorthodox,

unconventional, and controversial ideational system, she aggressively initiated challenges or responded to personal and doctrinal attacks by contemporary critics. Her targets most often were the defenders of the status quo in religion and science, creating or sustaining an environment of perpetual tension, simmering with hostility towards "enemies" and "accusers." This confrontational stance is evident in many of her writings, and illustrates her intense desire to gain a degree of respect and recognition while yet challenging many of the cherished premises of orthodox systems of thought. In that social context her reputation as personally disreputable increased with every controversy. And in one controversy of particular note, the investigation conducted by Richard Hodgson of the Society for Psychical Research, her personal credibility and that of the society both suffered severe and long lasting harm, reinforcing the notion of disrepute. And by extension, the theosophical movement itself was likewise perceived as dubious, both because of substantive doubts about the merits of the theosophical worldview, and through association with Blavatsky and others of questionable standing, who nonetheless challenged the legitimacy of the ensconced primary worldviews.

The efforts aimed at entrenching the Theosophical Society as a viable institution worldwide required the powers of organisation, persuasion and argumentation. And an unflagging devotion, sense of mission, and conviction of the essential truth of the cause. Blavatsky and others equally outside of mainstream orthodoxy and likewise considered disreputable by their enemies undertook the effort to entrench the movement wherever opportunity presented itself. And in so doing, essentially challenged the foundations of the dominant traditional Western institutions of legitimation while positing an alternative based on a mix of non-traditional sources. However, when circumstances indicated the likelihood of a more sympathetic reception of the theosophical message elsewhere than in the West, and opportunity presented itself, the founders of the Theosophical Society availed themselves of the chance to explore possible new connections and alliances in India, Ceylon, and elsewhere in Eastern countries of their era. Yet, even when adapting and reformulating doctrinal content and social objectives in the East, the theosophical movement still was largely focused on confronting and challenging the primary Western vision of reality. Societal branches were established and proliferated throughout many Western countries. Theosophical literature was often focused on issues pertaining to

Western sensibilities. And Western-based enemies and critics continued to confront the movement and reiterate insinuations of disreputability, regardless of geographical location.

In the theosophical system, many provocative doctrines and conceptual premises were integrated into a comprehensive schema, which attracted varying degrees of interest and curiosity from many outside the movement. However, perhaps the most controversial of all theosophical principles, and the most disreputable to many, was the claim that a group of "Mahatmas," or "perfected humans," were actively working through and guiding the Theosophical Society, with their objective being the acceleration of spiritual evolution for humanity at large. The belief in this kind of secret spiritually advanced brotherhood operating covertly through an unbroken span of time was not a new one, having been part of the lore found in Rosicrucian and Masonic traditions as well as in popular fiction, such as the contemporary novel *Zanoni*, by Bulwer-Lytton. This premise was one ardently insisted upon as being literally and factually valid by Blavatsky, and perhaps defined the tone of the movement in her lifetime. Subsequently this doctrine acquired additional layers of interpretative connotation, becoming the dominant controversy and perhaps most disreputable element of the movement to critics. As well, many other incidents, issues, controversies engulfed the theosophical movement in its attempt to gain a wider public footing as a serious and viable worldview, deserving of respect and consideration from those willing to acknowledge the validity of its main principles.

We will attempt to explore events and issues from a variety of vantage points, recognising the theosophical movement as a social and historical phenomenon, emerging as a reaction to the dominant worldviews at its time of modern origin. And as a thorough and determined attempt to create a lasting ideational legacy, embodying spiritual values and an enhanced visionary worldview in the form of a specific nexus of ideas, ideals, beliefs, symbols.

1.2 Methodological Issues

1.2.1 Methodological Issue 1 – Questions Surrounding the Classification of Theosophy as a Subject of Religious Studies

Moving on to the problems of dealing with theosophical materials, we find that there are a number of issues that must be considered before actually embarking on the task at hand. One cannot simply delve into the subject matter without first examining possible sources of confusion or misconception. In fact, assurance that the theosophical movement can be comprehensively studied under the auspices of a particular discipline is the first issue that must be confronted.

The modern theosophical movement is an intriguing field of study for those interested in the history of ideas and of non-traditional social religious entities. In fact, part of the intrigue, and a hint of the necessity for a broad approach, is the very assumption that theosophy itself (as formally represented in various societies, lodges, organisations) is in fact, identifiable exclusively or primarily as a "religion" as typically understood and delineated. Although there are many definitions and perspectives about what constitutes religion, pursuing the variations and nuances and the positions from which they emanate takes us far away from our task. For instance, the very assumption that religion can be adequately defined as an all-encompassing concept is open to challenge.

> Religion is not a native term; it is a term created by scholars for their intellectual purposes and therefore is theirs to define. It is a second-order, generic concept that plays the same role in establishing a disciplinary horizon that a concept such as "language" plays in linguistics or "culture" plays in anthropology. There can be no disciplined study of religion without such a horizon. [3]

Given the necessity for a somewhat selective and pragmatic definition that will adequately serve our purposes of providing such a "horizon", we must establish a conceptual framework that comfortably works with the data of the theosophical enterprise to be in discussed. The parameters of the following approach seem to provide such a position.

---

[3] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Religion, Religions, Religious,* in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 281.

> To practice history of religions in a fashion consistent with the disciplines claim of title is to insist on discussing the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions of those discourses, practices, and institutions that characteristically represent themselves as eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine. [4]

The defining criterion for a religious orientation would thus seem to be a commitment to a set of beliefs, ideas, values that would be considered essentially spiritual, grounded in the transcendent, and which are expressed through, and embodied within, the most efficacious cultural forms in particular historical and social environments. The institution of religion, with its social, doctrinal, and value concerns sanctioned by transcendental premises of one variety or another, has historically been considered the primary representation of spiritually oriented worldviews. And the modern theosophical movement unequivocally was founded on a firm and explicit spiritual orientation. However, although therefore "religious" in terms of essential values, ideas, and beliefs, the founding theosophical theoreticians insisted that they were not promulgating a sectarian "religion." This distinction between the esoterically articulated presumed pure universal spiritual source, and the assumed flawed and ossified formulations of exoteric religions was a key element in theosophists establishing their sense of a distinctive identity.

As we shall see, one of the initial organisational intentions of the founders of the theosophical movement was to emphasise that theosophy was a synthesis of diverse streams of thought, inclusive of particular core spiritual themes, yet not restrictive or exclusivist. A typical theosophical statement of position regarding religious stance would be as follows;

> Theosophy is the essential truth underlying all religions and does not recognize any one religion as being supreme over the others or as the last word of truth. [5]

Though positioned as aloof from the confines and perceived limitations of, and commitments to, any single specific external religious institution or system, proclamations about embodying or synthesising the "essential truth underlying all

---

[4] Bruce Lincoln, *Thesis on Method,* in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon, London and New York: Cassell, 1999, p. 395.
[5] H. T. Edge, *Theosophy and Christianity,* retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1998, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/th-xity/th-xty1.htm>. (Accessed February 25, 2002).

religions" certainly seems to place the movement legitimately within the purview of the discipline of religious studies. The theosophical "discourses, practices and institutions" indeed are intended to embody and reflect "eternal, transcendent, spiritual, and divine" beliefs and values, although other motives and objectives coexist as ends to be pursued. The theosophical worldview is one such representation, a unique and idiosyncratic ideational and value saturated system of ideas, principles, and beliefs, shaped by "the temporal, contextual, situated, interested, human, and material dimensions." And because the explicit religious quotient and focus is only part (albeit, perhaps the most essential and defining) of a more complex system, incorporating other secular aims, it seems appropriate to try and draw upon the widest set of methodological options.

Historically, much of the doctrinal theosophical content, various points of institutional emphasis, selective prioritisation of intentions and objectives, have been malleable and easily re-configurable to suit needs and adapt to the requirements of the occasion. Theosophical teachings and the theosophical approach thus could be tailored specifically to appeal to those both without commitment to a specific religion as well as those desirous of a different way of interpreting and evaluating existing traditions, with or without extensive or exclusive use of the apparatus of religion per se. As institutionalised in 1875 in New York City, the Theosophical Society presented itself to the public in the broadest possible light, carefully crafting objectives and by-laws intended to appeal to the general speculative inquirer. The initial Objects were

"… to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe." [6]

And to reiterate the stance of neutrality, objectivity, social egalitarianism, and the desire to pursue truth for its own sake, the initial Preamble carefully spells out the position to be adopted by the fledgling society in its self-presentation to the public.

> Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as a Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body. Its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propaganda. In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership it knows neither race, sex, colour, country nor creed...[7]

[6] Josephine Ransom, *A Short History of the Theosophical Society*, Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1938, p. 81.
[7] Ibid.

As well as carefully and methodically trying to present to the public a neutral starting point, where previous social and ideological biases would be recognised as counterproductive and antithetical to the pursuit of "the omnipotence of truth," the emphasis was continually placed on appeal to all forms of inquiry. Thus there would be equal legitimacy for the devout religious orientation, the rational philosophical perspective, the detached scientific approach, or any sincere seeker after compatible forms of truth. This fundamental organisational premise has persisted amongst the various factions over the duration of the movement. For instance, this statement comes over fifty years after the first public assertion of objectives.

> Theosophy touches life at all points and illuminates every problem, but, naturally, different people find certain aspects more attractive than others—especially at the beginning. To the most intuitive, who immediately perceive the practical importance of its teachings for the happiness and welfare of humanity, this is the greatest incentive to its study; others appreciate its profound speculative features; some are attracted by its revelation of the inner meaning and basic unity of the great world religions; and there are many who prefer the scientific aspect, which includes the rational explanation of occult phenomena. [8]

And yet, despite explicit attempts to present to the public an image of a diversified non-sectarian enterprise, with rational and intellectual avenues of approach, theosophy has most commonly been identified and defined as a particular religious orientation. For instance, over a hundred years after the founding of the Theosophical Society, it is perceived primarily in the following terms.

> A religious movement founded by Madame H. P. Blavatsky and Annie Besant...[9]

However, the original Theosophical Society was legally classified not a religious body per se, but recognised as an organisation teaching the study of religions. In the 1880s a judge in St. Louis had this opinion when dealing with a case of incorporation.

> To teach religions is educational, not religious. "To promote the study of religions" is in part to promote the study of the history of man. I add the

[8] Charles J. Ryan, *What is Theosophy,* retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1998, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/ryan-wh/wit-hp.htm>. (Accessed February 26, 2002).
[9] *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought,* ed. Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass, Stephen Trombley, London: Fontana Press, 1988, p. 858.

> subordinate finding that the Society has no religious creed and practices no worship. [10]

And yet technically, according to that judgment, if theosophy wasn't a religion as familiarly recognised, why has it been predominantly interpreted as one? Perhaps the reason was that even though not legally presented as such, nor constitutionally organised as one, a significant portion of its doctrines and the manifest behaviours and attitudes of a substantial portion of its membership gave reason to identify the movement more as belonging to the category of religion than anything else. Arguments for viewing it as a primarily secular speculative enterprise have been made. And a case could likewise be framed to suggest that a major function was the objective investigation of paranormal phenomena. And yet, the interpretation as a "religious movement" was the one that most permeated public consciousness.

Another one of the main reasons was associative. In the early days of the movement, the implications and connotations surrounding the movement derived from its connections to occult, mystical, and esoteric religious subject matter. And in a later phase of the movement, the main association was with its partial reconfiguration as a ceremonial, devotion-prioritised entity. This most obvious example of theosophy appearing nearest the form of a traditional religious entity evolved through the nineteen twenties with the millenarian fervour surrounding belief in the immanent appearance of the world saviour. With the Theosophical Society sanctification and justification of the anointment of Jiddu Krishnamurti as this world saviour, and his subsequent sudden and dramatic repudiation of the role, a major portion of the theosophical movement most closely took on the look of a cult.[11]

Besides associative connections to religion in public consciousness, many of the elements of a religious rather than secular identification can be clearly observed, even though the Theosophical Society at its very inception was intending to present itself as

---

[10] Sylvia Cranston, *H.P.B. The Extraordinary Life & Influence of Helena Blavatsky,* New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1993, p. 147.

[11] A special-interest offshoot of the Theosophical Society, devoted to the "coming of the World Teacher" was established in 1911 and called Order of the Star in the East It was dissolved in 1929 by Krishnamurti himself when he repudiated all messianic claims and dissociated himself from all religious organizations. See Roland Vernon, *Star in the East: Krishnamurti, the Invention of a Messiah,* New York: Palgrave, 2000.

more than a religious orientation. The contents of its doctrines, rationale for its ethical conduct, its most cherished ideals are grounded in an affirmative and explicit belief in the spiritual sustenance of reality. So, despite efforts to appear purely non-sectarian and intellectually detached from partisan religious positions, the theosophical movement appears to fall more within than outside the field of religious studies. The history, sociology, psychology and philosophy of religion adequately provide the means of investigation. As well, the hermeneutical approach adds a dimension of inner meaning, revealing more of the intentions and feelings implicit in written documents. So despite continued efforts to present the movement as a secular speculative endeavour or branch of scientific inquiry, it most naturally and logically has fallen under this purview more than of any other discipline.

1.2.2 Methodological Issue 2 – The Rationale for Classification as a Sub-Genre of Esoteric Studies and The Importance of Madame Blavatsky

However, because the Theosophical movement has shown an intrinsic fluidity in the treatment and interpretation of conceptual materials (i.e. shifts in prioritisation of the three main objects of the society and subsequent positions taken in interpreting subject matter), and the way it has publicly represented itself (i.e. as a quasi-scientific investigative body, a secularly based speculative enterprise, a repository of supernatural knowledge, a link in a historic esoteric tradition), a thorough examination of any facet of the movement must avail itself of as many methodological tools as can reasonably be applied without distorting historical facts or offering one-dimensional reductive suggestions. As well, because of the contents, objectives, self-proclaimed links to past occult, mystical, spiritually oriented traditions, it is quite apparent that the theosophical movement falls more precisely under the specialised auspices of "esoteric studies" within the broad discipline of religious studies. All facets of the field of religious studies can certainly be utilised, but this emerging sub-genre seems especially appropriate as an intellectual locale for the study of this movement. Rather than receiving treatment primarily as a deviant and eccentric cult, or as a minor curiosity, the theosophical movement can be recognised as a fully legitimate expression of religious and spiritual impulses, utilising much of the pre-existing and contemporary conceptual apparatus

pertaining to esoteric and spiritual traditions. The contributions of Hanegraaff in *New Age Religion and Western Culture,* Versluis in *Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism*, and Faivre in *Access to Western Esotericism* particularly are important, helping to sharpen the historical focus and bring fresh methodological clarity and conceptual vigour to a domain traditionally treated superficially, from the vantage point of a vested emotional bias, or dismissed as confused and confusing. Hanegraaff for instance, sees the need for

> ... the study of western esotericism not to restrict itself to empirico-historical description of narrowly-circumscribed currents and personalities, but also to develop interpretive theories pertaining to various dimensions of western esotericism in general—or, at least, large and significant sub-areas of it. [12]

The theosophical movement is certainly at least a "significant sub-area" of esotericism, and requires "interpretative theories" which venture beyond the "narrowly-circumscribed currents and personalities" which usually are the major focus of attention. And Versluis had these observations about the difficulty of a purely empirical methodology applied to this category of religious studies.

> What is more, we cannot adequately investigate, singly or comparatively, variants of esotericism without an awareness from the outset that we are entering into unfamiliar territory for the strictly rationalist or scientific mind, and that in order to understand it in any genuine way, we will have to learn at least imaginatively to enter into it. [13]

This acknowledgment that unfamiliar academic territory is the subject matter of study, and that a rigid rationalism or scientism will likely be incapable of eliciting genuine understanding also suggests the need for a comprehensive and proactive approach. By stating that the investigator has to try to incorporate a more imaginative understanding, issues are raised about the boundaries of objective scholarship. However interesting and important, such disputes and debates are beyond the scope of our topic. Suffice it to say that we shall endeavour to utilise the methods that seem most appropriate for particular issues. A detached objectivity is necessary to try and understand social and historical events and evaluate claims that clearly were intended to be judged in terms of factual

---

[12] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism,* retrieved from Esoterica, 1999, <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/Hanegraaff.html>. (Accessed February 26, 2002).
[13] Arthur Versluis, *What is Esoteric? Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism*, retrieved from Esoterica, 2002, < http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIV/Methods.htm>. (Accessed February 26, 2002).

accuracy. But with the theosophical movement being a "variant of esotericism," the ideas, beliefs, experiential expectations represent an orientation to the world which is expressed through use of its own idiosyncratic terminology, symbolism, and conceptual model of reality. To "imaginatively enter into it" requires a hermeneutical explication of textual materials, where different levels of meaning may be discerned. Trying to understand the frame of reference and the values, intentions, and motives of the author allows a broader understanding of the actual text or document. However, even such an approach may be problematic. For instance, Madame Blavatsky adamantly insisted upon the historical veracity and literal meaning of many key theosophical premises. However, she also noted the need for symbolic encoding and decoding of esoteric knowledge. So the intent and the implications of her words must be carefully scrutinised to try and elucidate her specific message at any given time. Dealing with theosophical materials, we can aspire to show both "inner" and "outer" layers of significance where each seems most evident.

We feel that the most productive way to extract the maximum value from source material is to attempt to apply the methods that most effectively help us uncover the most seemingly logical and transparent meanings pertaining to the particular issue at hand. At times, statements and events can be readily comprehended without recourse to secondary forms of analyses. And in other situations, the apparent surface meanings do not convey the full depth of concern of the author. It should be stressed too that we shall be taking a thematic rather than a chronological and purely descriptive historical approach. Each main chapter will attempt to isolate and elucidate particular issues, which collectively, will be shown to logically cohere and demonstrate our position. We will outline these major themes shortly. However, we must first discuss some of the problems faced in any treatment of theosophical materials.

At the outset it must be stated that our intention is not to produce a strict linear historical account of the role of seminal figures, significant events, and accomplishments of the theosophical movement itself. Rather, we will discuss the personages and pertinent historical events as they relate to our chosen themes. In particular, we will focus on the character, contributions, and argumentative style, of Madame Blavatsky. As the primary source of theosophical knowledge and theory, supported by her own claims of skilled

supersensory ability, and credited by others with demonstrating such prowess, she must be the central focus of any study of the early (modern) theosophical movement. We will examine her charismatic leadership role within the theosophical movement, as well as the content of her message and the manner in which she crafted her arguments.

Concerning other figures, not all personages contributed to the same degree, or in the same ways, though many played significant roles in various phases of the movement. We shall direct most of our attention to Madame Blavatsky because of the unique multiple functions she had in the movement. Her creative and inspirational impetus was far more significant than any other figure, and her uniqueness as authoritative magician, prophetess, and priestess as it were, defined how theosophy was publicly perceived in the late nineteenth century.

1.2.3 Methodological Issue 3 – The Treatment of the Premises of Occultism

A major issue that must be discussed before embarking on an analysis of any esoteric system of thought is the treatment of the claims of occult, psychic, abnormal, mystical and similarly unusual but intense forms of subjective experience. A number of questions immediately come to mind. Firstly, the very disputability of such experiential claims has traditionally engendered scepticism.

> The main problem … has been the pervasiveness in intellectual circles of a worldview that makes examination of the evidence, let alone open-minded examination, very difficult. Because of the resulting "absolute disdain on a priori grounds," the leaders of the scientific, philosophical, and theological communities have been in no position to do anything to mitigate the "indiscriminate credulity" that often abounds in other circles. [14]

Such entrenched cynicism would immediately dismiss all such claims as unworthy of serious consideration at the outset. If the sceptical perspective denies factual authenticity, are there other approaches in which these forms of experience are accorded more legitimacy? Should the claims of extrasensory and transcendentally cognitive states of consciousness be treated empathetically and accepted as empirically factual because the subject makes such assertions and presumably believes them to be true? Can they be evaluated as psychologically real to the percipient, but not necessarily valid as

[14] David Ray Griffin, *Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality*, Albany, New York: State University of

consensually binding objectively verifiable statements of fact? Or should a purely sceptical scientific standard be applied? McClenon for instance avoids such true/false, real/illusionary dichotomies by stating that such phenomena, which he terms "wondrous events," are sociologically real because they are perceived to be authentic modes of experience by particular social groups, who behave and believe with that premise taken as an undisputable given. He considers scientifically anomalous phenomena such as extrasensory perception, apparitions, out-of-body experiences, spiritual possession, contact with the dead, and other similar phenomena to be examples of such wondrous events. As well, though not specifically encompassing spiritual and religious experiences, such as mystical states of consciousness, he sees a direct connection. Even fraudulent claims to such experience may be accepted as important because they are considered a form of oral literature and reinforce folk beliefs of believers.

> Many wondrous experiences support belief in spiritual powers or forces. They play a role in the development of religious ideologies. The universal elements that recur within these episodes contribute to uniformities within folk belief. However, the capacity for experiencing wondrous events is not evenly distributed. Some people report far more incidents than others. Those who posses the greatest ability to experience anomalous episodes rend to fulfil special roles within their societies. They develop and perform ceremonies that include wondrous exhibitions. [15]

Where theosophy is concerned, there are a number of implications. Madame Blavatsky clearly was one who was considered to be proficient at experiencing wondrous events by her followers, and assumed a special role within the theosophical movement. At times, the anomalous phenomena she was associated with at certain public occasions may be likened to "wondrous exhibitions," although the likelihood of some quotient of fraud seems a reasonable conclusion. As well, the use of the term "wondrous events," while an apt way to characterise of such phenomena, connotes too much of an impression of the miraculous to totally fit the theosophical profile. Blavatsky and most theosophists insist upon the belief that supersensory abilities are part of the natural order, latent capacities for most, but consciously and wilfully developed by those following the path of esoteric wisdom. Thus, we have chosen to use the term "extraordinary" to indicate

---

New York Press, 1997, p. 33.

[15] James McClenon, *Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, p. 1.

more of a theosophical tonality. As well, McClenon refrains from using qualifying words when referring to the manifestation of these kinds of phenomena. He feels that the sociological reality precludes the necessity for questions based on empirical criteria. However, certain difficulties arise when treating purely theosophical materials. A persistent theme of theosophical thinkers is that extraordinary supersensory experiences are in fact empirically legitimate. That they do reveal as yet hidden cosmological and anthropological truths, as well as a much more extended picture of the nature of man. So it would seem judicious to qualify most claims where necessary by using words like "ostensible," "purported," "alleged," "supposed," "claimed," and so forth.

It should also be noted that we shall include references to mystical experience under the category of "extraordinary" for the sake of convenience. Although there are qualitative differences between mystical and paranormal modes of experience, both are integral elements of the theosophical belief system. We shall differentiate between them when necessary in the course of our discussion. Such issues are complex, involving a number of imprecise variables. And thus any methodological approach inevitably must be somewhat selective and adaptable, capable of acknowledging the difficulties inherent in dealing with ambivalent and allusive claims and beliefs.

1.2.4 Methodological Issue 4 – Interpreting the Theosophical Historical Record

As well, another contentious area involves certain discrepancies and diverse interpretations of known records, verifiable facts and tangible documentation. Not all statements, policies, shifts in focus were equally monumental or important. Much time and effort was spent on the minutiae of the day-to-day societal operations. Many crises dealt with petty logistical affairs or the inevitable clashes and conflicts between personalities. As well, there are acknowledged gaps and lack of consensual agreement about particular situations and chains of events, inevitably necessitating speculation and inference. This is particularly true about the so-called "veiled years" of Madame Blavatsky, which have been, and still are, the subject of diverse lines of speculative exploration. The words of Carl Becker come to mind when contemplating the dilemma of dealing with somewhat ambiguous historical data.

> In truth, the actual past is gone, and the world of history is an intangible world, recreated imaginatively, and present in our mind. [16]

Yet though any historical presentation inevitably reflects a subjective orientation in the arrangement, shaping, interpretation of the materials, a judicious attentiveness to the known record and primary data, as well as references to diverse (and often, conflicting) sources may allow for a wide scope for estimation and evaluation of the meaning and implications of the issue under consideration.

This brings us more particularly to consideration of past treatments of theosophical materials proper. A major issue that must be confronted is the fact that theosophical history has rarely been dealt with from a neutral perspective. In fact, with some exceptions, partisan polarisation has dominated the way theosophical history has been handled. Essentially, the two extremes are those of committed adherent and dismissive sceptic. Not all such starting points are at the extreme ends of the spectrum, though many clearly are. As well, a further qualification must be noted. When the theosophical movement eventually generated offshoots and independent bodies, a variety of vested interest historical revisions and reinterpretations of events and ideas subsequently followed. Thus, even amongst dedicated theosophical adherents, there are diverging points of view and revaluations. As well, even amongst sceptics, opinions vary about the possible contributions and value of the movement. Even presupposing problems of credibility, proven dubious claims, and factual contradictions or errors. To illustrate the problematical issues of dealing with explicitly partisan accounts and evaluations of theosophical materials, let us look at a few representative examples. Firstly, a typical example of how the theosophical movement was viewed from the inside by an adherent.

> The Theosophical Movement in the world is age long. It existed in the far distant past, as it will continue for ages to come. It can exist quite apart from any organization, and has often done so. It is that centre in the mind of Manu (the collective mind of man), which makes for unity, and seeks to raise the concrete mind to higher levels of expression. We can trace this movement not only in the religious philosophies of the past, but in the rise and fall of nations and in the growth of new forms of civilization, art and invention. It is particularly active at

[16] Carl. L. Becker, *What Are Historical Facts,* in *The Philosophy of History In Our Time*, ed. Hans Meyerhoff, Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959, p. 128.

> the present time when evolution is being speeded up and new complex forces are playing upon the human race.
> A Theosophical organization is the physical body in which the Movement may embody itself for the time being. It has appeared many times in the past under different names. [17]

Clearly there is much to explicate in such a statement of belief. We will deal with the implications of this kind of content in due course. What is important to note here is that to adherents, the movement and its organisations are believed to play a unique role in history and thus have a special elite status, and that there is assumed a direct linear participatory link between the movement and the manifestation of supernatural evolutionary forces. Thus, in reading, researching, evaluating theosophical "insider" materials, this kind of presentational perspective must be kept in mind.

And at the other extreme, that of unsympathetic sceptic, we find this kind of generalisation about the origins of theosophy.

> Spiritualism was also the cradle for Theosophy, the creation of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91), an eccentric Russian mystic who lived a life of scandal and died amid accusations that she was a fraud. [18]

Extreme veneration or contempt does not in itself negate the possible worth of histories, critiques, interpretations of theosophy in any form. Legitimate insights and valuable information can certainly be extracted. However, it is important to recognise that a priori premises do shape presentations, and therefore must be taken into consideration when evaluating sources and statements. As well, even in neutral and more objective studies, it is worth noting that there are inevitable implicit subjective assessments and judgments built into the fabric of the exposition.

Since one of the considerations of a thorough methodological approach is a judicial and contextual understanding and accounting for possible preferential shaping of theosophical materials by commentators, it also stands to reason that the historical personages themselves would obviously be presenting a vested point of view in the

---

[17] Prajnanda, *The Eternal Movement,* in *The Aryan Path,* Bombay: The Theosophy Company, August 1930, p. 501.
[18] Russell Chandler, *Understanding the New Age,* Dallas/London/Vancouver/Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1991, p. 34.

primary source documentation. As history was lived, and events transpired, the normal and natural human reactions would be to reflect the feelings and intentions of the moment. Books, letters, conversations, actions taken and so forth, would be construed in light of the needs and issues of the moment. Sometimes, posterity may have been in mind as well as the need to "set the record straight" in a favourable light. But it seems more likely that short-term focus and dealing with immediate priorities would determine the tone of interaction. Thus, finding obvious contradictions and inconclusive statements seems unavoidable, and part of the "human equation" of real people conducting themselves in real time. However, it also should be emphasised that there is a difference between spontaneous statement, action, reaction, and premeditated, calculated deception or intentional allusiveness. Trying to differentiate and determine if certain contradictory or fallacious statements, anecdotes, recollections were merely the result of normal human fallibility and embellishment, or intentionally misleading and meant to deceive for ulterior purposes is another difficulty in methodological procedure. Perhaps this intrinsic difficulty of dealing with original documentation can be inferred in these words from Meiland in speaking about history.

> ... it attempts to deal with a certain class of present entities (which we will call "documents" and which includes artefacts, memoirs, records, and memory beliefs) in a certain way. ... The historian "tells a story" which is in the past tense. Each historian creates the past or part of the past in writing history. ... He is trying to give a coherent account of presently existing objects (namely, the documents), which, as we say, are related to past events. He tells a story that accounts for the existence and nature of these documents. [19]

The variety of polarised opinion in secondary sources as well as difficulty of understanding the complete context of primary documentation will invariably lead to a certain amount of subjective evaluation in analysis of theosophical materials. This though is unavoidable and will require subjective judgment as we proceed.

1.2.5 Methodological Issue 5 – The Utility of Sociological Analyses

Having touched on some of the methodological problems of dealing with extant historical treatments of the theosophical movement, we must now turn to some other

[19] Jack W. Meiland, *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge*, New York: Random House, 1965, p. 192.

preliminary issues shaping our approach to the subject. The use of the historical materials is just one means of dealing with the issues. We must also make use of the conceptual apparatus of sociology. Particularly, the sociologies of knowledge and of religion. Although separate disciplines, there is an overlap of connecting interests which allows for mutually beneficial insights. For instance, Berger and Luckmann see this relationship as crucial, and a key to the wider understanding of religious phenomena.

> ... the sociology of religion is an integral and even central part of the sociology of knowledge. Its most important task is to analyse the cognitive and normative apparatus by which a socially constituted universe (that is, "knowledge" about it) is legitimated. This will involve the sociology of religion in the study of religion in the sense in which this term is commonly known in Western civilization ... But the sociology of religion will also deal with other legitimating systems, whether one wishes to call these religious or pseudo religious... [20]

It will be important to look at the "cognitive and normative apparatus" which were incorporated into the theosophical orientation as the knowledge about their "socially constituted universe" was constructed, articulated, and legitimated. And clearly theosophy is subsumed as an "other legitimating system" which Berger and Luckmann would likely classify outside the Western religious norm, possibly as "pseudo religious." As a movement with religious motives and objectives, a distinctive hierarchal structure, clear authoritative criteria, canons of revealed and hidden truths, charismatic leadership, appeals to supersensory experience, theosophy can thus be analysed according to a number of the classifications and categories proposed by various sociologists and other analysts. However, the temptation to impose reductive conclusions must also be factored in as a methodological difficulty. Even when a particular classification or typology appears to be accurate, there may be other ways to treat the subject at hand. We will explore a variety of theoretical schemas when dealing with the specific thematic issues, trying to provide the most efficacious analytical models.

---

[20] P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Knowledge,* in *Sociology of Religion,* ed. Roland Robertson, Harmondsworth/Baltimore/Ringwood/Markham: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 69.

1.2.6 Methodological Issue 6 – The Importance of Psychological Considerations

As well as the historical and the sociological approaches to the theosophical movement, we must utilise the psychological perspective. However we do so with qualifications, and with full cognisance that the resultant explanations are often only a particular selective way of dealing with the ambivalent materials of human subjectivity. And yet, it also seems apparent that a fuller comprehension of some of the motives and actions of individuals may be aided by understanding possible motivational and formative influences. Not to necessarily reduce complex processes to simple ones, but to try and illuminate behaviours and attitudes, with possible hypotheses about causal connections between feeling, thought, and behaviour. The more problematical question perhaps is interpreting and evaluating what specific experiences may be considered to be authentically numinous and extraordinary, and what may more properly pertain to more familiar and prosaic subconscious or conscious sources. With Madame Blavatsky in particular, there appears to be a mix of different types of personal experience that coalesce and find expression in the manifest forms of her writings, inter-personal relationships, and public conduct. Certainly at least some of her beliefs and behaviour are shaped by what she interpreted as paranormal and religious experience. As well, it seems fair to observe that other motives and ambitions likewise have had a determinative influence on her presentations and actions. Where discussion relates to what may be considered the religious quotient, these words reflect the perspective necessary to properly evaluate the phenomenon in question.

> To talk about religious experience from a psychological perspective is in no way to try to explain it away in terms of simpler or more fundamental psychological components, a process which both diminishes its reality and usually also requires denial of its actual phenomenology. [21]

However, once criteria of religious experience and psychology become part of the analytical apparatus, other issues come into play. For instance the role of the imagination (in its most comprehensive sense) is also an important component of the psychological approach. In dealing with claims of supersensory, mystical, numinous, phenomena, not factoring in the role imagination may play would be a serious omission. Selective theories and speculative directions suggested in the works of the psychoanalytical,

Jungian, archetypal, and other schools and sources help provide a broader spectrum for interpretation of subjective influences.

1.2.7 Methodological Issue 7 – Dynamics of the Structured Empathy Approach

The historical, sociological and psychological elements of our methodological apparatus may lead to a wider understanding of theosophical events and the positions taken by individuals. However, it neglects a very important dimension That is the issue of inner meaningfulness and feelings of worth and spiritual contentment experienced by the adherent. To try and understand the subjective side of a belief system, one must try and evoke a resonant tone by the non-judgmental treatment of texts and other significant expressions of the viewpoints and feelings of those committed to the system of beliefs and values. The terms "phenomenological" and "hermeneutical" have most commonly been used in such applications. However, each carries connotations and associations specifically rooted to their respective sources of origin. The hermeneutical approach derives from biblical exegesis while the phenomenological discipline emerged from the philosophical school of phenomenology. Although great amounts of subsequent work have produced more refined and specialised techniques of analyses, we feel a more neutral and broader term would suffice to characterise our treatment of theosophical materials. We feel the term "structured empathy" as defined by Smart is more applicable and less restrictive. He defines this approach in these words.

> … the empathy needs to be structured. We have to comprehend the structure of another's world: in general, we have to try to understand the structure of belief inside the head of a believer. [22]

The attempt to understand the theosophical worldview as a "structure of belief inside the head of the believer" requires historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical perspectives be factored into the total approach. The need for structured empathy suggests that both an objective disciplined "structural" perspective as well as a subjectively expansive "empathetic" commitment be juxtaposed to produce a result which reveals both the outer and the inner sides of the system. The outer side would encompass the system in terms of its historical and social structure and dynamics. The

---

[21] Lionel Corbott, *The Religious Function of the Psyche*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 18.
[22] Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, Upper Saddle River, New

inner would attempt to illustrate how the worldview serves as a satisfying and viable way of envisioning reality for those committed to its premises and doctrines. Our priority will be a focus on the way the theosophical edifice was construed and presented, and thus must therefore be primarily structural. However, as a framework of values, ideas and beliefs, its worthiness cannot be judged merely by its outer form or by how it was construed. Nor can the enunciation of anomalies, contradictions, and dubious occurrences be considered justification to dismiss the subjective merit that adherents and sympathisers have accorded it. The enduring presence of the modern theosophical movement for over a century and a quarter illustrates that the worldview it espouses retains a degree of public attractiveness. An empathetic awareness of such allure must be factored into any analysis of the definitive doctrines, ideas, values, and beliefs to provide a realistic assessment of the attractiveness of theosophy to those committed to its worldview.

1.2.8 Methodological Issue 8 – Textual Analysis as a Means of Explication

A major methodological technique we will use will be textual analysis of a number of relevant articles written by Madame Blavatsky. In trying to understand how she intentionally wanted to present theosophical ideas and beliefs to the public, a thorough analysis of her own words and argumentative style seems a useful means of explicating the theosophical message. In trying to construct a comprehensive and convincing alternative worldview that attracted newcomers, convinced sceptics, and reassured believers, Blavatsky was challenged by a variety of simultaneous needs when writing articles and books. Trying to trace such motives in her writings somewhat qualifies the hermeneutical method. Expressions of spiritual values, ideas, beliefs, certainly permeate her writings, but there were also more pragmatic and immediate concerns. Blavatsky expended a great deal of time and effort in her writings critiquing contrary positions while trying to boost public confidence and assurance in her own stance. However, because our primary interest is in trying to follow how intentions of legitimation were represented, textual analysis will be a major part of our procedure. An unavoidable selectivity of written materials for analysis is necessary, so we have tried to isolate writings that directly relate to the theme under discussion. Blavatsky was a prolific author from the time she embarked upon her mission, having written extensively both in

---

Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 14.

private correspondence and in general and specialised publications. Often a number of leaps from issue to issue can be found in single articles as she surveyed a broad range of concerns while yet addressing a particular topic or question. We will examine the creation of her three main books, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, and *The Voice of the Silence* in a separate chapter, because the crafting of those works was intended to present the theosophical worldview in a more formal and enduring light. Elsewhere we will draw from representative articles to illustrate her approach to issues at given discrete moments, where the needs to explain, emphasise, reiterate specific points was paramount. In her writings she often proceeded with both critical and constructionist motives, simultaneously trying to debunk critics and enemies while hoping to elicit public confidence in the trustworthiness of the theosophical vision of reality.

1.2.9 Methodological Consideration 9 – Theosophy's Philosophical Perspective

And finally, there are philosophical questions that arise when perusing the doctrinal formulations of the theosophical movement. Perennial questions about the nature of the universe, the meaning and purpose of life, the grounds for choosing proper ethical conduct, the different types of knowledge and modes of experience, the structure of the mind, and so forth. Theosophical answers to such philosophical questions were not necessarily original, and often were based on eclectic, selective, and distinctive interpretations of philosophies, philosophers, scientists, religious, mythological, and occult traditions, by appeal to subjective experience, and so forth. And though often lacking originality per se, the weaving together of diverse strands of conceptual materials in support of a priori premises is in itself a valuable form of creative activity. Given our aim of examining the structure of the theosophical legitimating process, we cannot pursue in depth discussions of the relative strengths or weaknesses of their answers to such perennial philosophical questions. To do so would lead to excessive digressions and veer away from our topic. What is important though is to show how the theosophical ideational system was presented as an all-encompassing solution to such philosophical dilemmas.

The theosophical approach to the major philosophical issues reflected more of a religious than a purely intellectual or secular orientation, and thus can considered a

"religious philosophy" with a priori assumptions about the primacy of a mystical ground of Being. In the course of our discussion we will see that the philosophy enunciated by theosophy drew from diverse sources. Most particularly, appearing as a hybrid variant of an Absolute Idealist metaphysical stance, with Vedantic, Neoplatonic, Mahayana Buddhist, and other similar strands contributing to the overall philosophical position. As a general orientation to the world though, Madame Blavatsky created a system that was most explicitly gnostic in outlook.[23] As we pursue our thematic analysis of the process of theosophical legitimation, evaluation of the merits or problems of the theosophical philosophical stance per se is beyond our purview. We can describe how Blavatsky dealt with specific philosophical issues, her viewpoint, and the parallels or support she felt she discerned from extant sources. However, recognition of the philosophical overview of theosophy is important in understanding the kind of speculative foundation that was in process of being consolidated by Madame Blavatsky and other theoreticians. So it may prove useful to provide an inclusive definition at the outset.

> Theosophy differs from speculative philosophy in allowing validity to some classes of mystical experience as regard soul and spirit, and in recognising clairvoyance and telepathy and kindred forms of perception as linking the worlds of psyche and body. Its content describes a transcendental field as the only real … from which emerge material universes in series, with properties revealing that supreme Being. Two polarities appear at the first manifesting stage, consciousness or spirit … and matter or energy… Simultaneously, life appears clothed in matter and spirit, as form or species … In a sense, life is the direct reflection of the transcendent supreme, hence biological thinking has a privileged place in Theosophy. Thus, cycles of life are perceived in body, psyche, soul and spirit. The lesser of these is reincarnation of impersonal soul in many personalities. A larger epoch is "the cycle of necessity," where spirit evolves over vast periods. [24]

This philosophical orientation is here presented in its distilled essential form and obviously reveals a syncretistic origin. We will be more concerned with how and why such a stance was construed than with the credibility of its assumptions.

---

[23] The non-capitalised use of the term "gnostic" refers to the philosophical orientation rather than the historical Gnostic religion.

[24] Fritz Kunz, *Theosophy*, in *Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes, Ames, Iowa: Littlefield,

1.3 Thematic Categories

1.3.1 Thematic Category 1 – Intentionality and Motivation

The historical approach provides detail about what events transpired and who the significant personages were. The sociological approach gives a broader social understanding of how a belief system came to fruition under particular circumstances and took the form it did. The psychological approach is an attempt to understand possible motivational factors and the influence of personal character on the evolution of the system and the institution. The examination of philosophical positions reveals the consensual stance on perennial speculative issues. Structural empathetic analysis of significant documents and passages can convey the tone of the personal dedication and faith of those committed to the system of beliefs, ideas and values. As well, through textual and stylistic analysis, we may attempt to explicate some of the ways Blavatsky tried to gain legitimation for the theosophical worldview, as well as rehabilitate or create her own image for public consumption

Having now discussed the meaning of our title, looked at the major methodological considerations and the intrinsic problems of dealing with the particulars of theosophical data, it remains to explain our selection of thematic categories. The first area that we will try and explore is that of intentionality and motivation. The kind of ideas, objectives, and ambitions that the theosophical impetus was driven by. And the feelings that Blavatsky and her followers had of her special mission and purpose. As well, a look at how she typically expressed her own feelings and thoughts reveals a pattern of both critical and constructive rhetoric in her writings as she attempted to deconstruct traditional entrenched positions while promoting the emergent theosophical option. Additionally, it is instructive to see what the Theosophical Society was attempting to achieve by regularly revising and rewording its formal statements of purpose. Ultimately, the overarching intent underlying all particular objectives was to change the way reality was perceived by instituting a new worldview that prioritised esoteric ideas and beliefs.

Adams & Co., 1959, p. 317.

1.3.2 Thematic Category 2 – The Nature of Worldviews

The second thematic area derives from the conclusions of the first, and lead to a discussion of the dynamics of worldviews. It will be necessary to examine the nature of worldviews to be able to understand why Blavatsky felt such urgency in rejecting the status quo positions of her time in favour of a differently prioritised perspective. Thus, we must look at how worldviews are established, maintained, transmitted, and potentially changed. Where the theosophical worldview fits in relation to the dominant Western traditions. What the main categories of knowledge are upon which the representations of reality have been built in Western tradition. And what the nineteenth century mix of authoritative and alternative worldviews was when the theosophical movement was initially consolidating.

1.3.3 Thematic Category 3 – Blavatsky's Treatment of the Categories of Knowledge

A major aim of Madame Blavatsky was to show that theosophy is an inclusive source of knowledge. In essence, the synthesis of religion, philosophy and science. Those three categories of knowledge are also the same three that have been crucial in the creation of worldviews. So obviously, to gain mainstream status as a legitimate and credible alternative, Blavatsky had to make a convincing and appealing case for choice of the theosophical option in opposition to the entrenched authoritative traditional positions. This is the next theme we will explore. We will look at how Blavatsky confronted the entrenched positions by challenging each of the main legitimating institutions of Western thought. We will explore her critique of conventional exoteric profane knowledge and her attempt to present a constructivist vision of esoteric sacred wisdom that subsumed all lesser forms.

1.3.4 Thematic Category 4 – The Importance of Experience as a Legitimating Factor

The effort to validate the theosophical worldview with a spiritually prioritised interpretation of knowledge was one facet of the legitimating process An equally

significant factor was establishing that the potentialities of human experience extended beyond the familiar, and indeed provided access to more etherealised planes of being and more refined states of consciousness. As the dominant figure of the movement, it was crucial for Blavatsky to maintain authoritative leadership status by demonstrating personal familiarity, self-assurance, and control of such rare and unique powers. It will be necessary to look at Blavatsky's personal history to see the kinds of purported extraordinary experiences she allegedly was subject to. And if she can be fairly profiled under a typology that accounts for a wide variety of numinous experiences. Her statements on enhanced powers and states of consciousness are essential parts of the theosophical worldview, supporting the theoretical arguments of the esoteric view of knowledge. As well, though intent on promoting an expanded vision of human potential, she yet presented that developmental path as one requiring dedication, commitment, and moral strength.

1.3.5 Thematic Category 5 – The Masters as Authoritative Sources and Paradigmatic Ideals

A uniquely theosophical concern within the wider topic of paranormal phenomena and altered states of consciousness that requires separate thematic attention is the doctrine of 'Masters," "Mahatmas," "Brotherhood of Adepts." In the theosophical context, the importance of belief in these supremely evolved, spiritually enlightened entities goes back to its roots in Blavatsky's personal experiences. These purportedly began as non-corporeal apparitions and progressed to include a relationship of ongoing reciprocal communications on subtle planes of being, as well as periods of physical visitation and teaching. The importance of the idea of the Masters for legitimating purposes was significant. As well, it was perhaps the most contentious and divisive issue of the theosophical movement. A look at the main competing theories about the origins and nature of the Masters will reveal contradictory positions, ranging from total commitment to belief in their veridical status to charges of cynical invention. But they may not necessarily be mutually exclusive. It may be possible to accommodate specific parts of each to produce a more comprehensive hypothesis. Regardless of possible origins or credibility, the idea of the Masters played a large role in the legitimating apparatus used

by Blavatsky and others. Blavatsky's personal leadership authority was reinforced through belief that she was the mediator of their intentions. And not only was the idea of the Masters important as a doctrinal component, but also it served other purposes in Theosophical Society operations as well as providing a criterion for determining leadership credentials. We shall try and explore these functions. As well, Blavatsky's highly contested exposure as an instigator of fraud by Richard Hodgson must be examined. This investigation had long-lasting effects on the theosophical movement and further entrenched Blavatsky's disreputability.

1.3.6 Thematic Category 6 – Blavatsky's Major Literary Legacy – the Formal Entrenchment of the Theosophical Vision

The attempt to gain legitimation for an alternative worldview required confronting existing mainstream opponents critically, as well as creating a positively constructed, intellectually defensible, and emotionally enticing system of ideas and beliefs. From the theosophical perspective, consolidation and formalisation of critical doctrines and essential premises was needed to provide a source of trustworthy and authoritative knowledge. By undertaking the task of consolidating theosophical beliefs in book form, and proclaiming the importance and gravity of those publications, Madame Blavatsky created a solid and authoritative corpus of formal theosophical doctrine. For many supporters, those books acquired status as semi-sacred texts, invested with special meaning and surrounded by an aura of mystique. She in fact, produced three especially significant and self-contained written works that served to define and guide the movement in specific ways. We will examine the circumstances surrounding the composition of *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, and the *Voice of the Silence*. As well, the main intentions and thrust of each must be explored.

1.3.7 Thematic Category 7 – Historical and Sociological Dynamics

The theoretical foundation and the kinds of beliefs and values promoted and favoured are only one aspect of the larger whole. They serve to provide support and assurance, an apparatus of probable explanations, and a source of motivational enthusiasm for believers. For the non-committed and curious public, knowledge of the

speculative system and the grounds upon which is based provides a firm basis for consideration and judgment of the merits of the option. In terms of internal organisational dynamics, acceptance of the belief system gave legitimacy to pursuit of the objectives of the Theosophical Society. In this thematic area, we will examine theosophical history from a sociological perspective. First we will identify some of the basic traits and characteristics of the main leadership figures and the dynamics of interaction occurring over the first four decades of the modern theosophical movement. Leadership succession depended on special sanctification, and competing claims and proofs eventuating in schisms and conflict. As well, the theosophical movement has sometimes been marginally treated through a number of sociological schemas. We shall look at some of the main categories of analysis and try to provide an overview of how it can be construed in those terms.

Such is the thematic outline of the study to follow. We hope to establish that the theosophical movement of the late nineteenth century was motivated to entrench a non-conventional, spiritually prioritised worldview as a viable alternative to the mainstream positions expounded in Western culture. This necessitated an intensive critique of the dominant worldviews while yet constructively creating a unique mix of extant and original ideational materials. A plausibility structure built upon motives of urgent and necessary change, a valuation of esoteric knowledge, extrasensory and mystical forms of experience, transcendentally grounded figures of authority, and definitive quasi-sacred texts provided a foundation that allowed the theosophical message to take form and be disseminated. The disputability of much of its ideational content and ostensible objectives clearly marked it as a minority movement within the larger Western mainstream. And the disreputability of Blavatsky and others marginalized the credibility of its premises. It is this process of attempted legitimation that we will examine.

1.4 Survey of Literary Resources

Our use of literary resources should briefly be explained before embarking upon our study. Our bibliography lists both specific theosophical documentation as well as items related to our discussion on other foundational concerns. We may categorise our

bibliography into four divisions. First, literature used for information about specific background areas of concern and for elucidating problems of procedure. Second, primary literature concerning the history, individuals, and controversies of the theosophical movement during the time frame of our study. Third, secondary materials deriving from theosophical circles or featuring explicitly theosophical subject matter but either written after our period of concern or with indirect bearing on our themes. Fourth, supplementary literature dealing with facets of theosophy in one way or another, but coming from disciplines and perspectives not explicitly affiliated with theosophy per se. These divisions are not intended to be inflexible, but serve as a useful convenience for our survey of literary resources.

The first category will not expounded upon in detail, because the utilisation of these materials has been mostly for guidance in our preparation and approach to the subject at hand. We have listed a variety of books that have been helpful in clarifying specific questions pertaining to historical, sociological, psychological, philosophical and other areas that have arisen during the process of research, organisation, and planning. We have noted in our citations these references when they are utilised as part of our analysis. Otherwise, the books listed have provided information that has helped illuminate and inform our understanding of both central and peripheral issues. For example, a number of books were consulted to clarify issues about nineteenth century cultural history and the conflicts of ideas; the mechanics of parapsychology; the traits of mystical experience; theories of the unconscious; methodological problems, sociological theories, and so forth.

In regards to the second category, theosophical context-specific documentation, there have been a variety of literary treatments of theosophical history and belief during the more than a century and a quarter since the inception of the modern theosophical movement. The primary materials consulted include the writings, reminiscences, correspondences of central theosophical personages as well as the contemporaneous observations, anecdotal recollections, opinions and commentaries of those who were involved in some way with the theosophical movement, such as members of an organisation, sympathisers, critics, analysts, acquaintances, or journalists. Let us give specific examples of how we have utilised primary materials, bearing in mind that we

have attempted to be judiciously selective in the choice of items we have included. With the advances in modern electronic technology, and the presence of multiple Internet databases, we currently have accessibility to thousands of purely theosophical items extending over the complete history of the movement. Many hundred of these at the least may be classified as primary documents.

Most crucial in any study of early theosophical history is the literary output of Madame Blavatsky. Her major books, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, and *The Voice of the Silence* will be accorded specific treatment in chapter seven. Her other significant book, *The Key to Theosophy* provides a more condensed and popularised exposition of key theosophical principles. Equally important for our purposes are some of the extensive quantities of articles that she wrote for a number of publications. We have specifically chosen some for textual analysis, such as *Philosophers and Philosophicules. Occult or Exact Science*? *Occultism Versus the Occult Arts. Mahatmas and Chelas. What are the Theosophists?* Others such as *The Theosophical Society: Its Mission and Its Future*, *The Organisation of the Theosophical Society*, *The Sign of the Times,* show her attitude towards the Theosophical Society and the broader social environment. The article *My Books* was written shortly before her death and is instructive as a response to intensive criticism of her methods. All articles reveal succinct commentary on specific theosophical doctrines and attitudes as well as discrete opinions on the state-of-affairs surrounding her private affairs and the wider social environment. *Collected Writings. Vol. 1. 1874 – 1878* is significant in the compilation of many early personal statements.

Blavatsky also conducted a number of correspondences. Documentation includes *Letters From H. P. Blavatsky to Her Family in Russia,* which reveals how she portrayed events from a familial perspective. The other side of this form of correspondence is visible in her sister Vera Petrovna de Zhelihovsky's *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.* Insight into the relationship between Blavatsky and other theosophical personages can be found in *Letters of H. P. B. to Dr. Hartmann 1885 – 1886. Letter From H. P. Blavatsky to Henry S. Olcott. Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to W. Q. Judge and Other Miscellaneous Letters.* A compilation of anecdotal testimony about Blavatsky's extraordinary experiences by Daniel H. Caldwell entitled *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky* is a useful resource relating to that specific issue. The volume of reminiscences compiled by

Mary K. Neff entitled *Personal Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky* is also informative. A variety of newspaper articles (mostly anonymously written) from the early formative years of the Theosophical Society provide insight into how Blavatsky and theosophy appeared to the curious public. These include *The Theosophical Society. The Lamasary at New York. A Miracle Worker of To-Day. A Visit to Madame Blavatsky. Madame Blavatsky's Power. Events in the Career of a Remarkable Woman.* Recollections about the formation of the Theosophical Society can be found in R.B. Westbrook's *Reminiscences of Original American Theosophists*. First-hand reminiscences about Blavatsky's literary methods are evident in Bertram Keightly's *Mr. Bertram Keightly's Account of the Writing of the Secret Doctrine* and Archibald Keightly's *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky*. Criticism by contemporaries of Blavatsky's methods and claims of scholarship are explored in William Emmette Coleman's *Critical Historical Review of the Theosophical Society, Henry Kiddle and the Mahatma; or H. K. vs. K. H., The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings.* Other critiques voiced during her lifetime by former supporters are found in Elliott Coues *Blavatsky Unveiled, A. O. Hume on Madame Blavatsky*, *Count Witte on Madame Blavatsky,* and William T. Brown's *Blavatsky and Her Followers*. Support is shown in *General Doubleday in Defense of Madame Blavatsky, Statement by Constance Wachtmeister,* and Ellen H. Morgan's *A Defense of Madame Blavatsky's Views and Phenomenal Abilities.* These are representative examples of some of the useful primary information pertaining specifically to Madame Blavatsky.

As well as documentation focussing on Blavatsky, the writings, correspondence, and recollections relating to other key theosophical figures are important primary documents. For instance Theosophical Society President H.S. Olcott's *Inaugural Address of the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society* is a key document elucidating the original intentions of the movement. How he presented the idea of the Masters to the theosophical public can be discerned in his article *The Himalayan Brothers*. His recollections of theosophical history are evident in *The First Leave of T. S. History.* And how he presented himself and the impression made during Hodgson's inquiry are evident in *Henry S. Olcott's Deposition to the Society for Psychical Research, 1884.* Early exposition of theosophical doctrine prior to Blavatsky's authoritative presentation can be found in A.P. Sinnett's *The Occult World.* William Q. Judge also presented an early

theosophical overview in his book *The Ocean of Theosophy*. His personal assessment of the utility of theosophy is found in *Letters That Have Helped Me.* Signs of the political undertones that informed his interpretation of the Masters are evident in *The Mahatmas As Ideals and Facts, An Interesting Letter (Written to an Indian Brother), Masters, Adepts, Teachers, and Disciples.* The justification for his claims of Presidential legitimacy are found in *By Master's Direction.* As well, the text of all Theosophical Society rules, bylaws, and objectives as well as the particulars of other key formal investigations and complaints have been utilised.

The details of Hodgson's investigation can be found in the Society for Psychical Research Committee's *Report of the General Meeting of the SPR on May 29, 1885: Hodgson's Report on Madame Blavatsky (Meeting 1)* and *Report of the General Meeting of the SPR on June 26, 1885: Hodgson's Report on Madame Blavatsky (Meeting 2).* The perspective of her primary accuser, Madame Coulomb is presented in *Theosophy. Madame Coulomb v. Madame Blavatsky.* Hodgson's hypothesis about Blavatsky's motives appear in his *The Theosophical Society. Russian Intrigue or Religious Evolution?*

Amongst other primary materials are further contemporary critiques, defences, expositions and observations on specific issues, events, and persons. Some of the writings of Besant, Leadbeater, and other significant theosophical leaders can also be considered primary reference material as well. However, much of their output came after the time period under discussion and therefore is not strictly reflective of the orientation that prevailed as the theosophical worldview was first emerging. We therefore have classified their work as supplementary, though recognising that this is a fluid distinction.

The third category, secondary theosophical literature, consists for the most part, of the commentaries, observations, and studies that have proliferated after the ascendancy of Besant as President of the Theosophical Society. They do not necessarily reflect the tone or feelings that prevailed while the theosophical movement was first emerging as a distinct entity. And whether written by advocates, adversaries, neutral analysts or commentators, they are unavoidably conditioned by knowledge and events occurring after the period under discussion. Many though are informative, and help provide useful hypotheses and greater understanding of all facets of theosophy.

For two thorough but very differently oriented overviews of the history of the theosophical movement there are Josephine Ransom's *A Short History of the Theosophical Society: 1875 – 1937,* which embodies an orthodox Theosophical Society perspective and the compilation of a series of articles known as *The Theosophical Movement 1875 – 1925: A History and a Survey,* an interpretation based on a stricter loyalty to a Blavatsky-centric version of theosophy. Charles J. Ryan's *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement* and Walter J. Carrither's *The Founding of the Theosophical Society* likewise share such a position. Gomes' *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* is more scholarly and non-partisan while Godwin's *The Theosophical Enlightenment* covers important ground about earlier occult and esoteric figures and groups. Peter Washington's *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon* is more cynical and suspicious of the premises of theosophy and of esoteric movements in general.

Biographies of Madame Blavatsky abound and often draw contrasting pictures. Perhaps the most thorough recent book sympathetic to Blavatsky is Sylvia Cranston's . *H.P.B, The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement.* Another comprehensive biography, but from a less empathetic perspective, is Marion Meade's *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth.* Other critical accounts are found in John Symonds' *Madame Blavatsky, Medium and Magician* and Williams' *Priestess of the Occult*. Murphet's *When Daylight Comes: A Biography of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky* is informative, but more imaginatively written, as is his biography of Olcott, *Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light: Life of Col. Henry S. Olcott.* Caldwell indulges in metaphysical speculation about the purported role that Blavatsky played in advancing the cause of spiritual evolution in *"Bear Witness!" Who Was the Real H.P.B.?* Hobbes' *Madame Blavatsky and the Latter-Day Messengers of the Masters* also ventures along similar lines. As can be seen from just these examples, there are a wide variety of stances in secondary literary materials intended to portray Blavatsky according to position of the author.

Secondary commentary and analysis about early theosophical controversies are plentiful. For example, attempted refutations of the Hodgson Report from a theosophical perspective are found in Harrison's *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885,* Edges' *First Report of the Committee of the Society for*

Psychical Research, Studds' *Concerning H. P. B.: An Examination of the So-Called Proofs of Fraud on the Part of Madame Blavatsky,* and Carrithers' *Obituary: The "Hodgson Report" on Madame Blavatsky.* Johnson's speculation about the possible identity of the theosophical Masters is found in his books *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Brotherhood* and *Initiates of Theosophical Masters.* These have engendered great controversy and have been challenged by others, such as Caldwell's *A Closer Look at Some of K. Paul Johnson's Arguments Concerning H.S Olcott's Testimony About the Masters.* Investigation into the possible origins of *The Book of Dzyan* are found in Reigle's *The Book of Dzyan Research Reports* and Pratt's *The Book of Dzyan.* And even analysis of the stanzas of *The Book of Dzyan* by those not affiliated with theosophy is accessible in *Man, the Measure of All Things* by Sri Krishna Prem and Sri Madhava Ashish and *Man, Son of Man*, by Ashish.

Exposition and analysis of theosophical doctrine is perhaps the most familiar and available form of theosophical literature. Complete philosophical overviews are found in *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom* by Kuhn, *Man, God and the Universe* by Taimni, and the four volume work by Poortman, *Vehicles of Consciousness.* Extensive conceptual analysis of theosophical history, ideas, and beliefs based on a Blavatsky-centric theosophical position is evident in the books of de Purucker, *Fountain-Source of Occultism, The Esoteric Tradition, Man in Evolution* and *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy.* Thoroughly detailed presentations of the particulars of the theosophical worldview have been available since the beginnings of the theosophical movement. Many specialise in specific themes, such as *Rounds and Races: Our Divine Parentage and Destiny* by van Pelt, *The Universal Mystery Language and Its Interpretation* by Edge, *A Geometry of Space-Consciousness* by Perkins, *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition* by Mead, *The Doctrine of Cycles* by Ross, *The Seven Rays* by Woods, *Occult Chronology* by James, and so forth. Most of these kinds of works are presented with the assumption that the foundation of the theosophical worldview is sound, and that further description, analysis, and hypothesis are worthwhile endeavours. Another form of exposition also can be found prominently amidst theosophical literature.

Going back to Blavatsky and other early theosophical theoreticians, we find discussion of specific theosophical issues that are based on the authority of personal

supersensory or numinous experience. Most notably, a number of prominent figures within the Theosophical Society have written extensively on specific topics based on the data deriving from their purported supersensory abilities. Besant and Leadbeater for example collaborated on a number of books allegedly utilising clairvoyance, such as in *Thought Forms.* Leadbeater was widely recognised for his clairvoyant abilities, and produced an extensive body of writings. In *A Textbook of Theosophy* he presents his overview of the theosophical system. In *The Hidden Side of Things* he describes the occult perception of everyday objects, events, and situations. In *The Devachanic Plane or the Heaven World: Its Characteristics and Inhabitants* he catalogues the phenomena and environment of an alleged more spiritually refined and subtler sphere of being. Other leading theosophists likewise have presented their own literary recollections of such excursions of consciousness. Former Theosophical Society President George Arundale has expressed his impressions in *Nirvana: An Occult Experience* and *The Lotus Fire: A Study in Symbolic Yoga.* Geoffrey Hodson has also written extensively about his clairvoyant experience, such as in *Clairvoyant Investigations*, *Thus Have I Heard*, *Kingdom of the Gods.* In any survey of theosophical literature, recognition of such experiential based accounts must be noted. The most significant conflict within the theosophical movement was between those who believed that the vision of Blavatsky was complete, and others who felt it appropriate to amend their own insights. And since Besant and Leadbeater were the most prominent examples of the latter camp, it is instructive to understand more about their personal backgrounds and lives. Besant wrote her own *Autobiography* in which her conversion to theosophy is defended. Other biographies are also insightful. Nethercott's *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* comprehensively covers her theosophical years. Taylor in *Annie Besant: A Biography* and Dinnage in *Annie Besant* also provide useful insight. Shearman's *Charles Webster Leadbeater* shows the conventional theosophical side while *The Elder Brother* by Tillet explores in more detail the controversies and accusations surrounding Leadbeater.

Another form of literature that can be specifically identified deals with the existential value and spiritual worth felt to be implicit in the theosophical worldview. From the perspective of the theosophical devotee, organisation member, or sympathiser, the theosophical system of ideas and beliefs provides fully satisfactory intellectual

explanatory and emotionally satiating value. In the writings of former Theosophical Society Presidents we often find this kind of inspirational and encouraging testimony, intended to confirm the worthiness of the theosophical orientation and its relevance for the future. For instance Jinarajadasa's *Divine Vision* portrays the theosophical way of interpreting reality as the recognition of implicit mystical harmony. N. Sri Ram presents a more intellectually based view of the pertinence of theosophy in *An Approach to Reality*. Burnier Radha in *Looking at the World* attempts to show the necessity for a more spiritual and compassionate attitude in the modern world. As well, many other arguments have been made over the decades for the adoption of the theosophical worldview, or at the least, the permeation of ethical values and ideals propounded in theosophy and consonant with similar public attitudes. For instance in Long's *This Era's Opportunity*, Knoche's *On the Shores of Darkness There is Light*, Orderberg's *The Dawn of a New Age,* Robb's *Access to Great Ideas,* we find exhortations of encouragement and reasoned explanations of why theosophy should be a preferred option. In Ellwood's *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of Wisdom of the Ages,* we see a logically reasoned and philosophically justified modern case made for the adoption of a theosophical worldview. Such kinds of attitude and motive are embedded in much of theosophical literature, often expressed in reaction to the dominant orientations of the day and of the locale.

In addition, though not necessarily included directly as part of the theosophical oeuvre, it should be mentioned that the writings of various proponents of later splinter organisations deriving from the original theosophical movement are of interest. Ahern's *Sun At Midnight: The Rudolph Steiner Movement and the Western Esoteric Tradition* provides a useful sociological framework for interpreting Steiner's role. *Maitreya's Mission* by Crème, *The Message of Aquaria: The Significance and Mission of the Aquarian Age* by the Curtiss', Kingsford and Maitland's *The Perfect Way: or, the Finding of the Christ,* Prophet's *The Great White Brotherhood in the Culture, History and Religion of America,* Bailey's *The Externalisation of the Heirarchy,* although critically indebted, reveal deviations from the orthodox theosophical stance. The issues surrounding Krishnamurti's defection are explored in Lutyens' *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, Vernon's *Star in the East: Krishnamurti, the Invention of a Messiah,* Fields' *The Reluctant Messiah,* Jayakar's *Krishnamurti: A Biography.*

The fourth category is of literary treatments directed explicitly towards theosophy, but coming from outside of theosophical circles. This reflects a number of attitudes and premises, and form a source of supplementary materials. For instance, since the days of Blavatsky, most branches of Christianity have perceived theosophy to be a hostile and misguided rival. With Blavatsky's intense criticism of traditional Christianity, and fundamental divergences on doctrinal grounds, it is not surprising that such suspicion has persisted. Even attempts by some theosophists to propound versions of "esoteric Christianity" have done little to quell distrust. And even with the waning of theosophy per se and the absorption of many of its premises in newer organisations and movements, reaction to theosophy has usually been negative. For instance, in Chandler's *Understanding the New Age*, Hoyt and Yamamoto's *The New Age Rage*, Streiker's *New Age Comes to Main Street: What Worried Christians Must Know,* Peters' *The Cosmic Self: A Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements,* and Lind's *From Nirvana to the New Age*, we see theosophical ideas and beliefs contrasted negatively with those of Christianity, even when expressed in the idiom of more recent schools and groups.

As well as criticism from the Christian vantage point, theosophy has often been the target of dismissive and contemptuous treatments by rationalists, scientists, and those not accepting the credibility of occult and mystical claims. Because theosophy is defined by such principles, it remains an obvious and inviting target for such critics. This kind of critique is found in Webb's *The Flight From Reason* and *The Occult Establishment*, where adoption of the theosophical mindset is perceived to be a regressive and defensive reaction. Smith's *The London Heretics: 1870 – 1914,* Kurtz's *The Transcendental Temptation,* Evans' *Cults of Unreason,* and Faber's *New Age Thinking: A Psychoanalytic Critique* also express the same kind of critical evaluation.

A different critical treatment of theosophy comes from those who accept the premise of a transcendental ground to reality and numinous forms of religious experience However, from this perspective, the theosophical form of esotericism is found to be superficial and inauthentic, inferior to more traditional strains of religiosity. Perhaps the most notable of such critics was Rene Guenon, who thought of theosophy as a "pseudo religion." Though his most notable critique is not available in English translation, the gist of his argument is repeated in *East and West.* As well, his line of criticism has been

reiterated by Eliade in *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religion.* Eliade himself in *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* finds the theosophical approach to be an inferior emulation of true religious behaviour. Blavatsky's assumptions were found to be dubious by Bharati in *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism.* Even during the early days of the theosophical movement there was often ambivalence and protestation when Blavatsky and others tried to show a seamless connectivity between their version of esotericism and those of living traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. For instance, Max Mueller's views of *Esoteric Buddhism* were inconsistent with theosophical claims. Although a number of traditional religious representatives did admit to certain similarities and shared beliefs, many were openly doubtful.

As well as critical literary treatments, theosophy has also been evaluated more positively by outside sources. Where some have seen delusion, deception, and denial, others have recognised a legitimate expression of spiritual values and estimable ethical ideals. For instance, rather than being derided as an inauthentic imitation of a true religious tradition, Godwin in *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Faivre in *Access to Western Esotericism,* Hanegraaff in *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought,* Trevelyan in *A Vision of the Aquarian Age: The Emerging Spiritual World View,* and Melton, Clark and Kelly in *New Age Almanac* point out the legitimacy of the historical minority esoteric stream of thought and belief in which modern theosophy locates itself.

The critique of the non-rational element applies to more than just the theosophical, but to the even wider religious spectrum. However, the theosophical belief in the desirability of supersensory and mystical modes of consciousness places it in a minority position. As the twentieth century progressed however, recognition that levels of experience deeper or more profound than normal consciousness may be accessible has provided some sense of justification for theosophical objectives. In *Unfinished Animal* Roszak argues for the worthiness of the theosophical vision of extended human potential. In *The Spectrum of Consciousness* Wilber provides a model of consciousness compatible to that found in theosophical literature, even using similar categories and terms at times. In *The Planetarization of Consciousness: From the Individual to the Whole,* Rudhyar

hypothesises about an evolutionary scenario featuring personal and collective changes in consciousness towards a more integrated, spiritually grounded future condition of humankind, paralleling basic theosophical beliefs. In White's *The Meeting of Science and Spirit: Guidelines for a New Age*, theosophical cosmology and cyclical theory is considered a plausible hypothesis.

The acknowledgement of the theosophical movement as a precursor to later spiritually directed movements was seen as an influence of negative ideas and beliefs from the competing Christian perspective. However, from more objective positions, the historical precedent is recognised simply a neutral sociological fact, without judgment of merits of the system of thought and ideals. Ellwood's *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America.* Heelas' *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity.* Chryssides' *Exploring New Religions*. Dawson's *Comprehending Cults: The New Sociology of Religious Movements.* Wilson's *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society.* Glock and Stark's *Religion and Society in Tension.* Hexham and Powe's *Understanding Cults and New Religions.* Melton's *Finding Enlightenment: Ramtha's School of Ancient Wisdom.* All these, amongst other writings, explicitly comment on theosophy to one degree or another from a historical or sociological perspective.

Thus it can be seen by just this cursory list of references that all such supplementary literary sources provide a number of interesting and useful perspectives. Whether explicitly adversarial, neutral, or affirmative of particular facets of theosophy. In conjunction with primary context-specific theosophical resources, other secondary theosophical literature, and supplementary information from beyond theosophical circles, we find a full spectrum of pertinent materials.

1.5 Importance of This Study

In light of these broad approaches to the subject matter of theosophy, it may be asked why our analysis is pertinent and what new insight may be gained about the theosophical movement. As a social phenomenon in existence for over a hundred and twenty-five years, facets of the theosophical worldview have permeated other groups and

schools of thought. As well, the original Theosophical Society has endured, as have other organisations and individuals loyal to or inspired by the basic vision of Blavatsky. Therefore, it would be fair to say that though not numerically notable, theosophy is yet a living meaningful preferential way of envisioning reality, with its own accrued traditions and distinctive quasi-mythical narrative. We have also seen that there have been a number of treatments from the adversarial, promotional, and analytical perspectives, whether condemning, praising, or investigating particular aspects of theosophy.

Rather than duplicate other approaches, we hope to show that our line of speculative inquiry indeed sheds new light on the process by which the distinctly theosophical vision of reality was articulated and presented. We feel that our study is unique in the fact that it treats the attempted legitimation process of the theosophical movement by Blavatsky and others structurally. As an ongoing, developing, dialectical phenomenon, in which the dominant motives, insights, experiential influences of individuals are directed towards the deconstruction of the unacceptable profane status quo positions while simultaneously attempting to provide more preferable spiritually grounded content for those very same institutions. Yet such a process involves more than just intellectual operations, and is inevitably influenced in unexpected or unanticipated ways by the interactions and actions of individuals. In theosophical history, much of the disreputability of Blavatsky and others derived from attitudes and behaviours less estimable than ideally expected. In our analysis, we have attempted to account for the ambivalences and ambiguities prevalent in theosophical history by suggesting profiles accommodating Blavatsky's experiential background as well as by utilising a sociological overview of theosophical history.

We also feel that it is important to isolate and look at the critical elements of the legitimation process because such a focus provides a very different way of examining the formation and evolution of the theosophical worldview and understanding how a new, explicitly created system of thought and belief can take effective form. Most treatments have concentrated on biographical, historical and doctrinal exposition. Though often illuminating, succinct or provocative, they do not usually deal with root issues relating to the sociology of knowledge, such as the function of worldviews. Our discussions of motives and intentions, the criteria of knowledge and truth, the potentialities of human

experience, the functions of supernatural authorities, the utility of unassailable texts reveal the integrated connectivity of ideas and beliefs intrinsic to the worldview embedded in theosophy. Our modest efforts in concentrating on such aspects of the theosophical movement are not intended to diminish the work and worth of the more conventional treatments of theosophical materials. Rather, we hope to provide a complementary and somewhat novel way of interpreting and assessing the early development of one of the more interesting and controversial minority worldviews.

Chapter 2
Motivational Factors

2.1 Introduction to Chapter Two

Any notable social or ideational movement is dependent on the vision, inspiration, ambitions, and objectives articulated and exemplified by its leaders and authorities. To understand the theosophical movement in its formative stages requires an understanding (as best can be construed) of the "motivational side" as it were, of those leaders, particularly Madame Blavatsky, and an examination of the social factors and theoretical components as well. For our purposes, the semantic distinctions between the terms "purposive," "motivational," and "intentional" are not significant enough to necessitate strict adherence to a narrow definition. We shall consider all roughly equivalent in the sense of referring to

> … *consciously held-in-mind* orientations towards a goal. [1]

In this chapter we will focus on motivational issues, and try to trace the changes in definition of the formal Theosophical Society objectives. These documents serve perhaps as the most revealing public indicators of the motives and intentions of the organisation. The careful and meticulous crafting and refining of those statements illustrates the way the Theosophical Society intended to present its most succinct message to the public. By noting the changes in wording and shifts in nuance, we can trace the way internal self-examination by theosophical leaders adapted over time in reaction to, or anticipation of, public sentiment. As well, we will look at an overview of Madame Blavatsky's estimation of the theosophical movement at a discrete moment in time, as she publicly expressed her thoughts on how it was implementing its goals and objectives. Her observations about various facets of the movement emphasised what particularly concerned her at any given moment, and how she felt about the implementation of the ideals that motivated her work. The next chapter will deal with the social dynamics that shape worldview construction. Following that in successive chapters we will discuss the major theoretical categories through which the theosophical worldview attempted to gain status as a credible cognitive option. Those respectively are the categories of knowledge,

[1] Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method*, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1977, p. 76.

experience, supernatural authority, and finally, systematic exposition. Following that we will discuss historical continuity in light of sociological theory.

2.2 Motivational Relevancy

By "motivational side" is meant an attempt to understand the rationale for undertaking and sustaining the enterprise; the impetus which carried the project onwards despite serious obstacles; and the resourcefulness and creativeness needed in crafting shaping, proselytising and defending the principles and themes at the heart of the movement.

Schutz had this perspective about the roots of motivation.

> The interest prevailing at the moment determines the elements which the individual singles out of the surrounding objective world ... so as to define his situation. It is by virtue of the same interest that out of the pre-given stock of knowledge those elements are selected as are required for the definition of the situation. In other words, the interest determines which elements of both the ontological structure of the pre-given world and the actual stock of knowledge are relevant for the individual to define his situation thinkingly, actingly, emotionally, to find his way in it, and to come to terms with it. This form of relevancy will be called 'motivational relevancy' because it is subjectively experienced as a motive for the definition of the situation.
> Motivational relevancy may be experienced as imposed from without or else as a manifestation of inner spontaneity of any form (from a dark urge to a rational project). It can be experienced in all degrees of evidentness or else, it can be unconscious ... The degree of clarity of the insight in which motivational relevancy is experienced depends upon the structure of the actual stock of knowledge from which the elements required for the definition are selected. [2]

The concept of "motivational relevancy" pertains to the reasoning and justification underlying particular acts and events in theosophical history. What is important to note right now is that "defining the situation" is a subjective process that likewise applies as part of the mindset in the choice of options and the selection of particular themes and clusters of information. The field of knowledge and information confronting the individual comprises data from both subjective levels of experience and socially accessible objective sources. How the situation is defined, and what mix of conceptual materials are used to construct the framework of beliefs and ideas is a process

[2] Alfred Schutz, *Some Structures of the Life World*, in *Phenomenology and Sociology*, ed. Thomas

with many variables, and is dependent on the motivational relevancy of the persons involved.

We begin by looking to see if we can find a dominant motive or objective animating the undertaking of the theosophical project. A statement of values that can be found embedded in a broader overarching ambition or aspiration.

> …values can only meaningfully define desired ends as they are more or less systematically encompassed in some rationale—some conception of the nature of reality. [3]

The "desired ends," that were sought embodied the values, objectives, and ambitions of the theosophical founders, particularly Madame Blavatsky, who was the pre-eminent theosophical theoretician and its charismatic public spokesperson. As we shall see, it appears that what was considered motivationally relevant to her was a coalescence of different interests. It also seems likely that one of the motivational factors was what can be characterised as a spiritual impulse, or mindset. A "manifestation of inner spontaneity" comprising both subconscious and rational energies that was expressed through the usage of an idiosyncratic theosophical idiom, drawn from disparate conceptual resources. Simmel describes the state of mind common to this kind of undertaking.

> Out of the visible and the conceptual, which we also experience in the realm of reality, the religious world arises in new tensions, new extensions and new syntheses … augmented by standards of value and shades of feeling, arranged in different dimensions and assigned a quite different focus and perspective. Thus the very same material seems to produce the empirical, the philosophical or the artistic order. The religious life creates the world over again; it interprets the whole of existence in a peculiar key … [4]

The "peculiar key" by which theosophy "interprets the whole of existence" derived from the "new tensions, new extensions, and new syntheses" underlying the perceptions and experiences of its founders. The theosophical edifice in essence was "a quite different focus and perspective" than that prevalent in contemporary mainstream society. Madame Blavatsky primarily was responsible for its formal expression, "arranged in different dimensions" than the majority worldviews of the time, defined by the motivational

---

Luckmann, Harmondsworth/New York/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books, 1978, p. 254.
[3] Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Y. Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension*, Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1971, p.8.
[4] Georg Simmel, *Sociology of Religion,* New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1959, pp. 4–5.

relevancies important to her and the other significant personages of the movement. It seems a fair assumption to surmise that she saw her own role as one dedicated to effecting radical change in how reality was perceived. Whatever the mix of egotistical and altruistic ambitions, she clearly was intent on interpreting the "whole of existence in a peculiar key." She wanted to "create the world over again" to reflect a more spiritual and expansive foundation while establishing "a new synthesis" of knowledge to legitimate this vision and show the contrast to the existing dominant worldviews.

Perhaps the most fruitful starting point would be to see how her supporters and enthusiasts have interpreted her goals and intentions. Besides the private conscious and unconscious motives of the significant innovators and leaders is the perception of their ostensible objectives and intentions by those who are in empathy with the values and beliefs espoused. Implicit trust in the integrity of the religious leader will perpetuate confidence in the claims that they make, and eventuate in belief that their role is indeed special. The position of the believer however is different than that of a sceptic, who does not necessarily share the same uncritical set of premises. So any estimations coming from within a movement will inevitably tend to reflect the orthodox, often mythically embellished, positive view of the role and purpose of the founders.

> Believers implicitly have faith in human perception and human truth, trusting that: (i) people see accurately and interpret correctly what happens in the world around them; and (ii) that they have no reason to lie or mislead others when they report these experiences. Sceptics on the other hand, will not take these things for granted—indeed, their case is ultimately based on the assumption that not only are people frequently mislead themselves, but also that they do indeed sometimes have cause to mislead others. [5]

This dichotomy of perception was intrinsic to the history of the theosophical movement, especially when questions of motive arose regarding claims of supernatural intervention and sanctification. We will discuss such issues in due course. However, the important point to note now is that the perspective of believer and sceptic will often differ diametrically.

[5] Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief*, London/Harmondsworth/New York/Victoria/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 90.

2.3 Blavatsky's Role According to Theosophists

When we look at representative interpretations given by theosophical believers of what they perceived to be the motivation for Madame Blavatsky's intentions, we find that there is a common theme running through all of them. That is the belief that her founding of the Theosophical Society and assumption of leadership within the theosophical movement was not an accident or a random historical development. They all see a higher purpose at work, for which she especially was chosen to fulfil. A special mythically consonant explanation of why Blavatsky was designated to stimulate a new spiritual awakening, and why her motives were selfless and altruistic, intended for the benefit of mankind.[6] The rationale for the emergence of theosophy as a unique and distinctive worldview has always been linked by followers to the belief that it appeared because of cyclical inevitability. A necessary corrective intervention or adjustment in the scheme of human evolution, intended to re-introduce and purify spiritual values at a time when they were perceived to be in decline or disrepute. The particular historical period dominated by dogmatic, rationalistic, and materialistic orientations was envisaged as the low ebb of authentic spiritual belief in the nineteenth century, and thus necessitating the appearance of a countervailing movement. And in subsequent theosophical speculative theorisation, the last quarter of all centuries was likewise interpreted as similarly bereft of properly sacred sentiment and value, calling for similar infusion of leadership and morale boost. [7] In theosophical tradition, the motives for the appearance of the movement and the subsequent founding of the Theosophical Society have been accepted as obvious and self-evident. From this perspective, H.P. Blavatsky appeared because it was her mission to dramatically re-orient the modern world away from the secular and towards the sacred; from the alienating and unsatisfying visions of reality entrenched in Western societies to a deeply fulfilling and intelligible synthesis of esoteric spiritual beliefs, ideas, and values. Let us look at some representative interpretations.

> H. P. Blavatsky challenged the Western world with a formulated plan in which the universe was shown as a cosmos of order and of conscious activity, not an

[6] The orthodox theosophical narrative of Blavatsky being chosen by the Masters to enlighten mankind conforms in essentials to the myths in many religious traditions about a specially qualified messenger or prophet entrusted to impart supernaturally sanctioned wisdom to the wayward or needful social body.
[7] See H.P. Blavatsky, *Our Cycle and the Next*, retrieved from Theosophical Library Online, 1889, < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/OurCycleAndTheNext.htm>. (Accessed September 3, 2002).

> unreasoning or unreasoned chaos, and that man is, and always has been, an inseparable part of the universe, no accidental visitor here today and gone tomorrow. [8]
>
> There need be no doubt about the reason for H.P.B.' s coming to the western world: she declared that she had come to change the molds of mind, for only by accomplishing this may world thought be changed. [9]
>
> It was to "change the mind of the twentieth century" that—as she herself stated—H.P. Blavatsky was sent among the proud and egocentric individualists of our Western society by those who were able to work through her. [10]
>
> Madame Blavatsky had by now a general concept of what her destined work for the world was to be. To begin, she had to use this new public interest in psychic phenomena to lead men to the deeper teaching beyond it. The current of intellectual thought must be led away from the false deductions of Darwinism. Spiritualism, though inadequate in itself, as it stood, could be used as a gateway to a deeper, satisfactory understanding if life's mysteries as revealed in the esoteric teachings of the Adepts. [11]
>
> H.P. Blavatsky herself described a part of her mission as that of being a breaker of "the molds of mind." [12]

We can discern from these representative interpretations of Blavatsky's motives the following conclusions. Blavatsky is perceived to have intentionally embarked upon a cause, a mission, a calling. There were two phases to this undertaking. First, a critical deconstruction of prevailing attitudes and habitual orientations. She explicitly "challenged the Western world," "had come to change the molds of mind," "change the mind of the twentieth century," show why the "current of intellectual thought must be led away." As well, there is a constructivist phase, laying the foundations for what was considered a more spiritually efficacious and necessary alternative worldview. "A plan in which the universe was shown as a cosmos of order," trying to insure that "world thought be changed," to enact the plan of "those who were able to work through her," to help

---

[8] Ryan, op. cit., chapter 1
[9] Geoffry A. Barborka, *H.P. Blavatsky's Effort Toward Changing World Thought*, in *H.P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine*, ed. Virginia Hanson, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1971, p. 96
[10] Dane Rudhyar, *Occult Preparations for a New Age*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1975, p. 260.
[11] Howard Murphet, *When Daylight Comes*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1975, p. 72.
[12] G. de Purucker, *The Esoteric Tradition,* Volume 1, Point Loma, California: Theosophical University Press, 1935, p. 383.

establish a "gateway to a deeper, satisfactory understanding if life's mysteries as revealed in the esoteric teachings of the Adepts." These are two of the major underlying motivational stimuli, which propelled the early surge of the theosophical movement.

And for theosophical adherents, expression of these general motives is represented in a plethora of associated ideas, including the substantive content and supporting plausibility structure of their own theosophical orientation. In attempting to effectively legitimise their own worldview, it was necessary to show how and why it was a preferable option in comparison to competing perceived inferior orientations. Thus, to publicly differentiate their position from others, explicit articulation of what the Theosophical Society represented and was attempting to establish was necessary. As well, Madame Blavatsky found it necessary to regularly give updates and assessments about the status of the movement and comment on how the primary objectives were unfolding. We will first look at the evolving Theosophical Society official bylaws and statements of objectives as they were amended, rephrased, and reinterpreted over the first few decades of its existence. The changes in nuance and prioritisation are fluid and ongoing, and illustrate the process of adjustment and refinement of organisational motives felt necessary to insure that the precisely desired image was being presented to the public. Next we will examine a representative article showing Blavatsky's assessment of her cause at a discrete moment during its early formative phase, which reveals theosophical motivational dynamics in action.

2.4 Analysis of Theosophical Society Rules and By-Laws

The goals noted in the preamble of the Theosophical Society are certainly an authentic reflection of the theosophical spirit. Those basic movement-defining sentiments played an important role in presenting an image to the public, and were both representative of organisational intentions as well as reflective of a consensus position regarding the scope and nature of their activities and interests. An examination of the process whereby the preamble evolved into the "Three Objects of the Theosophical Society" may perhaps shed some light on whether there was an explicit or deducible motivational rationale underlying the ambitions of the movement as it evolved in its first major organisational form.

A joint statement, *the Preamble to the Society By-laws* was revised by H.S. Olcott, C. Sotheran, and J. S. Cobb, and dated October 30th, 1875. It was published along with the first *Inaugural Address* by Olcott as President of the Theosophical Society,[13] and signals the tone and tenor of the incipient movement. By examining it we gain insight into the first formal declaration of purpose.

> The Title of the Theosophical Society explains the objects and desires of its founders: they 'seek to obtain knowledge of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Power, and of the higher spirits *by the aid of physical processes*.' In other words, they hope that by going deeper than modern science has hitherto done, into the esoteric philosophies of ancient times, they may be enabled to obtain for themselves and other investigators, proof of the existence of an 'Unseen Universe,' the nature of its inhabitants if such there be, and the laws which govern them and their relations with mankind. Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as a Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body. Its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propaganda. In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership it knows neither race, sex, colour, country nor creed.... [14]

It concludes with these words.

> The Theosophical Society, disclaiming all pretensions to the possession of unusual advantages, all selfish motives, all disposition to foster deception of any sort, all intention to wilfully and causelessly injure any established organization, invites fraternal co-operation of such as can realize the importance of its field of labour; and are in sympathy with the objects for which it has been organized. [15]

And in fact, the "objects" of the Society were general and all encompassing.

> The objects of the society are to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe. [16]

At this initial organisation stage, the relevant thoughts, impressions, emotions, beliefs, goals, of founding members were already consonant with each other. Conviction of purpose and a shared sense of likeminded attitudes would obviously be in place prefatory to further commitment. By endorsing a formal statement of objectives, we find

---

[13] See H. S. Olcott, *Inaugural Address of the President–Founder of the Theosophical Society,* retrieved from The Canadian Theosophical Association, 1875, < http://www.theosophical.ca/Inaugural%20.htm>. (Accessed February 22, 2002).
[14] Ransom, op. cit., p.81.
[15] Ibid.

the first manifest indications of the priorities of the founders of the Theosophical Society. Initially, the statement appears to be an extension or emulation of attitudes expressed in contemporary Spiritualist and other esoteric traditions. "The objects and desires of its founders" were essentially motivated by inquisitiveness about the phenomena of the supersensory domain. A key sentence follows. "They seek to obtain knowledge of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Power, and of the higher spirits." This objective could certainly be considered a purely religious or philosophical consideration, a subject of devotional, ritualistic, or meditative disciplines, or of contemplative speculation. But it seems to verge onto an entirely different track when the words "*by the aid of physical processes*" are affixed and especially singled out by italicisation.

Now we have a declaration that the intended approach to the objective is through means similar or analogous to, modern science. Yet the procedure isn't exactly "science" as commonly understood, but a different application of method. An enhanced technique or methodology by which "they hope that by going deeper than modern science has hitherto done" unprecedented areas of knowledge can be made accessible. The source of, or field of discovery for, this knowledge may be found by looking "into the esoteric philosophies of ancient times." Apparently, this implies discovering new and applicable theoretical and practical knowledge from the ancient sources. Whether through literal interpretation, symbolic decoding, imaginative stimulus, revelation of entirely unprecedented knowledge, or any other means is not specified. And that the new methods of inquiry assumed to derive from these insights are confidently believed capable of permitting a radical revision of science. So that for the practitioners, "they may be enabled to obtain for themselves and other investigators, proof." The implication is that a distinctive new scientific field of inquiry could be established in which these kinds of hybrid methodologies would allow for objective and verifiable testing of hypotheses pertaining to the occult, or supersensory domains. The end result of such probing would be expected to demonstrate "proof of the existence of an "Unseen Universe." However, the premise is somewhat qualified with the cautionary warning, "if such there be," while yet suggesting that such indeed is the most likely probability.

So far, the primary intention appears to be a desire to uncover or reveal a

[16] Ibid., p. 545.

scientifically acceptable (and therefore, respectable) proof of the existence of a supersensory realm of existence, "an Unseen Universe, the nature of its inhabitants if such there be, and the laws which govern them and their relations with mankind." Such an objective in itself was an explicit challenge to the established religious and scientific institutions, and is an example of how disputable subject matter was treated to legitimising efforts. One of the techniques in the attempt to gain credibility for such a proposition was to try and imitate the methods deemed authoritative. Hence the laboured efforts at framing a statement of intention in which the non-credible to scientific tradition (namely "Unseen Worlds" and their ancillary phenomena), were ostensibly to be treated by that very same kind of discipline, augmented by belief in esoteric principles.

And while it was the subject matter that was perceived disputable to science, to established Western religious institutions the disputability lay in that very credibility and trust in the worthiness of "esoteric philosophies of ancient times." The subject matter, "Unseen Worlds" was considered a legitimate belief when expressed in the orthodox and traditional religious terms of Christianity, but both the presumption of a scientific treatment, and trust in eclectic esoteric sources, provoked hostility and suspicion.

From statement of objective, the preamble shifts to a declaration of position regarding membership. And all effort is made to present the most tolerant, inclusive and selfless image. The absolute disassociation from any existing religious body is made abundantly clear. "Whatever may be the private opinions of its members, the society has no dogmas to enforce, no creed to disseminate. It is formed neither as a Spiritualistic schism, nor to serve as the foe or friend of any sectarian or philosophic body." Thus there is institutional protection of a neutral position for the organisation itself as an independent body, though a loophole is allowed for "private opinion" of individuals. And in its subsequent history, the grounds for accusation and contention between "official opinion" and "private opinion" materialised regularly in the Society.

However, in proclaiming that "its only axiom is the omnipotence of truth, its only creed a profession of unqualified devotion to its discovery and propaganda," we find another strong motivational objective. The "omnipotence of truth" of course is an axiom in which "truth" was capable of multiple definitions, depending on the initial premises of the question. In most theosophical contexts, the search for truth was equated with the

discovery or revelation of occult, mystical, esoteric, or numinous experience, knowledge or information. Essentially, spiritually or psychically directed materials not commonly accepted as rightfully fitting into in the worldviews of conventional society. And in sanctioning a universally equable and fair standard of admission and participation, the Theosophical Society likewise recognised the potential for tacit or conventional discriminatory social exclusion and faced the issue bluntly and directly. “In considering the qualifications of applicants for membership it knows neither race, sex, colour, country nor creed.…” The ideal of establishing an organisation to act as an exemplary model in the demonstration of the principle of essential equality can also be recognised as another motivational element, again, intended to be considered as a morally superior and preferable option than found in the divisive social environments prevalent throughout the world.

The closing words of the Preamble reiterate a stance of unselfish, truth-oriented idealism. “The Theosophical Society, disclaiming all pretensions to the possession of unusual advantages, all selfish motives, all disposition to foster deception of any sort, all intention to wilfully and causelessly injure any established organization.” Other like-minded organisations are acknowledged, but mutual efforts along the same general lines of shared values are preferable. “Fraternal co-operation of such as can realize the importance of its field of labour; and are in sympathy with the objects for which it has been organized.”

The comparatively vague and allusive statement that “the objects of the society are to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe” seems intended to be left broad enough for multiple future interpretations. Contextually, the “laws which govern the universe” were clearly derived or related to the occult, mystical, and esoteric sources which were presumed to embody such truths. And “collecting and diffusing” that knowledge implied investigation, study, assessment, propagation. Together these reveal a major aim of the Society, indicated as a general intention without enunciation of specific means or particulars of content.

Three years later, in 1878, the objects of the Theosophical Society were expressed in more specific form. Some of the points included amplification of earlier themes. Now, objectives included the acquisition of knowledge of natural law; the study and

development of latent human extrasensory powers; the display of exemplary moral and religious behaviour; disseminating knowledge about Eastern religions and philosophies; as well as the contents of the esoteric tradition to Western nations.

> ... and finally and chiefly, aid in the institution of a Brotherhood of Humanity . . . of every race. [17]

So at this stage, emphasis is on the social objective. Although the motives are largely directed to exploration of psychic capacities and the popularisation of esoteric and Eastern religious content, the goal of a universal "Brotherhood of Humanity" appears as a dominant theme.

A year later, further modification in the stated objectives was initiated. Seven plans were declared as the stated objectives of the Society.

> (a) To keep alive in man his spiritual intuitions . . .
>
> (b) To oppose and counteract—after due investigation and proof of its irrational nature—bigotry in every form . . .
>
> (c) To promote a *feeling of brotherhood* among nations. .
>
> (d) To seek to obtain knowledge of all the laws of Nature and aid in diffusing it; and especially to encourage the study of those laws least understood by modern people and so termed the Occult Sciences.
>
> (e) To gather for the Society's library and put into written forms correct information on ancient philosophies, etc.
>
> (f) To promote in every practicable way non-sectarian education . . .
>
> (g) . . . chiefly, to encourage and assist Fellows in self-improvement, intellectual, moral and spiritual. [18]

These plans were basically a rephrasing of the previous intentions, but with more of a practical implication for members. In section (b), (c), and (f) we discern a focus on the social sphere, with new attention given to combating bigotry and promoting non-sectarian education. As well, the reiteration of the goal previously given prominence (c) has now been reduced from "aid in the institution of a Brotherhood of Humanity" to that more

[17] Ibid., p. 546.
[18] Ibid., p. 547.

nebulous phrasing "to promote a feeling of brotherhood." The change from the objective of "institution" to "promoting a feeling" appears to indicate that the ideal was an easier concept to promote than to actually help implement. Plans (a) and (g) are focussed on encouragement and self-improvement, a recognition that day-to-day conduct and attitude must be given stimulation and motivation. In (e) we find a reminder of a different practical concern, aimed at archiving and promoting source materials. And in plan (d), we again find interest in "seeking," "diffusing," and "studying" the contents of the esoteric, but this time with a reference to contemporary perceptions. "Modern people least understood" matters occult, and thus must be specifically "encouraged" to take an interest. This somewhat patronising characterisation of "modern people" illustrates a clear disconnect between the theosophical stance and that prevalent in mainstream Western society. From the theosophical position, those non-members and non-sympathisers in contemporary society were lacking essential keys to a more expansive and accurate understanding of deeper truths. And one of the prerequisites of societal activity was to inform, educate, change prevailing opinions and premises, to help break down the entrenched positions and provide a new worldview.

In 1881, the objects were again reconsidered and rephrased. This time, reduced to four. These were enumerated as follows.

1. To form the Nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity.
2. To study Aryan literature, religion and science.
3. To vindicate the importance of this inquiry and correct misrepresentations with which it has been clouded.
4. To explore the hidden mysteries of Nature and the latent powers of Man, on which the Founders believe that Oriental Philosophy of Man is in a position to throw light. [19]

Again there is an alteration in emphasis and wording, with shifts in nuance and a hinting of new implications. The third point of "vindication" indicates that the theosophical message has been "clouded with misrepresentation." This indicates that public reception was not favourably inclined, though it was considered a desirable goal. The assumption was that the problem lay in the presentation of the message rather than the rejection of the

[19] Ibid. p.548.

option in its own right. The second object singles out a particular category of preferential study, assuming that "Aryan" materials are especially meritorious in content. The first point shows once more another subtle change in wording, and therefore has a slightly different nuance. Now we retreat once more from "institution" and "promotion of a feeling" of brotherhood to instead, "forming a nucleus." This type of indicator shows that an elite minority of specially qualified and competent people are considered to be the ideal candidates for this pioneering effort. And point number four once more revisits the topic of extrasensory powers and mysteries, hidden in nature and in man. And here, "that Oriental Philosophy of Man" is again posited as the most credible approach to proper envisioning of reality. As well, although doctrinal content is eclectic and drawn from diverse sources, theosophical empathy is publicly expressed to favour its Eastern heritage.

> The changes of 1886 now condensed the formal statements to three objects.
>
> 1. To form *the* nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed or colour.
>
> 2. To promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literature, religions and sciences.
>
> 3. A third object, pursued by a portion of the members of the Society is to investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the psychical powers of man. [20]

Once more there are some subtle differences in emphasis. The italicisation of the word "*the*" in the first object indicates that the organisation was envisaging itself as a revolutionary group, acting in a manner that would set a precedent for the future. This assumption reveals a sense of self-identity as a privileged nucleus of visionaries, prepared to act in the present according to principles of equality they believe will be the norm of the future. In the second object, "Aryan literature, religion and science" is expanded to include "other Eastern" materials. This allows for a wider scope of support sources and broadens the range of explicitly endorsed resources. The third object now has been more particularly defined. The "hidden mysteries" and "latent powers" are now respectively configured as "unexplained laws of nature" and the "psychical powers of man." The shift from "hidden mysteries" to "unexplained laws" is rather understated, but indicates an

effort to present a more scientifically respectable image. The substitution of "law" for "mystery" clearly is intended to achieve that end. And the change from "latent powers" to "psychical powers" is more a matter of definition and clarification. Now the capacities under consideration are identified and made more explicit, and conform more to the terms being used in common parlance amongst contemporary psychic investigators.[21] As well, an interesting amendment of this object now shows that it is no longer necessarily intended to be included amongst the pursuits of all members. It is to be "pursued by a portion of the members of the Society." Thus the interests of individuals need not converge or be directed equally to the same lines of inquiry. Those who are more eager and motivated to pursue interests in cultivating and understanding latent supersensory powers do not necessarily represent the main thrust of the organisation, but may do so sanctioned as a specialised subgroup.

Refinement of the objects continued in 1888, and again were attuned to issues of the moment, with changes in nuance reflecting the collective institutional mindset and the way the Society saw itself, and desired itself to be represented. The only differences in the first object were the addition of two italicised words. Instead of "without distinction of race, creed or colour" we now find "without distinction of race, creed, *sex, caste* or colour." [22] The inclusion and emphasis on the new categories reveals an effort to make more explicit what was already presumed under the broader generalisation. Gender equality was explicitly mentioned in the original preamble, but subsequently dropped. Now it was again brought to the surface. And the recognition of caste as a category was significant. As the movement spread around the world, India became one of the most supportive hosts of the project. And, although interest largely came from the Anglo-Indian community, curiosity, attention, and interest were shown from all strata of Indian society. As well, the theosophical prioritisation of equality and brotherhood clashed with the entrenched principles of the caste system. Thus explicit reference to caste differentiation was intended as a rebuke to such tradition and encouragement towards the principle of equality. In the revised second object, there is only one small change.

---

[20] Ibid., pp. 548–549.
[21] For discussion of the historical unfolding of psychic investigations, see Renee Haynes, *The Society For Psychical Research 1882 – 1982. A History*, London and Sydney: Macdonald and Company, 1982.
[22] Ransom, op. cit., p. 549.

"Literatures, religions and sciences" now becomes "literatures, religions, *philosophies* and sciences."[23] The addition of "*philosophies*" appears intended to be more inclusive of potential subject matter, providing equal standing for secular and more independent conceptual materials. The third object is very, very subtly changed. Now it is a portion of "Fellows" rather than "members" encouraged to "investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the psychic powers of man."[24] The change from "psychical" to "psychic" appears to just be a grammatical adjustment, keeping in conformity with popular usage. The differentiation between members and Fellows was further clarified by an addendum noting that the Fellows interested in the third object formed a "distinct private division" of the Society under the direction of the Corresponding Secretary, who was Madame Blavatsky. [25]

This division was known as the "Esoteric Section," and became the primary organisational wing dedicated to the study and investigation of psychic phenomena. This division now more explicitly allowed for specialisation in the field of psychic exploration, while not necessarily committing the average member to the premises or conclusions of that separate body. Thus the potential for dissension amongst members was theoretically given an institutional footing. One could still be a full member of the Society without necessarily endorsing or participating in the specialised line of inquiry of the Esoteric Section.

In 1890, the first object was left intact. The second object was kept the same, except for an additional justification. The promotion and study of Aryan and other Eastern literature, religions, philosophies and sciences was now given a basis. This was "to demonstrate their importance to Humanity."[26] So we now find that a more focussed and specific intent was considered necessary to validate the object. The "demonstration of their importance" obviously came with already assumed beliefs that such data was valuable and needed promulgating. And by addressing the object to "Humanity" we see that this notion was felt to be of profound and monumental import. Thus, whatever the content expected to be explicated from those sources, clearly it would be different,

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., p.550.

unusual, or contrary to at least some established and entrenched ideational principles and patterns. The third object is almost left unchanged. A slight rewording brings back the word "latent," earlier dropped, and appears now as "the psychic powers latent in man." [27] This seems to be intended to emphasise that there are two points of fact. One is that there are indeed specific "psychic powers" which exist. The second, is that they are precisely located, "latent in man," therefore subsisting but undeveloped for most persons, though potentially capable of activation via proper training and preparation.

The stated objects of the Society stayed the same for a few years. A minor change to the second object took place in 1894 when the wording was changed. Rather than the last addition to the object reading "to demonstrate their importance to Humanity," it now reads, "to demonstrate the importance of that study." [28] Thus we can infer a slight toning down of expectations. No longer is are grandiose expectations presumed from the undertaking of the object, but a more modest intent is suggested in which "study" is implied to lead to acquisition of knowledge and therefore eventually, incremental change. "Humanity" is no longer put on notice that an impending radical revision of knowledge based on "Aryan and Eastern" sources is immanent.

In 1896, the first object is once more tinkered with. In fact, a reversal of words, and italicisation for emphasis, gives a different connotation once more. The standing "To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood" is changed to read, "To form *a* nucleus of *the* Universal Brotherhood." [29] This shift shows the desire to indicate that there may not necessarily be just a single nucleus, but that a plurality of equivalent or similarly inspired groups may also co-exist and play the same role. It also disavows the notion that those from the Theosophical Society who envision themselves as part of the nucleus are exclusivists or elitists. However, by indicating that there is a singularity about "*the*" Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, it implies that it is more an ideal than an actual expectation, and would likely be utopian in conception. The second object also is also changed in tone and wording, to a more neutral and secularised statement.

To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. [30]

---

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., p. 551.
[29] Ibid. p. 552.
[30] Ibid.

Here we see quite a change. The associations implied with the terms "Aryan" and "Eastern" no longer were as exotic and unfamiliar, and perhaps perceived more as a hindrance than a stimulus. The change from "promote" to "encourage" indicates another subtle alteration. Promotion involves proactive advocacy. Encouragement is a less strident and demanding, a suggestion rather than an obligation. The third object has only one change. The word "psychic" is dropped, and just "powers latent in man" is retained. This appears to indicate a desire to adopt a neutral stance and not pre-define the area of inquiry. The presumption of their "psychic" character may persist, but emulation of the more objective and neutral scientific approach would preclude a conclusion from being part of the statement of intention.

No other organisational amendments to the objects occurred over the span of time we are covering. However, the three objects have continually been expressed with slightly different wording and emphasis constantly over the years. And with different schismatic organisations later emerging, the Theosophical Society was not exclusively the vehicle of the entire theosophical movement, though certainly the largest. In fact, in many different books, pamphlets, magazines, and other materials, individual authors have re-stated those objects in their own terms or adapted more current substitutions for words and phrase no longer part of popular usage. That is simply the natural process of revision and adaptation. However, for the time period we are covering, the final 1896 declaration should stand as the last institutional restatement of the three objects of the Theosophical Society.

> 1. To form *a* nucleus of *the* Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
>
> 2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
>
> 3. To investigate unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man. [31]

The wording of the three objects reflects methodical and carefully crafted expressions of consensually shared aims, sentiments and ideals. The formal incorporation of the objects into the Theosophical Society's publicly declared record illustrates the need for caution and forethought. To outsiders, the formal declarations served as indicators of

[31] Ibid., p. 552.

motive, purpose, and intent. To members and sympathisers, firm and guiding parameters were established, defining the scope of concerns. Thus the understandable tinkering with even the most seemingly innocuous words, and the continual fine-tuning of emphases and nuance. Each revision was also a reaction to unfolding events and processes both within the movement and in the larger social environment. The objects were also framed in language that sought to take advantage of the mood and tone of the times by adopting or acknowledging the sentiments displayed by those who felt psychic phenomena was a legitimate field of inquiry.. The formal declaration of the three objects therefore can be seen to be one measure of the way the Theosophical Society prioritised its interests and its ambitions, and revealed what was motivationally relevant on a collective organisational scale.

As well, concurrent during the periodic organisational declarations and revisions of objects were the opinions, thoughts, feelings, evaluations, assessments, and aims, of individuals. While the input of individuals helped shape the public expression of the objects, personal statements and comments also revealed much about the way the movement was perceived to be heading and how it appeared to be faring. Personal opinion also was less constrained by organisational obligations. The loophole in the original Theosophical Society preamble allowed for disagreement between official organisational stance and possible dissenting individual opinion. This meant that a more spontaneous form of reflection and speculation could appear without necessarily being defamatory or contradictory. Personal commentary was not necessarily spoken on behalf of the official Society, therefore is a useful supplementary means of discovering what individuals authentically felt. And perhaps the most important individual was Madame Blavatsky. Although the essential founder, inspiration, source of content for the Society, she yet often spoke candidly rather than as a corporate mouthpiece. And though a key influence in the shaping of official Theosophical Society policy, her own commentary reflects more of an impromptu attitude, dealing with the concerns and issues faced by the movement in the larger social sphere. Often involved in multiple disputes and debates, she was primarily motivated by the desire to achieve specific goals and to effectively transmit the theosophical message. Her overall objectives were the same as those framed in the three objects, yet in her discussions she was able to be less constrained and

circumspect, conveying a wider sense of the types of changes in worldview that she hoped to see implemented.

2.5 Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *What are the Theosophists?*

We begin with a look at an article written in 1879 in *The Theosophist*, entitled *"What Are the Theosophists?"* In it we find a rather expansive statement of her thoughts at that moment about the status of the movement, the Theosophical Society, its objectives, and the issues it was confronting. She begins by asking whether theosophists are what they claim they are, students of natural law, ancient and modern philosophy, or exact science. And whether they are

> Deists, Atheists, Socialists, Materialists, or Idealists; or are they but a schism of modern Spiritualism,—mere visionaries? [32]

And having thus established that there was a sense of confusion about whether theosophists were non-sectarian students or partisans of particular philosophies or ideological movements, or connected to Spiritualism, she suggests that in any event, the question about any possible practical worth may be moot if they are merely visionaries. And she then asks a rhetorical question about whether their philosophical and scientific contributions have any merit, or should be treated with the compassionate tolerance accorded enthusiastic though unqualified amateurs.

Blavatsky next lists some of the accusations and accusers of the movement. Those included charges of "miracle-working;" serving as spies for the Czar; promulgating socialistic and nihilistic ideas; being in collusion with the French Jesuits; having a monetary motive for discrediting Spiritualism. More charges include being categorised as unrealistic dreamers by the American Positivists; as fetish-worshippers by a segment of the New York press; of reviving superstition by Spiritualists; as "infidel emissaries of Satan" by the Christian Church; of superficiality by Professor W. B. Carpenter, F. R. S.; and of acting out of a motive of jealousy from some Hindu opponents, who claim that they use "demons" to perform certain psychic phenomena. And her assessment of all this negative opinion and the reputation of disrepute?

---

[32] H.P. Blavatsky, *What Are the Theosophists?* Retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1879, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/theosoph/theos1a.htm#whatarethetheos>. (Accessed March 12 2002).

> One fact stands conspicuous—the Society, its members, and their views, are deemed of enough importance to be discussed and denounced: *Men slander only those whom they hate—or fear.* [33]

So by thus implying that the movement and its message were being unjustly prosecuted and absurdly persecuted, Blavatsky seems to feel that such provocations can be reduced to feelings of "hate or fear" by theosophical detractors. And further implied is that the fear is ultimately of the theosophical worldview establishing itself as more believable, accurate, and preferable than contemporary majority positions. And thus, potentially capable of providing a more satisfactory and desirable option than accessible through the frameworks of those enemies. Accusations of motives other than those ostensibly stated in the formal theosophical bylaws and in theosophical literature are categorically denied. Blavatsky's sense of outrage at suspicions of what she feels are her own purely selfless altruistic and enlightened motives is explicitly expressed, as well as implied by a tone of sarcasm directed to those who immediately are inclined to be suspicious of anyone enthused to challenge the status quo.

As well as characterising the enemies of the movement, Madame Blavatsky next establishes that theosophy, although a minority position, does have some degree of public support and respect. And she tries to convey the impression that there is an equal balance between sympathisers and critics.

> But, if the Society has had its enemies and traducers, it has also had its friends and advocates. For every word of censure, there has been a word of praise. [34]

She uses the exponential growth of membership and geographical expansion of the Theosophical Society as one example of positive reception. As well, the (short-lived) alliance with the Indian Arya Samaj and the empathetic bond with a group of Ceylonese Buddhists were mentioned as examples of others acknowledging theosophy as a plausible entity. The acceptance of a portion of theosophical doctrine by credible Hindu and Buddhist organisations was an important propaganda claim, establishing that the movement indeed represented something tangible and legitimate when claiming to embody beliefs represented in historical Eastern traditions. And ancient India is glorified.

None is older than she in esoteric wisdom and civilization, however fallen may

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

> be her poor shadow -- modern India. Holding this country, as we do, for the fruitful hot-bed whence proceeded all subsequent philosophical systems, to this source of all psychology and philosophy a portion of our Society has come to learn its ancient wisdom and ask for the impartation of its weird secrets. [35]

This effusive admiration of an ancient India reveals how she envisioned the lineage of theosophical knowledge. Yet it wasn't stated to be the only authoritative and legitimate source, as only "a portion of our Society" has actually taken specialised interest to "learn its ancient wisdom and ask for the impartation of its weird secrets." The characterisation of some of the Indian knowledge as "weird secrets" seems to reflect a sense of glamorous infatuation or mystification, a common treatment at that time of exotic cultures. Still, a curious choice of words from a vehement supporter trying to legitimise its stature.

As well as establishing theosophical connectivity to sources in ancient India, Blavatsky refers to another common theme that was, and still remains, a constant throughout the entire history of the movement. That is the belief that theosophical knowledge as she presented it, was directly indebted to, and largely derived from, an esoteric or "wisdom tradition." The contributions of knowledge to this tradition were said to come from Eastern and Western sources dating back to the earliest civilisations and cultures, and predominately express a belief in the mystical nature of reality. In the article under discussion, Blavatsky brings up this belief to augment her earlier statement about India.

> The line of philosophical heredity, from Kapila through Epicurus to James Mill; from Patanjali through Plotinus to Jacob Bohme, can be traced like the course of a river through a landscape. [36]

It is worth noting now that tracing this "line of philosophical heredity" is inevitably selective to some degree, and involves interpretative creativity in establishing associations while ignoring or dismissing contradictions or discordant elements. One of the monumental accomplishments of Madame Blavatsky was, without a doubt, in weaving a massive ideational web that involved careful and clever crafting of ideas from this esoteric tradition. We also see that part of the motivational mix that inspired her was a sincere and effusive admiration for Indian wisdom. Madame Blavatsky expressed

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

unqualified admiration because spiritual values and premises were prioritised and sustained for millennia in Indian culture and thought. This provided her with a paradigmatic model from which to critique contemporary Western dogmatic, rationalist, and empirical orientations

Another issue brought up by Blavatsky as a necessary part of the theosophical agenda was the critique of the Spiritualist position on disembodied spirits. Quoting from the *Allahabad Pioneer* about the emerging status of the Theosophical Society as a potentially useful investigative body into occult phenomena, Blavatsky states that such a function is just one of many organisational objectives. She then raises more questions about theosophy's historical lineage

> As to the transcendental side of the ancient Theosophy, it is also high time that the Theosophical Society should explain. With how much, then, of this nature-searching, God-seeking science of the ancient Aryan and Greek mystics, and of the powers of modern spiritual mediumship, does the Society agree? [37]

. A perfunctory but predictable response is given, as Blavatsky states that the Theosophical Society agrees with all that these predecessor movements propose. And to further clarify this point she notes that the Theosophical Society has no creeds, and has no binding belief as a body. However, theosophy is equated with "spiritual knowledge itself." As such, it supposedly would be in position to avoid potential sectarian divisiveness. And since the contents of this knowledge appear under particular historical and geographical conditions, and are sought for by individuals with different cultural and personal backgrounds, there is an organisational freedom to individually envisage and articulate the knowledge in the manner felt to be most familiar and comfortable.

> The religion of the Society is an algebraical equation, in which so long as the sign = of equality is not omitted, each member is allowed to substitute quantities of his own, which better accord with climatic and other exigencies of his native land, with the idiosyncrasies of his people, or even with his own. [38]

So as an institution, the Theosophical Society stands for individual freedom of intellectual pursuit, though qualified by the reminder that each cultural representation is but a conditioned and partial expression of more encompassing and transcendent

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

knowledge. Blavatsky tries to reinforce the motivational objective of presenting the Theosophical Society as entirely free of partisan preferences and sectarian interests. And the Society itself, since alleged to support a purely objective form of speculative inquiry, has opportunity to make use of the insights and investigations of its members.

> Having no accepted creed, our Society is very ready to give and take, to learn and teach, by practical experimentation, as opposed to mere passive and credulous acceptance of enforced dogma. It is willing to accept every result claimed by any of the foregoing schools or systems that can be logically and experimentally demonstrated. Conversely, it can take nothing on mere faith, no matter by whom the demand may be made. [39]

This idealised stance would lead the reader to conclude that the Theosophical Society was equivalent to a scientific investigative body. Criteria of logic and experimental verification are praised while dogma and blind faith are derided. The motivational desire to supplant the purely intellectual and rationalistic perspectives with an uncompromising spiritual and paranormal orientation is not expressed here as a radical option. It is simply suggested, with the assumption that the mystical and occult premises of theosophy would ultimately be verified and confirmed through the type of demonstrative methods found acceptable with "other schools or systems". So we see that a desire to change the prevailing dogmatic, rationalistic and materialistic authoritative worldviews is a strong motivational factor. In her promotional enthusiasm Blavatsky also suggests that the contents of knowledge obtained via esoteric means are fully capable of meeting empirical and logical standards of verifiability.

The distinction between the position of individuals and Theosophical Society philosophy however can lead to confusion and misconception. Blavatsky mentions how individual members derive from different races, nationalities, locations, and have diverse educational backgrounds with differing belief systems. She goes on to specify that empathy for magic, spiritualism, mesmerism, occultism, or only a "state of attentive expectancy" are common to theosophical sympathisers. Thus, even certain theoretical materialists may qualify as members if they are truly objective enough to admit that spiritual principles may in fact supersede the limited conceptions of orthodox science. However, there can be no atheists or bigoted sectarians of any religion in the Society.

---

[39] Ibid.

> … for the very fact of a man's joining it proves that he is in search of the final truth as to the ultimate essence of things. [40]

In other words, "final truth" is believed with absolute certainty to be spiritual in essence, and the search for this final truth is equated with a religious quest. Thus, hardened atheists and sectarians are not really considered free of preconceptions and open to the possibility of reaching this objective. Someone willing to suspend such belief, and allow for the reality of transcendent principles might be capable of being convinced of the viability of the theosophical orientation. But without the motivation to find a spiritual alternative, the theosophical approach wouldn't be of any practical use. Blavatsky continues with her reasoning why "speculative atheism" and "bigoted sectarianism" are contradictory to theosophical principles, stating that those positions preclude objectivity. Speculative atheists she says can only apply their arguments to the notion of a personal God, but not effectively rule out the pantheistic concept of a Universal Soul. Sectarians are boxed in and unable to see past their creed. She concludes with a validation of the theosophical position towards unfettered speculation.

> The very root idea of the Society is free and fearless investigation. [41]

The "free and fearless investigation" however, is founded on the premise that reality is spiritually grounded, so it in fact advocates a particular set of conclusions prefatory to the commencement of any hypothetical inquiry. However, if taken as a starting point, she surmises that this approach must inevitably result in the discarding of divisive doctrinaire positions. The caveat though is that investigative commitment must from the very start be pursued with a desire to acquire "eternal truth,"

> It will, we think, be seen now, that whether classed as Theists, Pantheists or Atheists, such men are near kinsmen to the rest. Be what he may, once that a student abandons the old and trodden highway of routine, and enters upon the solitary path of independent thought—Godward—he is a Theosophist; an original thinker, a seeker after the eternal truth with "an inspiration of his own" to solve the universal problems. [42]

A contrast is established between what Blavatsky conceives as mutually exclusive

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

options. The entrenched, conventional traditions of the present, with their established and habitual ways of thought and perception, "the old and trodden highway of routine" on the one hand. On the other, the authentic path to "eternal truth," via the theosophical interpretation of independent and original thought, taken by the non-conventional and solitary "original thinker." Clearly, Blavatsky intends to flatter the disillusioned or disgruntled individual by implying that supporting an unconventional position requires courage and conviction. Rather than appeal to any social group with a vested interest in supporting an existing system of belief, she targets the uncommitted freethinker.

And besides embracing such independent individuals, theosophy is allied with what Blavatsky calls "honest science" and "honest religion." What she means to do is again differentiate between biased and unbiased positions on the credibility of mystical and occult claims. "Honest" equates to openness, and a desire to confirm spiritual beliefs. "Dishonest" are those who remain unconvinced of the superiority of the mystical and occult vision. It was a common technique used by Blavatsky (and others) to support a point of contention. Driven by the importance of what appears to be motivationally relevant, everything that seemed supportive was praised, and all that contradicted or could not be used favourably was dismissed. In search of support for the ideas and beliefs she was motivated to promote, Blavatsky had to selectively search disparate sources for the carefully chosen citation of statements and quotes from others with respected reputations and credentials. Even if the final positions of those scholars, religious spokespersons, scientists, and others were not necessarily congruent on all points with theosophy, Blavatsky carefully presented the segments that were useful while ignoring the discrepancies. Thus, appreciation for the works of authors and researchers in various fields was often profuse, especially when useful. For instance, the works of contemporary Eastern scholars as Sir W. Jones, Max Muller, Burnouf, Colebrooke, Haug, and St. Hilaire were respectfully cited (where supportive) for providing materials which helped confirm theosophical motives. Especially regarding the premise that common spiritual interests could be discerned in different religious traditions.

> …the society, as a body, feels equal respect and veneration for Vedic, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, and other old religions of the world; and, a like brotherly feeling toward its Hindu, Sinhalese, Parsi, Jain, Hebrew, and Christian members as

individual students of "self," of nature, and of the divine in nature. [43]

Here, identifying individuals of disparate backgrounds as equal spiritual seekers or students suggests a common solidarity, based upon the presumed shared beliefs about the divine, nature, and the self. Whether that equivalency was as consistent as Blavatsky assumed did not matter, because her motivation was to show that common themes and interests could be identified at least to some degree, and therefore tangible evidence could be adduced to support the theosophical principle of a universal wisdom tradition. Just by showing veneration and respect for “old religions,” and noting cases of empathy with contemporary representatives of living religions, Blavatsky reinforced the impression that continuity could be proven and that the beliefs themselves were similar and virtually interchangeable if understood from a theosophical context.

She next explains how the Society was modelled upon the constitution of the United States of America, the country of its formation. Equality of all religions and protection under state law served as an inspiration.

> The Society, modelled upon this constitution, may fairly be termed a "Republic of Conscience." [44]

Thus, individuals have the freedom to maintain associations with existing creeds, as long as they respect freedom of opinion and do not try to impose their opinions on others. This is an important criterion, significant enough that Blavatsky quotes from the revised rules of the Theosophical Society.

> It is not lawful for any officer of the Parent Society to express, by word or act, any hostility to, or preference for, any one section (sectarian division, or group within the Society) more than another. All must be regarded and treated as equally the objects of the Society's solicitude and exertions. All have an equal right to have the essential features of their religious belief laid before the tribunal of an impartial world. [45]

This entrenchment of principle reveals how the ideal of equality retained special stature, even though in the actual practical course of events it was a much more difficult proposition to enforce. Throughout its history, the Theosophical Society was often divided by differences in preference for specific systems of ideas, especially between

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

Eastern and Western forms of esotericism. However, Blavatsky's motivation for establishing a different worldview included the belief that the proper esoteric reading of religious content would reveal the same essential truths, merely expressed differently via the different symbols and terms of each religion. Therefore, there was no need for hostility or dispute, because ultimately, each contains the same message. So individuals within the Theosophical Society are enjoined to put their beliefs into practice and act with respect and tolerance. Theosophy is intended to stand as an exemplary model.

> For, above all human sects stands Theosophy in its abstract sense; Theosophy which is too wide for any of them to contain but which easily contains them. [46]

In stating how theosophy transcends yet subsumes the mere "human" sects, Blavatsky ascribes a special and superior status to theosophy, one that stands even above any transgressions committed by fallible individual members of the organisation. And in concluding, she reiterates how the Theosophical Society is potentially a more effective institution than those of science and religion. And unlike sectarian religions, it makes no distinctions, believing in the principle of universal brotherhood. In fact, this belief is critical, and ultimately, an objective and ideal transcending the existing ideologies and social movements. Theosophy therefore is represented in point of fact as a spiritual orientation from which the self-evidentiary nature of proper behaviour and conduct will be recognised and voluntarily adopted. And thus universal brotherhood would be the logical and inevitable result of living according to the theosophical position.

The contemporary social options are all deemed unsatisfactory and limited, based on partial and incomplete perceptions and beliefs, lacking authentic spiritual legitimacy.

> Unconcerned about politics; hostile to the insane dreams of Socialism and of Communism, which it abhors - as both are but disguised conspiracies of brutal force and sluggishness against honest labour; the Society cares but little about the outward human management of the material world. The whole of its aspirations are directed towards the occult truths of the visible and invisible worlds. Whether the physical man be under the rule of an empire or a republic, concerns only the man of matter. His body may be enslaved; as to his Soul, he has the right to give to his rulers the proud answer of Socrates to his Judges. They have no sway over the inner man. [47]

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

In theory then, theosophy was ostensibly apolitical, nor concerned with the "outward human management of the material world." This was the official policy, motivated by the ideal of spiritual priorities transcending mere worldly concerns. Although in actual fact, individuals within the movement did take divergent stances on specific issues of the moment, trying to approach issues from the overview of theosophical teachings but construed to justify worldly preferences. The stances taken by individuals were often in direct conflict because of political and national loyalties. For example, the British and the German theosophists had quite different positions on the occult significance of events precipitating the First World War. However, Blavatsky's admonitions were clearly to remain aloof with a quasi-world-denying position. "The whole of its aspirations are directed towards the occult truths of the visible and invisible worlds." The implications were that an ascetic orientation and withdrawal from the material world would be the most appropriate line of conduct for a serious spiritual seeker.

Blavatsky reinforces the idea of the theosophist as essentially detached from the mainstream of social activities and ambitions.

> The true student has ever been a recluse, a man of silence and meditation. With the busy world his habits and tastes are so little in common that, while he is studying, his enemies and slanderers have undisturbed opportunities. But time cures all and lies are but ephemera. Truth alone is eternal. [48]

By suggesting that the true student is a recluse, the passive victim of "his enemies and slanderers," a clear division is established between the image of the theosophist and "the busy world." The image of the disaffected solitary recluse appears to represent a segment of the populace who felt alienated, powerless, and spiritually frustrated within the mainstream of society. However, not all theosophists are portrayed in alienated terms. Blavatsky mentions contributions of some Fellows to science, biology and psychology, and the fact that diversity in opinion is inevitable. And in trying to account for controversial public statements made by theosophical representatives, she notes that even great theosophical thinkers may at times lose their sense of perspective and make regrettable comments. Such lapses may tarnish their reputations, but not negate their efforts. The motivational objective of changing habitual ways of thought requires the collective efforts of those willing to challenge the status quo, as well as promote a more

appealing and believable alternative system of truth.

> But as all work for one and the same object, namely, the disenthralment of human thought, the elimination of superstitions, and the discovery of truth, all are equally welcome. [49]

And this critical and constructivist endeavour is ultimately a collective effort. Blavatsky suggests that perhaps all that can be accomplished in that direction for the present is to initiate the process of change by establishing a foundational base of reasoned arguments. She feels that were this to be accomplished, the motivational impetus and enthusiastic conviction of the younger generation will make further inroads.

> The attainment of these objects, all agree, can best be secured by convincing the reason and warming the enthusiasm of the generation of fresh young minds, that are just ripening into maturity, and making ready to take the place of their prejudiced and conservative fathers. [50]

So in essence, the longer-term motivational determination for "attainment of these objects" becomes a matter of establishing the trustworthiness of the theosophical worldview, debunking the flaws of the established positions, and putting in place the organisation and the authoritative body of knowledge that will remain useful for future efforts at entrenching the theosophical orientation.

2.6 Conclusion of Chapter Two

Although the official societal program of three overarching objectives was reinforced and more expansively enunciated by Madame Blavatsky, they also can be seen as directional indicators and reminders of the values shaping the theosophical outlook on the world. As are many other statements of purpose and expression of ideals which clearly embody the aims and aspirations of the movement. Taken as such, those objectives reveal the manifest interests of the movement regarding tasks and goals of possible achievement. Implementing the objectives to their fullest would significantly impact on how reality would be envisioned. And in that sense, we tend to see another seemingly oblique though significant implication emerging from the collective sum of theosophical principles and ambitions. Even if it wasn't explicitly referred to as such or

---

[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.

conceptually framed as an end in itself. However, if we bracket out for a moment the corpus of doctrinal and practical specifics, we may see that there really is a more general and overarching motive implicit but clearly and logically deducible within the theosophical imperative.

This intent was to try and change, amend, revise, or supplant the established and familiar mainstream Western worldviews with a theosophical alternative. In essence, subsumed beneath the public proclamations, complex theories, and prerequisite beliefs, was a desire to fundamentally change the way nineteenth century Western man perceived the world and conceptualised the nature of reality. And with a change in perception, it was assumed a change in behaviour would follow, as the presumed self-evidentiary nature of theosophical truth would logically and inevitably stimulate conversion. Desire to change *from* what was considered the dominant dogmatic, rationalistic, and materialistic worldviews of the contemporary present also carried with it the objective of instituting a different and presumed better alternative. So change *to* what was presented as a more desirable and appealing spiritual, authentic, truthful, and meaningful awareness of the nature of the real was a critical motivational objective. Thus the three objects of the Theosophical Society are both reactionary regarding perceived present negatives, and revolutionary in encouraging radical transformation in a more positive direction.

The desire to change the way the world was perceived was certainly an ambitious expectation, even if not considered the sole measure of the success of the movement. Yet carrying this notion to its logical conclusion in actual real-world implementation would not be possible without legitimation of the embedded theosophical principles and beliefs. Only after the worldview itself was consensually perceived to be plausible and comfortable by a significant social segment would widespread conversion be possible. First on an individual basis, from those with percipient insight and an affinity for occult and mystical beliefs. And ideally, eventually on a wider scale as the basic tenets acquired legitimacy and gradually became publicly accepted and broadly disseminated. For this to have happened presupposed acquiescence with, and confirmation of, the essential theosophical premises by credible authorities. In other words, the authoritative spokespersons for the different dominant religious, philosophical, and scientific organisations and bodies would have to have incorporated many of the essential

theosophical principles into the mainstream ideational systems or else be in danger of rejection or abandonment in favour of more appealing options. In addition, a public transformation in attitude, acceptance of different first principles, and all the inevitable changes associated with implementing a dramatically different vision of reality into social and private life would also have been necessary for the theosophical perspective to become consensual on a mass scale.

Thus, with so much potential for public confusion and anomie, and the monumental logistical and psychological impracticalities of a short-term radical collective change in worldviews, it is not surprising that early theosophical speculation either is vague or simplistic regarding the practical nature of any large-scale immanent shifts. And why, perhaps, most discussion of any future implementation of the theosophical worldview is couched in vague utopian terms and pictured as a goal for a time when mankind is more receptive and prepared for the impending change. That is indicated when Blavatsky speaks of future generations perhaps being more receptive than her contemporaries to the theosophical worldview. [51] Wide scale change would have to occur incrementally. The only area where a more confident and realistic expectation of influence would have seemed feasible would have been in addressing the persons seeking non-conventional sources of spiritual knowledge or more viable answers to inexplicable questions. In addressing such individuals, the theosophical message of a need for urgent changes in consciousness, behaviour patterns, lifestyle, and attitude effectively add up to an effort to achieve incremental change on a small-scale basis, although hope always was for the widest possible dissemination of the unique theosophical message.

As well, Madame Blavatsky's pursuit of the desired theosophical objectives unavoidably involved strident confrontations with opponents. She also concentrated on the refining and reshaping of doctrinal contents and practical options, intending to appeal to both learned and public consciousness. Thus, it seems that a subsidiary or attendant motive of the theosophical directive can be recognised as a desire to attain the status of "legitimate alternative world view" if the difficulties of effecting quick massive change

[51] The Besant–Leadbeater led movement to prepare for the coming of Krishnamurti as the World Teacher can be seen as a more specific and immediate effort to implement a theosophical worldview on a larger social scale. However, it began with Leadbeater's "discovery" of Krishnamurti in 1909, and reached culmination in the 1920s. The time frame and the topic lie outside our purview.

were realistically assessed. For by denigrating the materialistic and religious status quo, what they represented, and the institutions legitimating those positions, the movement in effect challenged the validity of the dominant worldviews. And by suggesting an alternative based on spiritual or esoteric criteria, the burden of establishing credibility fell to the challenger. Thus, by suggesting that a new worldview was needed, the theosophical movement was faced with defending its principles, establishing the validity of its arguments, supporting the claims of its theoretical system. And insofar as the contents of the system and the viability of the objects were considered disputable, the burden of proof was placed on the theosophical authorities and theoreticians to convincingly make the case for their acceptance.

But before we can discuss the crucial elements of the theosophical efforts towards attaining legitimation, it is necessary to explore some of the underlying issues relating to worldview structure. If we accept the premise that a dominant though more implied objective of the theosophical movement was to achieve a change in Western worldviews, then it becomes necessary to examine the question of worldviews in more detail. Particularly, we must explore relevant factors relating to their composition as well as the intellectual climate from which the modern theosophical movement emerged.

Chapter 3
Worldview Structures and Historical Considerations

3.1 Religions, Philosophy and Science - the Theosophical Need for a Synthesis

Recognising that a prime motivational objective (even if indirect or deduced from other aspirations) was to try and refashion or replace the way the primary Western worldview was constructed or presented, it is necessary to examine more closely what worldviews do, and why the approach taken by Blavatsky in constructing a formal system drew upon particular fields of knowledge and information to sustain credibility. In her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, Madame Blavatsky intentionally subtitled the work "*The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*." In so choosing those terms, she implies that those three forms of systematic speculative inquiry (and their respective representative institutions) comprehensively cover the spectrum of accessible knowledge pertaining to the nature of man and the universe. Even if her subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data from those fields was uniquely idiosyncratic and selected to support unconventional a priori presumptions about what in fact entailed authentic knowledge. Her choice of those categories apparently was just a convenient and obvious one, seemingly a self-evident observation based on the way all varieties of speculative knowledge and articulated worldviews were intellectually partitioned. And although she drew from other diverse resources, those three forms, in their nineteenth century configurations, carried the most social prestige and credibility as authoritative and trustworthy ways of discerning comprehensive universal meaning.

The presumption that a definitive and encompassing esoteric worldview could be constructed or synthesised with support from those three channels of knowledge also suggested an unconventional reading of its materials. For instance, beginning with Blavatsky, most theosophical overviews of religion, philosophy, and science assume that there is a higher informing source of knowledge of which those three are but partial manifestations. Religion was considered as both exoteric and esoteric, the latter embedding special occult and mystical truths for those equipped with the proper interpretative apparatus. Philosophy was considered both as an intellectual method of speculation as well as a way of life dedicated to pursuit of wisdom. Science also was

considered to have dual aspects. The prosaic and familiar side utilised the empirical method of categorising and organising the observations of sense data, and constructing hypotheses based on logical deduction. However, from the esoteric side, it was believed that science had an extensive pedigree dealing with more subtle and multidimensional facets of the concealed side of nature, involving psychic and occult arts and practices.

Thus, each of the three main categories of knowledge was acknowledged as having public conventional exoteric meaning as well as the more specialised esoteric meaning, discernible through the expertise of elite technicians and theoreticians of the sacred. Madame Blavatsky's efforts were largely directed to trying to shift consensual opinion from habitual trust in the mainstream institutions of knowledge to acceptance of the alternative esoteric perspective. To do so meant having to challenge leading authorities and refute popular contemporary theories and methods in all fields of knowledge as well as present justifiable arguments for acceptance of the theosophical perspective. Thus, the premises of the esoteric orientation had to be rehabilitated from centuries of disrepute and shown to be feasible in a modern context. The theme Blavatsky often followed was to try and show that the exoteric view was restrictive and confining, failing to provide adequate knowledge of reality. In contrast, she presented the esoteric position as an expansive and enhanced, revealing additional dimensions and connections underlying all forms of knowledge, which were in fact were simply different facets of the same spiritual Truth. This attempt to legitimise occult and mystical data through a broadening of the categories of knowledge became a constant theme of theosophical writers. For example, in the following quote, written many decades after *The Secret Doctrine*, the assumption is that the esoteric interpretation of religion, philosophy, and science reveals complementary methods of demonstrating a more expansive, persistent, and underlying supersensory or occult approach to comprehensive knowledge.

> Any one who is spiritually awake and inclined to understand and if possible to unravel the great mystery of life can look for knowledge on this subject in three directions. He can try to find out what religion, philosophy and science have to say about it and how they try in their own respective ways to unravel it. It will be shown later how the Occult method of approach to this fundamental problem, based as it is on its systematic and direct investigation through the combined methods of religion, philosophy and science, can alone provide a satisfactory theoretical explanation as well as an effective technique for the solution to this

problem. [1]

And in this quote, these three "departments of human thought" are said to be the way of understanding the "great problems of life," but only when the inner meaning "behind the outward veil" is adopted.

> And in larger spheres if our thinking we must realize that if we are to understand the great problems of life, the great problems of the various departments of thought—religion, philosophy and science—we must go behind this outward veil, we must penetrate more deeply into the heart of things. [2]

This orientation was a constant in theosophical speculation, where conventional interpretations of religion, philosophy, and science were persistently shown as limited and incomplete, requiring occult and mystical supplementation and correction.

However, what is important to examine right now is why those three particular approaches to knowledge were felt to be so important. The theosophical efforts at synthesis were not only meant to describe a different worldview, but to support it on arguments addressed to the three most credible and consensually respected sources of mainstream legitimation. Because attempting to gain endorsement and acclaim for any alternative system of knowledge meant confronting and grappling with those authoritative institutions, even when disputing content We will discuss those issues in this chapter.

Since those particular forms of knowledge were deemed so critical in the construction of a socially acceptable and intellectually plausible worldview, it seems feasible to surmise that there must be an important reason why such a belief was held. By inferring that those compendiums of established knowledge were sources that must be dealt with to gain and sustain the sense of public trust, any proposed new or different worldview would therefore by necessity be required to challenge the views of reality authoritatively expounded in the most current version of those systems. And by extension, it would seem a logical deduction to conclude that religious, philosophical and scientific traditions, in their speculative capacities, must be the most significant sources of knowledge for any worldview claiming comprehensive trustworthiness.

---

[1] I.K. Taimni, *Man, God and the Universe*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1974, pp. v-vi.
[2] G. de Purucker, *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy*, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1979, p. 474.

Of course, the portion of data selected, treatment of the ideational materials, organisation of major points of emphasis, and doctrinal or official presentment of these individual forms of knowledge will vary in any worldview. Focus may be exclusively or predominately on a particular type of knowledge or it may, as in the case of Blavatsky's work, be an attempt to incorporate as much as possible. Not all worldviews necessarily attempt to be all-inclusive and utilise all available resources. In fact, in many instances, much of the content of a worldview will be based upon uncritical and unexamined residual notions and habitual patterns of culturally inherited material. However, in our discussion, we have in mind the more grandiose and all-inclusive formally constructed worldviews, of which Blavatsky laboured in the making of her theosophical synthesis. It is important to recognise how the contents of religion, philosophy and science seamlessly factor into the architecture of those kinds of ostensibly comprehensive worldviews. Blavatsky essentially treats the ideational materials of religion, philosophy, science, and other resources as supportive elements in her construction of a worldview she felt synthesised a more fundamental though unacknowledged or recognised underlying common datum which she called "Truth." We shall examine the theosophical perspective on the synthesis of these three categories of knowledge in the next chapter. First, a more general discussion of the issue of worldviews is in order, as well as a look at the mainstream and alternative currents of thought that were of interest to Blavatsky as she commenced upon her theosophical endeavour.

3.2.1 Worldview construction: General Considerations of Social Dynamics

If we look at one representative interpretation of a generic worldview, we can gain a general understanding of the concept before looking at more specific elements of its composition. This perspective of Dilthey is a typical one.

> World views develop under different conditions, climate, races, nationalities, determined by history and through political organizations, the time-bound confines of epochs and eras. All of them combine into the special conditions which mark from the outset a multiple growth of world views...Those world views which promote a deeper understanding of life and lead onto more useful goals of life are conserved and eliminate the minor ones. A selection takes place among the competitors. And in the course of generations the viable ones evolve into more perfect structures… There is a permanent renewal of combinations of life experience, sentiments and ideas in a given world view

> prevailing in a certain period of history and in its context. When we subject these structures to a comparative treatment, we discover that they coalesce into groups among which there exists a certain affinity. [3]

The universality, variety, variability of encompassing worldviews is apparent, as they are historically, geographically, and culturally conditioned. Each specific configuration is somewhat unique to some degree because of the variables of their environment and the "special conditions" of their genesis. A worldview is legitimising, providing a context of definition and interpretation of experience, and an ongoing rationale for the meaning and purpose of life. Within the larger social sphere, the plurality of options eventually narrows down to a choice, and in time, as a result of the effects of continuing social, institutional, ideational dynamics, the most adequately functional or comfortable "fit" takes hold. And if remaining relatively intact and unchallenged, will proceed to develop its own form and characteristics. The hypothetical worldview in question, while dominant and efficacious, is somewhat flexible and malleable, allowing for "a permanent renewal of combinations." However, as such it is still limited and ultimately vulnerable to radical change or being discarded as no longer relevant. It is vital, energising, attuned to majority values, beliefs and ideals only while resonant within the specific cultural and historical milieu. Future worldviews of course may maintain certain traditional traits, but they will still be different than previous configurations because of the new combinations that will occur. Now let us look at the concept a little more analytically.

The term "worldview" is derived from the German term "weltanschauung," and is usually defined like this.

> General conception of the nature of the world, particularly as containing or implying a system of value-principles. [4]

This connotes both an explicit and implicit interpretative orientation towards what is considered essentially true about reality, as experienced under particular historical and geographical conditions. An orientation both cognitive and normative, that derives from the reciprocal interaction between individuals, social groups, and cultural stock of knowledge within specific spatial and temporal environments. Worldviews are both

---

[3] Wilhelm Dithey, *Culture and the Production of World Views*, in *Man and Culture*, ed. D. P. Verne, New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1970, p. 110.
[4] *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*. op. cit. p. 905.

societal and personal, with the individual located within the encompassing larger cultural environment, but yet capable of reacting to, and reflecting upon, the premises which define the way reality is presented. However, as such, primary societal worldviews are usually taken-for-granted as self-evident in fundamental principles, simply perceived as "reality." Berger expresses this attitude in the following words.

> Society predefines for us that fundamental symbolic apparatus with which we grasp the world, order our experience, and interpret our own existence. In the same way, society supplies our values, our logic, and the store of information (and for that matter, misinformation) that constitutes our "knowledge." Very few people, and even they only in regard to fragments of this world view, are in position to re-evaluate what has thus been imposed on them. They actually feel no need for reappraisal because the world view into which they have been socialized appears self-evident to them. Since it is also so regarded by almost everyone they are likely to deal with in their own society, the world view is self-validating. Its "proof" lies in the reiterated experience of other men who take it for granted also. [5]

3.2.2 Ascendant and Alternative Configurations

Individuals and smaller groups may thus possibly come to feel dissatisfaction with particular implicit or explicit tenets or presumptions that are part of the dominant worldview fabric when they "feel need for appraisal." However for that condition to become widespread or organised into a dissenting movement, the self-validating reiteration of its apparent self-evident status must be brought to consciousness and questioned.

Thus selected elements of "our values, our logic, and the store of information" become issues of contention for those disputing their truth, efficacy or relevancy. Although the numbers of potentially dramatic and incongruous divergences between a primary collective and secondary dissenting minority position is a variable which may fluctuate greatly according to time, place, type of society. Historically for example, the emergence of a disproportionately widespread pluralism of potentially incongruous worldviews appears to be a phenomenon specifically related to conditions of modern Western society since the industrial revolution. [6]

---

[5] Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1963, p. 117.
[6] See for example, Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, New York: Vintage Books, 1964. Georges Gurvitch, *The Social Framework of Knowledge,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971. Raymond Barglow, *The*

Human societies reflect particular shared beliefs and values that are expressed, transmitted and legitimated through cultural institutions.

> ... institutions being defined ... as sets of interrelated practices whose rules, which may or may not be either explicitly formulated or universally acknowledged, apply to specific groups or categories of persons irrespective of those persons' choice or consent. [7]

And within particular societies and civilizations, a dominant worldview will often shape and configure the way reality is represented. The use of the term "dominant worldview" serves the same purpose as Mannhein's phrase

> ... ascendant form of orientation to the world... [8]

And with an "ascendant" or dominant "orientation to the world," or worldview, the assumption is that a multiplicity of worldviews is possible, with the less dominant based on principles that dissent or diverge from those of the larger traditional societal consensus, and are endorsed and supported by smaller or less influential segments of the society. We may designate those not in the ascendancy as "secondary" or "alternative," The analysis of Peter Berger is useful in helping characterise what a secondary or alternative worldview is. Berger uses the terms "cognitive minority," and "deviant knowledge" to describe the status of such minority ideational orientations.

> By a cognitive minority I mean a group of people whose view of the world differs significantly from the one generally taken for granted in their society. Put differently, a cognitive minority is a group formed around a body of deviant "knowledge." ... The term "knowledge" ... always refers to what is *taken to be* or *believed* as "knowledge." In other words, the use of the term is strictly neutral on whether or not the socially held "knowledge" is finally true or false…
> The status of a cognitive minority is thus invariably an uncomfortable one—not necessarily because the majority is repressive or intolerant, but simply because it refuses to accept the minority's definition of reality *as* "knowledge." At best, a minority's viewpoint is forced to be defensive. At worst, it ceases to be plausible to anyone. [9]

So, if this analysis is used, the theosophical position can be called that of a "cognitive minority" as well as an alternative or secondary worldview. And the theosophical

---

Crisis of the Self in the Age of Information, London and New York: Routlege, 1994.
[7] W. G. Runciman. *A Treatise on Social Theory,* Volume 2*,* Cambridge/New York/New Rochelle/Melbourne/Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 2.
[8] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia,* New York: Harvest Books, 1936. p. 275.
[9] Peter L. Berger. *A Rumor of Angels*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1970, pp. 6–7.

ideational system would be interpreted as "deviant knowledge" in comparison to the majority perspective. The theosophists' confidence and assuredness in the accuracy and credibility of their own compendium of knowledge may therefore reasonably confirm the definition of reality they hold for themselves and for others supporting their premises. However, to those who do not accept those principles or share the same orientation, what appears logical and self-evident becomes problematical and an issue of dispute. This accounts for much of the strident style and terse rhetoric in Blavatsky's argumentation and public discussion.

Worldviews are not intrinsically or uniformly inflexible and closed, although the capacity for revision and reassessment greatly varies. As does the willingness to amend or reject portions of the familiar, which may be in conflict with newer perceptions and preferences. As events unfold and new knowledge, opinion, insights, priorities, choice of values factor into consensual consciousness, the challenge of selecting, interpreting and incorporating relevant elements into the existing worldview becomes a matter of both unconscious assimilation and preferential choice.

3.2.3 Sophisticated and Pre-Theoretical Forms of Knowledge, and the Basis of Authority

Worldviews consist of different levels of meaning and types of knowledge. Berger and Luckmann distinguish between "theoretically sophisticated knowledge" and "knowledge on a pre-theoretical level." [10] Sophisticated knowledge is the formally constructed and logically organised expression of conceptual ideas. Pre-theoretical knowledge consists of what is taken-for-granted in societies, the variety of common sense knowledge and unquestioned normative precedents. Another view expressing the same belief in dual levels of worldview composition and can be found in these words.

> Cultures vary greatly in their degree of integration. Synthesis is achieved partly through the overt statement of the dominant conceptions, assumptions and aspirations of the group in its religious lore, secular thought, and ethical code; partly through habitual but unconscious ways of looking at the stream of events, ways of begging certain questions. To the naïve participant in the culture these modes of categorizing, of dissecting experience along these planes and not others, are as much "givens" as the regular sequence of daylight and darkness or

[10] Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., pp. 65–67.

the necessity of air, water and food for life. [11]

Here, sophisticated theoretical knowledge can be found in the "overt statements of the dominant conceptions, assumptions and aspirations of the group." The institutional representations of those forms of knowledge appear in the "religious lore, secular thought, ethical code." As we shall see, these distinctive forms of knowledge may be generally considered to represent respectively religion, science and philosophy as dominant institutions of legitimation. And the other worldview component, pre-theoretical knowledge, is here suggested as the "habitual but unconscious way of looking at the stream of events." And, for those "naive participants" immersed uncritically in perceiving reality through the unconscious filter of a worldview, its self-evident "giveness" appears to be a matter of obvious facticity. A useful depiction of this kind of normal scenario is aptly indicated in these words by C. Wright Mills.

> …men lives in second hand worlds. They are aware of much more than they have personally experienced; and their own experience is always indirect. The quality of their lives is determined by meanings they have received from others. Everyone lives in a world of such meanings … Their image of the world and of themselves are given to them by crowds of witnesses they have never met and never shall meet. Yet for every man these images – provided by strangers and dead men – are the very basis of his life as a human being. [12]

The "image of the world and of themselves" provided by these "strangers and dead men" is the worldview which defines the "second hand world" for that group or society. A worldview will subsume both types of knowledge, though its institutional expression will appear more structured and consistent because of the intentionality motivating its delineation. What may be known, believed, assumed or implied on the pre-theoretical level might appear disconnected or discontinuous when considered separately. However, when the same materials are drawn from to contribute to a sophisticated theoretical model or systematic exposition, further comprehensive and definitive meanings, patterns, and implications are enunciated. A more useful understanding of "sophisticated knowledge" in reference to worldview functionality is the provided with the term "symbolic universe," as defined by Berger and Luckmann.

---

[11] Clyde Kluckholm, *Mirror for Man,* New York: Premier Books, 1965, p. 38.
[12] C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics, and People,* New York: Ballantine Books, 1963, p. 405.

> Symbolic universe ... are bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality ... To reiterate, symbolic processes are processes of signification that refer to realities other than those of everyday experience. It may be readily seen how the symbolic sphere relates to the most comprehensive level of legitimation. The sphere of pragmatic application is transcended once and for all. Legitimation now takes place by means of symbolic totalities that cannot be experienced in everyday life at all—except, of course, insofar as one might speak of "theoretical experience" ... Now, however, *all* the sectors of the institutional order are integrated in an all-embracing frame of reference, which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the word, because *all* human experience can be conceived as taking place *within* it.
>
> The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe. What is particularly important, the marginal situations of the life of the individual ... are also encompassed by the symbolic universe. Such situations are experienced in dreams and fantasies as provinces of meaning detached from everyday life, and endowed with a peculiar reality of their own. Within the symbolic universe these detached realms of reality are integrated within a meaningful totality that "explains," perhaps also justifies them ... The symbolic universe is, of course, constructed by means of social objectifications. Yet its meaning-bestowing capacity far exceeds the domain of social life, so that the individual may "locate" himself within it even in his most solitary experiences."
>
> On this level of legitimation, the reflective integration of discrete institutional processes reaches its ultimate fulfilment. A whole world is created. All the lesser legitimating theories are viewed as special perspectives on phenomena that are aspects of this world. Institutional roles become modes of participation in a universe that transcends *and* includes the institutional order. [13]

Essentially, worldviews are self-contained symbolic wholes which describe and ascribe meaning to reality as perceived from within a particular "symbolic universe". Everyday pre-theoretical experience and the "sphere of pragmatic application" are subsumed within the more comprehensive and inclusive frame of reference. The "bodies of theoretical tradition" provide the worldview content, which collectively will "integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality." The functional utility of a worldview is in the application of significance for understanding the nature of the perceived world and the experiences of the inner self, respectively "socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings." In fact, because of its "meaning-

[13] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality,* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967, pp. 95–96.

bestowing capacity," a comprehensive apparatus of particularly articulated conceptual and symbolic ideational materials is available to supply the means for achieving insight and understanding, so that "the individual may "locate" himself within it even in his most solitary experiences." The comprehensive whole of a symbolic universe provides explanation and justification for individual experience but is yet "constructed by means of social objectifications," and serves a larger social purpose. The encompassing worldview provides a dominant picture of reality, subsuming "all lesser legitimating theories" that yet maintain their own specialised and limited functions. Thus a plurality of individual traditions and disciplines may co-exist in their delineation of particular aspects of knowledge and experience. However, insofar as they deviate from the mainstream worldview, their authoritative credibility may become compromised. The "institutional order" is part of, but yet is transcended by, the symbolic universe, therefore becoming susceptible to change and revision. And modes of participation via "institutional roles" are implied to function efficaciously as long as the integrity of the symbolic universe is maintained. Since "the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe," any radical change or deviation from its basic premises would suggest severe feelings of uneasiness, dissatisfaction, incompleteness, doubt, alienation, anomie, discomfort, inadequacy.

Worldviews, especially if based mostly on pre-theoretical knowledge, may be largely implicit and taken for granted below the threshold of reflection for many within a society. However, for the long established traditional institutions of legitimation responsible for maintaining and reconstructing sophisticated theoretical worldviews (such as religious, philosophic, scientific, scholarly and other bodies of specialised expertise), the reflective and critical process is ongoing. The "very few people, ... in position to re-evaluate what has thus been imposed on them" come primarily from such ideational domains, or claim to have similar expertise and information. Often elite experts and specialists of a particular field of sophisticated knowledge, such as priests, philosophers, scientists, scholars, and so forth will shape and articulate a specific form of response, fashioning a particular variation or novel conceptualisation for their time and place. However, the degree of consensual sway is variable. The presence of competing or differing institutions and systems of knowledge and belief may offer alternative

interpretations that temper and relativise each other. And the social pervasiveness of any worldview will thus become a matter of presentment, preference, power, or popularity.

As well, the emergence of alternative or revised worldview content may be part of an internal process, appearing inexorably within a traditional institution of knowledge. Or it may appear from an unaffiliated, independent, competing or dissenting source, whether expounded by individuals or groups. When coming from within an established religious, philosophical, scientific, or other institution or school of thought, the process of worldview revision can be viewed as simply part of the ongoing internal evolution of the discipline or tradition. When appearing from a non-traditional secondary source, the proffered transformed or amended worldview may on the one hand be closely related or empathetic to the prevailing system, and therefore easier to evaluate and integrate.

But on the other, if founded upon discordant or socially unacceptable premises and sources of authority, it may be perceived as incongruous with what is familiar and known, hence lacking the same legitimating criteria of trustworthiness and reliability. Thus the appearance of a dissenting unprecedented or unusual non-traditional worldview will provoke more stringent and sceptical analysis and evaluation from the proponents of the status quo. So the emergence of explicitly contrary or conflicting alternative worldviews is itself a phenomenon that seems to reflect a certain degree of urgency and sense of commitment on the part of those who envisaged, articulated, and propagated it. Dissatisfaction with the familiar coupled with sincere belief in the correctness and legitimacy of the new orientation seem to be the most obvious motivational factors. And if the feelings of inadequacy about the status quo position are strong, " voluntary destructuration" may ensue.

> Voluntary 'destructuration' … is the deliberate process of abandoning old forms and procedures… thus beliefs, rituals, even moral precepts are abandoned. [14]

The individuals who feel the urges, convictions, and certitude of belief must work with the prevalent "pre-given stock of knowledge" of the specific symbolic universe as they embark upon their quest to change or transform existing views. So the formation of a new or revised worldview must to some extent be based upon a selection and utilisation

[14] Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 85–86.

of "the elements required" from the acknowledged ideational materials of a culture, embedded in the different forms of knowledge, and transmitted by specific institutions. The "degree of the clarity of the insight" depends on how this alternative worldview is articulated and presented in relation to that which is already established and familiar. A plausible and workable presentment may eventuate with integration or absorption of ideas. A worldview that has emotional appeal may attract commitment and sympathetic curiosity. Needless to say, the spectrum of possible responses is wide. And the basis of authority upon which rests the credibility of an alternative worldview is also significant in establishing its legitimacy.

> Authority is measured by the probability that people will accept given values for the sole reason that someone else—the person or organization endowed with authority—practices or preaches such values. A person or organization may carry authority for certain people inasmuch as the fact that they vouch for the values in question will be seen by these people as a sufficient reason for acceptance and compliance. The authority a person or an organization wields therefore boils down to the likelihood that other people will follow their example or advice. That obedience may be justified in all sorts of terms, such as wisdom, truthfulness, experience, the moral integrity of the source of guidance which has been followed. In each case, however, what is justified is the *trust* of the followers in the basic soundness of the guidance that comes from such a source.
> The values we cherish are ultimately a matter of our choice. In the end it is we who bestow authority upon the examples we decide to follow and refuse authority to examples we do not like… To become an authority for us, a person or an organization must produce a *legitimation* or an argument which demonstrates why their advice for their hierarchy of values ought to be followed in preference to another…
> The alternative would be to defend new values as a revelation of sorts – either a result of an epoch-making discovery, a particularly profound insight into the truth of the matter, or a strong vision that pierced through the unknown and hence threatening future. This kind of argument is associated with *charismatic* legitimation… We can speak of charisma whenever the acceptance of certain values is motivated by conviction that the preacher or preachers of such values have superhuman qualities (unusual wisdom, foresight, access to sources of knowledge closed to ordinary men and women) that guarantee the trust of their vision and the propriety of their choice. [15]

Madame Blavatsky certainly qualifies as a charismatic leader, and the legitimation here spoken of applies to the initial impetus of the theosophical movement, when her "unusual wisdom, foresight, access to sources of knowledge closed to ordinary

[15] Zygmunt Bauman, *Thinking Sociologically,* Oxford: Basic Blackwell Ltd., 1990, pp. 118–121.

men and women" provided the authoritative foundation of the worldview espoused. First as described personally by Blavatsky, then as embedded organisationally in the system of ideas and beliefs. The theosophical option then became a matter of preference as a secondary minority cognitive system. And making a persuasive case for its adoption was what much of the work by Blavatsaky and others within the theosophical movement was about. The effort to convincingly make an "argument that demonstrates why their advice for their hierarchy of values ought to be followed in preference to another" was particularly directed against the three established traditional sources of knowledge and the respective religious, philosophical, and scientific worldviews prevalent in mainstream nineteenth century Western society. We will discuss the question of charisma in chapter eight, but now will examine the specific role of those three forms of knowledge as they pertain to the function of worldviews.

3.2.4 The Rationale for Blavatsky's Choice of Types of Knowledge

What distinguish worldviews from each other primarily are the uniqueness of ideational content and the concomitant associations of plausibility built into each system. In discussing such contents, it would be useful to look at analytical models that may be helpful in providing a convenient way of categorising the most common types of theoretical knowledge. As mentioned, the presence of religious, philosophical and scientific content seems to be a significant characteristic of the structure of explicitly intended comprehensive worldviews. It was a major assumption for Blavatsky when she chose to construct an alternative, and therefore must be accounted for in any analysis of worldviews. And though obviously other sources of cultural data, including aesthetic, political, technical, social, and other influences. are potentially part of the worldview mix, they are less comprehensively speculative and all encompassing. Religion, philosophy, and science in their exploratory forms attempt to create explicitly formulated symbolic universes, worldviews locating and explaining the status of man in the cosmos, and provide a totality of meaning to the nature of reality. That appears to be the line of thought behind Blavatsky's choice of those particular sources of knowledge for supportive use in shaping her synthesis. Thus any analysis of theosophical material must be based on recognition that those three forms of knowledge were considered especially

significant, and represented the most socially familiar and authoritative ways of describing reality at the time the alternative worldview was being conceived.

Two distinct yet complementary approaches to the roles of religion, philosophy and science in forming worldviews may help broaden our perspective. Madame Blavatsky seemed to feel that a synthesis of those types of knowledge would serve as a fully adequate and accurate means of presenting a novel worldview to the public. Although she consistently qualified the perception that there in fact were different means of obtaining truth, claiming that ultimately there was a supreme and transcendent "Truth" which subsumed all partial manifestations. However, is there any intrinsic basis for assuming that religion, philosophy, and science have special significance as cognitive components in worldviews, and justify Blavatsky's synthetic objective? Was she simply grasping for conceptual support randomly, or were the choice of religion, philosophy and science either a conscious or instinctive attempt to transmit the most credibility and legitimacy to her doctrinal system? We shall examine this subject first with a look at how those three forms of knowledge may be sociologically and historically considered, both as types of ideational content as well as specific modes of experience. Then in the next chapter we will look at Madame Blavatsky's treatment of religion, philosophy and science as sources in her synthetic systematic objective.

One analysis is from the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, and the other from philosopher E. A. Burtt. A number of sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers have categorised the different fields and forms of knowledge, but to extensively compare and analyse them would take us far beyond the scope of our inquiry. For instance, Georges Gurvitch in *The Social Framework of Knowledge* lists seven types of knowledge and five dichotomies of the forms of knowledge. Religion, philosophy, and science are classified and incorporated according to the different interpretative criteria of his schema. Philosophical and scientific knowledge comprise two of his seven types. He sees religious data (particularly mystical knowledge) as a form, specifically polarised with rational knowledge as one of the five dichotomies. Talcott Parsons in *The Social System* differentiates between empirical and non-empirical, cognitive and evaluative categories, placing religion, philosophy, and science (along with ideology) as the major divisions. However, the two examples we have chosen to discuss come from separate disciplines

and reveal complementary perspectives that help illuminate the historical dynamics at work in worldview creation.

3.3.1 Sorokin's Differentiation of the Truths of Faith, Reason, Sense

We begin with Sorokin, and his analysis of dominant cultural categories of truth. His division of three major systems of truth and six main epistemological currents is one approach to the interpretation of pertinent cultural phenomena. And though by no means exhaustive or methodologically indisputable, it does provide a useful outline for historically and typologically interpreting important characteristics of such worldviews. Right now, a brief examination of Sorokin's characterisations of the three components of the cultural truth systems will be useful. In his classification, the "Truth of Faith" corresponds in essence with the substance of religious experience and thought. Its subject matter is seen in this way.

> Mainly the supersensory, and superrational "subjects" and "realities." God, devil, angels. spirits; soul, immortality, salvation; sin; redemption; resurrection; paradise, purgatory, inferno; and so on, with an enormous number of other subproblems of the same kind...
> The sensory and empirical phenomena are studied only incidentally and even then not for their own sake but merely "visible signs of the invisible world," as symbols of the supersensory reality. The supreme discipline in such a system of truth is always theology as a science of the supersensory realities. The exposition of the truth is apodictic and symbolic. [16]
> .

And his "method of validation," or, from our perspective, legitimation, is based upon appeal to a sacred source, such as a revealed Scripture, demonstrated by divine inspiration. Logical reasoning and empirical criteria are only applied as secondary support apparatus and retain any degree of credibility if they are not seen as contradictory to the claims of revealed Scripture.

In his classification, the "Truth of Reason" corresponds basically to the parameters of philosophical thought. As such, this is how it is described.

> Partly supersensory, partly sensory-empirical. Each for its own sake, but the value of the knowledge about the sensory phenomena is subordinated to that of the supersensory "realities." The total system of knowledge here incorporates usually in the form of idealistically rationalistic philosophy... reasoning and empirical knowledge in the sense of the contemporary science. The ultimate

[16] Potirim Sorokin, *Social & Cultural Dynamics*, Boston: Extending Horizon Books, 1957, p 226.

> reality is thought of as knowable. The exposition of the truth is dialectic and deductive. [17]

And the method of validation requires the use of logical reasoning in conjunction with the testimony of the senses. As well, supplementary support drawn from sacred texts may be used to amplify or illustrate principles deduced or arrived at through the dialectical process.

In the "Truth of Sense" we see correspondence with the materials of scientific thought. This is how it is characterised.

> Mainly the world of the sensory perception, like the phenomena studied in the natural sciences. When ... the phenomena seem to have an aspect not easily reducible to the sensory material forms, science concentrates mainly at their sensory aspect and either disregards the "nonmaterial" aspect or treats it as subsidiary and tries to "measure them" through the measurement of the sensory-external phenomenal forms. Hence the tendency to "objectivism," "behaviourism," "quantivism," "mechanisticism." The supersensory realities are declared either non-existent, or irrelevant or "unknowable" (criticism, agnosticism, positivism). The natural sciences become the leaders as the most perfect, exact sciences, and are copied... Exposition of the truth is "inductive" and especially "experimental." [18]

And the method of validation for this type of truth is through the sense organs and their instrumental extensions, aided by the process of logical reasoning, especially mathematics. Hypotheses must be confirmed by accord with verifiable sensory facts, while the criteria of religious truth are of only superficial relevance.

And further clarification comes from distinguishing six epistemological currents. These are: 1 - Empiricism; 2A - Religious or ideational rationalism; 2B - Idealistic rationalism; 3 – Mysticism; 4 – Scepticism; 5 – Fideism; and 6 - Criticism. When connected to the three systems of truth, ideational or religious rationalism, mysticism and fideism primarily incorporate the truth of faith. Idealistic rationalism incorporates the truth of reason. And empiricism incorporates the truth of the senses. Scepticism is a purely negative, cynical and passive system. Criticism is a specific combination of scepticism, empiricism, and rationalism.

Rather than an extensive explication of each stated detail for each of the systems

[17] Ibid., p. 228.
[18] Ibid., p. 228.

of truth and their validations, let us now simply make a few general observations that have a bearing on our study. Firstly, the classification obviously is phrased in such terms to clearly indicate a reference to Western civilisation, although a wider application is possible with use of more expansive analogies. As well, terms like "Scripture" and "revealed truth" have obvious historical connotations, though, again, may be conceived in a broader sense. Especially when used in discussing "Truth of Reason" and "Truth of Sense." For instance, when mentioning the validation of Reason, one of the characteristics is use of quotations taken from the Scripture or deriving from a source equivalent to it. In some historical contexts, the literal reference is accurate. However in others, more emphasis should be put on the "source equivalent to it" interpretation. For instance, in many philosophical and scientific schools of thought, particular bodies of knowledge, texts, teachings, and so forth serve as similar authoritative criteria of legitimacy. While not imbued with the same purported transcendental validation, they yet provide a similar sort of evaluative functionality. What falls outside their parameters often immediately acquires the label of "falsehood", "error," "mistake" "misconception" because of non-conformity to the prevailing representations of the equivalent of "revealed truth."

Though just one very general differentiation of types of social knowledge, this schema can be utilised where applicable as a referential framework for evaluating and interpreting particular cultural phenomena. As well, when applied as a model for interpreting historical changes in patterns of thought, there is a basic continuity with a number of theories in which a movement from religious to philosophical to scientific worldviews is postulated. Although these modes of thought may simultaneously co-exist within a given society, the relative dominance and esteem of a particular form will be reflected in the legitimating authority of its institutions. For instance, in a worldview in which religion is the dominant source of legitimation, prioritisation of the validity of faith will overshadow the edifices of reason. And where philosophy or science dominates, the premises of the religious worldview will be modified or minimised. And even where science and philosophy are the dominating competing sources of primary legitimation, the relative preferences of rational or empirical ways of envisioning reality will become an issue of contention.

3.3.2 Burtt's Distinction of the Modes of Intuitionalism, Rationalism, Empiricism

The threefold division by Sorokin of truths of faith, reason and sense has an interesting correspondence in the outline of the evolution of thought presented by E. A. Burtt. in his book *In Search of Philosophic Understanding.* Although his assumptions are presented in the form of broad generalities, without extensive support or analysis, it supplements Sorokin's division of three systems of truth. However, Sorokin sees these systems of knowledge as part of more extensive integrated cultural wholes while Burtt differentiates between the types of knowledge in a general linear way.

He begins by recognising that the "common sense" world of everyday experience is a conditioned and imperfect representation of reality, and that common sense knowledge is inadequate in providing more comprehensive understanding of the "larger universe." He sees common sense knowledge as ambiguous, contradictory, lacking universal applicability, and conditioned by its social and historical environment. Burtt recognizes that three ways of "correcting common-sense" have historically evolved in Western civilization.

> Thus far, Western thought has hit upon three methods in the quest for a trustworthy way of correcting common-sense. They have appeared in a definite order. Surveying them in that order we may call them the ways of intuitionalism, rationalism and empiricism. [19]

These three methods fairly accurately correspond to Sorokin's systems of truth. Looking at Burtt's classifications, he sees "intuitionalism" as the first of a unique way of "correcting common sense."

> Taking intuitionism then as a distinctive way of revising common-sense beliefs, let us imagine ourselves in the age of the Hebrew prophets and the early Greek poets and tragedians who vividly illustrate it. During the same age farmers and artisans were slowly accumulating scraps of what now would be called technical lore... the intellectual elite—the shamans, seers, and prophets—did notice something else: the crucial and mysterious moment when a new idea, conveying a persuasive answer to some urgent perplexity, is born. Interpreted by the religious concepts which as yet were the only ones available for the purpose, these intuitions were naturally taken as revelations of the divine—oracles, inspired seizures—each carrying its voucher of authenticity on its face. Knowledge, thus interpreted, is an aggregate of such intuitions, bound together by no rational

[19] E.A. Burtt, *In Search of Philosophic Understanding*, New York and Toronto: Mentor Books, 1967, p. 29.

> order; any two of them might contradict each other. The criterion for determining their truth was in effect just the potent "compellingness" of each idea as it came.[20]

Historical over-simplification aside, this isolation of a "distinctive way of revising common-sense beliefs" illustrates some important points. For one, that articulation and cultural institutionalisation was instigated by an intellectual elite. When the "persuasive answer to some urgent perplexity" was intuited at the "crucial and mysterious moment," the new idea took on the representational form of the prevailing ideational legitimating institution. And, according to this interpretation, religious concepts were the only clearly articulated and accessible means of dealing with the crisis. As non-rational kinds of numinous experience, these intuitions were presumed to have a divine basis. And the referential context of legitimacy was implicit, with "each carrying its voucher of authenticity on its face." This kind of knowledge thus interpreted becomes the means of response to such existentially vexing situations. Thus, as a distinctive way of enhancing the common-sense interpretation of reality, the knowledge derived from the intuitional mode of experience is somewhat chaotic and ambivalent. Credibility and authenticity do not depend on rational or intellectual standards, but are determined by an indefinable and allusive emotionally powerful "compellingness" extrapolated from the dynamics of the encounter. What is inferred by compellingness and intuitional knowledge reverts finally to the domain of religion for derivation of explicit meaning.

In Burtt's account, the intuitional method of augmenting common sense knowledge was incapable of providing a logically connected and rationally grounded non-contradictory synthesis. Lack of coherence and conflicting intuitions without a means of resolution in his opinion illustrated the limitations of this form of knowledge. However, as history unfolded and other configurations of articulated experience emerged and matured, "intuitionalism," was joined by "rationalism" as a distinct means of knowledge. And it was one key factor that enabled this other approach to effectively work. This was the discovery of mathematics, and with it, the process of deductive inference.

This second essential phase of the acquisition of knowledge was concurrently evolving, but not yet ascendant as the primary legitimating methodology. Only when it

[20] Ibid.

became pervasively recognised as a valuable and viable approach capable of providing new coherence and meaning were the conceptual tools of mathematics and rational deduction accorded preferred legitimating status. The application of mathematical reasoning provided continuity between the diverse intuitions, creating a systematic compendium of knowledge based on abstract axioms of truth. And shared confirmation and understanding was possible for those who could apply the principles of logical reasoning, while the adequacy and credibility of any assumption could be tested publicly. By being able to predictably depend on the accuracy of such a mode of thought, all quantitative relations were capable of management and mastery, establishing a foundation of rational knowledge. And this eventually became ensconced as a dominant Western orientation for interpreting the nature of reality.

> The ideal of knowledge, as coherently organizable and demonstratively certain came to dominate Western thought, especially when the basic lesson of mathematics was confirmed by the logical syllogism of Aristotle. This formal pattern revealed the way in which the mind must proceed from any subject-predicate premises to a conclusion if the inference is to be valid. ...We may best refer to this revolutionary orientation... by the word "rationalism."
> ... Knowledge was now viewed as a system of truths bound together by strands of logic. No longer to be taken or left on the authority of a seer or the compulsion
>
> of some vivid idea, every piece of it was capable of demonstration. One could trace its necessary relations to a set of ultimate principles, which, when clearly grasped, appeared self-evidently true. [21]

Clearly, distinctive approaches to comprehending reality exist between intuitionalism and rationalism. The legitimising apparatus shifts from "the authority of a seer or the compulsion of some vivid idea" to a logically coherent and consistent system of truths. The pre-eminence of the rational form of knowledge extended from the practical domain to the speculative sphere. Being able to "trace its necessary relations to a set of ultimate principles" allowed for purely rational analytical criteria. And the recognition that by exercise of reason truth could be clearly comprehended and appear "self-evidently true" allowed for pure philosophical speculation. However, historically, in the social world, there are rarely occasions when only one type of knowledge or mode of experience exclusively dominates.

[21] Ibid., p. 31.

In fact, even as rationalism was acquiring more credibility, intuitionalism yet retained status as an entrenched way of comprehending reality. But one form did not totally replace the other, with each co-existing by prioritising experience somewhat differently, and extrapolating novel forms of signification. Thus, a certain amount of cross-fertilisation and revision existed between reason and special forms of intuition. Where empathy and connectivity could be found, a more comprehensive structure of knowledge could be established. However, much of the substance of intuitionism was simply intrinsically incompatible with the treatments of reason, deriving from a different modality of experience.

> Mere "inspired visions" unable to find a place in such a logical order, were no longer quite respectable—save in such fields as religion and art, where rationalism was long impotent to gain a sure foothold. Yet even there the intuitionism of the earlier vintage, at least, was forced into a losing struggle. The way of systematic demonstration, once successful everywhere, seemed clearly the way that ought to be successful everywhere. Reason, in its power to apprehend deductive form and self-evident axioms, is a single faculty, and once it has found itself it claims universal authority. [22]

The discontinuity with the emerging criteria of reason marginalized the claims of intuitionism somewhat. Any truth quotient must be sought for in the domains of religion and art, and recedes from the forefront of rationalist values. As the progressively dominant mode of representing reality, "the way of systematic demonstration" becomes accepted as the most viable and credible because it seems to be most satisfactory and sensible. The ideas, ideals, and the values of the rationalistic approach become the authoritative criteria and are used to judge and evaluate all facets of life. Reason is recognised as the most trustworthy and defensible orientation. Thus established as the most credible and esteemed form of knowledge, it becomes a defining component of the legitimation process. So that "once it has found itself it claims universal authority," leading to the pre-eminence of philosophers as specially qualified authorities about the nature of the real.

The rationalistic approach became institutionalised in the enterprise of philosophy, represented at first by the appearance of philosophers who engage in discursive speculation. The ideal of an inclusive, comprehensive worldview of reality

[22] Ibid.

construed through the apparatus of the rationalist method meant that all areas of human experience were susceptible to analysis and evaluation according to the criteria of logic. All dimensions of experience and all kinds of knowledge became the materials of particular conceptual and analytical treatments. And from each perspective, all significant categories of experience and knowledge were defined and woven into the specific all encompassing system promoted by the particular philosopher or school of thought. As a legitimising institution, philosophy emerged with a significant degree of authority, primarily amongst the intellectual elite. Other perspectives may have existed, but if incapable of displacing the entrenched approach they were accorded secondary eminence.

Despite the rise of philosophy as an authoritative institution of legitimisation, in continual contact or conflict with the institution of religion, both the intuitional and the rationalistic orientations were constrained in their modes of operation. And the philosophical application of reason itself was reconfigured to allow for a different prioritisation. The application of reason in the purely rationalistic way could produce self-consistent and systematically encompassing representations of reality, but even with those self-contained systems and their rigorous logic and axiomatic foundations, occasions presented themselves when what was observed in nature defied a single certain explanation. And again, a concurrent though historically more peripheral approach to envisioning reality rose to prominence as more adequate and applicable. This was the empirical approach, which was defined by a careful and thorough focus on the data of sense observation.

The change is one of orientation, based on a different set of criteria. The empirical, or scientific institution gradually acquired the defining characteristics that set it apart as a separate framework of legitimation. Through continued experimentation new parameters were established, so guidance and evaluation could be determined by reference to how those paradigms functioned over time. The cumulative result was an improved methodology by which alternative hypotheses could be tested and evaluated according to their conformity to known facts and logical plausibility. The supporting rationalist logical framework was employed where seemingly needed, and retained if it appeared to be feasible. However, the new orientation presupposed an ideal of continued refinement and adaptability to account for any new facts of evident knowledge.

> The success of the way of empiricism has likewise proved definitive. Once established, its drastic reconstruction of the principles of rationalism has been retained. A system of propositions unable to square itself with the relevant observable facts is no longer quite respectable. [23]

The transition in prominence of legitimating institutions resulted in rationalism, as expressed in philosophical systemisation, to inevitably recede as the most esteemed method of envisioning reality. The scope and focus of philosophical inquiry was compelled to change as science, or "the way of empiricism," grew in stature and credibility. With the expectation that new facts would stimulate the formation of new hypotheses, the prioritisation of the emerging methodology eventuated in a revised set of criteria and ideals. The valuation of the ideals of reason was not totally abandoned, but a different orientation evolved founded upon that "drastic reconstruction of the principles of rationalism."

So, tracing the various ways of worldview adaptation, we see that each has its own unique configuration and institutional representation. In Western history, there have been shifts of stature and importance for each, although they have existed simultaneously in various stages of maturation and influence. And Western civilisation has thus passed through a historical process with a distinctive mix of orientations by which to interpret the world.

> In the era of intuitionism his world was what custom and habit had traditionally taken for granted, modified slowly by novel ideas that appealed to this or that keen mind and were gradually accepted by others. In the era of rationalistic confidence his world was a system of principles generally regarded as self-evident along with inferences about the cosmos that could logically be drawn from them. Now in the era of empiricism, his world is the manifold of facts of observation, organized in more or less comprehensive theories and continually expanding through new discoveries. It is in that world that you and I live today, and it is slowly becoming accepted by all living men. [24]

Burtt's sequence of events is instructive more for its identification of distinguishing types of knowledge by which common sense could be "corrected" than for the presumption of a straightforward linear and inexorable progression. The historical identification of "the era of intuitionism," "the era of rationalism," "the era of

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., p. 34.

empiricism" does however generally indicate the conditions in which the respective distinctively articulated representations of reality were dominant, and fairly well correspond to the eras which Sorokin thought each system of truth dominated.

3.3.3 Comparison of the Two Approaches to Knowledge

It need be stressed that analytical classifications are never absolutely precise for each and every occasion. Sorokin's division of the three systems of truth within a culture is a generally useful way of organising historical data, but not the only way. And Burtt's enunciation of intuitional, rationalistic, and empirical types of knowledge and corresponding eras likewise is a constructive speculative outline, that isolates and concentrates on certain tendencies.

The correspondence in thought in these two outlooks is as follows. Religion is the institution representing and legitimising the "Truth of Faith" or "intuitionism." Philosophy is the institution embodying the "Truth of Reason," or "rationalism." And science is the institution defining and articulating the "Truth of Sense," or, "empiricism." Collectively they represent the three main western historical sources of knowledge, providing the formal "stock of ideas" which are utilised in constructing worldviews.

The focus on these three forms, of course, does not presume other significant interpretative channels do not exist or provide important functions. For instance, the arts, and the entire aesthetic domain have always served as a significant cultural repository for embodying value and meaning. Sometimes serving to enhance and amplify strains of already articulated belief systems, sometimes suggesting more intangible personal and imponderable allusions of significance. The forms, imagery, resonant themes may more easily conform to a prevailing ideational framework or else may appear in any degree of flux towards new or less prevalent directions.[25]

Although all such classifications of knowledge are inevitably selected from a broader cultural mix , they do reveal distinctive characteristics and have co-existed in different configurations of influence and eminence. In bringing down the theoretical and

[25] See Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Humanities,* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966, and Susan K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* New York: Mentor Books, 1948, for analyses of the connection between knowledge and aesthetics.

formal to the domain of the everyday world, and extending the inquiries of common sense into a more abstract sphere, assimilation becomes a fusion of personal and cultural concerns. The individual grapples with the culturally available representations of reality while trying to accommodate subjective feelings and thoughts. Although the elite theoreticians hone and shape the minutiae of definition and implication, it usually requires a more direct emotional and intuitive connection before the "self-evident" nature of any framework takes hold.

When we look at the way these three forms of knowledge contribute to the contents of worldviews, what is important to note is that historically in Western society they collectively were the acknowledged primary sources of credible facts, speculative theories, trustworthy insights about the nature of reality. From the historical and ideational setting Blavatsky was located in, the only way to present an alternative worldview was by challenging the premises and conclusions drawn from these fields of knowledge and embedded in the then dominant worldviews. Whether religion, philosophy and science were viewed simply as repositories of particular kinds of traditional knowledge; or the "Truth of Religion," the "Truth of Reason," and "the "Truth of the Senses" were considered as integral components of a cultural whole; or "intuitionalism," "rationalism," and "empiricism" were seen as distinctive modes of human perception; dealing with the data pertaining to these three sources was critical for the formation of any encompassing worldview. And it was by recognising the necessity of both utilising selective materials and confronting and challenging existing assumptions that Blavatsky was able to make the claim of an alternative and preferable synthesis. Despite radically unorthodox interpretations of traditional material, the only way to gain credibility was by acknowledging the need to critique the existing dominant religious, philosophic and scientific worldviews and by reconstructing and reinterpreting them in a way which still respected their traditional status and effectiveness even while disputing many of their premises and conclusions. This leads us to a discussion of the religious, philosophical and scientific interpretations of knowledge that prevailed during this time frame, and an overview of the major elements of the esoteric alternative cognitive perspective.

3.4.1 An Overview of Traditional Christianity in the Nineteenth Century – Conflict Between Religion and Science

Let us begin by looking at the status of mainstream traditional Western religion during the period the theosophical initiative was being contemplated and constructed. Christianity, both in its Catholic and Protestant forms, was the dominant religious framework for interpreting and representing the nature of reality during the nineteenth century. Despite a plethora of variations in doctrine, belief, and themes of emphasis pertaining to individual Christian movements and churches (particularly Protestant), a disputable generic Christian worldview was felt to be undeservedly dominant by Madame Blavatsky. Key elements sustaining the legitimacy of that worldview were trust in faith as a criterion of truth, belief in the supernatural as a primary operative force, the eschatological impetus of history, and the unique and special divinity of Jesus Christ. The last half of the nineteenth century in particular saw major elements of the Christian worldview come into direct conflict with the representation of reality emerging from the domain of the sciences and from rational critique in general. The "conflict between religion and science" was a phrase repeatedly used at both sophisticated and popular levels of discourse, and reflected in general the movement towards secularity in Western societies. Essentially, it indicated a transition from the religious worldview orientation to the philosophic or more prominently, the scientific.

> The word secularisation began as an emotive word, not far in its origins from the word anticlericism. Sometimes it meant a freeing of the sciences, of learning, of the arts, from their theological origins or theological bias. Sometimes it meant the declining influence of churches, or of religion, in modern society. … A word to describe a process, whatever that process was, in the changing relationship between religion and modern society, a process arising in part out of the industrial revolution and the new conditions of urban and mechanical life, in part out of the vast growth in new knowledge of various kinds. [26]

Two issues in particular characterised the nature of this dispute from the point of view of the defenders of the religious status quo. One was the crisis of credibility engendered through rationally grounded scholarly and critical treatments of the Bible. The work of

[26] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p.264.

many, including David Strauss, F.C. Baur, Bishop Colenso, Ernest Renan, and Bruno Bauer brought many of the basic assumptions under scrutiny.

> The nineteenth century… brought Christianity to face the biggest intellectual crisis of its history. The Bible, though not always regarded as absolute literal truth, had been regarded for many centuries as the inspired word of God. People might differ as to the mechanism whereby the writers of the scriptures received inspiration from God, but it was generally agreed that here was a body of writing that showed forth in detail God's revelation. The authority of the Bible was supposedly guaranteed by the miracles that verified the teachings of Christ and of the prophets. Protestantism had even stronger reasons for the veneration of the Bible. The Bible was the rock of authority upon which Protestant Reformation rested. It was particularly important to those of Evangelical persuasion. … Nor was the Catholic position altogether different. … [27]

The other was the implication of fallibility deriving from the theory of evolution.

> Darwin's account … devastated the myth of the past upon which religious faith rested. The Origin of Species delivered the coup de grace to whatever lingering hopes there were that the historicity of the Bible and the Judaeo-Christian view of man springing from it would somehow be substantiated by science. The long-cherished providential theory, that God had created man, in all his pristine perfection, as a special favour, and tailored the universe to his special needs, was finished. Man was merely the most highly developed (for the moment) form of animal life and subject to the same laws of development that governed the rest; he was even given a museum label, Homo sapiens. [28]

3.4.2 An Overview of Traditional Christianity in the Nineteenth Century – Protestant and Catholic Stances

These two areas of dispute, along with various historical and doctrinal stances brought the Christian worldview(s) under attack when the standards of evaluation were based on purely rational and empirical criteria. From within the Protestant tradition, a number of specific reactions emerged. Here we see two different stances.

> Certain Protestant sects, particularly evangelical groups, rejected both evolution and the higher criticism root and branch. They clung to the literal word of the Bible and defended the inspiration theory and special-creation doctrine. These thoroughly devout and orthodox religionists came to be known, at the close of the century, as Fundamentalists. Some liberal Protestants were inclined to accept evolution and the findings of biblical scholarship. They made a real effort to

[27] Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, London and Glasgow: The Fontana Library, 1973, p. 623.
[28] Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas,* New York/London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973, pp. 227–228.

> reconcile the essentials of Christianity with modern science and criticism. This school of Protestant thought came to be known as devout modernists. They resembled the Christian deists of the preceding century. While accepting the idea that the universe, the earth, and its inhabitants were produced by evolutionary processes, and conceding that the Bible was written without direct supernatural inspiration, the devout modernists vigorously maintained their belief in God and the divinity of Jesus Christ. [29]

And the position of the Roman Catholic Church also maintained a strict adherence to traditional lines. During the papacy of Pius IX (1846–1878) a hardening of entrenched positions was fostered by the reaffirmation of a number of controversial doctrines. These included the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the issuance of the papal encyclical, *Quantra cura,* and the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1864, which denounced the tendency to pursue naturalistic intellectual inquiries. As well, the announcement of the dogma of papal infallibility in 1870 provoked controversy and cynicism from critics. And this outlook was sustained when the succeeding pope, Leo XIII (1878–1903) maintained the critique of modern intellectual tendencies by reaffirmation of the encyclical and syllabus of 1864 and the reassertion of the theology of Thomas Aquinas in his encyclical, *Aeterni patris*. The official and authoritative position of the Roman Catholic Church thus left little room for adaptability, or deviation from its traditional worldview.

> From the beginning to the end of the century, the Catholic church stood firmly against evolution, biblical scholarship, and all other phases of the new learning which directly challenged Catholic dogmas … But the Catholic church opposed promptly and vigorously those scientific discoveries which cut at the roots of Catholic doctrines. Works which were deemed in any way dangerous were placed upon the index of forbidden books. [30]

The crisis in intellectual credibility of institutional Christianity was not necessarily something that filtered down through all spheres of religious interest, as popular pietism, focus on social reforms, proliferation of new sects and the spread of foreign missions served to sustain the legitimacy of Christianity. However its status as an unassailable and taken-for-granted ideational edifice was now brought under more scrutiny. And it was on that larger encompassing theoretical and conceptual level where critique was directed. It was under those circumstances that Blavatsky and other

---

[29] Harry Elmer Barnes, *An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World,* Volume Three, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1965, pp. 983–984.
[30] Ibid., p. 986.

expounders of mid and late nineteenth century minority cognitive orientations confronted the established religious institutions.

3.5.1 An Overview of Traditional Philosophical Schools and Trends in the Nineteenth Century – the Idealist Orientation

When we turn to the philosophical milieu of this period, we find that two major trends are evident. On the one hand, primarily the influences of Kant and Hegel in various forms of idealism, romanticism, and more critical reactions in other directions. On the other, philosophies that prioritised the input of scientific (particularly, evolutionary) materials. The interaction of both orientations resulted in a number of distinctive outlooks.

> It is clear, then, that the development of European thought in the course of the nineteenth century proceeded according to three dialectical stages—idealism, scientific evolutionism, and a simultaneous operation of both tendencies. Despite their antagonism both tendencies had certain essential features in common: the tendency towards system, a markedly rationalistic attitude toward the world of experience; a disinclination to penetrate into the area of reality behind appearances—or even to admit its existence; and lastly, the monistic tendency which allows human personality to be merged into the Absolute or into the evolution of the universe. Rationalism, phenomenalism, evolutionism, monistic antipersonalism, and the development of great systems largely determined the pattern of the nineteenth century. [31]

The pre-eminent philosopher during the early part of the nineteenth century was Hegel, who constructed an elaborate and comprehensive philosophy based on the belief that the universe was entirely rational, and comprehensible as such through philosophical speculation. This premise was rejected in some circles and precipitated a "back-to-Kant" movement, in which only what was cognisable in the phenomenal world was considered valid knowledge, and the "things-in-themselves" of the noumenal domain were considered outside the sphere of proper speculation. Karl and Ernst Reinhold, Jacob Friedrich Fries, Ernst Kuno Fischer, F.A. Lange, Friedrich Paulsen, Charles Bernard Renouvier amongst others exemplify this position. Reaction to Hegel extended in another direction as well, where the social implications of his system were considered inadequate

[31] I.M. Bochenski, *Contemporary European Philosophy*, Berekey and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966, p. 8.

or not fully extrapolated. Most notable exponents of the "Hegelians of the left" movement were Ludwig Feurbach and Karl Marx. In moving from the idealism of Hegel to an explicitly materialistic philosophy, Marx reflected one of the philosophical trends by which the claims and assumptions of nineteenth century science were taken as unquestioned givens, and utilised to devise newer and more socially and historically focussed speculative theories.

> Perhaps among the materialisms begun in the nineteenth century it was Marxism that became the leading exponent of such views, because it, more so than the others, took over the impressive Hegelian synthesis of modern thought and presented itself as an outgrowth and improvement upon it. But it no doubt also achieved a position of eminence because of the relevance of its special content to an agonizing social problem which the European industrial development had left wallowing in its wake. [32]

Feurbach's materialist inclinations were further explored and extended by Buchner and Haeckel. As we shall see in looking at nineteenth century scientific thought, materialism as a philosophy more properly expresses a valuation of the empirical orientation.

A number of more personalised eclectic combinations of varying portions of romanticism, idealism, and science attained popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century. Arthur Schopenhauer construed a philosophical system drawing upon Kant and newly accessible translations of Eastern religious texts. Rudolf Hermann Lotze combined romanticism, idealism, and mechanistic theories. Eduard von Hartmann sought to synthesise Hegel and Schopenhauer, and popularised the idea of the unconscious. Victor Cousin attempted to mix Germanic and Cartesian sources. Sir William Hamilton stimulated interest in Kantian ethics and metaphysics. F.H. Bradley utilised materials of German idealism and empiricism. Bernard Bousenquet reaffirmed Hegel's belief in the power of philosophical speculation. Josiah Royce explored the idea that universal consciousness is differentiated into individual selves through the action of the will. These and other explicit or quasi-idealist philosophical positions provided a number of variations on the Kantian and Hegelian schools, and served as feasible intellectual options for those trying to maintain a position in which "spirit" under one guise or another was pre-eminent or superior to "matter."

[32] Harry Prosch, *The Genesis of Twentieth Century Philosophy*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1966, p. 340.

> The Idealists were committed to a faith in the cosmic significance of man, to a substantial God, to a future immortality, to a cosmic moral order. During the nineteenth century, the scientific spirit was steadily undermining such a faith. The Idealists were committed to a "transcendent" or supernaturalistic philosophy. But such philosophies were steadily giving way to philosophies based on scientific methods. The Idealists still insisted on escaping into a realm inaccessible to scientific inquiry, despite the fact that enlarged and broadened scientific methods and concepts were making such escape impossible… [33]

As well, an empathetic source of support for the broad idealistic and romantic philosophies came from literary personages who attempted to add explicitly presented philosophical substance to their beliefs. These included Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth, Goethe, Alcott, Emerson and Thoreau amongst others. And a more extreme variation on the theme of the primacy of the subjective, minus the idealistic framework of support, came from proto-existentialist thinkers Fredrich Nietzche and Soren Kierkgaard. Nietzche in fact comes at the end of a line of critics of Hegel, and signifies the dramatic change of orientation that accrued from the earlier to the later part of the nineteenth century.

> Whatever abyss separates Nietzsche's anti-Christian philosophy from Hegel's philosophical theology and his "hammer" from Hegel's "speculation" is bridged by Hegel's pupils through a consequent series of revolts against Christian tradition and bourgeois culture. At the beginning and end of this bridge stand Hegel and Nietzche. [34]

3.5.2 An Overview of Traditional Philosophical Schools and Trends in the Nineteenth Century – Non-Idealist Perspectives

Another philosophical direction was more amicable to the hypothesis that scientific ideas and knowledge could provide a more valid direction to speculative inquiry. The utilitarianism and theory of logic of John Stuart Mill, the pragmatic orientation of William Peirce, F.C.S. Schiller, William James, the early stage of John Dewey's career, the positivist philosophy of Auguste Compte, the evolutionary speculation of Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer and John Fiske, and other perspectives represented this non-idealistic outlook. The influence of science on philosophy during the latter half of the nineteenth century in fact changed the very way philosophy was

[33] John Herman Randall Jr., *Philosophy After Darwin,* New York: Columbia University Press, 1977, p. 8.

conducted for many.

> But by 1860 the scientific faith had been established and no longer stood in need of philosophical support and defense. It was now, many came to feel, religious and moral values that needed defense against the "encroachments" of science. The problem of earlier modern philosophy had been to make a mechanistic science "intelligible" in a human and social world—originally in the Aristotelian universe. But the prestige of "science" grew, until by 1860 the problem had become rather to make man and his society and culture intelligible in a mechanistic and scientific universe. [35]

No longer was it a self-sufficient enterprise guided by purely rational and conceptual criteria, but for those abandoning purely idealistic models, philosophy was only legitimised as a technique for articulation of the implications and meaning of scientific knowledge. And as such, it essentially lost status as the more credible and independent source of authoritative knowledge

> Toward the end of the nineteenth century philosophy declined under the heavy hand of positivism. Most philosophers were frightened, perhaps to expound their own thought, with the result that most universities were dominated by a certain historicism, confining themselves to the sheer cataloguing of past doctrines. [36]

3.6.1 An Overview of Science in the Nineteenth Century – Permeation of Materialism

The scientific representation of reality emerged as the dominant worldview by the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. And it was not necessarily only through the theories and statements of scientific innovators and theoreticians themselves that science attained primary legitimacy, but through the efforts of philosophers who articulated, shaped, extrapolated the broadest meaning from the raw material of scientific investigation and hypotheses. For instance, Huxley and Spencer were responsible for popularising and refining the evolutionary theory suggested by Darwin to encompass a broader sphere of historical and social applications. Comte essentially substituted a contrived secular scientism for traditional religious forms. Haeckel, Draper, Vogt, Moleschott, Buchner popularised and expounded variations of the materialist philosophy that emerged as the most publicly identifiable of purely scientific worldviews. The

---

[34] Karl Lowith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1967, p. 174.
[35] Randall, op. cit., p. 14.
[36] Bochinski, op. cit., p.22.

opportunity of promulgating the new vision was often treated as a special cause, with full emotional intensity and commitment on the part of those attempting to win converts to the emerging new scientific orthodoxy. And this emerging authoritarian stance was predisposed to treat the entrenched religious position with disdain, acting sanctimoniously towards those unwilling to accept the new gospel of evolutionism as the self-evidently most credible orientation towards reality.

> It is part of Huxley's importance that, together with Haeckel, he brought the man of science as a cultural type into the broader arena of European civilization. The warfare between evolution and orthodoxy created a splendid dramatic opportunity, and with the quick instinct of a man of action Huxley seized it. To the cleric as the benighted and prejudiced defender of a fading superstition, he opposed the scientist, the impersonal investigator who, though somewhat satanically godless and inhumanly detached, is by virtue of his dedication and disciplined devotion to truth in the field of thought, to rectitude in the field of action, and – because truth is power, and in its nineteenth century form rectitude is sympathy – to humanitarian progress in both fields. [37]

Materialism essentially was the logical extreme of an exclusive and narrowly defined empiricism, eventuating in the polar opposite worldview that was represented in traditional Christian expressions. The indestructibility of matter and the conservation of energy were the primary scientific principles that supported a mechanistic view of the cosmos, while evolution by natural selection allowed a mechanistic interpretation of life to be integrated into the scientific worldview.

Naturalism replaced supernaturalism, mechanism replaced divine purpose, matter was absolute, not requiring the hypothesis of soul, and evolution replaced special creation. As a self-sufficient and inclusive worldview, materialism became synonymous with science in its most speculative and authoritative nineteenth century form.

> Science was advancing, filling in the details of the Cartesian and Newtonian program: the results were so impressive that by 1860 they could no longer be disregarded. The fundamental dogmas of the scientific faith now served to organize a vast body of facts that could scarcely be gainsaid. In the nineteenth century they took the form of sweeping generalizations: the conservation of energy, the law of thermodynamics, the method of natural selection in biological evolution, the mechanical theory of life. Above all, there was the dogma of an unyielding mechanistic determinism… The most speculative generalizations …

[37] William Irvine, *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution*, Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1962, p. 117.

> were seized upon after the middle of the century to complete the picture of what was called the "scientific world." Nineteenth century science … still clung to the same fundamental assumptions of a closed mechanical and material order of Nature … With this framework and with these assumptions and dogmas, the backbone of the scientific faith, shaken believers in the older traditions felt that they had to come to terms. [38]

The materialist worldview drew upon the discoveries and theories of the different branches of the sciences, and collectively presented a picture of reality that was speculative and hypothetical, but carried the prestige and legitimacy that religion and philosophy no longer embodied. To critics, it was perceived as demeaning and selective, based upon assumptions and premises that were not necessarily as absolute and sacrosanct as proclaimed by its proponents.

3.6.2 An Overview of Science in the Nineteenth Century – Two Emerging Themes

The kind of pessimistic and accusatory attitude towards materialism shown by detractors was based not only on disagreement with its claims and contents, but with the diminishment and elimination of what were considered spiritual or transcendent realities, pertaining both to the universe and to the subjective self. And in attempting to confront and repudiate the dominant and authoritative materialistic worldview, it was necessary to provide more feasible alternatives while showing justification for rejection of the scientific status quo. The spectrum of dispute for those opposed to the scientific mainstream position encompassed a variety of positions. From militant denials of the basic claims of science, to those aspiring to reach a compromise that incorporated at least some religious values and premises, the intellectual climate of the second half of the nineteenth century was often characterised by polarised tensions

And the rejection of the mainstream status quo applied not only to those ensconced within traditional religious or philosophical circles. Many of those who were dissatisfied with contemporary intellectual currents in general felt opposition to the narrow and restrictive doctrinaire posture of materialism. A variety of alternative cognitive orientations appeared, covering a spectrum of ideas ranging from close association with the prevailing trends to more radical dissociation and reprioritised

[38] Randall, op. cit., p. 12.

options. Two influential trends can be discerned emerging from the post-Darwinian climate, affecting subsequent schools of thought. On the one hand, the idea of progress as an independent belief or sustaining principle. Such movements as social Darwinism, Marxist socialism, and the emerging new liberal theology can be seen to have their roots in the idea of evolutionary progress. This hypothesis was transposed from the biological domain and reassigned to account for a variety of historical and social phenomena. And on the other hand, the valuation of the non-rational spheres of consciousness was a revolt against the dominant scientism and rationalism. In the artistic domain for example, the neo-romantic valuation of intuition, emotion, and the non-rational can be seen as a reaction against what was felt to be dehumanising and reductive in the materialistic worldview. [39] These two themes informed a variety of other alternative cognitive positions to some degree. Perhaps none more so than the initial theosophical stance.

3.7.1 An Overview of Alternative Esoteric Sources of the Nineteenth Century – The Ideas of Progress and the Non-Rational Accessible to Blavatsky

In her efforts at construing a comprehensive alternative worldview, Madame Blavatsky was clearly affected by both streams of ideational influence. She aggressively promoted the legitimacy and importance of non-rational modes of experience while determinedly sticking to a rationally expounded but unorthodox theory of evolutionary progress. The non-rational was primarily evaluated as a domain of supersensory and mystical experience while evolutionary progress was considered to have a spiritual objective as its underlying impetus. However, before discussion of theosophical issues proper, it is important to note that this initiative was not the only minority cognitive position that was grounded upon promotion of unorthodox spiritual and occult beliefs. Other nineteenth century trends and movements also emerged in protest to the religious, philosophical, and scientific worldviews of the nineteenth century. The gravitation towards other directions for quasi-idealist and religious interests took many unconventional alternative forms, in part stimulated by new sources of knowledge as well

[39] See Tim M. Berra, *Evolution and the Myth of Creation,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. Christopher Kaiser, *Creation and the History of Science,* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1991. Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe,* Harmondsworth and Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1968.

as by a renewed interest in past minority positions.

> New trends in scholarship were pressed into support of religion; on the one hand, the techniques of the new experimental psychology; on the other hand, the opening to Asian philology and history, such as the translations of Hindu texts (beginning in 1875) by the Oxford professor Max Mueller, an import from German philology seminars. This was the heyday of séances and spirit-callings, of Madame Blavatsky (who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875) and Annie Besant (the Theosophical leader in the 1890s). In 1882 Sedgwick and F.W.H. Meyers, a psychologist and fellow Trinity man, founded the Society for Psychic Research, seeking scientific evidence of the survival of bodily death… [40]

Madame Blavatsky did not work in an intellectual vacuum. In fact, a consistent theme of hers was that she was merely articulating and synthesising selected elements from this larger and enduring "wisdom tradition." Her particular ideational construction however, was not the only attempt to claim this pedigree and use it for legitimating authority. Many of the nineteenth century occult, mystical, mythological, conceptual, historical, speculative ideas, themes, and materials were part of a minority cognitive perspective. Many proponents of specific belief systems claimed continuity with traditions dating back to ancient Egyptian, Neoplatonic, Gnostic, and "mystery schools of antiquity," passed on through Medieval and Renaissance mystical, alchemical, hermetic, cabbalistic, magical, astrological, and other similar positions into their more contemporary forms. This has more recently been termed the "esoteric worldview" by Faivre, Hanegraaff, and others. Faivre for instance, though noting the roots of Western esotericism in antiquity, considers the Renaissance as the defining historical starting point because of the separation of the sciences of nature from theology.

> From then until the present, a vast field is constituted, comprised of fundamental characteristics (or components) selected from a multiform historical corpus… On the one hand, are presented three rivers, the three "traditional sciences," which do not seem to belong to any epoch in particular: alchemy, astrology, magic (in the Renaissance sense of *magia*), generally linked to some kind of arithmosophy … On the other hand, there are a certain number of streams that have hollowed out their bed at relatively determinable moments (often starting with a founder's text). These are in no way alien to the three large rivers because all this is intermingled. From the end of the fifteenth century on these streams are the Christian Kabbalah (an adaptation of the Jewish Kabbalah), neo-Alexandrian Hermetism, discourses inspired by the idea of *philosophia perennis* and of the "primordial Tradition," the

[40] Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies*, Cambridge, MA. And London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 669.

> philosophy of nature of the Paracelsian variety, then the Romantic (partly German) *Naturphilosophic*; from the seventeenth century on, theosophy and Rosicrucianism (both Germanic at first), as well as the later associations (initiatory societies more or less inscribed in the wake of the former).
> We might have believed that these rivers and streams would disappear after the Renaissance. But when the great epistemological break of the seventeenth century occurred, they survived, and the scientism of the nineteenth century did not cause them to dry up. [41]

Not all movements, philosophies, theoretical constructs, necessarily expressed absolute conformity or consistency, or covered the exact same ground, but enough common principles and values have been discerned to consider them representative of a distinctive minority mindset. Hanegraaff expands upon Faivre's delineation by noting that the post-Enlightenment intellectual atmosphere of the nineteenth century, dominated by secularisation, further shaped and determined the forms of esotericism.

> The impact of Western processes of rationalization and secularisation … is of an importance which can scarcely be overestimated… it represents *the* decisive watershed in the history of western esotericism. The survival of esotericism under the conditions of post-Enlightenment processes of secularisation produced new and unprecedented phenomena… in spite of their diversity, they have emerged essentially from two broad movements, both of which are rooted in the late 18th century and have flourished in the 19th. The first of these is *Romanticism*: a movement with deep roots in the esoteric tradition, but shaped decisively by the Enlightenment and, especially, the Counter-Enlightenment. The second is most properly referred to as *occultism* … Both movements … can be defined as the products of a clash of worldviews. Romanticism emerged from a momentous event: The reinterpretation of esoteric cosmology under the impact of the new evolutionism. This changed the nature of esotericism forever, but left the internal consistency of its worldview essentially intact. Occultism, in contrast, came into existence when the esoteric cosmology (based on universal correspondences) increasingly came to be understood in terms of the new scientific cosmologies (based on instrumental causality). As a result, the internally consistent worldview of traditional esotericism gave way to an unstable mixture of logically incompatible elements. In both streams (and in the various hybrid combinations that emerged) traditional esoteric ideas and concepts continued to be used under the new conditions but, since meaning and function depend on context, they inevitably underwent subtle but important changes. [42]

---

[41] Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, Albany, New York: State University Press of New York, 1994, p. 8.
[42] Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998, pp. 406–407.

It was these new conditions of a secularised and scientifically dominated worldview that shaped the hybrid appearance of theosophy as expounded by Madame Blavatsky. Yet her construction was not the only esoteric manifestation. *In The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Joscelyn Godwin traces the emergence of various esoteric movements and innovators from the period of the Enlightenment through the nineteenth century, of both the romantic and the occult persuasions, emphasising that the intellectual climate was ripe for the fermentation of alternative minority cognitive positions that prioritised spiritual and occult values above the dominant traditional religious, philosophical, and scientific outlooks.

3.7.2 An Overview of Alternative Esoteric Sources of the Nineteenth Century – Western Influences

He begins by noting that one of the new minor streams of non-conventional thought was directed towards a radical reinterpretation of religious and mythological materials. Two specific themes are identified by which all such data was believed to be capable of reduction to a single cause. These were phallic and solar worship. Leading proponents of the idea that world myths, legends, religious symbols derive from worship of the generative powers included Richard Payne Knight (1751–1824), Sir William Hamilton (1730–1803), Pierre Francois Hughes, known as "Baron d'Hancarville" (1719 or 1729–1805), Charles Townley (1737–1805), Antoine Court de Gebelin, Charles Dupuis, Sir William Jones (1746–1794), Henry O'Brien (1808–1835), John Davenport (1789–1877), Captain Edward Sellon (1817 or 1818–1866), Thomas Inman, Hargrave Jennings (1817?– 1890). As well as expounding a controversial and unorthodox theory, a common anti-traditionalism and cynicism towards Christianity was a prevailing sentiment.

The other main reductive theory was the belief that all religious and mythological materials derive from a worship of nature, with the sun considered the primary symbolic object of worship. Leading theoreticians of this school included Francois Dupuis (1742–1809), Constantin Francois de Volney (1757–1820), and Sir William Drummond (1770?–1828). As well, besides proposing a disputable and controversial theory, the prevailing attitude was also anti-Christian and non-traditional.

In addition to as these two lines of alternative speculation, many other distinctive approaches to an esoteric worldview can be discerned. Samson Arnold Mackey (1765–1843), influenced by Hindu mythology devised an elaborate mythical cosmology based on the changing conditions of the earths shifting axis. Godfrey Higgins (1772 – 1833), most explicitly in his *Anacalypsis* constructed a complex worldview called "*the Mythos*," that prefigured a number of theosophical theories. Most notably, it proposed the belief in cosmic cycles with their own subsequent emanations of gods, races, civilizations, individuals, and spiritual avatars. Catastrophic natural disasters were thought to be the cause of the destruction of past civilizations, and new cycles were believed to commence every 6,007 years. The early nineteenth century was considered to be the ending of the Piscean era and the start of the Aquarian cycle.

Another stream of minority cognitive influence came from the input of diverse magicians, seers, and secret organizations. Samuel Falk (1710–1782), Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772), Cagliostro (1743–1795), Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740–1812), Manoah Sibly (1757–1840), Ebenezer Sibly (1751–1799), General Charles R. Rainsford (1728–1809), and Francis Barrett amongst others contributed to the valuation of the non-rational, the magical, and the occult. Barrett's main work, *The Magus or Celestial Intelligencer* (1801) was a popular literary production. Though largely drawn from seventeenth century writings of Henry Cornelius Agrippa, J.B.van Helmont, Peter of Abano, and Giambattista Porta, it present to the public a compendium of occult ideas and techniques.

> For all that Barrett misrepresented his material, *The Magus* did offer the public a fairly complete occult manual, which taught the principles of arithmology and correspondences, planetary and Kabbalistic magic, and scrying technique. A series of potted biographies of great magicians complete the work. There was stuff aplenty there for aspiring magi, as well as for the gothic novelists who were part of the same reaction against classicism and pure reason. [43]

As well, Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875), a gifted spiritualist medium, healer, orator, made a notable impact through his travelling lectures, teachings, books, and remedies. And the afore mentioned Hargrave Jennings, interpreter of Buddhist thought, enthusiast of Gnostic teachings, theorist of sexual symbolism, and later expounder of

[43] Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Albany, New York: State University of New York

Christian pietism, also was a charismatic and influential figure.

In addition to the transmission by charismatic individuals, a number of secret societies maintained continuity of portions of esoteric teachings. Those mostly were forms of, or derived from, different variants of Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry. "Fellows of the Rosy Cross," "The Golden and Rosy Cross," "The Asiatic Brethren," "The S.R.I.A." (or, "Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia"), "The "Orphic Circle," (the predecessor to "The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn"), "The Sat B'hai", "The Rite of Swedenborg", "The Brotherhood of the Mystic Cross", "The Brotherhood of Light", "The Society of Eight", "The Hermetic Order of Egypt," and a variety of other orders and organisations helped perpetuate esoteric and occult themes and information. An immediate precursor of the Theosophical Society was "The Brotherhood of Luxor," from which its rival, "The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor" originated. The underlying worldview common to this orientation was alluded to in the popular novel *Zanoni* (1842) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–1873). Lytton was thought to have been familiar with a number of these organisations and to have drawn his knowledge from such acquaintance. The worldview itself can be seen to reflect the general kind of perspective common to Western esoteric thought.

> The novel is an encyclopedia of ideas about the occult sciences … Herbalism is mentioned reverently, along with the general value of research into the mysteries of nature. The doctrines of universal sympathy, of secret affinities in nature, and of hierarchal planes of being permeated by an omnipresent Mind are essential to *Zanoni,* as to any Hermetically influenced work. The multiple planes include those that can only be explored out of the physical body. Therefore ascesis is necessary to the aspirant, refusing the demands of the flesh in order to live in the soul and work with the imagination. The artist can do this as well as the mystic; a Platonic subtheme of *Zanoni* is the sacred nature of art, if only inspired by the Ideal. [44]

Another common theme of many of these organisations too, was belief in the presence of "unknown Superiors" of supreme spiritual status, usually located in exotic or inaccessible locales, who were the inspiring and directing forces of the movements from behind-the-scenes. The influence on Blavatsky and other similarly focussed empathisers in later nineteenth century was significant.

Press, 1994, p. 119.
[44] Ibid., p. 126.

It was Bulwer-Lytton who made the idea of occultism fashionable in England. [45]

As Hanegraaf noted, one of the streams of esoteric interest came from the romantic artistic tradition. William Blake, as well as Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), John Flaxman, (1755-1826), Richard Cosway (1740-1821), Samuel Palmer, and John Varley (1788-1842) were painters who shared interests in occult, astrological and mystical subjects.

Another set of influences came from more practically applicable phases of the occult arts. On the one hand, the influence of John Smith, John Cornfield, Henry Andrews, James Wilson, Robert Cross Smith (known as "Raphael"), and John Palmer was felt through a mixture of discussion on practical astrology, divination, magical practices, alchemy, and other occult topics. Magazines such as *The Straggling Astrologer, Urania, The Astrologer of the Nineteenth Century* helped disseminate interest in these areas to a wider public.

And the revival and advancement of the theory animal magnetism through the works of Franz Mesmer (1734-1815) led to the methods of hypnosis and the idea of the subconscious mind. The interest in "magnetic healing" spread belief in the subtle powers of nature and the theory of correspondences. As well, the experiments in 1784 of the Marquis de Puysegur and his brother Count Maxime with somnambulism brought awareness that lucid states of consciousness, some pertaining to supersensory knowledge, could be induced. Medical success in many instances of the healing use of mesmerism brought a degree of public respectability. As well, recognition that unusual states of consciousness could be induced on mesmerised patients led to further metaphysical speculation. J.C. Colquhoun published *Isis Revelata: An Inquiry into the origin, progress, and present state of animal magnetism* in 1836, the same year that Higgins's *Anacalypsis* appeared. Both use the analogy of revealing secret truth from Isis, the Egyptian goddess of nature. Obviously these were precedents for Blavatsky's title and themes in *Isis Unveiled,* still over forty years away. Colquhoun noted six distinct stages of consciousness. These included the waking state; half sleep; magnetic sleep; somnambulism; clairvoyance; and lucid vision. Other proponents included Chauncey Hare Townshend, Baron Jules Dupotet de Sennevoy (1798-1881), John Elliotsen (1791-

[45] Colin Wilson, *The Occult*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, p. 328.

1868), Alexis Didier, Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), Friederike Hauffe (1801-1829), Philip Henry, Fourth Earl of Stanhope (1781-1855). Though leaving a legitimate medical and esoteric legacy, a certain quotient of political intrigue surrounded a number of mesmerist figures.

Another occult based practice was scrying, or divination through the use of crystal. This practice was incorporated into the routines of many of the aforementioned individuals, as well as some more specialised exponents. Frederick Hockley (1808-1885), Richard James Morrison (1795-1874), writing under the name of "Zadkiel," William Gregory (1803-1858), Kenneth R.H. Mackenzie (1833-1886) were the most notable. The importance of this technique was that it provided another means of engaging in visionary and dissociated states of consciousness.

A major component of the alternative cognitive nexus of viewpoints and beliefs was the emergence of spiritualism. [46] Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott, the two founders of the Theosophical Society met in Vermont in 1874 while investigating the alleged psychic phenomena surrounding the Eddy Brothers, who were representative mediumistic figures within the spiritualist environment. The spiritualist movement itself has been traced to March 1848 in Hydesville New York, where the Fox sisters were believed to be mediums for presumed post-mortem communication via mysterious "raps." As well, a variety of other inexplicable phenomena, such as apparitions, spontaneous acts of levitation, phantom voices and sounds, "ectoplasmic" materialisations and so on characterised such scenarios. The implications of the spiritualist phenomena were explicated in quasi-religious and philosophical terminology, most closely resembling traditional Christian frames of reference. The dominant message was that the death does not destroy the individual personality, and that a more ethereal though familiar mode of subsistence endures after death, including the potential to communicate with chosen members of the living.

> The new religion could have been designed on Madison Avenue. It offered evidence of immortality, direct contact with the departed—even pets—and required nothing in the way of intelligence or moral effort…For hundreds of thousands who had hitherto doubted the immortality of the soul, the new religion

[46] For a succinct account of the early Spiritualist movement, see Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001, pp. 10–31.

> offered a grand vista of eternal progress, combined with loving care for those left on earth. "Modern" Christians far preferred this to the prospect of resting in unconscious limbo until the last Judgment dispatched them to eternal Heaven or Hell. In this respect it was an exoteric revelation of attitudes long held among Christian esotericism. Moreover, it was not just a doctrine, but a path to the most moving experience that most people ever had: the apparent communication with their departed loved ones. [47]

The proliferation of mediums and alleged proofs of authentic psychic communication grew enormously after the first public disclosures on such unfolding phenomena. And though a large percentage of the claims were discovered to be fraudulent, suspicious, or ambiguous, enough conviction remained for many that authentic experiences had in fact occurred. Amongst the more credible mediums were Mrs. Hayden, Allan Kardec, David Dunglas Home (1833-1886), Emma Hardinge Britten (1823-1899), Stainton Moses (1839-1892). Amongst exponents of spiritualist worldviews, Britten provided a thorough and comprehensive system.

> In Emma's synthesis, spiritualism becomes a complete religion, with a cosmology and an eschatology, a version of world history able to explain all myths and religions, a devotional practice in the form of a sort of Unitarian prayer and a social or socialist program for this world. [48]

Britten and Moses as well as Lady Caithness in fact expounded beliefs quite compatible with those of Blavatsky. And all were acquainted with her, with both periods of solidarity and episodes of recrimination and hostility. Some of the common ideas included belief that all religions emerged from the same ancient source, most likely India; the Bible and the life of Christ must be interpreted symbolically; the human soul descends from a divine source; the universe is multi-dimensional with a hierarchy of intelligences and beings; spiritual progress can be achieved through dedication and proper actions towards that end; a new age or cycle was immanent. A major difference was that Blavatsky vehemently rejected a primarily Christian frame of reference while many other spiritualists tried to emphasise compatibility to Christian ideas, conceived more in spiritualistic terms. [49]

---

[47] Godwin, op. cit., p.188.
[48] Ibid., pp. 203–204.
[49] See Godwin, op. cit., for more extensive historical and biographical discussion of these and other significant personae of the Spiritualist, Eastern and occult traditions prior to, and contemporaneous with,

A number of other esoteric Christian systems appeared as well, within which a variety of occult and mystical themes were represented primarily in the language and symbolism of Christianity. One such trend was the school of thought based upon a revival of the ideas of Jacob Boehme. James Pierrepont Greaves (1777-1842) founded a circle based on Boehme's beliefs, with a prioritisation of attending to the "inner voice," and rediscovering the inner divine nature of man. His influence fell to Thomas South (1785-1855) and his daughter Mary Ann South (1817-1910), who later became Mrs. Atwood after marriage to a Reverend Atwood, and expressed an initial interest in theosophy, and then recanted that decision. Other members of this movement included Ann Judith Brown (1825-1893), Christopher Walton (1809-1877), and Robert Alfred Vaughan (1823-1857). Others who combined a priority of Christian esotericism and mysticism in addition to an active participation in the early Theosophical Society included C.C. Massey (1838-1905), Isabel de Steiger (1836-1927), and notably, Anna Kingsford (1846-1888), and her close associate Edward Maitland (1824-1897). Kingsford was a visionary who believed she was revealing the doctrines appropriate for ushering in the new age. Her beliefs were primarily expressed in esoteric Christian terms, but included many common occult beliefs, such as the symbolic meaning of religious and mythological data, the immortality of the human soul, a universe with a plurality of planes and beings, the approaching end of a cosmological cycle, and so on. A major priority in her thinking was the elevation of moral behaviour, especially in the treatment accorded animals. And upon discovering that Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* covered similar ground, she subsequently became an acquaintance of Blavatsky and an influence on a number of Theosophical Society members.

Kingsford and Maitland, after finding the Theosophical Society less amicable to their own esoteric perspective, founded the Hermetic Society in 1884, an explicit effort to organisationally differentiate between a primarily Western esotericism and the Eastern influenced Theosophical Society. The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, founded by Max Theon, Peter Davidson and Thomas Burgoyne and the Hermetic Order of the Golden

---

the foundation and establishment of the theosophical movement. In addition, historical and philosophical analyses of many of these groups and their teachings can be found in Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman ed. *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad, 1992.

Dawn, founded by William Wynn Westcott, William R. Woodman and Samuel L. McGregor Mathers also appeared as alternatives to the Theosophical Society, emphasising Western occult ideas and a focus on practical instructions. In response, the Theosophical Society created an "Esoteric Section" in 1888 (at first led by Blavatsky herself) to combat defections and provide more practical advice and knowledge. The desertion from theosophical ranks (at least in part) because of the perceived shift to a more Eastern flavoured form of doctrine also included Dr. Franz Hartmann (1838-1912), Rudolph Steiner (1816-1925), Papus (Gerard Encause, 1865-1916), and A.E. Waite, amongst other previous members or sympathisers.

3.7.3 An Overview of Alternative Esoteric Sources of the Nineteenth Century – Eastern Influences

The influence of Eastern religious and philosophical ideas and traditions was at least an equally significant component of the theosophical worldview as the streams of Western esoteric, occult, fringe-scientific, and mystical materials. During the nineteenth century, much that had been previously unknown or inaccessible about Hindu and Buddhist thought gradually became open to Western inquiries, providing a rich source of alternative ideational content for those unhappy with conventional Western perspectives. The publication of an essay entitled *on the gods of Greece, Italy and India* in 1778 by Sir William Jones (1746-1794) in the first volume of the *Asiatic Researches* showed comparative similarities between the gods of the different cultures. The beginning of a more systematic and scholarly understanding of Indian thought began to build upon the seventeenth century fascination with Chinese culture and the Romantic interest in Persia. The first translation into English of the *Bhagavad-Gita* in 1785 by Charles Wilkins of the East India Company and the first Governor General of India, Warren Hastings, revealed Indian literary and theological qualities previously unanticipated by the West. Soon a stream of French and German philologists and scholars continued the work of translation of Hindu religious texts, and explication of the complexities of beliefs and practices. Max Mueller's translations of *The Sacred Books of the East* became a popular source of Western information later in the nineteenth century.

And from the other side, some significant Hindus acclimatised themselves with

Western thought and traditions and attempted to present Indian thought in terms more accessible to Westerners. Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), primarily interested in social and political causes, translated texts from the Vedanta and Upanishads, showing that similarities existed in all religions. In 1828 he founded the Brahmo Samaj, to promote broad religious solidarity and common social virtues. He in particular was a figure praised by Blavatsky. In 1868 Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884) continued in this tradition, founding the Brahmo Samaj of India in 1868. He though was a "bhakta," a practitioner of devotion based religious belief and practice, and was less concerned with social reform. From his perspective, he found points of empathy with Christianity, particularly with the person of Jesus. In 1875 he met another bhakta, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836-1886), who was more charismatic, and attracted more followers. One of the supporters was the even more religiously eclectic Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who founded the Ramakrishna Mission and Order, and was their representative at the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions, where he attracted much attention.[50] More specifically of importance to the theosophical movement was Damodar Thackersey, who put Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott in contact with Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1882), the founder of a powerful and influential Hindu reform movement in 1875, the Arya Samaj. His belief system was based on a strict monotheism derived from the authority of the Vedas as the sole revealed scripture, and engendered a consequent distrust of other religions. As well, his lasting influence as a social reformer and defender of Indian culture extended into the twentieth century in the form of the Indian National Congress and the movement towards Indian independence. Blavatsky and Olcott had anticipated a working arrangement between the Theosophical Society and the Arya Samaj on relocating to India in 1879. However, disillusionment on both sides quickly set in and the connection was dropped.

The transmission of Buddhist thought and tradition in the nineteenth century also was significant in providing another alternative source of unfamiliar ideas to the West. Blavatsky, Olcott, and other theosophists took the five vows of Buddhism (Pansil) and considered themselves Buddhists. The permeation of information in the West about

[50] See Richard Hughes Seager, ed. *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices From the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, La Salle: Open Court, 1993.

Buddhism was more problematic than it was with Hindu thought, largely because of the divisions in Buddhist tradition and the different interpretations of many key beliefs. Early information appeared in 1799 in the *Asiatic Researches* when a physician, Francis Buchanan, published information he had obtained from treatises supplied to him from a priest on Rangoon. The dilemma of incorporating the Buddhist pantheon of gods into the framework of other mythologies proved problematic, as did the explanation of the meaning of the term "nirvana." In 1801a story by Mr. Joinville, Surveyor General entitled *On the Religion and Manners of the People of Ceylon* appeared, which also was ambivalent about the nature of Buddhism. In 1810 Edward Moor wrote *The Hindu Pantheon*, and admitted he had trouble distinguishing between Hindu and Buddhist tenets. And more confusion was sown in 1828 when a civil servant, B.H. Hodgson wrote *Notice of the languages, literature and religion of the Bauddhas of Nepal and Bhot*. The introduction of Mahayana Buddhist materials to go along with previously discovered Theravada themes brought confusion to Westerners attempting to gain full understanding of Buddhist theories of nirvana, God, the soul, reincarnation, and so forth. Scholars like Barthelemy, Saint Hillaire and Mueller followed the logic of assuming that the ultimate goal of Buddhist strivings was for "annihilation." And yet the contrast between the apparently atheistic Theravada school, and the multidimensional hierarchy of gods of Mahayana Buddhism engendered Western uncertainty.

In 1871, the publication of *The Wheel of the Law* by Henry Alabaster, interpreter to the Siamese Consul General, of the thoughts of Siamese nobleman Chao Phya Thipakon, had helped clarify and correct the most disturbing issues and present an account more comprehensible in Western terms. And when Edwin Arnold's poem *The Light of Asia* appeared in 1875, a more easily assimilated overview was provided to the Western public. The influence of the "Pure Land" form of Buddhism popular in China and Japan was also felt in California, where visiting priests to small Buddhist centres helped stimulate interest. Apparently Madame Blavatsky entertained one such priest in 1877, who presented a view of nirvana as a reunion of the spirit with God, diametrically different than the presumption of personal annihilation. As well, despite publicly stating that she had spent time in Tibet, there was nothing in *Isis Unveiled* that revealed profound insight or unique knowledge about Buddhism itself. However, Blavatsky and Olcott

became acquainted with Peary Chand Mitra (1814-1883), a spiritualist and medium who presented Buddhism as a mystic endeavour. Blavatsky's most notable early connection to Buddhist tradition was through the Theravada school, in the person of H. Sumangala Unnanse (1827-1911), a high priest of a temple on Ceylon, who encouraged them to formally take Buddhist vows. Olcott later spent much of his career encouraging Buddhists in Ceylon to assert their own religion against the efforts of colonisers and missionaries. The influence of Buddhism on early theosophical thought was to emphasise that the idea of a personal god was misleading and counterproductive. Later Mahayana influence provided belief in the option of Bodhisattva compassion as the preferred ethical consequence of the realisation of nirvana. And fundamental Eastern concepts of both Hinduism and Buddhism, like reincarnation, karma, cosmic cycles, avatars, multiple planes of existence, etc. provided crucial ideational material that was incorporated into the total system of belief and thought.

The nineteenth century was a time when the dominant religious, philosophical, and scientific worldviews were confronted by new contents of knowledge, a changing social and political climate, increasing secularisation and mechanisation. With the ascendancy of the empirical and scientific framework in its most seemingly menacing materialistic form, the realm of values and spiritual concerns that had been most familiarly represented by religious and philosophical traditions became less secure and workable for those threatened or troubled by this process.

The theosophical enterprise drew from these sources when formulating and articulating its own unique synthesis. However, to attempt to attain widespread public acknowledgment as a preferable option, the three dominant majority frameworks of knowledge had to be challenged and measured by the criteria of the esoteric tradition, and proven less efficacious, legitimate, and satisfying. The theosophical equivalents of what commonly was considered the authentic truth of religion, philosophy, and science had to be publicly proposed and argumentatively justified. We now will examine representative examples of how Madame Blavatsky compared her versions of these categories of knowledge to those commonly held and socially prevalent in her era.

Chapter 4

Blavatsky's Theosophical Legitimation of the Three Categories of Knowledge

4.1 Introduction to Chapter Four

Having seen how religion, philosophy, and science may be viewed as specific types of knowledge and as ways of categorising perceptions and experiences, it seems apparent that any purported reliable and reasonable alternative worldview would by necessity need to confront the existing institutions and incorporate whatever possible into their own system. To acquire widespread respect, prestige, acceptance, confirmation of beliefs and ideas from larger social sectors required acknowledgment of the validity or potential legitimacy of the foundational principles, as well the soundness of arguments contra the established authoritative tenets and presumptions. This is what Madame Blavatsky attempted to do in her synthetic objective. She sought both to demonstrate that her interpretation of religion, philosophy and science was legitimate and logically sound, and that her critique of existing forms was deserved and just. Even when the content of her ideational system itself was alleged to surpass what was considered undisputable in nineteenth century mainstream religious, philosophical, and scientific thought. And though other minority cognitive options along esoteric lines were in place in varying stages of sophistication and coherence, Madame Blavatsky's explicit confrontation and challenge was the boldest, most aggressive, and most self-assured. Rather than merely trying to critique established institutional authorities to factor in esoteric data, she attacked with a sense of indignation and moral self-righteousness. And though her presentations attempt to show rational, logical, and empirical grounds of reasonableness, the tone of her writings is transparently emotional and passionate. We now must examine how she actually expressed her thoughts about those forms of knowledge and their institutional representations. Analysis of some of her explicit articles along those lines may be perhaps the most illuminating way of following her logic and understanding the rhetorical techniques she employed.

4.2 Religion as a Category of Knowledge: Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Is Theosophy a Religion?*

In *Is Theosophy a Religion?* we may be able to comprehend her view of religion and how she envisions the theosophical option. In it she begins by making a point often reiterated in her articles, namely, that there is a general sense of confusion and misunderstanding on the part of the public about the true nature of the theosophical movement. Particularly, in assuming that the movement was a religion.

> Year after year, and day after day had our officers and members to interrupt people speaking of the theosophical movement by putting in more or less emphatic protests against theosophy being referred to as a "religion," and the Theosophical Society as a kind of church or religious body. Still worse, it is as often spoken of as a "new sect!" [1]

Thus, in the view of the primary founder of the movement, theosophy is not a "religion," or an offshoot in the conventional sense. She rhetorically asks whether this confusion is intentional, a result of ingrained prejudice, or just erroneous, based on lack of knowledge. And in the case of those who are intentionally predisposed to cynicism and slander, she feels that by use of the categories "ism," or "sect," a sense of distrust is engendered. However, Blavatsky states that common opinion is simply wrong.

As well as this kind of hostile attitude serving as grounds for prejudicial judgment, even sympathisers and the neutrally inclined are subject to the same kinds of confusion. Blavatsky emphasises the fact that dogmatic creeds are antithetical to objectivity and stultifying to thought, and as such, contrary to theosophical principles. And she even goes on to say that a primary objective of the movement was to combat such attitudes.

> Moreover, the very raison d'être of the Theosophical Society was, from its beginning, to utter a loud protest and lead an open warfare against dogma or any belief based upon blind faith. [2]

This "raison d'être" is thus characterised here as a corrective impetus, expressed in the form of "loud protest" and "open warfare," clear and explicit indicators of a challenge to the status quo. And the objects of this dissatisfaction are rigid dogmatic attitudes. Those

[1] H.P. Blavatsky, *Is Theosophy a Religion?* Retrieved from Blavatsky Net Foundation, 1888, <http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/IsTheosophyAReligion.htm>. (Accessed March 23, 2002).
[2] Ibid.

are traits found in traditional religious formulations, particularly in Christianity according to that line of reasoning. The critique is aimed specifically at the prevailing mindset and attitude that prefers unthinking acceptance rather than unimpeded inquiry. And from that perspective, Blavatsky states that the best recruits to the theosophical movement came from a background of agnosticism or even materialism, where the speculative process is less restricted or restrained by dogma. Conversely, from the perspective of traditionally understood exoteric religion, too many obstacles stand in the way of objectivity. The issue becomes a matter of distinguishing between blind faith and a sincere and open approach to truth. So it would seem that she feels there is more hope for a materialistic empiricist to (theoretically) show an open mind to esoteric materials than for a dogmatic Christian. The gist of her logic appears to suggest that suspension of personal preconceptions is therefore more difficult to achieve if they are of a Christian background than of a scientific perspective because science at least endorses objectivity while Christianity preaches exclusivity. As well, she assumes that the sincere truth seeker will be predisposed to rational criteria of evaluation. Foundational beliefs and principles would not retain authoritative status purely on blind faith, but would be subject to scrutiny and debate. So from her perspective, it seems that she believes with full confidence that the esoteric vision of reality must implicitly appear more logical, appealing, satisfying than the more circumscribed mainstream alternatives.

Blavatsky places great concern on how theosophy is being perceived by the public. She is at great pains to repeat that from her perspective, theosophy is not a religion, though it has become associated with specific religious, philosophical and scientific beliefs, and therefore has engendered confusion. Theosophy however, is presented not as "a" religion, but in all sincerity is believed to be "religion itself." This firmly held belief implies that theosophy derives from, or is an expression of, a purer or more essential source of authentic religious sentiment, knowledge, and experience than contained in the existing popular forms of the time. From Blavatsky's perspective, she seems to feel that theosophy is capable of eliminating the awkward and distracting social functions of religion (considered "exoteric"), and remain a purely detached elite esoteric ideational source accessible to properly qualified and receptive individuals. And what is the particular theosophical interpretation of "Religion itself?"

> Religion in the true and only correct sense, is a bond uniting men together—not a particular set of dogmas and beliefs. Now Religion, per se, in its widest meaning is that which binds not only all MEN, but also all BEINGS and all things in the entire Universe into one grand whole. This is our theosophical definition of religion; [3]

Religion therefore is defined as a unitive "bond," connecting all spheres of existence, "the entire Universe into one grand whole." So far, the meaning of "bond" is rather nebulous, a sentiment suggestive of spiritual immanence when applied to the extended universe. This seems to be confirmed when it is noted that the bond does transcend conventional religious treatments. And a hint of a grand, spiritually grounded hierarchal view of the universe is suggested by the capitalisation of the terms "all MEN" and "all BEINGS." The "grand whole" thus would transcend a mere worldly social form of unity or solidarity, and more properly suggest a mystical bond that bespeaks of enduring essences rather than transitory appearances. So "religion" from the theosophical position would be defined by a mystical or quasi-mystical experience or revelation of this transcendent bond.

Blavatsky finally equates the acquisition of authentic religious knowledge with the process of spiritual cognisance. The subjective nature of this acquisition or realisation is characterised as occurring in "the inner sanctuary of man's heart wherein reigns alone the awakened soul." Thus, the ultimate legitimacy of religious knowledge derives from spiritual experience, which may be confirmed by individuals who follow the suggested process and take the same route towards enabling that "awakening." As such, theosophy is the embodiment of religion so conceived, and the institutional representation of the ultimate transcendent wisdom. Legitimated not by criteria chosen by fallible persons, but by the inherent authenticity of its self-evidentiary truth. And this overall perspective is again re-stated.

> Thus Theosophy is not a Religion, we say, but RELIGION itself, the one bond of unity, which is so universal and all-embracing that no man, as no speck—from gods and mortals down to animals, the blade of grass and atom—can be outside of its light. Therefore, any organization or body of that name must necessarily be a UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD. [4]

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.

The identification of religion per se with a mystically grounded conception of reality is apparent. No speck can be "outside its light," and therefore the ultimate divinity must be fully encompassing, conceived with both immanent and transcendent qualities. The details about the extensive hierarchal structure emanating from the mystical source are more fully elaborated in specialised theosophical literature, particularly *The Secret Doctrine*. But here they are hinted at by indication of as vast a cosmic scale as may be conceived, ranging from "gods" to the "atom." And therefore, from the theosophical perspective, the only logical deduction would seem to be that there must "necessarily be a UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD."

Blavatsky states that any lesser conclusion would compromise the theosophical imperative, in effect, turning the movement into a pretentious and empty superficial shell. She compares the theosophical attitude to that of "Medieval alchemy" as a process for explicating hidden meaning and discerning truth where none seemed apparent.

> It transmutes the apparently base metal of every ritualistic and dogmatic creed (Christianity included) into the gold of fact and truth, and thus truly produces a universal panacea for the ills of mankind. [5]

This analogy in fact encapsulates her perspective about the difference between exoteric and esoteric interpretations of symbols, myths, legends, scriptures, folkloric and virtually all relevant forms of cultural material. From Blavatsky's perspective, theosophy is the definitive filter through which all religious subject matter must be screened and "transmuted." If the "gold of fact and truth" is believed to be latent or disguised, uncovering it is a matter of interpretation and approach, and presupposes a set of a priori criteria for determining just what that "truth" in fact ought to resemble. And presuming that the theosophical equation of ultimate truth with transcendent reality is maintained, the conclusions would invariably reflect those assumptions. Any subsequently emerging interpretations could only be validated as "gold" if they are identical or similar to the same mystical principles that are ensconced in the theosophical interpretation of religion. Once the data is reconstructed through the theosophical "transmutational" interpretative process. And Blavatsky feels fully assured and sincerely convinced that this methodology is critically necessary to correct the misleading and delusional direction that exoteric

religion has been heading. Nothing less than the production of "a universal panacea for the ills of mankind" is being promoted with this desired and anticipated change of religious orientation.

So with full cognisance of the limitations and difficulties presented by exclusivist religious views, potential members are urged to try and expand their horizons and empathise with the ideal of a universal encompassing esoteric view of religion. Even the outward diversity and formal differences of the various religious traditions can be tolerated as long as the more essential esoteric truths are given priority. However, even from the social and exoteric perspective, the principle of universal brotherhood is a unifying value, and an ideal that should be urgently striven after. The esoteric notion of a universal, all-encompassing mystical bond serving as the foundation of religion is supplemented by the practical application of an idealised mode of conduct befitting such an orientation, called "universal ethics." And like the belief in the universality and cross-cultural nature of the mystical foundation of religion, the ethical dimension also is perceived to extend across cultural and historical divisions. Including theosophy as a movement with equal moral status to those established by the famous ethical leaders of history allowed Blavatsky to present it with additional persuasive legitimacy. As did the allusion to the unbroken continuity of this orientation, according to Blavatsky, persisting from the distant past of uncharted history through all historical eras. So individuals who may be confused and suspicious of traditional religious sects and creeds need not feel the same about theosophy.

> … for it heals the wounds inflicted by the gross asperities of the Church "isms" on the sensitive soul of every naturally religious man. [6]

The potential theosophical convert thus is characterised as a "sensitive soul," and "naturally religious," but dissatisfied, and "wounded" by the claims and contents of traditional institutional religious "isms." So, essentially, the religious attitude itself is considered to be a desirable orientation. Only when it is misdirected and misapplied through the negative influences of formal dogmatic "isms" does it become diluted or become susceptible to rejection. Blavatsky infers that those disappointed in the religious

[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

systems because of acceptance of beliefs based on blind faith have often turned to the other extreme and become "disbelievers," totally dismissing all religious claims. However, she states that such persons have gained renewed confidence in the pursuit of their spiritual aspirations by joining the Theosophical Society. Yet it is admitted that some early members themselves became disillusioned or unhappy with particular facets of the movement. Particularly, the way theosophy has critically scrutinised Christianity.

The depiction of dissenters being sensitive to criticism of what she calls "sham Christianity" typifies Blavatsky's orientation to the established religious traditions. Because they were less inclined to acknowledge (let alone promote) what she perceived as their essential esoteric core truth, identified as a common mystical bond, they became legitimate targets of criticism. And this distinction between the superficiality and limited exoteric vision of dogmatic religions, and the perceived universality and transcendent wisdom of esoterically interpreted traditions remained a dominant theosophical theme.

And what can theosophy provide? Blavatsky next enunciates what she feels are the distinguishing features of the theosophical approach.

> Its doctrines, if seriously studied, call forth, by stimulating one's reasoning powers and awakening the inner in the animal man, every hitherto dormant power or good in us, and also the perception of the true and the real, as opposed to the false and the unreal. Tearing off with no uncertain hand the thick veil of dead-letter with which every old religious scriptures were cloaked, scientific Theosophy, learned in the cunning symbolism of the ages, reveals to the scoffer at old wisdom the origin of the world's faiths and sciences. [7]

Serious study of theosophical doctrines are said to stimulate the cognitive process, both intellectually and spiritually. Intellectually, "one's reasoning powers" are brought into heightened activity and sharp focus. And purportedly, the intense intellectual encounter with theosophical content will serve as an activating impetus, a spiritual inspiration, "awakening the inner in the animal man." The simple body-mind dualism of a latent spiritual "inner" dimension/substantive essence struggling against the restrictive conditioning of the physical body/"animal man" was perhaps one of the principal traditional philosophical themes implicit in much of Blavatsky's rhetoric. Here she just suggests that the "hitherto dormant power" of the subjective self was equal to the "good," and that its cognitive and normative capacities would reveal the "true and the real." The

"false and the unreal" are identified with the exoterically constructed worldviews, derived from "the thick veil of dead-letter with which every old religious scriptures were cloaked." Theosophy is presented as a cleansing and enlightening force, "tearing off with no uncertain hand" the presumed misleading and misconstrued portions of the theoretical edifice. And what makes the theosophical approach a more accurate and rightful interpreter of religious materials and intentions? Theosophy, it is implied, uses a truer and less variable or conditioned mode of analysis than demonstrated by the exoteric legitimators of religious institutions.

The theosophical evaluative and interpretative approach is based on an esoteric methodology, "learned in the cunning symbolism of the ages." Theosophy thus applies its own set of criteria for judging the assumed authentic meanings of all pertinent streams of data. The theosophical readings therefore are considered to be more in line with hidden and more obscure cognitive minority meanings and suggestions. From that perspective, they claim to be able to explicate and define a different set of esoteric ideas and beliefs and to be dealing with "the old wisdom," rather than the mere commonly understood exoteric readings that would suggest diversity and difference. Therefore, assuming that a consistent application of the same symbolic methodology is applied, the conclusion that a common source accounts for "the origin of the world's faiths and sciences" may appear self-evident, confirming the initial starting premises, and refuting the arguments of "scoffers."

Blavatsky sees the theosophical worldview as the most encompassing and authentic, subsuming separate religious, philosophical and scientific approaches within a more unified vision. These separate forms of knowledge are legitimate and complementary when informed by the more authoritative theosophical orientation, but not independently self-sufficient as means of attaining the most profound truths. The theosophical worldview essentially revives and stimulates all forms of speculative inquiry by revealing a unifying pre-eminent mystical foundation underlying all appearances.

> It opens new vistas beyond the old horizons of crystallized, motionless and despotic faiths; and turning blind belief into a reasoned knowledge founded on mathematical laws—the only exact science—it demonstrates to him under profounder and more philosophical aspects the existence of that which, repelled

[7] Ibid.

> by the grossness of its dead-letter form, he had long since abandoned as a nursery tale. It gives a clear and well-defined object, an ideal to live for, to every sincere man or woman belonging to whatever station in Society and of whatever culture and degree of intellect. Practical Theosophy is not one Science, but embraces every science in life, moral and physical. It may, in short, be justly regarded as the universal "coach," a tutor of world-wide knowledge and experience, and of an erudition which not only assists and guides his pupils toward a successful examination for every scientific or moral service in earthly life, but fits them for the lives to come, if those pupils will only study the universe and its mysteries within themselves, instead of studying them through the spectacles of orthodox science and religions. [8]

As an alternative but more authentic synthesis of knowledge, theosophy "opens new vistas," and has transformational and transmutational effect. It challenges and invigorates the status quo of non-progressive traditions, the "old horizons of crystallized, motionless and despotic faiths." And it does so not by mere bombast or emotional appeal. Blavatsky stretches out to be all things to all people by claiming that theosophy is definable and defensible on multiple levels of interpretation. From earlier being presented as the essence of religion, it now is called "the only exact science." And where it was expressed as the insight earned through meritorious and laboured dedication and self-sacrifice, it is now demonstrable by way of "mathematical laws," and thus as a purely rational proposition. For those who concur, it can provide immediate transformational utility, "turning blind belief into a reasoned knowledge." For those who have habitually been cynical of religious rhetoric, it allegedly reveals "profounder and more philosophical aspects," virtually capable of debunking and rehabilitating the "dead letter" interpretations that have been habitually proffered exoterically.

And the value of theosophy is not just in its reconstructive theoretical aspect. It also supplies a moral incentive, "a clear and well-defined object, an ideal to live for" to all who are capable of attuning themselves to the message. Specific social position and even intellectual capacity are not necessarily deterrents or prerequisites because "every sincere man or woman belonging to whatever station in Society and of whatever culture and degree of intellect" is potentially capable of empathising with and comprehending the theosophical thrust. As an applied ethical philosophy, theosophy is again once more not just "one" option, but "the" synthetic, inclusive, and morally determined sure path. And

[8] Ibid.

again she makes bold claims about the superior status of theosophy as an encompassing synthesis of knowledge. “Practical Theosophy is not one Science, but embraces every science in life, moral and physical.” And in this lofty exemplary role theosophy even has a legitimacy transcending the world of the present and the lifetime of individuals. It conceives of a much vaster cosmic stage on which the ethical dynamics are played out. Besides providing the ideal blueprint for a fulfilling and worthy life, even “lives to come” will be positively predisposed.

Theosophy, then, is envisioned as the proper compendium of ethical knowledge and paradigmatic behavioural guidelines for virtually all occasions. As well, it has long-term consequences by providing proper guidance for maximising the potential for optimal future incarnations. This of course brings in the doctrines of karma and reincarnation, which were critical elements of the theosophical system of ideas, and which supported much of the logic of their ethical outlook. Karma and reincarnation were not central tenets in the early theosophical writings, such as *Isis Unveiled*, which revealed a clear gnostic orientation and drew more from Western esoteric traditions than from the East. However, a gradual shift of emphasis to Buddhist and Hindu ethical thought eventually came to signify the official theosophical position. And Madame Blavatsky once more reiterates her preference for “inner” rather than “outer” criteria of legitimacy, emphasising that the subjective spiritual “inner” self is the locus of authentic spiritual experience. And for aspirants, that “the universe and its mysteries” can most authoritatively be studied from “within themselves” rather than in their conditioned and compromised form, through the “spectacles of orthodox science and religions.”

An important issue confronting the Theosophical Society was the reconciliation of idealistic objectives and the reality of flawed and fallible behaviour by representatives of the movement. Blavatsky could not avoid discussion of the unavoidable dilemma because she and others had been publicly criticised for various reasons. To outside observers, the suspicion that a double standard existed between what was taught, and how people actually acted only engendered ridicule or cynicism. To confront the issue, Blavatsky once more draws a distinction between “Theosophy per se” and the views of individual members, admitting that human beings are fallible and inconsistent. However, the sanctity and immutability of the pure theosophical knowledge itself is emphatically

defended as pristine and beyond reproach. It is only the imperfections of individuals in their statements and actions that may potentially provoke rebuke and prompt dispute.

> One is, as an ideal, divine Wisdom, perfection itself; the other a poor, imperfect thing, trying to run under, if not within, its shadow on Earth. No man is perfect; why, then, should any member of the T.S. be expected to be a paragon of every human virtue? And why should the whole organization be criticized and blamed for the faults, whether real or imaginary, of some of its "Fellows," or even its Leaders? Never was the Society, as a concrete body, free from blame or sin—errare humanum est—nor were any of its members. Hence, it is rather those members most of whom will not be led by theosophy, that ought to be blamed. Theosophy is the soul of its Society; the latter the gross and imperfect body of the former. [9]

This categorical separation of "ideal, divine Wisdom," the "soul of its Society," from "its shadow," the "gross and imperfect body of the former," once more illustrates a tendency to simple dualistic argumentation. As well, the practice of studiously and methodically trying to somehow isolate the primary ideational content (interpreted as "divine Wisdom") as unequivocally pure and incapable of causal connection to human action or rationalisation ("a poor imperfect thing") was a typical strategy of theosophical discussion.

Individuals who stray from the approved guidelines of proper attitude and conduct are most culpable for their intentional disregard, and "ought to be blamed." Next, unintentional, though unavoidable human error, misjudgement or miscalculation must be factored into the equation. Collectively, then, any distorted, confusing, misleading, erroneous, controversial presentation of theosophy is solely the result of human imperfection. And the stances of individuals are likewise based on the variables of human nature. "Theosophy per se" yet retains its stature. And widespread social acknowledgment of this simple fact should mitigate against careless and superficial condemnation. The argument presented to hostile critics is based on simple common sense propositions. Accusations from those who presume to judge based on ignorance are obviously fallacious. It is assumed that an accurate and objective understanding of the issues at hand will negate such irrational disregard and "slander." By engaging in verbal hostilities and derisiveness, only prejudicial and uninformed opinions will eventuate.

After hinting at the uniqueness of theosophical insight and knowledge in broad

general terms, Blavatsky feels it necessary to supply a brief encapsulation of the origins of religious knowledge explicated in her recently completed opus.

> The just published "Secret Doctrine" will show what were the ideas of a antiquity with regard to the primeval instructors of primitive man and his three earlier races. The genesis of that WISDOM-RELIGION in which all theosophists believe, dates from that period. So-called "Occultism," or rather Esoteric Science, has to be traced in its origin to those Beings who, led by Karma, have incarnated in our humanity, and thus struck the key-note of that secret Science which countless generations of subsequent adepts have expanded since then in every age, while they checked its doctrines by personal observation and experience. The bulk of this knowledge—which no man is able to possess in its fullness—constitutes that which we now call Theosophy or "divine knowledge." Beings from other and higher worlds may have it entire; we can have it only approximately. [10]

In the myth of origins in the theosophical worldview, the ultimate truth about the universe was first transmitted to the ancestors of the human race by advanced spiritual entities within cosmic, biological, and temporal time frames far vaster and more extensive than imagined by exoteric traditions of knowledge. A complex ontology is hinted at, which purportedly involves evolutionary processes unfolding on multiple planes of existence. The original revelation of extra-cosmic truth, or transmission of primary spiritual knowledge during the appropriate phase of the cycle, was purported to have come from exalted spiritually sophisticated beings who ensured that such esoteric knowledge would perpetuate via symbolic encoding and a tradition of spiritually mature and properly attuned interpreters. The transmission of primordial truth was a necessary part of the overall evolutionary schema and involved those advanced spiritual entities who have been entrusted with ensuring that the primordial wisdom remain accessible under all circumstances and conditions. Even if only in disguised and secretive form.

The terms “WISDOM RELIGION,“ “Occultism,“ and Esoteric Science” appear to be used to convey the same sense of a primary transcendent spiritual ground of knowledge. “That secret Science” seems to imply the practical utilisation of forces and powers related to this knowledge. The residual contents of that primary source of knowledge have been successively refined, reformulated, and retransmitted by

---

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

enlightened "adepts", or elite spiritually evolved and advanced beings. They have maintained responsibility for the successive formulations and transmissions of primary spiritual knowledge throughout history. And through their efforts and foresight, the accessible contents have not remained static, but have been adapted to fit historical and social circumstances. Yet, regardless of how much of the knowledge is actually cognisable and comprehensible to human consciousness, it still remains far greater than the capacity of the human mind to grasp. The so-defined limited quotient of it available to Blavatsky in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the substantive corpus of esoteric thought with which theosophy worked. The human race may not be evolved adequately to deal with the full impact or implications of the knowledge, but it nonetheless remains potent and actual. Other more highly evolved extra-terrestrial and inter-dimensional "beings from other and higher worlds" do have the capacity to understand and utilise it more fully, while the average human must make do with approximate semblances of the more profound original primary revelation.

For Madame Blavatsky, The critical and definitive belief that informs her thinking about the nature of knowledge is that the primary transcendent source subsumes all seemingly separate modes. Knowledge that appears from the human perspective to be differentiated into religious, philosophical and scientific forms is perceived to be so only because of the failure to properly cognise the unconditioned unity that underlies appearances.

> Thus, unity of everything in the universe implies and justifies our belief in the existence of a knowledge at once scientific, philosophical and religious, showing the necessity and actuality of the connection of man and all things in the universe with each other; which knowledge, therefore, becomes essentially RELIGION, and must be called in its integrity and universality by the distinctive name of WISDOM-RELIGION. [11]

The view that scientific, philosophical and religious knowledge can be categorised under a more inclusive form of mystical unity in effect makes all knowledge religious knowledge. "Knowledge therefore, becomes essentially RELIGION." This is an important concept that colours Blavatsky's thinking on all related matters. The criteria of a mystical religious orientation are always used as precedents for judgment and

[11] Ibid.

evaluation of all forms of knowledge. So philosophical inquiry, scientific speculation, and all other conceptual endeavours must conform to those presuppositions to be theosophically legitimated. Blavatsky's position doesn't favour an impartial, objective, value-free approach to knowledge, but seeks the confirmation of a set of mystical premises. Secular knowledge only has a limited value by itself. It only is fully sanctioned and incorporated into the theosophical worldview when conforming to the premises supporting an esoteric (and ultimately, mystical) vision of reality. The values and principles of the "WISDOM-RELIGION" thus stand as the ultimate criteria for interpreting the import of knowledge. And though religion, philosophy, and science are treated as more-or-less equally valid paths of inquiry, their independent status is valued only in when confirming the principles of the theosophical mystical vision. Exoteric religion, non-idealist philosophy, empirical secular science would not be conjoined favourably under the banner of the wisdom-religion. Some suggestion of empathy or possible support or validation of esoteric beliefs would seem to be required to be included as a legitimate embodiment of authentic knowledge. And all knowledge would therefore be, in a sense, reduced to appearing as a variant of religious knowledge, or "wisdom-religion."

A fundamental premise of the theosophical movement has been the belief that a hierarchy of advanced spiritual beings have intervened and guided the evolution of the human race. Blavatsky's understanding of the history of religions is based on the premise that the essentials of the wisdom-religion were transmitted and nurtured by such entities.

> There is not a religion worthy of the name which has been started otherwise than in consequence of such visits from Beings on the higher planes. [12]

By again reiterating that esoteric knowledge was transmitted by these spiritually advanced beings native to "higher planes," religion is represented as a repository of sacred truths, though not necessarily recognised as such without the proper symbolic decoding. The exoteric familiar institutional renderings of religion are felt to be partial and disguised versions of deeper and more radical truths. The esoteric, mystical, occult symbolic filter on the other hand reveals what is the real essence of such religious materials. And even though sensitive or properly receptive individuals may experience

[12] Ibid.

the requisite (though uncommon) kind of spiritual cognisance or insight, the distortions of the fallible personality invariably compromise the presentational form this knowledge is expressed in. And because of the limitations imposed by a flawed normal human personality and cognitive apparatus, the appearance of a plurality of often contradictory or incompatible beliefs becomes the inevitable end result.

Blavatsky though is optimistic that her own definitive work, *The Secret Doctrine*, will reconcile such disputes and definitively present to the world the bare essentials of the authentic esoteric tradition. She modestly prefaces her remarks by noting that she is restricting her revelation to only the permitted quotient of truth allowed for her century.

> The "Secret Doctrine"—a work which gives out all that can be given out during this century, is an attempt to lay bare in part the common foundation and inheritance of all—great and small religious and philosophical schemes. It was found indispensable to tear away all this mass of concreted misconceptions and prejudice which now hides the parent trunk of (a) all the great world-religions; (b) of the smaller sects; and (c) of Theosophy as it stands now—however veiled the great Truth, by ourselves and our limited knowledge. [13]

Blavatsky states that one of the purposes in writing *The Secret Doctrine* was to purify and correct ideas and beliefs that have been misconceived, or improperly comprehended because of the limitations of human knowledge. As well, a presentation of the "the common foundation and inheritance of all" religious and philosophical schemes remains a priority. The "parent trunk" of diverse religions and "philosophical schemes" represents "great Truth," which has been until now obscured, distorted, or ignored. However, it may yet still be laboriously recovered via a proper reconstruction. And the theosophical efforts towards this reconstruction and reinterpretation of traditional and extant materials required intensive and continuous commitment and steadfast effort. Blavatsky is strongly opinionated and angered that her efforts at explication have been largely treated with scorn or indifference. She blamed a significant degree of the resentment towards theosophy on the fact that it explicitly and unequivocally challenged many entrenched ideas.

> The crust of error is thick, laid on by whatever hand; and because we personally have tried to remove some of it, the effort became the standing reproach against all theosophical writers and even the Society. Few among our friends and readers have failed to characterize our attempt to expose error in the Theosophist and

[13] Ibid.

> Lucifer as "very uncharitable attacks on Christianity," "untheosophical assaults," etc., etc. Yet these are necessary, nay, indispensable, if we wish to plough up at least approximate truths. We have to lay things bare, and are ready to suffer for it as usual. It is vain to promise to give truth, and then leave it mingled with error out of mere faint-heartedness. That the result of such policy could only muddy the stream of facts is shown plainly. After twelve years of incessant labour and struggle with enemies from the four quarters of the globe. [14]

Because the accrued errors of exoteric and secular treatments have resulted in trivialisation and superficiality of esoteric beliefs, the theosophical objective of revision and contemporary restatement was felt to be a necessary task. A facet of their overall program was the attempt to reveal the common threads of all religions, considered to be the essentials of the primary wisdom-religion. Yet difficulties were unavoidable because those who felt threatened and defended the status quo became hostile. Even many supporters and sympathisers reading the theosophical literature felt that the tone and tenor of the “attacks on Christianity” were “uncharitable.” However, since the only way to solidly entrench the theosophical worldview required direct confrontation on disputable issues, an explicit challenge was unavoidable. The theosophical proponents had to “lay things bare,” and “suffer for it.” And that pattern of enduring repercussions was simply acknowledged as unavoidable, taking place “as usual.” If a compromised position was taken, in which accommodation was more of a priority than “the promise to give truth,” only an unsatisfactory result would eventuate. And the impression of a sense of steady though weary resolve is suggested when it is noted that the efforts have endured over twelve years of world-wide strife and personal confrontations. And yet, despite showing commitment to the cause, a tone of resignation and frustration can be detected when she speaks of the timidity of theosophical efforts.

> ... our wish-washy, tame protests in them, our timid declarations, our "masterly policy of inactivity," and playing at hide-and-seek in the shadow of dreary metaphysics, have only led to Theosophy being seriously regarded as a religious SECT. [15]

It appears that Blavatsky regrets what, in reflection, appears to be a less than successful strategy to gain widespread legitimation for theosophy. However, she feels it

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

was because the approach wasn't bold enough rather than it being too confrontational. In fact, it seems fair to infer that Blavatsky felt that excessive verbal argumentation was a miscalculation. "Playing at hide and seek" suggests that the process of ongoing debate was essentially a sterile and fruitless intellectual exercise. And "the shadow of dreary metaphysics" clearly reveals how Blavatsky felt about such a purely conceptual line of attack. It seems apparent that a more emotionally appealing and profound sense of conviction could not be elicited solely by intellectual techniques. And the gist of the self-doubt centres on the failed strategy of the "timid" approach. Her reflections suggest frustration that public acknowledgment of theosophy's legitimacy as a universally valid worldview was making little inroads. It was still, despite twelve years of argumentation, "seriously regarded" as merely another "religious SECT."

And though theosophy was still a minority cognitive orientation, it was considered to have the same conversional capabilities of traditional religions in effectively change the convictions of individuals.

> Theosophy has brought back from Materialism and blank despair to belief (based on logic and evidence) in man's divine Self, and the immortality of the latter, more than one of those whom the Church has lost through dogma, exaction of faith and tyranny. And, if it is proven that Theosophy saves one man only in a thousand of those the Church has lost, is not the former a far higher factor for good than all the missionaries put together? [16]

While appealing to the emotional and existential capacity of theosophy to instil authentic religious conviction and attract converts, the justification is yet presented as "based on logic and evidence." Theosophy is presented as a species of reformed religion, which is yet said to be defensible on logical and scientific principles. Christianity it is stated has lost the power to convincingly elicit belief in the immortality of "man's divine Self" because of its flaws, such as "dogma, exaction of faith and tyranny." Theosophy, on the other hand, it is claimed can be a channel of moral good if it "saves one man" who has abandoned the Church. Thus, it seems clear that theosophy is here being shown as a more effective and preferable religious option for those who may abandon Christianity. The major distinction implied is that theosophy claims to be free of the errors of the Church, and trusts in their own edifice of "logic and evidence" rather than unsupported faith to

[16] Ibid.

demonstrate the validity of its religious premises.

As a worldview attempting to gain legitimacy, theosophy by necessity was forced to be critical of objectionable mainstream tenets, yet still incorporate what was considered favourable, supportive, or indisputable. The contemporary dispute between defenders of orthodox (Christian) religion and materialistic science was addressed. However, rather than siding with either option, Blavatsky once more felt that the theosophical perspective would reconcile the conflict from a more persuasive and inclusive perspective.

Seeking out what was felt to be the "essence" of each, it was concluded that theosophy in fact was the purer source of each abstraction. The inter-changeability of religious, philosophical and scientific knowledge as equally valid paths to mystical truth once more was presumed, and permitted Blavatsky to think of theosophy as a superior synthesis. She also envisioned theosophy to be aloof from such conflicts because it was believed to be the authentic source of the other forms, and thus removed from charges of exclusivity or preferential leanings. However, from either side of the partisan divide, there is conflict, which will remain as long as each thinks it alone is exclusively correct. This state of hostility generated cynicism and confusion in public consciousness and bred mutually exclusive one-sided opinions. And theosophy, if for no other reason, retains a singular purpose in provoking analysis and criticism by revealing that each ignores important truths while exaggerating its own claims. At the minimum, theosophy is presented as a necessary source of corrective information, pointing out and exposing the roots of the ideational conflict. And ideally, theosophy would serve best as an integral worldview, in which the synthetic and inclusive esoteric spiritual truth would prevail over fragmented separate traditions of knowledge.

She concludes her article by continuing to stress the fallibility of the individual members, including herself, stating that only in the future will posterity be able to judge the net worth of the movement. However, the objectives stand as ideals worthy of full dedication and selfless pursuit, despite the difficulties encountered. The efforts of the movement in effecting change in public consciousness was acknowledged as generally inconclusive, and difficult to objectively judge. Recognition of a class of perpetual enemies from those with vested self-interest or commitment to traditional worldviews

seems to be accepted as unavoidable and inevitable. However, a tone of scorn seems to be directed at a wider Western public-at-large who neglected, rejected, or ignored theosophical propaganda, not empathising with the urgency felt imperative for a change of conviction, nor condoning the seeming self-evident legitimacy of the cause. However, despite the lack of massive consensual adaptation or infiltration into the dominant mainstream worldviews, the endeavour was still felt to be of long-term value. The goals and objectives of presenting a modernised synthetic spiritual worldview transcended any opinions publicly held about the Founders. Commitment to the cause was paramount; and a dominant theme was the establishment of the belief that their roots in the "wisdom-religion", though seemingly different, in essence unify all forms of speculative knowledge.

Religion, interpreted according to Blavatsky's distinctive usage, therefore seems to be the dominant category by which all forms of knowledge are evaluated. When we analyse how Blavatsky applied the term, certain conclusions may be drawn. We have examined one typical and representative position about how religion was perceived in the theosophical mix; and have seen that Blavatsky's interpretation was basically to differentiate between two meanings. One positive, one negative. The defining criterion was whether her vision of an underlying, inclusive, unifying, transcendent, mystical reality was accepted or rejected. This orientation was synonymous with her belief in a primordial wisdom tradition, embodying esoteric knowledge, and transmitted by specially qualified and spiritually advanced beings. Religion is therefore considered either positively in the reconstructed theosophical sense as the compendium of esoteric knowledge and instruction, or negatively, as the exoteric shell of spiritually devoid formalism and vapid obscurantism. Madame Blavatsky's usage of the term therefore is nuanced, dependent upon the context of her reference. Most often when describing historical traditions that were not particularly inclined to favour esoteric doctrines, "religion" signified dogmatic, limited, intolerant, attitudes. When "religion" referred to more esoterically convivial materials, she often qualified and expanded the term or utilised a hyphenated or capitalised word, expression or phrase, such as "divine Science," "RELIGION," "divine wisdom," "WISDOM-RELIGION," "Esoteric Science," "divine knowledge," TRUTH," "OCCULTISM," etc. Apparently, the fluid inter-changeability of

conceptual materials interpreted from an esoteric perspective produced an almost constant need for re-statement with subtle or prominent alteration of nuance, as the author dealt with the issues at hand.

4.3 Philosophy as a Category of Knowledge: Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Philosophers and Philosophicules*

We now must look at how the institution of philosophy was treated. Although more commonly subsumed as an analytical, descriptive, or interpretative function supporting religious or scientific positions, it yet was regarded as independent enough an enterprise to be classified as a necessary element of the grand theosophical synthesis. In her article *Philosophers and Philosophicules,* Blavatsky deals with the issues of philosophy from the theosophical perspective.

The article commences with complaints that prejudicial and misinformed attitudes have hardened, especially in Britain. A theme enunciated constantly was that the public were never properly exposed to theosophical intentions and interests by the reporting of the press. This obvious frustration was seemingly provoked because of suspicions that theosophy was not taken seriously as a viable philosophy, but treated more as a disreputable new religious entity.

> ... the proposition now generally adopted by the flippant press that "Theosophy is not a philosophy, but a religion," and "a new sect." [17]

The assumption was that the "flippant press" was either intentionally hostile, superficially informed, or incapable of grasping the true implications and significance of the theosophical message. Blavatsky clearly believed that theosophy was buttressed by fully defensible and sound philosophical principles and therefore deserved respectful consideration as an intellectual enterprise. And accusations of being a "new sect" were a familiar refrain, and always seemed particularly irksome to Blavatsky. Despite the preponderance of explicitly religious priorities, and the undeniable social facts suggesting sect-like organisation, Blavatsky strongly tried to maintain the stance that theosophy was more than, or different than, the unwanted stereotype portrayed in the press. However,

[17] H.P. Blavatsky, *Philosophers and Philosophicules,* retrieved from Blavatsky Net Foundation, 1889, <http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/PhilosophersAndPhilosophicules.htm>. (Accessed March 24,

lest there be confusion, she states that theosophy cannot be reduced to a single form of knowledge or mental activity.

> Theosophy is certainly not a philosophy, simply because it includes every philosophy as every science and religion. [18]

Once more, she insists on the superior inclusiveness of theosophy as the repository of all properly compliant (if esoterically compatible) forms of knowledge. Theosophy thus is not an independent school of philosophy, but because of shared values, subsumes idealist and mystically oriented philosophising as an integral component. The theosophical interpretation of the term "philosophy" however appears to be broader than it in fact was. By stating that "every philosophy" was included, any number of hostile or critical stances would have to be admitted. However, Blavatsky had in mind a more restricted definition. But by constantly stating that theosophy synthesised the essence of religion, philosophy, and science, she in fact simply meant that it was her interpretations of what was thought to be valid from these fields that was included. This kind of hypostatised superior synthetic status accorded theosophy was a common rhetorical device used frequently by Blavatsky when discussing any aspect of the theosophical belief system. As the ostensible synthesis of religion, philosophy, science, and compendium of esoteric data, theosophy often claimed to include or incorporate the familiar separate streams of knowledge as special instances or forms of the hypothetical larger comprehensive whole. Further in the article she notes that "philosophy" is somewhat equated with "theosophy" only when the former is understood in light of the view held by Pythagoras. So it in fact is an idealist/mystical/esoteric framework of reference that she bases her evaluation of philosophy on. And possibly as much because of the ascetic and mystically directed image of the Pythagorean communitarian than for content.

She accuses her critics of knowing even less about theosophy than they do about philosophy, either modern or ancient. Had they truly a deeper grasp, they would have seen the connections, but

> … they fail to see that every such definition shows Theosophy to be the very synthesis of Philosophy in its widest abstract sense, as in its special

---

2002).
[18] Ibid.

qualifications. [19]

In this “widest abstract sense,” and “in its special qualifications,” then, Blavatsky has identified theosophy as the “very synthesis” of philosophy. And as such, theosophy is the inclusive primary source of all possible separate and specialised modes of knowledge. So the endeavours of philosophy must therefore be interpreted in light of this more inclusive and already defined a priori position, accepting the premises of theosophy prior to directed speculation. And what would the most basic theosophical principle be?

> Theosophy is "divine" or "god-wisdom." [20]

So the merit of any philosophical inquiry would only be authenticated if it concurred with that starting premise. As such, philosophical activity would seem to be perceived as a supplementary methodology used to substantiate or augment knowledge acquired through religious experience or embodied in esoteric materials. And quoting Sir William Hamilton’s definition of philosophy, she confirms this interpretation.

> Therefore, it must be the life-blood of that system (philosophy) which is defined as "the science of things divine and human and the causes in which they are contained." Theosophy alone possessing the keys to those "causes." [21]

By stating that only theosophy is capable of providing the means to an accurate and authoritative understanding, Blavatsky is essentially reducing philosophical speculation to a supporting role at best, without status as a purely independent activity unless supporting a system based on “god-wisdom.”

She changes tone and perspective next, citing a generic encyclopaedic definition of philosophy as the love of, and search for wisdom, and speculation about causal principles, their implications, and their manifest effects. And this broad and easily adaptable interpretation is considered to have had various historical forms.

> When applied to god or gods, it became in every country theology; when to material nature, it was called physics and natural history; concerned with man, it appeared as anthropology and psychology; and when raised to the higher regions it becomes known as metaphysics. Such is philosophy—"the science of effects by their causes"—the very spirit of the doctrine of Karma, the most important teaching under various names of every religious philosophy, and a theosophical tenet that belongs to no one religion but explains them all. Philosophy is also

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

called "the science of things possible, inasmuch as they are possible." [22]

The philosophical impetus is again evaluated according to the subject matter under consideration. “Metaphysics” and “religious philosophy” are respectively “the higher regions” and “the most important teachings.” And therefore, when philosophy is practiced from such a perspective, it is identifiable as a “theosophical tenet.” Other specialised philosophical categories and interests are ignored or considered not as important. As well, Blavatsky bestows further esoteric legitimacy when she says that this kind of philosophical foundation is congruent with “the very spirit of the doctrine of Karma.” And she also claims that the modern materialist philosophies are deceptive and sophistic because they “reject even the possible” when their assertions are contradicted.

Blavatsky adds a further distinction, noting that philosophy and science have different functions. Philosophy reveals the meaning or “doctrine,” while the materials dealt with by science are “knowledge.”

> The office of Philosophy is the systematisation of the conceptions furnished by Science. . . . Science furnishes the knowledge, and Philosophy the doctrine. [23]

Doctrine and knowledge though are incomplete when not informed by higher spiritual aspirations or guiding premises. Philosophical credibility comes only when theosophy, the superior framework of interpretation, is applied for extraction of the most succinct meanings. That is only possible

> ... on condition of having that "knowledge" and that "doctrine" passed through the sieve of Divine Wisdom, or Theosophy. [24]

In other words, the “sieve of Divine Wisdom, or Theosophy” is an a priori conceptual framework that is applied to justify philosophical inquiry “on condition” of its conformity to the prerequisite criteria. Presumably, whatever is found to be unable to pass unscathed through the theosophical “sieve” is rejected as inauthentic, improper, or inappropriate philosophical content.

Another definition of philosophy as “the Science of Principles.” is suggested.

---

[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

Blavatsky interprets this by saying that it

> … is the claim of Theosophy in its branch-sciences of Alchemy, Astrology, and the occult sciences generally. [25]

Considered thusly, the "occult sciences generally" are perceived to be equivalent in their objectives to the pursuits of philosophical speculation. The "branch-sciences" are all accorded credibility as legitimate specialised fields of inquiry, regardless of the possible differences between each, or the validity of their starting premises.

She next moves in another direction, trying to show justification for her own theosophical efforts by claiming they are consistent with Hegel's views on the nature of philosophy.

> Hegel regards it as "the contemplation of the self-development of the ABSOLUTE," or in other words as "the representation of the Idea" (Darstellung der Idee). The whole of the Secret Doctrine—of which the work bearing that name is but an atom—is such a contemplation and record, as far as finite language and limited thought can record the processes of the infinite. [26]

So apparently, the "whole of the Secret Doctrine" represents the fullest most mature mode of philosophical activity, and stands as "such a contemplation and record" of the "self-development of the ABSOLUTE." As well, the suggestion is implied that whatever knowledge is conveyed is yet "but an atom" of immeasurably more. Only the limitations of "finite language and limited thought" prevent further understanding of "the processes of the infinite." This identification of her own work with "the representation of the Idea" would seem to create a connection to Hegelian Absolute Idealism. However, in her eagerness to claim all references to a spiritual first principle as basically analogous, she consistently identifies all conceptions of "the ABSOLUTE" in theosophical terms. The adaptation of Hegelian theory may have been more about acquiring supportive philosophical credibility than about substantial doctrinal parallels. The Hegelian system, as did most Idealistic philosophies, supplied a great deal of useful conceptual materials to theosophy, but in most cases, the theosophical orientation diverged because of a number of differences in basic assumptions. From the theosophical perspective, philosophical activity was considered sterile without occult and mystical presuppositions, and

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

intellectual pursuits were only justified if serving to validate those beliefs.

With the a priori premise that speculative activity (both "knowledge" and "doctrine") was only fully legitimated when passing through the theosophical "sieve," the only logical way of interpreting philosophical systems was to evaluate their spiritual quotient and intentions. Thus, for example, theosophy was consistently sympathetic to all varieties of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, as well as particular Idealist theories of Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, and others. However, in general, theosophical estimations of empirical and secular thinkers were more critical or hesitant because no initial premise about the superiority of God, Mind, Spirit, Reason, was assumed. Idealist thinking evoked more empathy because of a shared belief in the primacy of mental and subjective principles and the feasibility of an explicit or suggested spiritual grounding of the Absolute or its equivalent.

Having identified theosophical speculation as a true act of philosophising, Blavatsky emphasises this function. She now claims that the objectives are the same, and therefore supersede conventional religious limitations.

> Thus it becomes evident that Theosophy cannot be a "religion," still less "a sect," but it is indeed the quintessence of the highest philosophy in all and every one of its aspects. [27]

It would appear that in always reiterating that theosophy is a synthesis, and "more" than any one discipline or type of knowledge, a certain amount of linguistic confusion and contradiction is unavoidable. Here we find that theosophy is now represented as "the quintessence of the highest philosophy in all and every one of its aspects" and that it "cannot be a religion." By attempting to draw from religious, philosophical and scientific traditions and yet claim a superior synthetic and inclusive status, a common rhetorical technique was applied in which "*a*" is accorded secondary significance compared to "*the*." Thus theosophy is not merely "*a*" religion, philosophy, science, but "*the*" more authoritative and encompassing authentic source and synthesised whole. In this instance, theosophy is presented as "*the* quintessence of the highest philosophy." And the continual irritation of being perceived as an exclusivist religion or sect was an issue that required defence by enunciating that theosophy aspired to be inclusive and non-dogmatic.

[27] Ibid.

Blavatsky is confident that she has shown how theosophy

> … falls under, and answers fully, every description of philosophy. [28]

However, there are more philosophical principles which theosophy also concurs with. She quotes Sir William Hamilton again about philosophy being a search for principles, sensible and abstract truths, and the applications of reason "to its legitimate objects." She feels that theosophy is a fully rightful and reliable enterprise when attempting to achieve such ends. Especially pertaining to the nature of "the Ego or mental self" and the relationship between the "ideal and the real." Theosophy therefore is perceived to be equivalent to philosophy in pursuit of speculative objectives, although it blunts that mode of inquiry by pre-conditioning the criteria for judging and determining what is acceptable knowledge. This identification of philosophy with the premises of theosophy is reiterated by saying that

> ... he who studies Theosophy, studies the highest transcendental philosophy. [29]

So interpreted, Blavatsky attempts to attain a more respectable stature for the theosophical system, linking it with the tradition of philosophical speculation and suggesting that the objectives are similar, and that theosophy is equivalent to "the highest transcendental philosophy."

As she concludes the article, Blavatsky indulges in some accusatory rhetoric, attempting once more to show that theosophy transcends the people who may be espousing it, and that it is subsumes all forms of limited knowledge. She compares her situation to that of Socrates, stating that if Socratic teachings were rejected because of the accusations he was charged with, then the tradition of knowledge passed on through Plato and the Neoplatonic philosophers would never have come to pass.

And attention again is turned to the philosophical mood of the times. Blavatsky is scornful of those who philosophise without a spiritual orientation. Speaking of "true philosophy," she has these remarks.

> A sceptic can never aspire to that title. He who is capable of imagining the universe with its handmaiden Nature fortuitous, and hatched like the black hen of the fable, out of a self-created egg hanging in space, has neither the power of thinking nor the spiritual faculty of perceiving abstract truths; which power and faculty are the first requisites of a philosophical mind. We see the entire realm of

[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

> modern Science honeycombed with such materialists, who yet claim to be regarded as philosophers. They either believe in naught as do the Secularists, or doubt according to the manner of the Agnostics. [30]

True philosophy is only possible when informed by spiritual insight. Sceptics, materialists, secularists, agnostics cannot claim this position, so thus their efforts do not carry the same worth. Their speculative faculties are not a priori "spiritual," and thus do not begin with the required "prerequisites." So from her perspective, empirical speculation is problematic. Those who do not initially profess a spiritual orientation are considered a "materialist" of one form or other, and are accused of being superficial philosophers. Those who are capable of imagining the universe as self-subsistent without necessarily committing to a spiritual position are simply guilty of inadequate vision and depth of understanding. Believing in "naught" and maintaining a position of "doubt" are indefensible philosophical positions according to Blavatsky, who therefore denies "Secularists" and "Agnostics" credibility as philosophical enquirers. An a priori assumption of the spiritual basis of reality thus defines the veracity of all purported philosophers. And, finally, the deductive method of Plato is praised over the inductive method of modern thinkers.

> … none of our present Darwinians and materialists and their admirers, our critics, could have studied philosophy otherwise than very "superficially." … Theosophists have a legitimate right to the title of philosophers—true "lovers of Wisdom." [31]

The assumption is made that theosophical critics are also Darwinians and materialists, and thus hostile because of differences of opinion on major theoretical principles. And because these critics could have only studied philosophy "superficially," their opinions are not truly credible in any event. On the other hand, theosophists are "true lovers of Wisdom," considered according to the criteria earlier mentioned, and thus, "have a legitimate right to the title of philosophers."

The theosophical interpretation of philosophy as a category of knowledge, like that of religion, is basically reduced to a choice of two opposing perspectives. On the one hand the esteemed and idealised view, that equates the enterprise of intellectual

[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.

speculation with pursuit of wisdom as a moral undertaking. Philosophy is considered a lifelong quest, dedicated to the seeking out of what ultimately is believed to be a mystical form of truth, essentially alike in basics to the contents of the esoteric worldview. The other side of the equation shows those who intellectually defend philosophies based on non-mystical or non-explicitly spiritual principles to be superficial and misleading. At worst, those defending materialist or purely empirical principles are denigrated and labelled as sophists or sceptics, incapable of perceiving the wider spiritual picture that true philosophers spend their lives in pursuit of. It is only when philosophy is legitimised as a parallel theosophical path, or defender of theosophically endorsed principles, that it is considered legitimate. So its worth is dependent on its usefulness in defending that predefined position.

4.4 Science as a Category of Knowledge: Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Occult or Exact Science*?

The third category of knowledge through which the theosophical synthesis attempted to gain legitimation was that of science. Blavatsky's typical thoughts on this subject may be discovered by an examination of the 1886 article *Occult or Exact Science*? She begins by differentiating between "modern science" and "esoteric science," claiming that the latter methodology is superior because it is based on a more comprehensive and unassailable foundation.

> Every new discovery made by modern science vindicates the truths of the archaic philosophy. The true occultist is acquainted with no single problem that esoteric science is unable to solve if approached in the right direction. [32]

Modern science thus is considered an incomplete derivation or variant of "the archaic philosophy," which, as a synthetic worldview, includes "esoteric science." This is the position of the "true occultist," who is confident at solving any problem when using that methodology properly.

The modern scientific methodology and its way of envisioning the world are sarcastically referred to as "the pride of the age" by Blavatsky, who obviously does not concur with that characterisation in the literal sense, as was common amongst many contemporaries. She is critical because modern science claims independent legitimating status, without

[32] Ibid.

sanctification from other ideational sources. Blavatsky considers the tradition of ancient science as one with strong occult and spiritual connotations, and harmonious with the esoteric philosophy she is expounding.

Blavatsky critiques modern scientific claims, including those of Humboldt. She disagrees with the belief that mastery over matter is the real objective of science. She suggests that a substitution of the term "spirit" for "matter" would be more appropriate. She next wants to show that knowledge only of matter is insufficient for the purpose of true science, and that it cannot even adequately explain the simplest natural phenomena. The "men of learning" and "the superstitious," respectively are seen representing the traditional orientations of science and religion, and are shown to be equally ready to use what she considered to be pre-existing distorting and constrained categories of interpretation for explaining seemingly unknown phenomena. Blavatsky notes that spiritualist related phenomena had subsequently entered the stream of public consciousness, necessitating reconsideration of the stereotypical assessments. However, even before factoring in that challenge to habitual patterns of thought, Blavatsky claims that another form of "proof" was available and capable of demonstrating the existence of supersensory capacities. She cites examples where ingestion of narcotics and drugs has allegedly produced cases of supersensory experience. She was aware of possible mitigating factors, but still felt that a stratum of authentic evidence could be adduced.

> No doubt the powers of human fancy are great; no doubt delusion and hallucination may be generated for a shorter or a longer period in the healthiest human brain either naturally or artificially. But natural phenomena that are not included in that "abnormal" class do exist; and they have at last taken forcible possession even of scientific minds. [33]

Acknowledging the potential fallibilities inherent with the imagination and the untrustworthiness of "delusion and hallucination," it seems Blavatsky is yet trying to acquire the stamp of legitimation from authoritative scientific channels for concession that supersensory capacities "do exist."

This objective was a theosophical constant, although an implicit suspicion and distrust of the scientific establishment often eventuated in mixed rhetoric. On the one hand attempting to be conciliatory, on the other, accusatory. In the following words,

[33] Ibid.

Blavatsky is still trying to show that scientific confirmation of the supersensory is a logical step when seen in its entirety.

> The phenomena of hypnotism, of thought-transference, of sense-provoking, merging as they do into one another and manifesting their occult existence in our phenomenal world, succeeded finally in arresting the attention of some eminent scientists. [34]

Blavatsky assumes a dualistic stance in her interpretation of such phenomena, differentiating between "their occult existence" and their manifestation "in our phenomenal world." This would seem to imply that there is a noumenal sphere of reality that sustains the phenomenal. As well, the claim that "some eminent scientists" had shown interest in varieties of supersensory experience obviously suggests that the majority had not, and that widespread consensual legitimation from the scientific establishment was not immanent.

In particular, she takes offence at the conclusions of Charcot and others in France, England, Russia, Germany and Italy, who have been investigating, experimenting and theorising for over fifteen years.

> The sole explanation given to the public, to those who thirst to become acquainted with the real, the intimate nature of the phenomena, with their productive cause and genesis—is that the sensitive who manifest them are all HYSTERICAL! They are psychopates, and neurosists—we are told—no other cause underlying the needless variety of manifestations than that of a purely physiological character. [35]

Blavatsky indicates that there was an emotional stake involved for those of the public "who thirst" for credible scientific legitimation for psychic phenomena. They intently want to understand the truth, but are suspicious of current explanations. The reduction of most cases studied by science to physiological or psychological abnormalities is considered by Blavatsky to be an insulting and humiliating characterisation. By only adducing hysterical, psychopathic and neurotic causes, autonomous existence of supersensory powers, states, or environments is denied. The reduction of spiritually valued phenomena to physiological by-product also meant that such scientific methodology would never bring the type of legitimation sought after. Blavatsky

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

continues to dispute the reductivist claims, noting that some cases of extrasensory experience would appear absurd if "epileptic hysteria" was used as the only explanation. As well, she disputes the logic in classifying all prophetic, religious, and inspired statements as the pathological results of hysteria.

She then refers to her own writing of *Isis Unveiled* ten years previously, stating that amongst its objectives was the desire to demonstrate that nature had an authentic occult dimension; and that "certain men" have had the capacity since ancient times to thoroughly understood and apply this kind of knowledge. Much of this knowledge however has been lost or hidden from public view. As well, the Vedas and other ancient texts were also said to contain such hidden knowledge when properly understood.

However, it may not appear to be transparent or obvious, because one must be "reading esoterically" to perceive the truth. This would mean that a particular contextual understanding of language, symbols, and reference materials would be necessary to arrive at those conclusions. And the esoteric tradition thus would require continuity of transmission and in interpretation spanning the ages from "antediluvian Humanity." to the latest present moment. Therefore, a much more extended and disputable historical time span than commonly accepted in scientific and academic circles was presumed. So, in the end, claims to a more adequate, accurate, plausible understanding of supersensory experience required a radical departure from traditional Western scientific sources of legitimation. Rejecting the reductivist perspective as inadequate and demeaning led to the acceptance of a much more severe alternative position when considered from the Western ideational mainstream. Where she could, Blavatsky tried to show common ground between theosophical theories and fringe or pseudo-scientific speculation, but was adamant in protesting against the materialist tendencies of respected and established scientific schools. Basically, the response to rejection by orthodox scientific authorities is the adoption of a fully developed alternative system of belief and explanation. An "Esoteric Doctrine" which is synthetic, inclusive, felt to be of superior status than non-esoteric orientations. And thus deserving respect and primacy over any other form of scientific speculation.

And the reason why conventional science was believed to be inadequate and incapable of full elucidation of disputable paranormal phenomena was because it lacked

the necessary foundation for proper investigation. By not factoring in the principles enunciated by occult science, only a partial and very limited understanding of the causes and conditions of paranormal phenomena could be adduced. Scientists themselves were basically helpless under such conditions through no fault of their own. They simply were not equipped with the proper set of conceptual tools to approach the phenomena correctly. Without a prior familiarity with occult principles and acceptance of a working hypothesis about the subtle realms of nature, science inevitably fails to reveal the true depth and scope of the universal laws that are in operation throughout the cosmos. Orthodox materialist scientists are constrained by the presuppositions of their disciplines and require a new orientation based on inclusion of occult knowledge.

However, even by just acknowledging the legitimacy of an occult hypothesis, scientists could, in good faith, admit that they have conducted their investigations as far as they could take them and then let more qualified metaphysicians deal with the implications.

> Therefore, having conducted their experiments to a certain boundary, they would desist and declare their task accomplished. Then the phenomena might be passed on to transcendentalists and philosophers to speculate upon. [36]

So science as familiarly known and practiced could still function within prescribed limits, but would be considered a prefatory or preliminary exercise. The more authoritative expertise would be entrusted to "transcendentalists and philosophers" who share the esoteric orientation. Therefore, making sense of, and supplying meaning to empirical knowledge itself would not be a responsibility of the scientist (unless properly enlightened and initiated) but require the sanctification of elite esoteric specialists.

The fundamental principle is that intellectual/conceptual cognition is incomplete and untrustworthy without the guidance of intuitional/spiritual illumination. And to provide properly trained scientists, these initial conditions would have to be met.

As well, the only way the supersensory domain could be studied would be by those who had sufficiently developed their own paranormal capabilities. To be able to perceive these hitherto unrecognised dimensions of reality, perceptual and cognisable data must be transmitted from the source of origin through to the receptive faculties. Thus, the utilisation of the appropriate supersensory skills is required. However, under

[36] Ibid.

normal circumstances, the likelihood of the majority of established scientists developing appropriate sensitivity appeared more hypothetical than practical. It was an ideal that Madame Blavatsky hoped would be realised in due course, but which was unlikely to become a realistic option at the time. Yet, according to her reasoning, the investigation and evaluation of psychic phenomena externally without sensitised consciousness would not allow proper perception of the deeper aspects of the phenomena. And, as expected, the materialistic outlook was felt to be doomed to failure from the outset.

> And this, we think, is the case with the materialist: he can judge psychic phenomena only by their external aspect, and no modification is, or ever can be, created in him, so as to open his insight to their spiritual aspect. [37]

And thus the materialist is judged incapable of adaptation; able to only evaluate phenomena superficially without empathy or acknowledgment that truth may appear from beyond the spheres of sense and intellect. Without the "spiritual aspect," scientific endeavour could only be of limited value.

Turning specifically to the conflicting opinions about paranormal experience, Blavatsky states that scientific acceptance of the hypothesis of psychic phenomena is not necessarily impossible, but that the dispute is based on different perspectives about their cause. She claims too that the theosophical position is more difficult to defend than that of the spiritualists, because it is more extreme, rejecting both materialistic theory as well as belief in spirits as presented in conventional spiritualist thought. Blavatsky categorises spiritualists as "Idealists" and scientists as "Materialists" who equally share the same belief that known science could prove or disprove the authenticity of the spiritual realm. But those who believe in the possibility of science vindicating occult beliefs will be disappointed as well, because its current methodology simply will not allow a proper treatment.

> Science, unless remodelled entirely, can have no hand in occult teachings. Whenever investigated on the plan of the modern scientific methods, occult phenomena will prove ten times more difficult to explain than those of the spiritualists pure and simple. [38]

The modern scientific method must be rethought and reconstructed to allow the admittance of phenomena that cannot be adequately explained through either spiritualist

[37] Ibid.

or materialist frameworks of knowledge. Blavatsky, clearly showing her frustration at this entrenched state of affairs, is doubtful that sufficient progress is on the horizon. After ten years of attentively following the debate, she is doubtful of even the hope for an objective and impartial inquiry into paranormal phenomena, let alone help in effectively breaking down established scientific views and adopting more amicable theories from the occult system. Even those individual scientists who may be have come to believe in the authenticity of such phenomena are not receptive to hypotheses extending beyond spiritualist boundaries. Though perhaps able to doubt the credibility of the materialistic worldview, they yet remain unable to make the leap from spiritualist to occult theory. And if a choice has to be made, she feels that the esteem and prestige of traditional scientific orthodoxy would prevail even over private speculative belief. Even if open-minded at the outset, the cumulative conditioning affected by habitual deference to the authority of science simply takes precedent over more tenuous and subjective beliefs. Only the "right spirit of inquiry" precludes the imposition of the entrenched habitual ways when dealing with the unfamiliar and the mysterious side of nature. A new sense of reverence and non-judgmental objectivity is requisite.

As well, there is even a line of demarcation drawn between theosophists who are interested in occult investigation and those who do not consider it a high priority.

> Those Theosophists who are not Occultists cannot help the investigators, let alone the men of science. Those who are Occultists work on certain lines that they dare not trespass. Their mouth is closed; their explanations and demonstrations are limited. What can they do? Science will never be satisfied with a half-explanation.[39]

In other words, "those who are Occultists" are privy to more esoteric knowledge than those who are not interested. They also proceed with constraints, not daring to trespass boundaries. These boundaries may be implicit or self-imposed, but non-the-less regulate the field of inquiry. As well, the impression is given that a far vaster quantity of knowledge is potentially attainable, but not yet accessible. Secretive caution must be applied. "Their mouth is closed," so only a limited amount of information is transmittable. "Their explanations and demonstrations are limited," so only partial and

---

[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

selective information is conveyed or alluded to. Yet, by definition of the process and its cautionary restraints, there are no other options. So only hints and ambiguous suggestions are possible to indicate more extensive knowledge. But inevitably, this procedure can only be ineffective when measured by traditional scientific standards and expectations. So a certain sense of helplessness, frustration, and futility is unavoidable from the perspective of the experienced occultist trying to gain scientific legitimation.

The methodology of science is examined with the realisation that the inductive method, based on sense experience, cannot adequately provide a trustworthy method for investigation of abnormal phenomena.

> Science I mean Western Science—has to proceed on strictly defined lines. She glories in her powers of observation, induction, analysis and inference. Whenever a phenomenon of an abnormal nature comes before her for investigation, she has to sift it to its very bottom, or let it go. And this she has to do, and she cannot, as we have shown, proceed on any other than the inductive methods based entirely on the evidence of physical senses. [40]

By acknowledging the method of scientific investigation and the difficulties of applying it to abnormal phenomena, Blavatsky notes that in certain notorious public investigations scientists were unable to independently deal with phenomena beyond their scope. In Loudon, Salem, Morzine, and elsewhere, respective police agencies were called in to deal with situations arising from inadequate understanding of psychic phenomena. Also, she states that only small samplings of baffling cases have ever been designated for scientific investigation. And in many of those cases, evidence was grossly mismanaged. Hearsay statements would be accepted as factual while eyewitness accounts would be dismissed, according to how they conformed to established scientific principles. And even honourable people may react subconsciously and in their own self-interest.

As well, the repercussions of the materialistic scientific worldview extend from theoretical to practical interests and bring up ethical concerns. Blavatsky sees a direct logical connection between belief in a soulless mechanistic universe and what she feels is essentially a self-interested hedonistic outlook on life.

> The theoretical materialistic science recognizes nought but SUBSTANCE. Substance is its deity, its only God. We are told that practical materialism, on the other hand, concerns itself with nothing that does not lead directly or indirectly to

[40] Ibid.

> personal benefit. "Gold is its idol," justly observes Professor Butler of (a spiritualist, yet one who could never accept even the elementary truths of occultism, for he "cannot understand them."—"A lump of matter," he adds, the beloved substance of the theoretical materialists, is transformed into a lump of mud in the unclean hands of ethical materialism. And if the former gives but little importance to inner (psychic) states that are not perfectly demonstrated by their exterior states, the latter disregards entirely the inner states of life.... The spiritual aspect of life has no meaning for the practical materialism, everything being summed up for it in the external. The adoration of this external finds its principal and basic justification in the dogmas of materialism, which has legalized it. [41]

The contempt and disgust for the attitudes and practices of "practical materialists" as she characterises them is plain to see. She blames the ideational foundation of theoretical materialism and its lack of a spiritual component for allowing a purely secular attitude to prevail. Apparently, preoccupation with "the external" would not proliferate if a worldview with clearly defined boundaries between sacred and profane were to be dominant. This distaste for anything to do with non-spiritual values reflects her implicit gnostic ethical stance. The realm of matter and the interests of the body and personal ego are starkly contrasted with the idealised world of the spirit and the transcendental objective of mystical enlightenment. The practical materialist, even professing to abide by a moral code termed "ethical materialism" is thus denounced for conducting his life with "unclean hands." Blavatsky's radical gnostic dualism is an "either/or" affair, allowing no room for compromise or alternative options. She even damns with faint praise Professor Butlerof, who though not a materialist, is considered too timid to commit to the theosophical orientation because he "could never accept even the elementary truths of occultism."

The abhorrence felt by Blavatsky for any and all forms of materialism then clearly is not simply based on differing opinions about the ultimate nature of the universe. It is primarily a strongly felt emotional reaction to what she perceived to be the legitimising of potentially chaotic and self-interested ethical conduct. And from this perspective, it seems fair to conclude that Blavatsky feared a dominantly secularised world because it would reflect the successful influence of conventional science without acknowledging the primacy of spirit. Yet she detested orthodox Christianity and its worldview, so the only viable alternative was to embrace the esoteric vision. And her advice to theosophists

[41] Ibid.

therefore was to simply try and ignore the distractions of the secular world, maintain faith in the theosophical approach, and concentrate on making personal progress with one's inner life.

The scientific perspective endorsed by Blavatsky would substitute the occult vision of a dynamic and multi-dimensional view of nature for the mechanistic model based on Newtonian physics. To occultists, the belief is that all beings pass through increasingly complex cycles of transformation, growth and maturation. However, Blavatsky is disappointed at what she feels is

> …the spiritual stagnation in the world of the intellect and of the higher esoteric knowledge. [42]

That "the higher esoteric knowledge" had not yet infiltrated adequately to effectively change the dominant worldviews appears to be taken as indication of failure to achieve a major objective. She ends her article with a little more optimism, trusting in the assurance that time will prove her right.

> However, no one can impede or precipitate the progress of the smallest cycle. But perhaps old Tacitus was right: "Truth is established by investigation and delay; falsehood prospers by precipitancy." We live in an age of steam and mad activity, and truth can hardly expect recognition in this century. The Occultist waits and bides his time. [43]

While disappointment in people, groups, and institutions was inevitable, confidence in the inexorable workings of the cosmic plan sustained faith in the overall program. She seems to be suggesting that the evolutionary cycles proceed with an almost grim and autonomous inevitability. Not even the "smallest cycle" will be avoided or compromised, reaffirming the belief that long-term vindication of the theosophical position will ultimately prevail and justify the current enterprise. The frantic, active, technologically bourgeoning age was also used as an excuse for lack of widespread public repudiation of the status quo worldviews. Preoccupation with "this worldly" interests precluded mass attraction to alternative systems. The seemingly self-evident superiority of the theosophical brand of truth thus could "hardly expect recognition in this century." However, belief, confidence, self –assurance that the alternative worldview is

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

the better option allows the occultist to wait till others see what they feel is the same self-evident truth. He "bides his time" while the ephemeral and transitory come and go, certain that vindication and validation eventually will prevail.

Science, as the dominant category of knowledge in the West, is therefore considered both an enemy and a potential ally. The reality of a strongly materialistic strain of thought was considered a major impediment and obstacle, responsible for legitimating a worldview felt to be bereft of the kinds of beliefs and perceptions embedded in the esoteric way of envisioning reality. Thus, at every opportunity Madame Blavatsky tried to debunk what she felt were extravagant and erroneous claims, and the seemingly unassailable authority that the scientific establishment wielded. This meant challenging many of the fundamental tenets that supported the materialistic outlook. Yet, the broad scientific methodology and validation of a neutral and objective approach to the field of data also was respected. Therefore, the effort to emulate the scientific attitude in the promotion and defence of paranormal and mystical phenomena was a strategic tact used by Blavatsky in the effort to gain public credibility and legitimacy. However, because the theosophical animus was more aligned to spiritual and religious priorities, adoption of a quasi-scientific stance could not fully demonstrate the principles most esteemed. Every attempt to posture as a purely independent and objective investigative body was compromised by reference to the prerequisite set of beliefs considered critical to any potential exploratory undertaking. So regardless of the merit of any theory or hypothesis, only those sharing those criteria could adjudge the results to be independently and impartially arrived at. Blavatsky assumed that the position she espoused was a necessary corrective to the flawed materialistic approach, but it too reflected a vested and prejudicial viewpoint.

The critical stance taken by Blavatsky towards materialistic science was motivated by indignation about its dismissal of a spiritual dimension. The theosophical constructivist efforts were directed towards the legitimation of all forms of what were purported to be supersensory and mystical experience. Using a semi-scientific framework to incorporate materials pertaining to psychic or occult phenomena had a defensible logic, since those forms of experience were said to be based on extended or expanded sensory capacities. However, when venturing away from discussion of psychic

experience towards spiritual and mystical states of consciousness, Blavatsky's use of scientific analogies or creation of hybrid terms blurred distinctions. A constant theme in her writings is that spiritual truth can be "proven scientifically." In fact, the examples mostly used pertain to psychic phenomena, or promote disciplines, techniques, and changes of lifestyle that may eventually produce profound spiritual enlightenment. Combating scientific materialism by claiming to be able to use the very same methodology to prove the opposite conclusion and legitimate a spiritual worldview perhaps was an understandable but overly ambitious expectation.

4.5 Summation of Chapter Four: The Dual Interpretations of Each Category

Madame Blavatsky's approach to the three categories of knowledge often revealed a double set of objectives. On the one hand, it was important to debunk and critique what was felt to be wrong with the dominant orientations. Thus, she attacked the category of religion for being dogmatic, obscurantist, exoteric, intent on worldly and self-serving ends. More concerned with the letter rather than the spirit of authentic religion. And she likewise was dismissive of philosophy practiced for mere intellectual purposes, without a nobler objective in mind. Science was scorned when seen as a legitimator of mechanistic and materialistic worldviews and not as a technique for justifying occult knowledge. In her writings, Madame Blavatsky had a natural inclination to challenge what she disputed, because implementing her own vision required opportunity to prove that the majority consensual stances were fallacious or misleading.

As well, while attempting to prove that the status quo beliefs were wrong, it was imperative that a more appealing and more plausible option was presented. So when explicating her writings it is not unusual to see that the tenor of her style shifts constantly between deconstruction and reconstruction. Religious knowledge, when understood from an esoteric context, took on an entirely different worth than when considered purely as a by-product of a stagnant formalistic institution. Through the valuation of mystical experience and belief in an unbroken wisdom tradition, religious knowledge acquired a different meaning than commonly held in mainstream Western society. As well, by prioritising philosophy as a lifelong quest for wisdom (which was assumed to be a form of transcendentalism or Idealism), rather than as a mere intellectual exercise, a more

theosophically empathetic image was inculcated. The intellect was now believed to be informed or supplemented by spiritual intuition. And by idealising the role of the scientist as an impartial objective investigator of all facets of nature, it was presumed that the materialistic premises would naturally be proven unsubstantiated and repudiated, ultimately replaced by insights derived from scientists with more spiritually attuned and sympathetic outlooks. And this would invariably lead to a vision of nature that legitimises more subtle, occult, and spiritual dimensions.

To construct a minority worldview that challenged conventional thinking required that the main categories of knowledge be addressed and dealt with in a way that brought up doubts about the status quo positions, and also provided attractive alternatives that could be reasonably accepted as credible. The main thrust of Madame Blavatsky's writings attempts to do just that. As well as confronting the categories of knowledge, the type of esoteric, occult, mystical contents of the theosophical worldview depended upon a dramatically revised representation of the parameters of human experience. Proclaiming the benefits of an esoteric, spiritual worldview immediately suggested that the confirmatory means of legitimation would have to come from testimony or evidence that verified that such potential in fact was authentic. We shall now explore this issue.

Chapter 5
The Significance of Experience in the Theosophical Worldview

5.1 The Importance of Experience in Justifying Theory

Having looked at how the religious, philosophical, and scientific fields of knowledge were typically treated by Blavatsky for legitimating purposes, and how each category suggested dual critical and constructivist readings, it now becomes necessary to inquire about another significant component of the theosophical mix. Confronting the dominant social avenues of knowledge both ways in the effort to legitimise a minority esoteric and spiritual worldview was one major facet of the theosophical impetus. Another equally important component in the effort to entrench an alternative cognitive worldview was to try and legitimise a much more expansive representation of the parameters of human experience. The theosophical system of ideas and beliefs proposes a multidimensional hierarchal structure, with each discrete level or plane said to require the activation of the requisite state of consciousness to properly perceive and cognise the reality native to that specific existential position. A purely theoretical enunciation of newly reconstructed and rehabilitated esoteric knowledge would remain an abstract hypothesis without the suggestion that experiential confirmation supported such assumptions, and could potentially be verified by the individual who had achieved the necessary expansion of consciousness. As well, authority figures of the movement themselves could justify their elite organisational status more effectively by claiming experiential familiarity with the states of consciousness that purportedly confirm the premises laid out in theosophical speculation.

To understand the motivation required to secure personal commitment and dedication to the theosophical cause and ideational system, we must try and explore the experiential grounds of belief and inspiration that seemed to be foundational for Blavatsky's continued efforts. This requires examination of some facets of her personal life as they relate to the issue at hand. As the dominant personage and primary authoritative source of theosophical theories and beliefs, it is only logical to assume that a great deal of the inspiration for proposing, construing and defending this alternative cognitive system must be based on significant personal experience. It seems fair to

believe that a worldview grounded on occult and mystical premises would implicitly avow the worth and value of those types of experience; and that its leading theoretician and promoter would have a personal familiarity and background with such states of consciousness. And given the adamant insistence shown by Madame Blavatsky that esoteric beliefs were based on a primordial wisdom tradition that valued the highest mystical objectives, her own commitment would appear to be derived at least to some degree on the following interpretation of religious behaviour.

> The *experience dimension* takes into account the fact that … the properly religious person will at some time or other achieve a direct, subjective knowledge of ultimate reality; that he will achieve some sense of contact, however fleeting, with a supernatural agency. [1]

While a major incentive may have been to effectively change or transform the dominant worldviews, to proffer an alternative to the religious, philosophical and scientific ideational status quo, this determination seems to have been at least to some degree shaped by personal experiences and beliefs. And the states of consciousness pertaining to those forms of experience and idealised as ultimately desirable and supremely worthy of attainment, also stand as significant elements in the shaping of theosophical theory and practice. The undeniable authenticity of psychic and mystic modes of consciousness was a constant given in the theosophical worldview, as was belief in the special cosmic hierarchal status of the Masters of Wisdom. However, to try and entrench these beliefs and gain the attention of the interested public, it was necessary to show that there were means to verify such claims through experience. If the system promoted a belief in the possibility of enhanced states of consciousness, then some sort of authoritative precedent would need to be in place to give it the stamp of legitimacy.

5.2 Blavatsky: Experience and Leadership Reinforcement

Promoting a belief in the possibility of enhanced states of consciousness without a theosophical leader with a reputation for personal experience of those higher forms would provide only a hypothetical model rather than assure confidence in a confirmed and efficacious system. Discussions, reasoned arguments, appeals to logic, and portrayal of

[1] R. Stark and C.Y, Glock, *Dimensions of Religious Commitment*, in *Sociology of Religion*, ed. Roland Robertson, Harmondsworth/Baltimore/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 256-257.

possible hypothetical scenarios promoting the legitimacy of supersensory and mystical states of consciousness would not in themselves entirely suffice to sustain enduring belief and conviction. Those already committed or sympathetic to the theosophical worldview would require continued reassurance of the special experiential basis upon which the authority of the leader of the movement rested. In this context the following characterisation of a "charismatic leader" by Wilson is appropriate.

> The image of the charismatic leader depends on a mythology of origins; on the incidence of portents and signs; exceptional experiences; on his or her having had the opportunity to assimilate past wisdom; on hearsay stories of stamina, energy, untutored insight, and untrained exceptional abilities. [2]

Madame Blavatsky fits quite comfortably within this defining framework. Much of the biographical and testimonial material surrounding her career and exploits show that she perceived her life as a mission, with special significance attached to various events and circumstances. She often claimed that her Master had saved her life on different occasions in order that she be accessible as the chosen vehicle to transmit the teachings of theosophy, thus revealing a belief in the "portents and signs" of her special destiny. As well, the intentional ambiguity and embellishment of "exceptional experiences" actually reflect on the way she publicly recounted the narrative of her life. When relating details of her private life she effectively obscured independent outside inquiry about her "veiled years," and promoted a self-serving mythology of origins that was easier to integrate into the supporting framework of belief. By continually reiterating that she was especially chosen to initiate the new movement by the Masters, even self-deprecation and protestations of unworthiness became familiar refrains and part of her personal mythos. Stories of her "stamina and energy" were recounted, especially as it referred to the process of literary composition entailed in the creation of her major writings, as well as in other deeds and undertakings. It was acknowledged that though she did not have an extensive formal education, her "untutored insight" about a multitude of subjects was widely esteemed and praised, especially in conjunction with her conversational skills. The very contents of her teachings illustrated how she had "assimilated past wisdom." And the "untrained exceptional abilities" referred to her acclaimed mediumistic and occult capacities. And, although her purported extraordinary experiential episodes

generated both awed devotion and dismissive cynicism, it would seem highly doubtful to deny that in her mind at least, she sincerely felt that she had been subject to at times especially profound and qualitatively significant states of insight and cognisance. The following words of Underhill, although referring more specifically to the traditional mystic profile, seem to apply at least to some degree to Madame Blavatsky.

> Whatever the language, tradition or symbol through which such a dynamic experience of the supernatural comes to man, whatever its limitations or temperamental form, the effects are always vital effects. The ordinary sequence of natural life may continue, but it is seen, now and ever after, in supernatural regard. The soul suddenly perceives within that natural life further unguessed possibilities opening up before it. [3]

The "dynamic experience of the supernatural" refers to a confrontation or encounter with the numinous that often is characterised in the terminology of mysticism, but may refer to other forms of extraordinary consciousness or awareness. It seems clear that Blavatsky was familiar with at least a few such discrete supersensory or unusual states, including possibly, some form of mystical cognisance. From her own claims and those accredited to her followers, it seems that there were a number of unusual kinds of experience that could be considered as habitual or recurring. These, if non-fraudulent, would more commonly be interpreted as varieties of abnormal psychological activity. Some could be evaluated as involuntary manifestations, falling below the threshold of consciousness. While others perhaps are indicative of more volitional mental processes, and suggest lucid paranormal states. And yet others more clearly seem to reflect a deeper emotionally tinged form of religiosity. In spite of the accusations that all her claims to such experiences were based on fraud and invention, the intense motivation and determined effort put into legitimising the theosophical worldview would indicate uncompromising personal commitment. The expenditure of emotion, intellectual effort, dedication to a marginal cause, etc. would most likely derive from energies fuelled by deep belief in the authenticity of the unusual experiences.

Blavatsky may have held a reputation for disreputability, but "the ordinary sequence of natural life" for her was dominated by a sense of urgency and fervour, that would logically seem to refer back to roots in some sort of overwhelming private and

---

[2] Bryan R. Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 234.

moving experience on her part. Or perhaps reflect the cumulative influence of a variety of abnormal experiences. With the establishment of the Theosophical Society and the promulgation of its message, Madame Blavatsky could see "further unguessed possibilities opening up" that would provide opportunity to promote the kind of reality consistent with the content of her experiences, and the principles of theosophical knowledge that justified such a worldview. That she found a direct connection between experience and the representation of a worldview that esteemed such extraordinary excursions of consciousness seems obvious. It would appear that a dialectical process was in place whereby her own paranormal or deep psychological experiences were given shape and form through her understanding of esoteric theory; and that the esoteric framework of knowledge that she construed was felt to be justified by further manifestations of such extraordinary experiences. And the probable basis of such a view resting on some form of personal experience also seems more likely than the hypothesis that it merely resulted entirely from calculated manipulative efforts. Though that speculation certainly appears to be justified when looking at specific dubious incidents and events in theosophical history. However, to presume that there was no profound or extraordinary personal experiential basis whatsoever that inspired and motivated Madame Blavatsky would appear to be a somewhat harsh conclusion.

The following sentiment would indicate the psychological process of commitment to a worldview is based on an overwhelming sense of certainty in its correlation to an underlying datum of experience.

> … elementary experience … is something that tends to indicate totally the original impetus with which the human being reaches out to reality, seeking to become one with it. He does this by fulfilling a project that dictates to reality itself the ideal image that stimulates him from within. [4]

Blavatsky's "original impetus" would seem to be based on the types of unusual and normally inexplicable experiences that she was subject to, or imagined herself to be engaged in. Clairvoyance, ethereal apparitions, astral travel, psychokinesis, clairaudience, materialisations, and other extraordinary forms of experience were alleged as examples of the kinds of paranormal phenomena she was felt to be engaged in. And where qualitative

---

[3] Evelyn Underhill, *Man and the Supernatural*, New York: E.P. Sutton & Co. Inc., 1931, p.42.
[4] Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, Montreal/Kingston/London/Buffalo: McGill-Queens University

contents were more profound, powerful, and emotionally moving, it would seem that more spiritually definable energies appear to have been active at some level.

The veridical status of the contents of those experiences cannot be independently assessed, though it would appear that the emotional impact and sense of awe they seem to have engendered at some point in life at least sustained her sense of self-assurance. Even if only a small percentage of such experiences were genuinely awe-inspiring and numinous, it would provide justification for possible exaggeration and embellishment to reaffirm the significance of the initial feeling. She thus appears to have "reached out to reality" to conceptualise or visualise a worldview that properly accounted for such forms of experience while yet embodying the values and ideals most esteemed and venerated. For Madame Blavatsky, these were drawn from the ideational materials of the esoteric tradition that she was fluent with. The "project that dictates to reality itself" was the attempt to define and structure what was in process of becoming the unique theosophical organisation. The "ideal image" was the nascent theosophical vision of reality, based upon a personalised reconfiguration and enhancement of the esoteric worldview. She was certainly "stimulated from within" by the desire to confront the legitimators of the dogmatic and materialistic orientations that she vehemently opposed. And by firm belief that positively promoting the authenticity of expanded or conventionally inexplicable forms of experience would add plausibility and glamour to the appeal of theosophy.

5.3 Blavatsky: First Impressions and the Mystique of Power

A major stimulus to the very inception of the Theosophical Society was the public fascination with what was popularly called "phenomena." Particularly the kinds of presumed extrasensory experiences that regularly manifested within the spiritualist milieu. Madame Blavatsky first attained notoriety and public attention in America as a commentator, observer, and participant in the spiritualist environment. In fact, the main thrust of her earliest public arguments was that psychic phenomena are legitimate experiential manifestations, but can be explained in different terms than most commonly used in the spiritualist vocabulary. Rather than simply concurring with the prevailing spiritualist tenet that psychic communications and phenomena were exclusively products

---

Press, 1997, p. 9.

of the activities of discarnate entities, a different interpretation was proffered. She introduced theories based on a much broader understanding of the dynamics of psychic activity, locating those phenomena in a conceptual framework that allowed for the operation of extensive powers and forces within a unified multilevel universe. As well, her colourful and vivid narration of details and anecdotes from her globetrotting adventures were intended to convey an image of personal familiarity and expertise with all manner of occult and esoteric traditions, practices, and insights. By alluding to apprenticeships and initiations in Egypt, Tibet, India, and elsewhere before her theosophical activities, she created an aura of intrigue and elite expert status. For instance the impression she made on Olcott during one of their first meetings gives a hint of the kind of image she would convey.

> I found she had been a great traveller, and had seen many occult things… She spoke of the materialistic tendency of American Spiritualism, which was a sort of debauch of phenomena accompanied by comparative indifference to philosophy. [5]

And A.P. Sinnett, an important early theosophical figure, recounts his own impressions of Madame Blavatsky's extraordinary experiential involvement.

> I am not pretending to give an explanation of how he produces this or that result, nor for a moment hinting that I know. I am recording merely the certain fact that various occult results have been accomplished in my presence, and explaining as much about them as I have been able to find out. But at all events it has long since become quite plain to me, that wherever Madame Blavatsky is, there the Brothers, wherever they may be, can and constantly do produce phenomena of the most overwhelming sort, with the production of which she herself has little or nothing to do. In reference, indeed, to any phenomenon occurring in her presence, it must be remembered that one can never have any exact knowledge as to how far her own powers may have been employed, or how far she may have been "helped," or whether she has not been quite uninfluential in the production of the result. Precise explanations of this kind are quite contrary to the rules of occultism… [6]

Sinnett's puzzlement as to the causal process and his speculative interpretation reflects the orthodox theosophical explanations meted out by Blavatsky. However, regardless of hypotheses, the important thing to note is how the mystique surrounding Blavatsky grew as her reputation amongst theosophical sympathisers gained stature with the belief that she was fluently active in such a manner. This kind of talk helped solidify her charismatic

[5] Cited in Gomes, op. cit., pp. 34-35.
[6] A.P. Sinnett, *The Occult World,* retrieved from The Canadian Theosophist, 1888,

public image, and with the subsequent publicity she received, set the tone for how she was perceived by others. Thus acknowledged as both an active participant in diverse forms of supersensory exploration, and as a theoretician, capable of detailed, thorough, eclectic interpretations, Madame Blavatsky acquired an authoritative reputation amongst those sympathetic to the type of worldview she proposed.

The incorporation of this alternative minority cognitive view was linked with the message that the extraordinary human potentialities of consciousness she endorsed were indeed a legitimate, desirable, and necessary potential function of the human organism. And though latent and undeveloped for most people, the opportunity for conscious development of psychic and mystical capacities along theosophical lines was believed to be the first step to eventual full spiritual enlightenment. And not just in theory in some past or unspecified future time, but in real life practice, even in the immediate present. Typical theosophical perspectives like these repeat the message that Blavatsky enunciated, and represent the belief that the full spectrum of human experience includes capacities for psychic and mystical growth.

> The followers of this, the oldest and greatest of the sciences, the science of the soul, aver that extension of visual and auditory power and mastery of the forces, first of one's own nature, and then of nature herself, can be deliberately and consciously achieved. Anyone, they say, who will fulfil the necessary conditions, who will obey laws as certain in their operation as those to which the chemist subscribes in his laboratory, can pierce the veil of matter which normally hides from view the eternal, spiritual realities, as the veil of day conceals the ever-shining stars. By such means can be attained the direct knowledge of the forces and intelligences of nature and the faculty of cooperating with them in what is sometimes called the Great Work. [7]

> Since all explorations into spiritual realms are limited by an individual's ability to function in subtler levels of consciousness, it is necessary that he gain credible report as to his facilities for doing so, and to recognize through personal experience the focal centres of consciousness where movement is being awakened, the centres around which locomotion is to be oriented to reach higher consciousness. [8]

> We are only halfway up the ladder of evolution at present, and so our senses are only half-evolved. But it is possible for us to hurry up that ladder – possible, by

---

<http://www.theosophical.ca/OccultWorld.htm#first>. (Accessed September 26, 2002).

[7] Geoffrey Hodgson, *Clairvoyant Investigations*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1984, p.1.

[8] James S. Perkins, *A Geometry of Space-Consciousness*, Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1973, pp. 74-75.

> hard work, to make *our* senses *now* what all men's senses will be in the distant future. The man who has succeeded in doing this is often called a seer or a clairvoyant. [9]

By incorporating and consolidating into the theosophical program the idea that psychic powers and mystical realisation were attainable and demonstrable even to a limited extent, the movement would acquire another source of possible credibility for those willing to consider the arguments and accept the claims made. Belief that trustworthy exponents could vouch for and verify their own similar experiences would insure more interest in the theosophical assertions about the psychic and spiritual potentialities of human experience.

And even if not actually demonstrated indisputably, the suggestion and speculation that it undeniably was at least a viable and conceivable possibility still served an important function. Put more succinctly in the theosophical context, if it was surmised and assumed that Madame Blavatsky had spontaneously exhibited, or intentionally utilised, authentic supersensory powers, whether privately or publicly, it would augment the appeal of the purely theoretical formulations of the system of belief. Just the hint that psychic phenomena were, or could be, genuine natural occurrences, and that individuals such as Madame Blavatsky could exercise such faculties, provoked interest and curiosity, both positive and negative.

For those unwilling to deviate from an entrenched worldviews hostile to belief in those types of abnormal extraordinary experience, such claims would be dismissed outright, and hence never considered as possibly true. For those who were open to such potential, the presentation of purported credible experiential evidence would provide additional legitimating credence. And, although literary, historical, and anecdotal materials could be adduced as supplementary sources of confirmatory testimony to such beliefs in general, the only way the new movement was able to maintain its impetus was with the continued experiential corroboration supplied by, or accredited to, its founder and architect. As the primary theoretician, mythographer, publicist, critic of the status quo, her reputation for active involvement with paranormal phenomena added to the mystique surrounding theosophy, bringing public attention to the theosophical movement

[9] C.W. Leadbeater, *The Hidden Side of Things*, Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1977, p. 7.

as a vanguard in challenging the traditional entrenched positions.

The theosophical worldview thus was not only aspiring after legitimation on the basis of its critique of mainstream forms of knowledge, its rehabilitation of esoteric doctrines, its spiritual ideals, etc. It also tried to couch its appeal on the grounds of offering a feasible set of practical guidelines for awakening the extraordinary states of consciousness believed to be latent in humankind. And with Madame Blavatsky originally (and later other elite leaders) claiming a first hand experiential familiarity with extraordinary states of consciousness, a crucial component of the systemic mix was put into place.

The establishment of authority was based on the belief the leaders did indeed bespeak of authentic experiences, and that their methods of engagement could likewise be transmitted and utilised by their followers in the due course of proper teaching and conduct. Belief that opportunity for such participation would be forthcoming implied trust and faith in the teachings of the leaders as well as confidence that their insights and advice was to some degree based on personal experience. And to sustain credence and support, the leaders felt obligated to confirm their own claims to special status. Thus, most of the major theosophical figures, including many who subsequently broke from the ranks of the main Theosophical Society, are on record about having had what they say were personal paranormal experiences of one sort or another, whether sporadically or regularly, spontaneous or induced. [10]

5.4 Blavatsky: Problematical Issues in Evaluating Biographical Facts

Throughout her lifetime, Madame Blavatsky was constantly asked to demonstrate her psychic capacities or give indisputable evidence of such activities. Long before the Theosophical Society was contemplated she had acquired a reputation for having the capacity to demonstrate and expertly comment on such abnormal faculties, which largely helped solidify the mystique that formed around her. This was not an insignificant factor in enhancing her status as primary authority figure; although her explanations of such

[10] Blavatsky, Besant, Olcott, Judge, Leadbeater, and other leaders have all been on the record in mentioning specific or general instances of what they claimed, implied, or believed were lucid personal excursions into psychic dimensions and/or states of consciousness. Whether via techniques of inducement, unexpectedly, or under the dream state.

manifestations were highly controversial and the source of either distrust or reassurance, depending on the position taken by the inquirer. However, despite engendering intense suspicion and hostility in much of the tradition-bound social milieu, the entrenchment of an authoritative experiential component in theosophical belief was necessary to justify and augment the purely theoretical aspect of the system.

Any inquiry into the life of Madame Blavatsky is fraught with difficulty from the outset. And although we are only interested in particular limited areas, these problems yet are unavoidable. Fundamentally, the major difficulty lies in trying to extract and bracket out undisputed fact from embellished or intentionally distorted or revised recollections. As a charismatic and controversial figure, Madame Blavatsky provoked intense reaction, both positive and negative, and subsequent accounts have often betrayed excessive disdain or uncritical idolisation. However, apart from such secondary accounts, an even more problematical issue is that she herself was consistently revising, retelling, and reinterpreting the narrative of her life, often intentionally exaggerating, omitting, changing, or disguising facts and details for her own private reasons. For instance, one biographer, Marion Meade, had this to say.

> When Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was forty-five, she looked back on four-and-a-half turbulent decades and observed "One cannot remake one's past, one can only efface it according to one's strength." Actually she took pains to do both, and given her boundless energy, such efforts at revision were not entirely unsuccessful For the last fifteen years of her life, she worked strenuously to re-create herself, erasing what she regretted having done, inserting new material, continually editing herself into the person she would have liked to have been. [11]

This kind of a revisionist process may or may not have necessarily been exclusively cynical, malicious, or intentionally fraudulent. Circumstances obviously dictated actions and reactions. And biographers and analysts have been both harsh and lenient in evaluating the number of questionable instances in which premeditated and fraudulent activities may have occurred. Madame Blavatsky admits to some exaggerations and revisions for a variety of possible reasons while vehemently denying or reinterpreting other claims that appear to have contradicted her statements. [12] It is not

[11] Marion Meade, *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth,* New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1980, p. 7.
[12] See for example a cynical accounting in Count W.S. Witte, *Count Witte on Madame Blavatsky,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives, 2001, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/witte.htm>. (Accessed

our purpose to delve into each and every biographical detail, especially salacious issues which have no bearing on our topic. When the possibility of personal revision based on ulterior motives is factored into the equation, the need for cautionary judgment becomes paramount in attempting to evaluate the historic record.

What is important to try and ascertain from the personal side of Blavatsky's life are the types of abnormal experiences that she herself may have been subject to, as well as the experiential ideals that served as motivation for the attainment of personal objectives. The kinds of subjective experience that may have significantly contributed to the theosophical impetus, and served both inspirational and doctrinal purposes. Admittedly, all biographical data that can be used as evidence to attempt to draw conclusions are first-person statements and reflections, or observations and commentaries by others, both closely and remotely connected to her. And these may appear both at the immediate time of the phenomena in question, or any future point when retrospective recollection ensues. As well, personal biases both pro and con must be factored in, even if as unintentional filters shaping opinion. And the very articulation of abnormal subjective experience is in itself at best of times, problematical and elusive. Thus, examples used and conclusions drawn can only hope to indicate basic experiential characteristics rather than precisely define the exact causal processes of each and every phenomenon.

So, given these qualifications, we will first look at representative examples of the types of abnormal experiences Blavatsky was passively subject to or voluntarily initiated. This will provide a contextual background for understanding the grounds on which see herself felt justified in promoting and confirming a heightened and expansive view of human consciousness. Then we shall look at a representative written presentation of how she envisioned the powers of man, and how she attempted to legitimate that view. Where textual analysis of formally expressed doctrine or belief is concerned, we are dealing with intentionally formulated ideas and thoughts, in contrast to anecdotal or secondary comments.

With Madame Blavatsky, a certain amount of self-assurance in the validity of her views derived from belief in the significance of her private experiences. However, in her

---

November 18, 2002). For a sympathetic interpretation, see Vera Petrovna de Zhelihovsky, *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2001,
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/zhelhpbl.htm>. (Accessed August 13, 2002).

written formal presentations, she rarely goes into extensive first person detail (other than in the guise of fiction writing, or in private correspondence) to justify her beliefs. More commonly, she draws from the available body of speculative resources to try and present convincing arguments and support for her views. The personal element is there as a motivational factor and a source of inner conviction. And was acknowledged in theosophical circles because of her own charismatic status and reputation. But to try and obtain wider public recognition for the credibility of her claims, she more commonly drew on the authority of outside sources for legitimation.

5.5 The Relevance of Altered States of Consciousness as a Premise

Even a casual look into the life of H. P. Blavatsky will reveal that she consistently was subject to certain forms of what has been called "altered states of consciousness." This phrase has been in vogue since the nineteen sixties, but cultural connotations aside, serves as a useful generalisation for the kinds of experience under discussion. Before looking at examples drawn from her own life, an interpretative perspective may be in order. There have been many schemas proposed to define the entire range of experience, from the presumed unconscious levels to the hypothesised supersensory and transcendent states. Extensive exploration of this topic would carry us far from our objectives. However, this statement suggests more than just a minimal range of possible experiences.

> Typical examples are such altered states of consciousness as sleep, dreams, hypnotic trance, ecstasies, transcendental meditation, or crisis situations. Yet altered states of consciousness are only a small segment of the existential shift… It includes abrupt changes in the subject's volitional and behavioural attitudes, his motivations and orientation toward the world. [13]

The important reference is to an "existential shift." Not only is a relatively clear articulation of possible levels of experience noted, but emphasis is also on the belief that an "abrupt change" in the complete "orientation to the world" may be effected. This would seem to justify the pursuit of an alternative experience-based worldview felt to more adequately encompass the true potentials of human consciousness. The types of experience mentioned are broad and have been sub-divided and reclassified by others

[13] Jan Ehrenwald, *The ESP Experience: A Psychiatric Validation*, New York: Basic Books, 1978, p. 238.

who have approached the topic differently. For instance, Stanley Krippner differentiated twenty states of consciousness.

> In general terms, an altered conscious state can be defined as a mental state which can be subjectively recognized by an individual (or by an objective observer of the individual) as representing a *difference* in psychological functioning from that individual's "normal," alert, waking state. Twenty states of consciousness have been tentatively identified (with considerable overlapping) as worthy of further study. [14]

These encompass a spectrum ranging from entirely unconscious processes to explicit and intentionally pursued mystical kinds of subjective satiation. The category "Expanded" conscious states, according to Krippner, encompasses a gradation of four different levels, the highest being the integral level, proper to mystical experience. A more thorough and useful model is found in the work of Ken Wilber, especially in *The Atman Project* and *The Spectrum of Consciousness*, where modern Western psychologies are supplemented with Eastern philosophical theories to provide a comprehensive framework for interpreting the variety of states of consciousness in evolutionary and structural terms.

> We arrive at something that resembles an overall life cycle. Further, we find that—if all the higher states reported by the mystics are real—this life cycle moves from subconsciousness (instinctual, impulsive, id-ish) to self-consciousness (egoic, conceptual, syntaxical), to superconsciousness (transcendent, transpersonal, trans-temporal)... Further, we can divide this cycle, for convenience, into two halves: the Outward Arc, or the movement from subconsciousness to self-consciousness, and the Inward Arc, or movement from self-consciousness to superconsciousness. [15]

Wilber's categorisations are useful, but mostly are intended to illustrate an integrated life cycle and the ideal of dynamic movement towards progressive spiritual maturation. Another compatible schematic analysis may be more succinct only in so far as it provides a more extensive descriptive analysis of the types of experiences more properly reflective of those pertaining to Madame Blavatsky.

Defining and determining what portion of her abnormal or extraordinary experiences belong to which category is of course only estimable hypothetically

---

[14] Stanley Krippner, *Altered States of Consciousness*, in *The Highest State of Consciousness*, ed. John White, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1972, p. 1.
[15] Ken Wilber, *The Atman Project,* Wheaton/Madras/ London: Quest Books, 1980, p. 3.

according to the predefined criteria, but yet may provide a useful means of understanding the internal and subjective determinants underlying her efforts towards legitimating the theosophical worldview. Additionally, the incorporation of such subsequently legitimated modes of exceptional, extraordinary, unusual, spiritually grounded experiences as part of the theosophical ideational fabric may be more easily assessed when considered from a more comprehensive schema than simply as random or unrelated phenomena. However, we very strongly qualify our use of specific examples taken from anecdotal and biographical commentary.

In fact, there are very strong arguments suggesting that much, if not the vast majority of assumed paranormal experiences attributed to, reported about, or having been allegedly demonstrated by Madame Blavatsky are not strictly reliable or trustworthy. And when the subjective interpretative filter is applied (by participant as well as observer) to what is essentially private and subjective, the problematical nature of the enterprise is magnified even more. So, rather than simply avoid dealing with the issue because of the inherent difficulties, and dismissing all claims as either delusional or fraudulent, or naively accept claims of the literal accuracy of all reports, we must try to judiciously evaluate and categorise as best we can.[16]

5.6 Gowan's Taxonomy of the States of Consciousness

Any such explanatory framework is, of course, hypothetical and functions as a useful conceptual device rather than as an absolute measure. Therefore, we have applied what appears to be a workable and widespread interpretative model for evaluating and classifying the types of extraordinary experiences Blavatsky may have been subject to. Although there are many theoretical models to choose from, some of which very closely resemble or compliment each other, we have decided to use the classifications in the taxonomy of states of consciousness suggested by John Curtis Gowan (1912 – 1986), who approached issues of creativity and cognitive development from the perspective of

---

[16] For a critical estimation, see Elliott Coues, *Blavatsky Unveiled,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2001, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/coues.htm>. (Accessed May 24, 2002). For a supportive position, see Ellen H. Morgan, *A Defense of Madame Blavatsky's Views and Phenomenal Abilities,*
The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/morgan1884.htm>. (Accessed

an educational psychologist. His main works were *Development of the Creative Individual* (1972), *Development of the Psychedelic Individual* (1974), *Trance, Art, and Creativity* (1975), and *Operations of Increasing Order* (1980). Although somewhat constrained by occasional usage of conceptual terms and references directed to nineteen seventies sensibilities, his thematic treatment of the stages of consciousness is yet of value. By applying some of the categories of his analytical model to representative experiential phenomena reported by, or of, Madame Blavatsky, it may be possible to provide a useful means of hypothesising about the psychological dynamics that were at play during such manifestations.

To gain reputable social legitimacy, the theosophical worldview as constructed by Madame Blavatsky required religious, philosophical, and scientific plausibility. Or, effectively, the transformation of traditional institutions of knowledge, but now re-envisioned with fresh esoteric spiritual content. As well, the credibility of her personal reputation depended upon public validation and acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the non-rational modes of consciousness she claimed to be superior to prosaic understanding. And the continued reaffirmation of belief in a superior informing and guiding spiritual presence on the theosophical movement depended upon the personal liaison between Blavatsky and her Masters, which was predicated upon belief in the genuineness of her supersensory experiences. Hence the importance of trying to understand the factors contributing to that experiential mix. Without Blavatsky publicly acclaimed as a genuine occult or mystic practitioner with extraordinary skills, powers, or special knowledge, her proclamations would not carry the same authoritative stamp of authenticity. Thus it is necessary to try and explore, even if hypothetically, the possible subjective factors that cumulatively may have contributed to her public image as a psychic, medium, seer, prophetess, shaman, mystic.

We begin with the taxonomy of consciousness enunciated by Gowan. Primarily expressed in two books, *Operations of Increasing Order*, and *Trance, Art and Creativity*, we find a useful and inclusive framework for the classification of a wide variety of human experiences. The basic objective of this taxonomy is to show the relationship between the conscious ego in man and the forms of non-rational experience related to

---

June 30, 2002).

what has been called "the numinous" or the "collective unconscious." Gowan states that the qualitative value of the experience will be determined by the developmental level of the individual,

> The level of developmental maturity at the time of the junction determines whether the affect will be dreadful and awful (using such words in their original meanings), as in schizophrenia or possession trance, or benign and transcendental as in samadhi and mystic rapture. [17]

Basing his terminology on the work of Harry Stack Sullivan, he distinguishes three modes of the cognitive encounter with the numinous. These are:

> *prototaxic* (experience occurring before symbols), *parataxic* (experience using symbols in a private or autistic way), and *syntaxic* (experience which can be communicated).[18]

Gowan first of all defines what he means by "numinous." It is derived from the interpretation given by Rudolph Otto, in which it is expressed as the fundamental ground of being, the holy minus its moral and rational factors, and characterised by the elements of awe-fullness, overpoweringness, and energy. It is also "wholly other" than what is familiar and knowable by normal means of consciousness, and contains the element of fascination. And though it can be discussed, it cannot be strictly defined. Gowan notes that similar notions have been expressed in different cultural contexts, and sees the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious as a practicable theory accounting for the source of such manifestations. He uses the term "preconscious" to cover the same conceptual territory

Gowan in fact uses the criteria of ego control and increased creativity to differentiate between the various stages of maturity. He sees an ascending movement from "worse" to "better" in terms of movement away from the dissociation typical of the prototaxic through to subsequent increase of positive emotion and mental health at the parataxic stage. Further, the syntaxic stage reveals more integrated ego management and creative operations. And each discrete stage brings with it a distinctive treatment of numinous experience. At the prototaxic level, experience at its extreme is characterised by motor automatisms, with the ego absent and tending towards states of dissociation.

---

[17] John Curtis Gowan, *Operations of Increasing Order*, Westlake Village, California: privately published, 1980, p. 324.
[18] Ibid.

Some of the experiential phenomena native to this state are schizophrenia, trance, hypnotism, certain effects of proactive drugs, and automatic writing. As the ego emerges and stabilises, the parataxic state becomes dominant. This is the domain of images, generally represented through archetypal manifestations, dreams, rituals, myth, and art. And as the ego develops more fully and under more control, the syntaxic stage is reached, with an increase of cognitive representation. This level of experience includes manifestations of increased creativity, ortho-cognition, states of consciousness related to meditation, and higher psychic and mystical capacities.

The features of the numinous experience for the subject are expressed as polar opposites when located at either extreme. The prototaxic extreme represents weak ego, loss of will, loss of memorability, the ego function excursed, somatic activity, superstition, non self-actualisation, motor automatisms, possession, madness, anxiety, horror, fear, dread, trance, general negative effects, crudity of effect, dissociation, lack of control of the preconscious. Conversely, at the syntaxic extreme, the experience of the numinous leads to strong ego, evidence of will, memorability, the preservation or transcendence of ego function, cognitive activity, enlightenment, self-actualisation, cognitive representation, illumination, positive mental health, serendipity, love, compassion, charity, creativity, general positive effects, refinement of effect, integration, control of the preconscious. The differentiation is explained further.

> This difference which exists as a taxonomic hierarchy or gradation of different levels of the parameter can be spelled out with the following characteristics:
> a) will: in the higher states there is evidence of will; the individual will has been carried out by the numinous element (as in a creative product); in the lower states there is no such evidence, the preconscious seems to spew out whatever material adventitiously comes ...
> b) memorability: in the higher states there is generally memory of the experience; in the lower states there most usually is not.
> c) ego function: in the lower states the ego seems to disappear (there is an *excursus*); in the higher states the ego is changed but does not seem to vanish in the same way.
> d) crudity—refinement: in the lower state the character of the experience appears crude (dissociative ramblings, psychic tricks such as poltergeist phenomena, half formed words, glossolalia); in the higher levels we get works of art or other creative products; high level ideas, etc. [19]

[19] Ibid. p. 2.

The bulk of Gowan's work is devoted to thorough enunciation and comparison of the many distinct forms of numinous experience within each of the prototaxic, parataxic and syntaxic hierarchies.

5.7 Blavatsky's Extraordinary Experiences Classified

In attempting to distinguish the types of experience reported by, or about, Madame Blavatsky, a certain unavoidable judgment must be made about the quality, content, and significance of those experiences. This too must factor in the likelihood that certain portions are unavoidably inaccurate or incomplete, owing to either lack or distortion of factual detail via by Blavatsky herself or to the intentional or unconscious misrepresentations of those recording anecdotal impressions. We can only rely on a finite number of sources. Specifically, commentary made by acquaintances, colleagues, friends, foes, biographers, and Blavatsky herself. And even statements made by individuals are not necessarily consistent, as opinions change over time as a result of continued reflection and input of new knowledge. Blavatsky herself incessantly revised and reinterpreted events, stimulated by a variety of motives, so even her statements are not consistent. Thus, the following analysis can only be selective, based on a choice of materials that appear to be most credible. We shall only make note of relevant examples, and emphasise that a thorough and comprehensive biography is outside of our purview. Right now, we are primarily interested in the types of "numinous," "abnormal," "extrasensory" experiences which can be adequately evaluated and classified, even if just theoretically.

In our choice of examples we also add a further qualification. The instances we have selected of Blavatsky's alleged supersensory and spiritually significant experiences all came before the formation of the Theosophical Society and her emerging controversial reputation as a public figure. Once the theosophical movement became institutionalised, and her foundational role was acknowledged, her statements, claims, declarations, theories, as well as private life and history became the objects of much more intensive scrutiny. By sceptical critics, enthusiastic supporters, and the curious public.

When she subsequently became the central figure in a variety of unresolved

scenarios purportedly involving psychic phenomena, she no longer was just representing herself as a private individual, but as the dominant proselytiser of an institution offering an alternative cognitive worldview to the public for consideration and comparison. As a critical challenger to the entrenched traditions, not only was the formal theoretical edifice of ideas and beliefs perceived to be open to critique, analyses, rebuttal. The self-proclaimed "messenger" became the target as much (if not more) than the "message" she was trying to legitimate and entrench. Therefore we have intentionally limited our choice of examples to the period before her Theosophical Society status made her a public enthusiast for a specific vested interest organisation. As a "private person" without public affiliation to any formal institution, her activities and experiences represented no one but herself. As a leading organisational figure, everything related or attributed to her reflected on the credibility of the Theosophical Society.

When the early phase of Blavatsky's life is examined, there are many references to unusual occurrences and experiences. Most information has come from letters and commentary from her family, largely her sister Vera and aunt Nadya, as well as personal reflections and statements, mostly recorded by others. She co-operated reluctantly with her first biographer, A. P. Sinnett in supplying some information used in his *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*. However, much was omitted or meant to be evasive. Amongst the kinds of unusual experiences noted in the early life of Helena Petrovna von Hahn were phenomena that would appear to largely derive from spontaneous creative and imaginative activities. There are a number of anecdotes and recollections dealing with her story telling, hypersensitivity to objects and environment, conviction that there was a fluidic continuum between the worlds of the living and the dead, and that nature in its entirety was dynamically alive and active. For instance, there are recollections about her picking up stones, fossils, stuffed animals, and creating elaborate spellbinding narratives about their origins, histories, destinies, spanning millennia and successive incarnations.[20] She also was found apparently conducting hypnotic experiments on pigeons during this time,[21] as well as claiming to experience a variety of visions and unusual occurrences. This anecdote told by her sister is representative.

[20] Cranston, op. cit. p. 29.
[21] Meade, op. cit. p. 39.

> She had selected the uncanny region as a safe refuge where she could avoid her lessons. A long time passed before her secret was found out, and whenever she was found missing, a deputation of strong-bodied servant men was despatched in search of her. She had erected for herself a tower out of old broken chairs and tables in a corner under an iron-barred window, high up in the ceiling of the vault, and there she would hide for hours, reading a book known as "Solomon's Wisdom," in which every kind of popular legend was taught. Once or twice she could hardly be found in those damp subterranean corridors, having in her endeavours to escape detection lost her way in the labyrinth. For all this she was not in the least daunted or repentant, for, as she assured us, she was never there alone, but in the company of "beings" she used to call her little "hunch-backs!" and playmates. Intensely nervous and sensitive, speaking loud, and often walking in her sleep, she used to be found at nights in the most out-of-way places, and to be carried back to her bed profoundly asleep. Thus she was missed from her room one night when she was hardly twelve, and the alarm having been given, she was searched for and found pacing one of the long subterranean corridors, evidently in deep conversation with someone invisible for all but herself. She was the strangest girl one has ever seen, one with a distinct dual nature in her, that made one think there were two beings in one and the same body; one mischievous, combative, and obstinate every way graceless; the other mystical and metaphysically inclined. No schoolboy was ever more uncontrollable or full of the most unimaginable and daring pranks as she was. At the same time, when the paroxysm of mischief-making had run its course, no old scholar could be more assiduous in his study, and she could not be prevailed to give up her books, which she would devour night and day as long as the impulse lasted. The enormous library of her grandparents seemed then hardly large enough to satisfy her cravings. [22]

Although apparently excessive, this kind of imaginative indulgence is in itself not necessarily unusual at the pre-adolescent age, and usually disappears or recedes with the process of maturation. However, with Helena, this highly attuned sensitivity and inventiveness remained a constant in her makeup. It is also important to note that she had access to an extensive library maintained by her grandfather, which contained a significant amount of occult and metaphysical materials, which she was attracted to and eagerly digested. Apparently even at a young age she was searching for the elements of an ideational framework by which to interpret, explain, justify, embellish, what seemed to spontaneously manifest through her imaginative faculties.

... HPB apparently was not satisfied to be merely the visible focus for such

[22]Daniel H. Caldwell, *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky: Reminiscences and Impressions By Those Who Knew Her*, retrieved from The Theosophical Society in America, 2001, <http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/books/esotericworld/chapter01/index.html>. (Accessed April 7, 2002).

> manifestations, she wished to understand them, as well as her own developing psychic powers. [23]

The observation that she seemed to display contrasting personality traits, that there "were two beings in one and the same body" also indicates how the lure and sway of the imaginative was tempered by a more controlled and reality-based set of characteristics. As well, the somnambulistic experiences show that her susceptibility to imaginative absorption was not entirely voluntary or intentional, but at least partially a product of unconscious and depersonalised forces. And the graphic details of her narratives must also be recognised as emerging from the depths of the unconscious as well being a response to childhood emotional stimuli. Cranston's statement about Blavatsky wishing to understand her own "developing psychic powers" presumes at least some, if not most, phenomena were perceived to have an occult foundation. This is, of course, a later interpretation, expressed by Blavatsky herself and repeated by her supporters. However, it is not a hypothesis necessary to explain all varieties of subjective occurrence.

Using Gowan's taxonomy, these childhood forms of experience would clearly seem to be dominantly prototaxic in a very early stage. There is passivity implicit in the immature personality. The phenomena manifest spontaneously and appear dissociated from the personal ego. There is an authentic feeling of the numinous in respect to the sense of awe, energy, and "otherness," but perception and cognition is primarily depersonalised and general. This stage would mostly expressed as

> ... pertaining to that class of experiences which are dissociated and uncanny—outside the pale of rational explanation or control of the developing child. [24]

Besides these more intensive early imaginative experiences, another order of phenomena appears to have been present. These may be seen to be more unusual and perhaps deviate towards the category of extrasensory perception. Such phenomena as the production of "raps," automatic writing, mediumistic phenomena, telepathic contact, apparitions of, and communication with the dead, and so on are usually so classified. Blavatsky was alleged to have been able to effectively produce and demonstrate before

[23] Cranston, op. cit. p. 30.
[24] Gowan, *Trance, Art and Creativity*, op. cit., p. 25.

witnesses' examples of many such phenomena from an early age and throughout her life. Her sister again recounts an early typical scenario.

> All those who were living in the house remarked that strange things were taking place in it. Raps and whisperings, sounds, mysterious and unexplained, were now being constantly heard wherever the newly arrived inmate [Blavatsky] went. That such raps could be increased or diminished, and at times, made to cease altogether by the mere force of her will, she acknowledged, proving her assertion generally on the spot...
> The sounds were not simple raps ... as they showed extraordinary intelligence, disclosing the past as well as the future to those who held converse through them ... More than that, for they showed the gift of disclosing unexpressed thoughts, i.e., penetrating freely into the most secret recesses of the human mind and divulging past deeds and present intentions. [25]

Obviously, such phenomena may be explained in a number of ways, from belief in a purely occult cause to dismissal of everything as fraud or delusion. However, hypothetically, it seems reasonable to assume the possibility that at least some such phenomena occurred independent of Blavatsky's possible premeditated manipulation. Whether as genuine psi phenomena, the production of subconscious energies, the results of unknown natural forces, or any other reasonable hypothesis. From the taxonomy listed previously, it would seem that some of these kinds of phenomena appear to evolve from the primarily prototaxic stage, when unusual incidents appear spontaneously and there is no controlling ego. However, where there is evidence of a unified and directing ego or personality, such manifestations reflect a different developmental stage, which Blavatsky seems to have been able to demonstrate on occasion. Gowan sees mediumistic states as possibly covering a continuum ranging from uncontrolled spontaneous manifestations to more intentionally induced phenomena.

> As he evolves a more conscious relationship with his ego and consequently his ability to control his connection with the numinous element, he is able to allow his id greater expression without losing control. Thus, as he ascends the ladder of ego development man is able to achieve what is absent from the prototaxic mode – the clear artistry of expression, the creative utilization of energies which in the prototaxic mode are diffused and undisciplined, without significant organization into the unknowing and unknown. [26]

Another unusual practice exhibited by Madame Blavatsky appears to have its

[25] Cranston, op. cit. pp. 66-67.

roots in hypnotism and takes the form of influence or control over suggestible subjects. Although represented as a manifestation of more complex supersensory powers, it appears the following example can be adequately understood as a phenomenon based on exercise of hypnotic skills. In a discussion with her sceptical father and brother about the claims of mediums, Blavatsky attempted to demonstrate how the power of the mind could seemingly control matter, successfully producing miraculous results. Her objective was to show that a normal chess table could be made to appear so heavy that it would be impossible to lift. After a volunteer first affirmed the table was normal, the experiment began. Without touching the table, she asked everybody to stand back and leave it alone.

> The order was at once obeyed, and a great silence fell upon the company. All holding their breath, anxiously watched for what Mme. Blavatsky would do next. She apparently, however, did nothing at all. She merely fixed her large blue eyes upon the chess table, and kept looking at it with an intense gaze. Then without removing her gaze, she silently, with a motion of her hand, invited the same young man to remove it. He approached, and grasped the table by its legs with great assurance. The table could not be moved! He then seized it with both his hands. The table stood as though screwed to the floor. He grew red with the effort, but all in vain!
> There was a loud burst of applause. The young man, looking very much confused, slowly said, "Well, this is a god joke!"
> "Indeed it is a good one!" echoed Leonid [her brother]. A suspicion had crossed his mind that the young visitor was acting in secret confederacy with his sister.
> "May I also try?" he suddenly asked her.
> "Please do, my dear," was the laughing response.
> Her brother, upon this, approached, smiling, and seized the table by its legs. But the smile instantly vanished, to give an expression of mute amazement. He gave it a tremendous kick, but the little table did not even budge. Applying to its surface his powerful chest he enclosed it. "How strange!" he said, with a wild expression of astonishment.
> Addressing him with her usual careless laugh, HPB said, "Try and lift it now." Pulling it upward by a leg, Leonid nearly dislocated his arm. It lifted like a feather. [27]

These types of public demonstrations helped shape Blavatsky's reputation as an evoker of mysterious phenomena. Although possible explanations such as collusion, deception, exaggeration, and hypnotic suggestion are at least feasible. For instance, this example is typical of hypnotic demonstrations, where suggestibility produces belief that the laws of

---

[26] Gowan, op. cit., pp. 171-172.
[27] Cranston, op. cit. pp. 68-69.

nature may be subverted. However, Blavatsky and those who believe in her psychic skills have used such examples as literal evidence of her supersensory prowess. For example in her description of this particular phenomenon, she gave A. P. Sinnett this explanation.

> Madame Blavatsky has stated that this phenomenon could be produced in two different ways: 1st. Through the exercise of her own will directing the magnetic currents so that the pressure on the table became such that no physical force could move it; and 2nd, through the action of those beings with whom she was in constant communication, and who, although unseen, were able to hold the table against all opposition. [28]

If her explanation were accepted at face value, it most likely would be classified in Gowan's taxonomy as an example of the syntaxic side of trance in regards to its paranormal elements. More particularly, as one of the powers or "siddhis" pertaining to altered states of consciousness.

> In the process of mind-expansion man acquires, as a by-product of his development, the possibility of some unusual powers. These powers are known as *siddhis*, seldom seen naturally but are said to be "developed" by yogis and others as a result of spiritual training. … The *siddhis* also are related to the paranormal aspect of trance except that in the syntaxic mode it is not necessary to go into trance to induce them. [29]

On the other hand, if this example is scrutinised and assumed to be a form of hypnotic suggestion, then it would be comparable to phenomena of the trance category, and more properly belong to the prototaxic stage

> Hypnosis is a broad phenomenon exhibiting an wide variety of behaviours. Its significance to the prototaxic modality is that it introduces and utilizes basic processes which are consistently in evidence in the increasingly more dissociative states of the prototaxic continuum. [30]

The possible veridical accuracy of these or any other explanations is not the issue here. What is important to note though is that the doctrinaire occult position is reiterated (even stated with two plausible options) to account for a phenomenon intended to demonstrate the legitimacy of psychic powers. Even if causes such as deception or collusion are eliminated, the plausibility of a hypnotic basis is at least logical. More naturalistic explanations however would not convey the same sense of mystery, and turn a

[28] Ibid. p. 69.
[29] Gowan, op. cit., p. 264.
[30] Ibid., p. 72.

demonstration that is intended to inspire awe and belief in extraordinary powers into a mere example of skilled hypnotic technique. However, evaluation of the cause of such phenomena is not a main issue. In considering the possibility of an occult or naturalistic explanation, we see that the former adds to the mystique Blavatsky was nurturing while the latter would only imply manipulative intentions. So obviously it was to Blavatsky's self-interest to promote the occult explanation and enhance her reputation as an accomplished practitioner of the occult arts.

As Blavatsky travelled and gained experience by exposure to different esoteric traditions, cultivation of skills and techniques as well as knowledge about the theoretical basis of occultism, was added to her expertise. Eventually, the seemingly spontaneous and random manifestations of psychic energies diminished. Instead, Blavatsky now appeared to be more in control, or, at least, cognisant of, the forces of her own psyche. After passing through a medical crisis in 1860, this change was apparent to her sister.

> Her occult powers, all this while, instead of weakening, became every day stronger, and she seemed finally to subject to her direct will every kind of manifestation. The whole country was talking of her. The superstitious nobility began very soon to regard her as a magician, and people came from afar off to consult her about their private affairs. She had long since given up communication through raps, and preferred what was a far more rapid and satisfactory method to answer people either verbally or by means of direct writing. At times, during such process, Mme. Blavatsky seemed to fall into a kind of coma, or magnetic sleep, with eyes wide open, though even then her hand never ceased to move, and continued this writing. When thus answering to mental questions, the answers were rarely unsatisfactory. Generally they astonished the querists' friends and enemies. Meanwhile sporadic phenomena were gradually dying away in her presence. They still occurred, but very rarely, though they were always very remarkable. [31]

Here we see that her capacities were still largely grounded more directly in the subconscious, under a form of mediumistic trance if reports of "coma or magnetic sleep" are accurate. Although it is difficult to differentiate between what may have been consciously under the control of the will and what may have appeared intuitively or spontaneously, public recognition of her unusual skills and methods became more widespread. Using the taxonomy of Gowan, we see that this profile indicates a number of

[31] Caldwell, op. cit., <http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/books/esotericworld/chapter02/index.html>

things. In general, because the exercise of will becomes more dominant, the movement seems to be away from the spontaneous prototaxic type phenomena more towards parataxic and syntaxic levels. However, trance clearly indicates the absence of the ego, and thus is primarily prototaxic. Automatic writing is more problematic to classify.

> We can only conclude that automatic writing is a feature of the continuum of psychic development, and not a characteristic of any particular stage. [32]

Thus, it would appear that Blavatsky experienced a diverse number of unusual states or conditions, some involuntary manifestations, some under control of the will, and others perhaps grounded upon more manipulative forms of behaviour. Her charismatic presence is also becoming more pervasive as the reputation as a "magician" would indicate some sense of awe and belief in special personalised powers.

Another possible contributing element to her fluency with unusual experiences, and perhaps altered states of consciousness, rests on a more controversial hypothesis. Very rarely in the sympathetic biographical materials is there discussion of Blavatsky's alleged use of hallucinogenic substances as a stimulant to enhanced vision or altered states of consciousness. Blavatsky herself formally advises against the use of stimulants, and does not properly acknowledge personal experimentation or influence from such sources. However, some critics have gone to the opposite extreme, dismissing all of her work as merely a by-product of such indulgences. For example, this casual generalisation about the writing of *Isis Unveiled.*

> ... she wrote most of it under the influence of marijuana. [33]

What can be inferred along those lines comes primarily from the statements of two different and unconnected friends whom she knew before her career in Theosophy began. The first statement came in 1874 from Mrs. Hannah Shepard Wolff, a reporter, who had met and befriended Blavatsky in New York before she became a public figure. She had this comment in recollecting her acquaintance.

> I soon learned that she was addicted to the use of hashish. She several times endeavoured to persuade me to try the effect upon myself. She said that she had smoked opium, seen its visions and dreamed its dreams, but that the beatitudes enjoyed in the use of hashish were as heaven to its hell. She said she found

[32] Gowan, op. cit., p. 162.
[33] Louis Stewart, *Life Forces - a Contemporary Guide to the Cult and the Occult*: Kansas City/New York/Washington: Andrews and McNeel Inc., 1980, p. 482.

nothing to compare with its effects in arousing and stimulating the imagination. [34] This sort of hearsay statement may or may not be credible on its own. However, when linked with comments from a more trustworthy and independent source, appears to at least corroborate this line of reasoning. Albert Leighton Rawson was an artist and Orientalist, having written dictionaries in Persian, Turkish and Arabic, and produced thousands of engravings during his travels. He first met Madame Blavatsky in Cairo in 1851 when each was pursuing first-hand acquisition of esoteric knowledge. For a time they collaborated in this quest. He again met her in 1875 in New York. In February 1892, not long after Blavatsky's death, he had these recollections published in Frank Leslie's *Popular Monthly*.

> She had tried hasheesh in Cairo with success, and again indulged in it in this city [New York] under the care of myself and Dr. Edward Sutton Smith, who had a large experience with the drug among his patients at Mount Lebanon, Syria. She said: "Hasheesh multiplies one's life a thousandfold. My experiences are as real as if they were ordinary events of actual life. Ah! I have the explanation. It is a recollection of my former existence, my previous incarnation. It is a wonderful drug and clears up a profound mystery." [35]

Of course, such statements may be false or grossly exaggerated. As well, Blavatsky may have been embellishing conversation and indulging in romantic hyperbole. Yet it still would seem fair to think that two such independent statements would at least indicate a potential likelihood that hallucinogenic substances may have played some role in Blavatsky's experiential mix. Especially bearing in mind the accepted belief of the time in the medicinal value of certain such materials. As well, the use of such stimulants to visionary experience is a familiar procedure in the practical operations of shamans. As we shall see in chapter eight, Blavatsky can be evaluated by such criteria. And thus, hypothetically, we find that if classified according to the foregoing taxonomy, this form of experience has a double function.

> Psychoactive drugs are included in the prototaxic mode because of their dissociative and regressive features. However, their regressive character need not be delineated as negatively valued … It is in this vein that the proactive drug states can be viewed as a "regression in the service of the ego"—or ego-consent, superego excursive behaviour. [36]

---

[34] Cited in John Symonds, *Madame Blavatsky: Medium and Magician*: Long Acre, London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1959, p. 35.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Gowan, op. cit., p. 82.

If she did utilise hashish or some variant in the service of visionary enhancement, it may have triggered subjective processes that activated or drew upon ideas, images, symbols, already part of her own mental inventory, both personal and derived from her esoteric interests.

> One of the most interesting properties of psychoactive drugs is the amazing variety of states they may induce. Much of what one experiences appears not to depend on the drug which only acts as a catalyst, but what is already in the preconscious, only waiting to be disclosed. The drug functions like a theatre ticket which gets you to your seat; but what you see depends upon the particular play or movie you have chosen. [37]

As well as the possible imaginative, mediumistic, hypnotic, and chemically induced types of uncommon experience that Blavatsky was involuntarily subject to or may have intentionally cultivated, there was a more personally affective and qualitatively significant aspect. This began at first as visions and dreams of a figure she interpreted as her "guardian angel."

> ... she saw an adult male—handsome, virile, wise, protective and ... invisible. A psychiatrist might have contended that she had devised a father figure, but Helena had a completely different interpretation of the events that began to take place. [38]

The young Blavatsky believed the intervention of this figure twice saved her from serious accidents through mysterious and unusual means. And the belief in the self-subsistent authenticity of this entity took on a more intense confirmatory feeling on her twentieth birthday in London, when she claims to have met and spoken in person to this personage. This is how her sister recounts the story.

> In London, in 1851, she was one day out walking when, to her astonishment, she saw a tall Hindu in the street with some Indian princes. She immediately recognized him as the same person that she had seen in the Astral. Her first impulse was to rush forward to speak to him, but he made her a sign not to move, and she stood as if spellbound while he passed on. The next day she went into Hyde Park for a stroll, that she might be alone and free to think over her extraordinary adventure. Looking up, she saw the same form approaching her, and then her Master told her that he had come to London with the Indian princes on an important mission, and he was desirous of meeting her personally, as he required her cooperation in a work which he was about to undertake. He then told her how the Theosophical Society was to be formed, and that he wished her to be

[37] Ibid., p. 84.
[38] Meade, op. cit. p. 43.

> the founder. He gave her a slight sketch of all the troubles she would have to undergo, and also told her that she would have to spend three years in Tibet to prepare her for the important task. HPB decided to accept the offer made to her and shortly afterwards left London for India. [39]

As we shall see in the next chapter, there are a number of theories that have been proposed concerning these Masters. What is important to note now is that Blavatsky's personal cognisance of, and emotional attachment to, her Master had become the dominant theme in her own life. In her Sketchbook the entry dated August 12 1851 makes the following statement.

> Memorable night! On a certain night by the light of the moon that was setting at Ramsgate on August 12th 1851 when I met [symbol] the Master of my dreams! [40]

As was a typical practice in insuring a certain amount of ambiguity about her private life, Blavatsky admits that Ramsgate was substituted for London as a "blind" to confuse any who may have been privy to her personal papers. However, it is significant that we now see that the previously subjective, private symbol or image of the Master has unequivocally been located at least partially in the public physical world. He now is perceived to have a tangible as well as ethereal presence and to be active in human form.

The emotional and devotional connection between Blavatsky, her Master, and the wider Brotherhood of Adepts forms the nucleus of her most private and spiritual interests. We have briefly illustrated some of the kinds of unusual, distinctive, abnormal, possibly extrasensory subjective experiences Blavatsky personally was involved with. Though interesting in their own right, most are not intrinsically spiritual or profound. In her own private life, the most vivid expressions of spiritual sentiment can be traced to her dedication and commitment to the belief in the active presence of the Masters. Manifestations of unconscious processes or exercise of unusual skills does not in itself embody religious or spiritual values. However, when Blavatsky discusses the Masters, she often reveals a personal emotional commitment besides reiterating the narrative of their origins and purpose. On the one hand, the Masters serve as integral elements of the

---

[39] Caldwell, op. cit., <http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/books/esotericworld/chapter02/index.html>.
[40] H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings Vol. 1: 1874 – 1878*, Wheaton/Madras/London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1977, p. 4.

theosophical ideational system, providing a quasi-mythical stature to the edifice of ideas and beliefs. On the other, Blavatsky's expression of personal devotion and unyielding faith is often phrased in guru-chela relationship terms.

Thus, it serves as a genuine vehicle for Bhakti type, devotion based, mystical ambitions. Regardless of the possible origins and fusion of the disparate elements coalescing into the doctrine of the Mahatmas, Blavatsky's personal spiritual foundation is dependent on the perpetuation of an ongoing devotional relationship between her and a personally idealised image of spiritually perfected humankind. These words, quoting from one of her letters, seem to indicate that Blavatsky had been subject to this form of mystical realisation.

> … among the principal teachings of theosophy there is one that runs through the entire cycle of H. P. Blavatsky's guidance. This, the most important of all, is that of the inner divinity in man and of the possibility of becoming united with it. This is the fundamental basis of universal brotherhood. H.P.B. had realized this mystical illumination in a high degree, and was therefore qualified to point the way to others. She speaks of my inner Self which but for His [her Master Morya] calling it out, awakening it from its slumber, would have never come to conscious being—not in this life, at all events; . . . [41]

Thus considered, this form of experience would have to be located at the parataxic and syntaxic levels. The ego is fully cognisant and actively engaged, even when the qualitative nature of the experience may appear overwhelming and awe-inspiring. The assumption that there would be variations of the quality, intensity, numinosity of the experiences perhaps explain how she was able to refer to the Masters in multiple ways. It would also seem that some of her experiences were of the mystical or deeply affective variety while at other times, more prosaic attitudes and motives informed her statements. The lifelong reoccurrence of similar experiences also led to a refinement of the conceptual representation of these numinous episodes Her subjective experiences or impressions, both numinous and not, were combined and treated from the esoteric ideational perspective, acquiring a singular theosophical explanatory rationale, phrased in theosophical terminology, and substantiated by reference to theosophical doctrine.

And, as the primary theoretician for the theosophical position, Blavatsky had to

[41] Charles J. Ryan, *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement*, retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1975, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/hpb-tm/hpbtm-6.htm>. (Accessed April 8, 2002).

present a convincing argument for the rejection of status quo entrenched views and the adoption of a radically different and more dynamic notion of the potentialities of human experience. Rejecting the prevailing materialistic view of human consciousness as an epiphenomenon of matter, and the dogmatic classifications of Christian convention, a broader and more dynamic model of human consciousness was sought. With her own personal capacity to engage in altered, enhanced, or extended states of consciousness serving to justify such convictions, more general and universal arguments would be needed to win public support.

As she did for most fundamental theosophical principles and beliefs, Blavatsky wrote an extensive amount about the experience of supersensory phenomena and spiritual states of consciousness. Once more, to more closely follow her methods of rehabilitating disputable content and arguing for its legitimation, we shall choose a representative article. Again, it must be repeated that her articles are self-contained summations of specific topics and issues intended for public consumption. Analysing her articles is very useful in acquiring a sense of how she dealt with particular concerns at a specific time. As our intended objective is to understand her methods and techniques of legitimating controversial and minority cognitive positions, concentration on representative independent articles serves to accentuate the process itself, while yet clarifying the actual content of the subject matter.

With a personal background of familiarity with a variety of abnormal and unusual states of consciousness, Madame Blavatsky was able to present a self-assured overview of the potentialities of human experience. However, her motivation was not to simply enunciate and describe the alleged supersensory skills or qualities relating to such forms of experience. Her efforts were directed towards providing a proper contextual understanding of what those phenomena mean. Her context was the occult tradition, as she perceived it, culminating in the ongoing theosophical endeavour. Blavatsky discusses the topic and all its ramifications in many of her writings. We will analyse the article *Occultism Versus the Occult Arts,* written in 1888 and published in *Lucifer*, as a representative example of how she attempted to legitimate the belief in the supersensory potentiality of human experience.

5.8 Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Occultism Versus the Occult Arts*

The article begins by noting that an earlier discourse on practical occultism provoked responses that showed both a belief in the credibility of occult phenomena, but also a misunderstanding about its real nature. The discussion becomes more specific and focuses on the question of how psychic powers may be acquired and utilised. So the issue is not whether they exist, which is implicitly affirmed, but what they actually are and how they may be cultivated. She says that amongst the misconceptions is the belief that one simply may go to India and instantly become proficient in occultism; that emulating a character like *Zanoni* is sufficient; that idealising the quest for powers is enough to transform one into a legitimate adept; and that following the rules of ceremonial magic as enunciated by Eliphas Levi is an adequate method. These common misconceptions just illustrate the inaccuracies popularly held by those without the proper background, knowledge, and experience.

Madame Blavatsky then claims that she has more accurate and factual authoritative insight about authentic occultism, and bluntly confronts and challenges those holding partial and inaccurate positions. She explicitly intends to try and correct those that she feels are deluded by false ideas. This task is felt to be an urgent one, but one that must be engaged in before it becomes too late. As well, she sees her role as one of persuasion, trying to show that that her perspective is the most historically authentic and accurate. And to emphasise her point, she condescendingly notes that not more than a tiny percentage of aspiring occultists are on the right path. And, for more dramatic impact, she even warns such misguided individuals that they are potentially opening themselves up to danger and delusion because they are dabbling with sorcery. So competing occult views are not only misleading, they are potentially dangerous and pernicious. Protests, rationalisations and denials are of no avail unless the proper orientation is adopted.

> Let them restore some order in the chaos that reigns in their minds, before they protest against this statement. Let them first learn the true relation in which the Occult Sciences stand to Occultism, and the difference between the two, and then feel wrathful if they still think themselves right. Meanwhile, let them learn 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 reflection of the

> absolute, causeless and unknowable ALL—differs from the mortal clay—the human body. [42]

Blavatsky rhetorically places herself in a position of authority, lecturing down to those she feels deserve admonition and redress. This is born out by her language. "Let them restore," "let them first learn," "let them learn," are phrases that obviously assume others to be in need of correction. And challenging such people to engage in critical introspection seems to indicate a sense of pedagogical superiority and impatience. This tone of self-righteousness occurs because she vociferously insists that she is privy to the authentic methodology of occultism, and therefore is qualified through knowledge and experience to recognise the illusions and delusions of the inauthentic path. .

She then turns the argument to linguistic speculation, claiming that Western languages, shaped by culturally embedded prioritisation of selfishness and pursuit of materialistic goals, lack the necessary subtleness to differentiate between the different states of consciousness. Thus the highly required formulation of newer and more accurate terms has been neglected, necessitating the continued usage of older superstitious words, despite all the misleading connotations that they carry from centuries of generic use. This argumentative thread is very revealing. It continues to express Blavatsky's vision of a strictly polarised gulf between Western and Eastern worldviews. From her perspective, Western priorities differed from those of the East, and the respective languages reflected that difference. The terms that she was trying to rehabilitate, "magic," "sorcery," "occultism," etc., had accrued many negative connotations over the span of history and required great effort to present in a more reputable light. On the other hand, she insisted that Eastern languages were innately more conducive in defining and examining phenomena pertaining to a variety of states of consciousness. The major issue may be perceived as a difference in the Western and Eastern evaluation of "abnormal powers." Blavatsky notes that the terms of contempt familiar in her time (such as "jugglery," "crass ignorance," "sorry relic," "crank brained," "thimble-rigging"), were applied to areas of experience that have, on the contrary, been accorded respectful esteem in Eastern thought. But through centuries of contempt, neglect, disinterest, disputability,

[42] H.P. Blavatsky, *Occultism Versus the Occult Arts,* retrieved from Blavatsky Net Foundation, 1888, < http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/OccultismVersusTheOccultArts.htm>. (Accessed April 9, 2002).

disrespectability, there has been little Western effort to incorporate such controversial conceptual materials into mainstream traditions. Only within the framework of the marginalized alternative of esoteric knowledge is consensual validation accorded such phenomena.

And using a Hindu frame of reference, she articulates the division of occult knowledge into four categories. The first is Yajna-Vidya, or knowledge of the occult powers awakened in Nature through ceremonial and ritualistic activities. The second is Maha-Vidya, the magical methods found in Tantric and Kabalistic practices and considered by Blavatsky to be the worst form of sorcery. The third is Guhya-Vidya, or magical practices based on proper use of sound, as exemplified in mantras and prayers. And the fourth is the most esteemed and comprehensive.

> ATMA-VIDYA, a term which is translated simply "knowledge of the Soul," true Wisdom by the Orientalists, but which means far more. This last is the only kind of Occultism that any theosophist … would be wise and unselfish, ought to strive after. All the rest is some branch of the "Occult Sciences," i.e., arts based on the knowledge of the ultimate essence of all things in the Kingdoms of Nature. [43]

This classification differentiates between specific categories of supersensory experience, encompassing what may be interpreted as psychic, magical and mystical elements. She feels that they all relate to legitimate phenomena and spheres of theoretical and practical knowledge, but it is only the highest mystical aspiration of "ATMA-VIDYA," "knowledge of the Soul," that should be the priority of theosophists. Blavatsky implies that the other categories are not intrinsically spiritually directed, but more concerned with particular aspects of occult theory and practice. Those are the occult arts that may be acquired and utilised by those who study and master the necessary techniques. The occult faculties may be brought from latency to potency, and reveal a more expansive and vibrant universe than represented by empirical science.

> Alchemy, Astrology, Occult Physiology, Chiromancy, exist in Nature and the exact Sciences—perhaps so called, because they are found in this age of paradoxical philosophies the reverse—have already discovered not a few of the secrets of the above arts. But clairvoyance … is not Hypnotism, the illegitimate son of Mesmerism, and is not to be acquired by such arts. All the others may be mastered and results obtained, whether good, bad or indifferent; but Atma-Vidya

[43] Ibid.

> sets small value on them. It includes them all and may even use them occasionally, but it does so after purifying them of their dross, for beneficent purposes, and taking care to deprive them of every element of selfish motive. [44]

Atma-Vidya is clearly set apart, with a distinguishing criterion noted. That is the elimination "of every element of selfish motive." All occult branches may be independently pursued to a successful though limited end, but that is not the goal that is being sought after. Although Atma-Vidya includes the mastery of such powers, they must first be purified and cleansed of all selfish intentions, directed to "beneficent purposes" before being incorporated into the more encompassing and spiritually directed discipline.

The acquisition of supersensory powers itself is not considered a significant obstacle, since study of esoteric teachings and disciplined practice are believed to methodically lead to progress along those lines. And pursuing this path as an end unto itself does not even necessarily require a dramatic change in lifestyle or moral stance. The result however of such an amoral approach is seen to be the inevitable descent into the quagmire of "black magic," with its long-term destructive effects. Blavatsky's show of disgust and contempt for any approach to the occult as an end-unto-itself without moral prerequisites is couched in that most derogatory of phrases, which suggests the epitome of degradation and perversity. And the image of an efficient but amoral and selfish sorcerer is often used as a negative role model in contrast to the noble, selfless spiritual seeker.

To complete her graphic description of what she feels are the lowest depths to which a person may sink, the practitioners of black magic are equated with the materialistically inclined contemporary exponents of medical practices deemed cruel or degrading. Interestingly, Madame Blavatsky equates vivisectionists with "hypnotisers." Apparently, non-spiritually grounded medical experimentation in hypnotism was as much an evil as the inhumane practice of vivisection. And such contemporary medical experimentation in any event was contemptuously dismissed as the inadvertent dabbling in magic by those unaware that they even were dealing in occult matters. Blavatsky's key point of contention is that discipline and proper understanding are essential prerequisites for any efforts along occult lines. Those who abandon Atma-Vidya or Occultism because

[44] Ibid.

it is too demanding are only doing harm to themselves in thinking shortcuts will be as efficacious. Dabbling in magic and descending to the lowest levels of "Voodoos and Dugpas" will have long-term ramifications extending over several incarnations. And, even lower on the scale are the unconscious sorcerers of the medical field who don't even give the acknowledgment of indulging in sorcery. So by engaging in what she feels is unconscious sorcery, there is even more culpability than there would be by simply affirming that one was engaged in activities explicable only outside the sphere of the empirical.

Madame Blavatsky however recognises that not all those interested in occultism are fully cognisant of what taking the proper path entails. She repeats the caution that commitment to occult objectives may be more demanding than anticipated, and that mastery of the passions and unselfish behaviour are prerequisite necessities. She next paints a poignant picture of the prototypical aspirant.

> How about these unfortunates, we shall be asked, who are thus rent in twain by conflicting forces? For it has been said too often to need repetition, and the fact itself is patent to any observer, that when once the desire for Occultism has really awakened in a man's heart, there remains for him no hope of peace, no place of rest and comfort in all the world. He is driven out into the wild and desolate spaces of life by an ever-gnawing unrest he cannot quell. His heart is too full of passion and selfish desire to permit him to pass the Golden Gate; he cannot find rest or peace in ordinary life. Must he then inevitably fall into sorcery and black magic, and through many incarnations heap up for himself a terrible Karma? Is there no other road for him? [45]

Whether or not this portrayal is drawn from personal experience can only be surmised. However, it does seem to be expressed with emotion and conviction. The language used clearly is meant to be inspirational and evoke empathetic response. The imagery is especially transparent, painting a picture of the spiritual quest dominated by "conflicting forces." While this nameless seeker is driven by spiritual aspirations, he yet is not disciplined or focussed enough to attain the satisfaction sought after. The unwelcome possibility of a quick descent into black magic, and "a terrible Karma" lasting many lifetimes looms as a potential risk. Blavatsky emphasises the grave circumstances and the repercussions of taking the wrong path, which are severe and will effectively bring about long-term regression. Yet, in posing the rhetorical question, the possibility of another

option is hinted at.

This is a somewhat intermediary path. One more dedicated to spiritual values, but not fully committed to the highest and most demanding form of the esoteric way of life. It is, however, a positive and productive step, and diametrically different than the indulgence in the forms of sorcery so derided.

> Let him aspire to no higher than he feels able to accomplish. Let him not take a burden upon himself too heavy for him to carry. Without ever becoming a "Mahatma," a Buddha or a Great Saint, let him study the philosophy and the "Science of Soul," and he can become one of the modest benefactors of humanity, without any superhuman powers. [46]

This somewhat patronising attitude to those unable to sever personal ties and radically redirect their priorities of life is meant as a token compromise, bearing in mind her strict gnostic values. A way is provided to somewhat accommodate those desirous of embarking on the proper path but unable to fully embrace the disciplines and make the sacrifices deemed necessary. The compromised position is portrayed as one in which knowledge may be acquired, but practical acquisition and utilisation of "any superhuman powers" is denied. So rather than the ideal of a Mahatma to aspire to, the more modest aim of becoming a "benefactor of humanity" is encouraged. However, Blavatsky does not disguise a somewhat condescending attitude directed to those who settle for less than the fullest ideals and undertakings. And those unwilling to act boldly with full commitment.

She again stresses that the proper development of occult powers comes as a result of total life-commitment that includes the probability of sacrifice and hardship. There are no shortcuts, and only a totally selfless, compassionate, and altruistic approach can succeed.

> Siddhis (or the Arhat powers) are only for those who are able to "lead the life," to comply with the terrible sacrifices required for such a training, and to comply with them to the very letter. 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. It is ALTRUISM, and it throws him who practises it out of calculation of the ranks of the living altogether. "Not for himself, but for the world, he lives," as soon as he has pledged himself to the work. [47]

---

[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.

Selfless dedication to "the work" of self-transformation comes at the cost of personal sacrifices that must be made in order to facilitate proper attitude and training. However, even embarking on the difficult path does not in itself guarantee success. One either has to progress or else risk failure and further long-term karmic entanglements. There is no avoidance of choice and its benefits or repercussions. Blavatsky again illustrates her dualistic approach, because once accepted on the probationary path, the option of compromise is rescinded and the choice is between two possible scenarios. The preferred option is the slow but effective incremental process of step-by-step progress, which eventually will lead to Mahatmaship. The other possibility is presented as an inevitable road to failure through the seeking of easier but devious methods, via less morally grounded forms of occultism. The only possibility Blavatsky sees in her either/or dualistic stance from such failure is an inevitable and immediate descent once more into the despised state of "Dugpaship."

Another contemporary belief she fervently disputed was that "animal passions" could be sublimated and redirected into spiritual energies.

> Indeed, one who is able to follow the silent evolution of the preliminary aspirations of the candidates often finds strange ideas quietly taking possession of their minds. There are those whose reasoning powers have been so distorted by foreign influences that they imagine that animal passions can be so sublimated and elevated that their fury, force, and fire can, so to speak, be turned inwards; that they can be stored and shut up in one's breast, until their energy is, not expanded, but turned toward higher and more holy purposes: namely, until their collective and unexpanded strength enables their possessor to enter the true Sanctuary of the Soul and stand therein in the presence of the Master—the HIGHER SELF! For this purpose they will not struggle with their passions nor slay them. They will simply, by a strong effort of will put down the fierce flames and keep them at bay within their natures, allowing the fire to smoulder under a thin layer of ashes. They submit joyfully to the torture of the Spartan boy who allowed the fox to devour his entrails rather than part with it. Oh, poor blind visionaries! [48]

The key notion behind this criticism is Blavatsky's belief that the process of spiritual illumination is a continual intensive struggle. Not to integrate or accommodate, but to kill the passions by concentrated willpower. She appears to have little patience for those are uncommitted or too weak to engage in the struggle to destroy the passions. Apparently

[48] Ibid.

she is contemptuous and dismissive of the psychological theory of sublimation, equating the approval of such “strange ideas” to an irrational obsession that possesses naïve minds. The language clearly signifies total disdain for those who believe the theory. The idea of sublimation is attributed to “foreign influences.” And, she believes, may seem convincing only to those who no longer display proper reasoning power. Once more the language used to portray her firm either/or uncompromising position is excessively graphic. The animal passions signify “fury, force and fire,” “fierce flames,” a smouldering fire. Belief that such energies can be “turned inward,” “turned to higher and more holy purposes,” kept at bay, are considered naïve. The “poor blind visionaries” fail to get at the root of the problem as Blavatsky sees it, which is total elimination via intense internal struggle, and mastery and control via supreme willpower. The idea that the process of sublimation could actually be beneficial and eventuate in the highest objective is offensive. Her belief was that there are no shortcuts or ways of avoiding the necessity of total elimination of the passions, as she perceived them to be. To “enter the true Sanctuary of the Soul and stand therein in the presence of the Master—the HIGHER SELF” by any other way than how she envisioned it was illegitimate and tantamount to blasphemy. Obviously, Madame Blavatsky believed that sublimation was some form of ineffective and immoral shortcut, or delusional way of thinking, and totally inauthentic as a means of acquiring higher spiritual insight and experience.

To justify her position, Blavatsky gives a brief synopsis of her view of the metaphysical constitution of man, using that quasi-gnostic schema to argue why the passions are inimical to spiritual progress.

> The "Master" in the Sanctuary of our souls is "the Higher Self"—the divine spirit whose consciousness is based upon and derived solely (at any rate during the mortal life of the man in whom it is captive) from the Mind, which we have agreed to call the Human Soul (the "Spiritual Soul" being the vehicle of the Spirit). In its turn the former (the personal or human soul) is a compound in its highest form, of spiritual aspirations, volition, and divine love; and in its lower aspect, of animal desires and terrestrial passions imparted to it by its associations with its vehicle, the seat of all these. It thus stands as a link and a medium between the animal nature of man which its higher reason seeks to subdue, and his divine spiritual nature to which it gravitates, whenever it has the upper hand in its struggle with the inner animal. The latter is the instinctual "animal Soul" and is the hotbed of those passions, which, as just shown, are lulled instead of being killed, and locked up in their breasts by some imprudent enthusiasts. Do they still

> hope to turn thereby the muddy stream of the animal sewer into the crystalline waters of life? And where, on what neutral ground can they be imprisoned so as not to affect man? The fierce passions of love and lust are still alive and they are allowed to still remain in the place of their birth—that same animal soul; for both the higher and the lower portions of the "Human Soul" or Mind reject such inmates, though they cannot avoid being tainted with them as neighbours. The "Higher Self" or Spirit is as unable to assimilate such feelings as water to get mixed with oil or unclean liquid tallow. It is thus the mind alone, the sole link and medium between the man of earth and the Higher Self—that is the only sufferer, and which is in the incessant danger of being dragged down by those passions that may be re-awakened at any moment, and perish in the abyss of matter. [49]

Blavatsky here uses the term "Master" as a symbolic equivalent for "Higher Self," not as a reference to the class of spiritually evolved Masters who sponsored her mission. So it seems that the term had both a symbolic and a literal interpretation. In this schema, the Higher Self, or "divine spirit" does not manifest directly to human consciousness, but is diffused, filtered, and personalised through "Mind," or the "Human Soul." A further bifurcation exists at the level of the human or personal soul, which can be analytically perceived as a dualistic compound. The higher portion resonates to the informing Spirit, the lower, to the physical body. This version of the body/mind division attributes "spiritual aspirations, volition, and divine love" to the higher component of the human soul. And the lower portion receives imparted from the body, "animal desires and terrestrial passions." Blavatsky adopts a traditional stance espoused in some religious philosophies (particularly Hellenistic), where the human soul is posited as the locus of the perpetual struggle between the debilitating influences of the animal traits of man and the sublime aspirations intuited from his divine spiritual nature.

Perceiving the human soul as the confluence of higher spiritual and lower animal impulses, tendencies, traits and influences has been a common way of portraying the dynamics of personal, ethical, and spiritual struggle. Blavatsky here addresses the dilemma directly, in a manner not uncommon in traditional Western religious thought. The "animal nature of man" was considered totally negative, distracting and hindering higher spiritual aspirations. "Higher reason" is meant to serve as a wilful influence or power that can be used to gain the advantage in its perpetual struggle with the inner animal. By so controlling and imprisoning the lures and impulses of bodily energies, the

[49] Ibid.

human soul will be free from constraints and in a position to cultivate the more refined spiritual potentialities that were latent or stymied.

The imprisoning "instinctual animal soul" is portrayed as a "hotbed of those passions" and thus a hindrance to fulfilling a life of the spirit. In this dualistic gnostic outlook, "lulling" is not good enough, but "killing" is the only preferred option. This extreme position is imperative, because even if the residue of the passions remain "locked up in their breasts," negative results will ultimately eventuate. The distaste Blavatsky shows for the corporeal component of the compound human soul is evident in the language she uses. "The muddy stream of the animal sewer," "The fierce passions of love and lust are still alive," "unclean liquid tallow," "the abyss of matter," etc. In order to glorify the spiritual component and all things felt to pertain to it, the biological dimension had to be denigrated and despised. And in contrast, the Higher Self is "the only sufferer," "unable to assimilate such feelings," and remains at risk of contamination and "being dragged down by those passions that may be re-awakened at any moment, and perish in the abyss of matter." So the human soul, as the confluence of competing energies, remains vulnerable and in a continually hazardous situation.

Facing such a dilemma, Blavatsky wonders if there is any way to positively triumph under such debilitating circumstances. If the soul is enthralled by the animal passions, then how can it attain proper attunement to the higher spiritual essence to which it aspires? The achievement of the desired form of harmony will be difficult, because the human soul already is "stained and distracted" by the desires and passions of the corporeal portion of the human entity. And the extent of this damage goes even beyond the physical body, and encompasses the influences that the "Astral man" is subject to. The Astral man is an intermediary existent vehicle of personal consciousness native to a plane of existence more subtle than the physical, but yet not accessible to the even more refined states of higher spiritual reality. It is finite and perishable in its own right, and inexorably linked to the human entity. And it also serves as a conduit for personal excursions (allegedly, mostly during sleep) of consciousness into a more fluid and subtle psychic environment. However, although an extension or enhancement of normal consciousness, it is far removed from the truly spiritual states of being, and also must be mastered and deadened before the desired higher states of consciousness may become

operative.

> It is only when the power of the passions is dead altogether, and when they have been crushed and annihilated in the retort of an unflinching will; when not only all the lusts and longings of the flesh are dead, but also the recognition of the personal Self is killed out and the "astral" has been reduced in consequence to a cipher, that the Union with the "Higher Self" can take place. Then when the "Astral" reflects only the conquered man, the still living but no more the longing, selfish personality, then the brilliant Augoeides, the divine SELF, can vibrate in conscious harmony with both the poles of the human Entity—the man of matter purified, and the ever pure Spiritual Soul—and stand in the presence of the MASTER SELF, the Christos of the mystic Gnostic, blended, merged into, and one with IT forever. [50]

The astral body is still subservient to the physical during the life of the individual, and not self-sufficient as a vehicle of higher spiritual consciousness.

Blavatsky's radical dualism extends into her interpretation of mystical experience. True mystical consciousness arises only "with the man of matter purified." The "conquered man" must in effect, expunge "the longing, selfish personality." The passions must be "dead altogether," "crushed and annihilated in the retort of an unflinching will." The certitude felt by Blavatsky is reflected by the adamant position she takes. Recognition of the personal self must be "killed" and the "lusts and longings of the flesh" must become "dead." The mystical "union with the Higher Self" is only available to those that entirely purify and conquer their biologically based predispositions and become emotionally detached from their psychological and sociological identities. The "still living but no more longing selfish personality" has to be neutralised and properly attuned to the requisite mystical frequency, where it can "vibrate in conscious harmony" and participate in the ultimate experience," blended, merged into, and one with IT forever." Here we find the prototypical Blavatskyian interpretation of the way to mystical experience. Realisation only comes through intense and consistent effort to transcend an egocentric orientation. And the faculty most applicable in killing the passions and breaking habitual patterns of thought is willpower. But rather than conceiving the will as a part of the very ego that must be transcended, Blavatsky thinks that it derives from the complex of higher energies filtered down to human consciousness from the Higher Self. So the will is considered to be a crucial force in any such struggle towards establishing a

[50] Ibid.

mystical mindset, and thus, not a manifestation of the lower energies and personal ego, but a form of higher spiritual power, improperly understood or channelled.

Recognising the probability that such a radical prescription would be a difficult proposition to persuasively entice the average person, Madame Blavatsky yet remains obstinate and unyielding. The "straight gate of occultism" is the only effective approach, and does not allow for exceptions. Worldly interests and priorities, no matter how morally justified yet cannot be confused with spiritual aspirations. So not only is familial love a distraction, it also is considered an obstacle and distraction from the more alluring priority of "real occultism." Thus, Blavatsky unequivocally makes it clear that a dramatic reorientation of values and priorities must be in place prior to full engagement on the spiritual quest. Compromise dilutes energy and willpower, so there must come a firm choice of options. According to the strict interpretation applied by Blavatsky, selfishness and egotism are the dominant motives of the normal human mindset. So what is considered selfish and non-universal is felt to be antithetical to a broader form of compassion.

> This is but natural, we shall be told. Quite so; in the light of the code of human affections; less so, in that of divine universal love. For, while the heart is full of thoughts for a little group of selves, near and dear to us, how shall the rest of mankind fare in our souls? What percentage of love and care will there remain to bestow on the "great orphan"? And how shall the "still small voice" make itself heard in a soul entirely occupied with its own privileged tenants? What room is there left for the needs of Humanity en bloc to impress themselves upon, or even receive a speedy response? And yet he who would profit by the wisdom of the universal mind, has to reach it through the whole of Humanity without distinction of race, complexion, religion or social status. It is altruism, not ego-ism even in its most legal and noble conception, that can lead the unit to merge its little Self in the Universal Selves. It is to these needs and to this work that the true disciple of true Occultism has to devote himself, if he would obtain theo-sophy, divine Wisdom and Knowledge. [51]

"Divine universal love" is felt to be something incapable of demonstration by those who are only preoccupied with a "little group of selves." The conventional "code of human affections" may suggest a valuation of the selfish above the universal, but this orientation must be reversed if authentic mystical enlightenment is to be achieved. It appears that Blavatsky thinks that a choice must be made between mutually exclusive

options. If people are only concerned with their own private interests, then "Humanity en bloc" will be ignored or unacknowledged. The universal altruism that is favoured makes no distinction of "race, complexion, religion or social status," and is opposed to all forms of egocentric activity, regardless of how they may be esteemed by society at large. "The "true disciple of occultism" must remain dedicated to the acquisition of "theo-sophy" to productively embark upon true altruistic causes.

Madame Blavatsky allows no room for conciliation, suggesting a final choice that must reflect the true priorities of the individual. The continuity of the dualistic theme is now couched in practical terms, illustrated by scenarios that might result in ineffective and indecisive actions. The ultimate decision comes down to a choice of either serving "the body" or "the higher Soul." Exclusive attention to one or the other will result in discontent and failure to thoroughly attend to all needs. And the pursuit of "true practical Occultism" is especially doomed to failure when efforts extend to practice rather than theory. The choice of either the altruistic impersonal "divine love of Humanity" or the self-interested forms of "terrestrial love" must be made decisively and finally. Attempting to juggle priorities will only produce ambivalent and unsatisfactory results in either direction if firm commitment is not given one way or the other.

Even worse, those that once made a commitment to pursue occultism for noble reasons, but succumb to selfishness and lust later face an even more damaging and disastrous karmic fate.

> Worse than this. For, whoever indulges after having pledged himself to OCCULTISM in the gratification of a terrestrial love or lust, must feel an almost immediate result; that of being irresistibly dragged from the impersonal divine state down to the lower plane of matter. Sensual, or even mental self-gratification, involves the immediate loss of the powers of spiritual discernment; the voice of the MASTER can no longer be distinguished from that of one's passions or even that of a Dugpa; the right from wrong; sound morality from mere casuistry… And once being mistaken and having acted on their mistakes, most men shrink from realizing their error, and thus descend deeper and deeper into the mire. And, although it is the intention that decides primarily whether white or black magic is exercised, yet the results even of involuntary, unconscious sorcery cannot fail to be productive of bad Karma. [52]

The breaking of the pledge to occultism is shown as a dramatic and immediate qualitative

[51] Ibid.

change for the worse. The image of a descent from the lofty heights of the "impersonal divine state" to the "lower plane of matter" indicates that only absolutely dedicated individuals may hazard the risks. And when "sensual or even mental self-gratification" prevails, all sense of balance and order is dissipated. A confused and chaotic mental state ensues in which moral standards no longer stand clearly self-evident. And even the hint of potential psychosis is indicated when she mentions that the there will be difficulty distinguishing the source of subjective impressions. Any progress with enhanced supersensory power and spiritual consciousness is also stated to be susceptible to immediate retardation and dissipation.

Blavatsky takes the position that once the "mistakes" are made, most individuals would rather remain in a state of denial and thus avoid dealing with the responsibilities of their actions, and so they "descend deeper and deeper into the mire." And even though it is the intention that defines whether black or white magic is being exercised, even "involuntary, unconscious sorcery cannot fail to be productive of bad Karma." Thus, the repercussions will be long lasting and complex. This leads to Blavatsky's concluding observations on the possible negative ramifications of taking the wrong path towards occultism. Sorcery is an act of evil causing suffering for others. This produces greater and greater karmic debts, which will require lifetimes for fair retribution to be meted out. Better to avoid the initial entanglements and the heavy long-term cost. The most exalted spiritual role models are those who have dedicated themselves to the betterment of mankind while killing the influences of the personality. Here, the precautionary warning is extolled, reminding that "selfish motives" can lead to danger. The majority of individuals who are still in the process of reincarnating and dealing with their karmic debts must proceed carefully. Only the commitment to Atma-Vidya will prevent reckless indulgence in irresponsible occult practices

As well, it is not solely the actions of individuals that may be blamed for disastrous consequences, but the baleful influence of the current cosmic cycle also must be factored into the equation.

> We are in the Kali Yuga and its fatal influence is a thousand-fold more powerful in the West than it is in the East; hence the easy preys made by the Powers of the Age of Darkness in this cyclic struggle, and the many delusions under which the

[52] Ibid.

> world is now labouring. One of these is the relative facility with which men fancy they can get at the "Gate" and cross the threshold of Occultism without any great sacrifice. It is the dream of most Theosophists, one inspired by desire for Power and personal selfishness, and it is not such feelings that can ever lead them to the coveted goal. [53]

Blavatsky here seems to indicate a cosmic struggle on more elevated planes of existence between forces of good and evil. The "Powers of the Age of Darkness" are the antithesis of the compassionate Masters of Wisdom. One of the influences of these agents of Darkness is in fostering the illusion that it is relatively easy to succeed in occult objectives without personal sacrifice or cost. And being blunt, Blavatsky accuses a majority of theosophists of being motivated by greed, power, and ambition. And the note of cynicism warns that the desired end simply cannot be achieved in such a way. Not shying away from expressing her candid opinions, Blavatsky ends the article with an admonition about the dangers of believing that there is an easy and effortless means of achieving supersensory and exalted states of consciousness.

> …at the bare mention of some of the preliminary difficulties the affrighted Western candidates turn back and retreat with a shudder … Let them stop here and attempt no more in their great weakness. For if, while turning their backs on the narrow gate, they are dragged by their desire for the Occult one step in the direction of the broad and more inviting Gates of that golden mystery which glitters in the light of illusion, woe to them! It can lead only to Dugpa-ship, and they will be sure to find themselves very soon landed on that Via Fatale of the Inferno… [54]

The "narrow gate" is unequivocally presented as the only legitimate path to true occult knowledge and spiritual experience. Madame Blavatsky gets to the heart of the matter as she sees it. The inexperienced and naïve Westerner is prone to "great weakness." And though refusing to follow the necessary disciplines and make the appropriate sacrifices and change in lifestyle, they are still fascinated and lured by the occult. They may find other organisations and teachers. However, these ultimately are based on "illusion," that can only lead to the abhorred "Dugpa-ship" and inevitable descent to the psychological equivalent of Dante's Inferno.

---

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

5.9 The Influence of Blavatsky's View of Supersensory Experience on Theosophy

This representative view by Blavatsky about the requisite conditions necessary for authentic psychic and spiritual growth stamped the theosophical attitude towards such pursuits. And though the somewhat harsh and unbending stance was modified and simplified to some degree by later exponents, the basic framework of a moral justification has largely remained. In theosophical thought, pursuit of "powers" (siddhis) for their own sake is discouraged. A wider more comprehensive spiritual philosophy and recognition of moral consequences have usually been presented in conjunction with such occult priorities. And the possibility of deviating from a morally sanctioned framework of disciplined, selfless, incremental progress towards pursuit of powers for themselves has often been interpreted as a descent towards "black magic" or superficial occultism. These comments illustrate this point.

> It will tend to correct many errors which I see already springing up through misdirected notions of theosophists who are leaning and longing after psychic culture. For I know a good many persons who are hankering after what they call "knowledge and light" but which in reality is a desire to find occult powers that they are willing to hunt all through the Theosophical Society, but are not willing to put the society publicly on its true philosophical and moral basis… [55]

> It is the peril of Black Magic against which the student of occultism is guarded by the law which forbids him to use his occult powers for himself; for though no man is a Black Magician who does not deliberately exert his personal Will against the great Law it is well to recognize the essence of Black Magic and to check the very beginning of evil… [56]

> Unfortunately, as is always the case in an age which has lost touch with spirituality, people yearn for powers, for the development of suspected but scarcely accepted higher faculties: and in their blindness they search outside of themselves. These hearts are hungry for answers to the enigmas of life, and so they take what they can from self-advertised teachers about how to gain and use psychical powers … [57]

The following words sum up the theosophical state of affairs in regards to the

[55] William Q. Judge, *Practical Occultism*, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1980, p. 28.
[56] Annie Besant, *A Study in Consciousness*, Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1959, p. 343.
[57] G. de Purucker, *Fountain Source of Occultism*, Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1974, p. 9.

prevalent attitude towards the pursuit, acquisition, and utilisation of extended supersensory powers.

> Modern theosophists certainly taught that it was possible to acquire knowledge in an unusual way, but they did not value especially the acquisition of such knowledge except perhaps as an indirect result of "spirituality" rather than "psychism." As a consequence, only a small group of specially "initiated" theosophists and members who were far advanced in occultism claimed to possess this knowledge and some of these made communications on the basis of detailed and trained visionary experiences. [58]

While the moral distinction between right and wrong occultism was preached in the theosophical movement from Blavatsky onwards, and "spirituality" was always prioritised over "psychism," The attentiveness to, and pursuit of, supersensory skills was an important element of the system of thought. The types of unusual experiences that Blavatsky was subject to established her own justifiable framework of belief and grounds for claiming personal expertise. Other notable personages of the theosophical movement, the "small group of specially initiated theosophists and members," likewise claimed personal legitimation in so far as their own private psychic experiences were concerned. Thus, Judge, Olcott, Besant, Leadbeater, Kingsford, Bailey, Steiner, Arundale, and other leaders of the broad theosophical movement of that period all claimed first-hand fluency in psychic and spiritual activities.

With Madame Blavatsky utilising her own subjective experiential materials as a criterion of authority, the articulation via a rather conventional mainstream morality resulted in a system of ideas in which esoteric premises were presented as either "good" or "bad" according to the stance of the individual student/practitioner. The dualistic option meant that those adhering to the philosophy that the "animal side of man" must be unequivocally destroyed and mastered were considered the ideal candidates for proper expansion of consciousness. And those who opted for the "selfish" priorities were told they were potentially on the verge of disaster. Yet, despite this distinction, the legitimacy of altered states of consciousness and enhanced dimensions of experience were presumed to be undeniable facts. By using her own experiential expertise and fluency in such matters, Madame Blavatsky legitimised the belief that man's capacity to partake in such

[58] J.J. Poortman, *Vehicles of Consciousness,* Volume Two, Utrecht/Adyar/London/Wheaton: The Theosophical Society in the Netherlands, 1978, p. 182.

experiences was actual, though mostly dormant. And, together with a revised interpretation of the three main categories of knowledge, the inclusion of a belief in supersensory and mystical stares of consciousness helped solidify the unique elements of the theosophical ideational structure. Distinctive presentations of the nature of knowledge and the boundaries of experience were essential components of this edifice.

Another crucial element was the establishment of a source of supreme authority by which the basic worldview was given transcendent legitimation. Because the theosophical worldview was essentially based on mystical values, purely secular criteria could only carry the case for plausibility so far. Rational discourse using empirical data and logical argumentation could bring the system only so much reputability. But since the Masters or Mahatmas were presented as the sponsors of Blavatsky and personally involved with the Theosophical Society, their credibility would have to be based on more than human standards. However, the topic of the Masters is multifaceted and bears upon a number of issues in theosophical history. We will now try and examine how the Masters impacted on the theosophical movement.

Chapter 6
The Importance of the Idea of the Masters

6.1 Introduction to the Idea of the Masters as Legitimating Authorities

Having discussed how knowledge and experience were treated from the theosophical perspective, we now turn to another significant legitimating category. That is the question of authority. While Madame Blavatsky, through her charismatic persona, expertise in esoteric knowledge and supersensory practices was the primary authoritative figure of the early movement; the theosophical system itself required a greater sense of special mission to gain persuasive advantage. In a historical context of competing minority groups propagating their own versions of esoteric or alternative forms of deviant knowledge, the theosophical movement needed a distinguishing doctrine or especially appealing premise to gain the plausibility advantage. This definitive theosophical position was revealed in perhaps the most audacious or radical of all the claims made by Madame Blavatsky. This was in effect a personalised and revised reinterpretation of the esoteric belief that there is a hidden but controlling order of specially qualified occult-trained, operatives who shape and influence world affairs. The keynote of the Theosophical Society was sounded when she boldly and assertively proclaimed that she was personally selected by supremely evolved and spiritually awakened representatives of an abiding but secretive hierarchy of adepts, to found a new spiritually oriented movement intended to counteract the prevailing dominant Western worldviews. These Masters of Wisdom, or Mahatmas as they were typically referred to, appeared in human form, but bodily incarnation was merely a necessary convenience. They were in fact preoccupied with implementation of facets of the cosmic evolutionary plan. The belief in a mysterious occult hierarchy covertly shaping or directing human affairs was not original, but with Blavatsky's interpretation, it provided a special legitimating validation. This allowed her followers to feel that they were part of an elite vanguard of occult-oriented pioneers, working towards a collective change of orientation to the world that was a necessary step in the process of human evolution.

When we turn to the topic of the Masters of Wisdom, the Mahatmas, Elder Brethren, Great White Brotherhood, or any of the other similar appellations, we touch upon perhaps the most controversial and defining of theosophical topics. The notion of

such a group of "perfected humans," intent upon aiding or guiding humankind through the trials and tribulations of existence and towards a more spiritually evolved status has persisted for centuries, particularly in Rosicrucian and Masonic lore. However, through the efforts of Madame Blavatsky, the idea became entrenched in the fabric of the theosophical worldview, a principle of belief deeply ingrained in the self-referential sense of uniqueness and special elite status felt by members of the Theosophical Society. Although belief in the Masters, or conformity to their purported admonitions were not binding criteria for membership in the Society, they yet served significant supporting and legitimating functions. The presumption that there was a special connection between the operations of the Society and the will of superhumanly enlightened beings supplied a particular kind of transcendental justification to the objectives propagated by the Theosophical Society; as well giving special status to its system of beliefs, doctrines, ideas and values. If the objectives of the movement were believed to have been pre-defined and encouraged by the Masters, and the body of theosophical knowledge they allowed to be meted out was proportionate to the retentive capacities of individuals and societies, then those loyalists of the Theosophical Society who concurred would logically infer that they were at the forefront of the impending revolution in consciousness. And Blavatsky and others reinforced that assumption constantly.

Since the first early proclamations about the Masters, confusion and controversy often ensued when the topic was discussed. We shall look at the most common positions taken before further examination of the functions served. The credibility of these theories is not our major interest although we will explore a hypothetical scenario in which most of those opinions may be integrated as components of an inclusive theory. All have earnestly been believed to be accurate by respective supporters. We are more concerned about how theory and belief served a number of functions for the Theosophical Society, regardless of their possible credibility or factual basis. As a newly redefined enunciation of an older esoteric notion, the belief in the Masters acquired status as a myth. And as myth, the historical factors are rendered of secondary importance compared to its value as an abiding and confirming component of the belief system. Yet despite such mythic status, the Masters were represented as historical contemporaries, actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the theosophical enterprise. Thus questions surrounding the

credibility of the Masters significantly affected the way the movement was perceived by the public and by individual members desirous of personal contact. The Masters were defined as actual living entities, though in their mythic capacities were portrayed with characteristics far transcending the familiar, thus engendering mixed responses.

As well, we qualify our discussion by noting that since the purported Masters themselves (in their physical bodily forms) were allegedly accessible to very few individuals on a sporadic and irregular basis, it is more proper to refer to the "idea of the Masters." It was the literary or verbal characterisation of this class of being that was familiar to most theosophists. Only the elite leaders laid claim to actually being individually entrusted with their mission and having personal relationships with the occult hierarchy. And often even that contact was usually alleged to occur through astral visitations, telepathic messages, or disputable occult communiqués. Blavatsky was the only figure who claimed a long-standing and personal relationship. Olcott and others at times believed they had been in physical meetings or had sighted a Mahatma in bodily form. However, in most instances, the circumstances were questionable and could not hold up to the scrutiny of a non-believer. Yet despite the ambivalence surrounding the Masters as physical entities, their importance lay in the image that was created and transmitted. It was the idea of the Masters (regardless of historical credibility or not) that served as a critical component of the theosophical schema. But before looking at the functional roles the belief in the Masters played, the main theories about their origin must be discussed.

As we have earlier noted in the previous chapter, Madame Blavatsky claimed that her first-hand communications with the Masters occurred originally in unusual states of consciousness, via dream and vision, (and possibly, through mediumistic trance and hallucinogenic stimulation)[1]. This initial private subjective cognisance was said by her to have been later confirmed satisfactorily in physical contact, communication, teacher-pupil relationships, primarily during the adventures and travels of her so-called "veiled years" of private life. This period roughly covered the years 1849, when she fled an impulsive and ill-conceived marriage, to 1873, when she arrived in New York and began

[1] Blavatsky's mediumistic communication with the purported disembodied figure known as "John King" during her involvement with spiritualism reveals an image with at least some prototypical "Master" characteristics.

to prepare for the mission she claimed was intended for her by the Masters. During this time span, which began when she was eighteen, she claimed to have spent most of her energies seeking spiritual and occult wisdom, travelling the world in search of such objectives.[2] Her movements (only some of which can be confirmed) begun in Russia, and were alleged to include stints in the following countries of her era. Turkey, Greece, Egypt, France, England, Canada, the United States, Mexico, South America, West Indies, Ceylon, India, Tibet, Kashmir, Ladakh, Burma, Germany, the Caucasus, the Balkans, Syria, Italy, Palestine, Lebanon. In responding to questions about her whereabouts and activities, she was usually either intentionally vague or self-righteously indignant about certain events and issues, including some of dubious historical veracity or suggestive of perceived moral or behavioural impropriety. Her personal recollections were usually expressed as a romantic and adventurous narrative, and indeed, biographical and fictitious blending is implied in the short stories and travelogues that she authored, such as *Nightmare Tales*, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan*, *The Mysterious Tribes from the Blue Hills*, *The Durbar in Lahore*. The main point that she attempted to convey about those private years were that she was persistently preoccupied with a quest for first-hand knowledge of arcane and esoteric teachings; that she had without a doubt acquired a substantial measure through her varied experiences; and that what she had learnt and experienced could not be overtly revealed in its completeness to the profane public. Thus, she felt morally justified in not revealing all details of her life, and in using intentionally confusing methods to protect from the uninitiated and unworthy what she believed to be privileged information.

As well, through her lifelong eclectic reading and familiarity with a variety of alternative occult traditions, a broadly detailed conceptual and symbolic mass of materials was possibly available for embellishment or incorporation within a new system. A possible creative and imaginative fusion (consciously, unconsciously, or both) of subjective experiential elements with imagery and ideas pertaining to external literary, historical, and anecdotal sources may have been critical in supplying the input that was shaped into the theosophical myth. However, another strand of influence would tend to

[2] See Cranston, op. cit., pp. 41–60 for the orthodox theosophical interpretation of this period of travel. Also see Colin Wilson, *The Occult: A History*, New York: Vintage Books, 1973, p. 330.

suggest the Masters had more historical substantiality. That may have come from the recollections and ongoing input deriving from encounters and communications with actual historical personages. These possible sources of Madame Blavatsky's experience and knowledge of the Masters have generated most of the hypotheses and speculation.

6.2 Origins of the Idea of the Masters

6.2.1 Theory 1 – the Linear Narrative as Primarily Historical Fact – the Orthodox Theosophical Position.

The first of the three major explanations of the origins of the Masters is the view expounded by Blavatsky and held in essentials by loyal supporters. From that perspective, the Masters are believed to appear bodily in human form when necessary for their purposes, and while so incarnate and dealing with the non-enlightened, are somewhat constrained by the delimiting conditions native to this state. However, they more essentially are "perfected humans," spiritually evolved beings far beyond the stature of normal mortals. Subsequently they have volitional control and mastery of their supersensory capabilities, as well as secret knowledge permitting what may appear to the non-initiated as miraculous phenomena to occur. These Initiates voluntarily incarnate in human bodies to stimulate spiritual evolution, secretly influencing world affairs and manipulating (within the confines of karmic law) conditions to enable more efficacious and widespread spiritual and moral progress. They often incarnate as esteemed and important historical (usually religious or morally paradigmatic) figures. However, they are obligated to work within the rules of cosmic law, and must therefore account for all significant variables. So their efforts may not be immediately apparent because of all the circumstantially mitigating factors they precognitively anticipate, and that force them into seemingly inexplicable and indirect processes of long-term planning. In other words, to those impatient for evidence and proof of the powers of the Mahatmas, a stock response was that they must work in their own inscrutable ways, factoring in all the extensive karmic repercussions of any actions undertaken. The creation of the Theosophical Society though was an explicitly planned operation, timed to coincide with the last quarter of the century, which was stated to always be a time for potential fermentation of spiritual ideas.

The Theosophical Society was created with a special destiny in mind. Its intended function was to propagate sacred beliefs and combat dogmatic religion and materialistic science, and to thus provoke and stimulate a change in values and worldview orientation. Madame Blavatsky was stated to be the primary interpreter and disseminator of this message, the trusted vehicle to transmit and convey the will of the Masters as best she could. Others in the Theosophical Society could likewise become chelas of the Masters if they obey their admonitions and properly dedicate themselves to the cause. Physical signs and communications would potentially be possible, but at the discretion of the Master. Two Masters in particular, Koot Hoomi and Morya, were said to be the major sponsors and contacts for the Society. Let us look at a pair of comprehensive definitions written well after the immediacy of the first formulations of the theosophical doctrine to see how the orthodox theory appeared after years of familiarity and acceptance. First this outlook from Alvin Boyd Kuhn in 1930.

> The Masters whom Theosophy presents to us are simply high-ranking students in life's school of experience. They are members of our own evolutionary group, not visitants from the celestial spheres. They are supermen only in that they have attained knowledge of the laws of life and mastery over its forces with which we are still struggling. They are also termed by Theosophists the "just men made perfect," the finished products of our terrene experience, those more earnest souls of our own race who have pressed forward to attain the fullness of the stature of Christ, the prize of the high calling of God in Christhood. They are not Gods come down to earth, but earthly mortals risen to the status of Christs. They ask from us no reverence, no worship; they demand no allegiance but that which it is expected we shall render to the principles of Truth and Fact, and to the nobility of life. They are our "Elder Brothers," not distant deities; and will even make their presence known to us and grant us the privilege of cooperating with them when we have shown ourselves capable of working unselfishly for mankind. They are not our Masters in the sense of holding lordship over us; they are the "Masters of Wisdom and Compassion." Moved by an infinite sympathy with the whole human race they have renounced their right to go forward to more splendid conquests in the evolutionary field, and have remained in touch with man in order to throw the weight of their personal force on the side of progress. [3]

Another definition in 1933 by George de Purucker is as follows.

> The mahatmas are perfected men, relatively speaking, known in theosophical literature as teachers, elder brothers, masters, sages, seers, and by other names.

[3] Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 1930, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/kuhnmahatmaletters.htm>. (Accessed May 1, 2002).

> They are indeed the "elder brothers" of mankind. They are men, not spirits—men who have evolved through self-devised efforts in individual evolution, always advancing forwards and upwards until they have now attained the lofty spiritual and intellectual human supremacy that now they hold. They were not so created by any extra-cosmic Deity, but they are men who have become what they are by means of inward spiritual striving, by spiritual and intellectual yearning, by aspiration to be greater and better, nobler and higher, just as every good man in his own way so aspires. They are farther advanced along the path of evolution than the majority of men are. They possess knowledge of nature's secret processes, and of hid mysteries, which to the average man may seem to be little short of the marvellous—yet, after all, this mere fact is of relatively small importance in comparison with the far greater and more profoundly moving aspects of their nature and lifework.
>
> Especially are they called teachers because they are occupied in the noble duty of instructing mankind, in inspiring elevating thoughts, and in instilling impulses of forgetfulness of self into the hearts of men. Also are they sometimes called the guardians, because they are, in very truth, the guardians of the race and of the records—natural, racial, national—of past ages, portions of which they give out from time to time as fragments of a now long-forgotten wisdom, when the world is ready to listen to them; and they do this in order to advance the cause of truth and of genuine civilization founded on wisdom and brotherhood.
>
> Never—such is the teaching—since the human race first attained self-consciousness has this order or association or society or brotherhood of exalted men been without its representatives on our earth.
>
> It was the mahatmas who founded the modern Theosophical Society through their envoy or messenger, H. P. Blavatsky, in New York in 1875. [4]

With these definitions, we see that in the perspective of later years (both quotes coming approximately forty years after the death of Blavatsky), the potential for immanent contact is hardly suggested at all. As we shall see, during the period when Blavatsky acknowledged an ongoing relationship both on the physical and the astral planes, one of the dominant concerns of members was the opportunity to be invited into their presence, and given tangible and convincing proof of their authenticity. Preferably, on the physical plane, where it was hoped, rational and vigilant attentiveness on the part of the inquirer could convincingly verify and ascertain that status.

The process of establishing a credible legitimacy for the emerging ideational system required an alluring, captivating, and inspiring object of belief. Something to capture the imagination and galvanise those flirting with the theosophical option And this

[4] George de Purucker, *Occult Glossary*, retrieved from Theosophical University Press Online, 1996, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/ocglos/og-hp.htm>. (Accessed May 2, 2002).

crucial enticement for attracting prospective members and retaining the interest and commitment of the loyalists was the continued assurance that the Theosophical Society was a special and privileged organisation, created, sanctified, and endorsed by the Masters. This often meant that "evidence" or "signs" were useful (in fact, necessary for many), in assuring sustained belief and dedication. However, this initial claim of an ongoing and active relationship between the Masters and the Society eventually became the most contentious issue in future leadership disputes, as competing individuals each presented their own claims of Masterly endorsement. The acrimony and divisiveness of those conflicts, as well as the renunciation of Krishnamurti in 1929 of his assumed role of World Teacher effectively changed the tone of theosophical speculation.[5] Through most of the intervening years the Masters were discussed more as ideals or distant figures. Far less intimately involved in the day-to-day operations of the movement or occupied in training the Society elite as personal chelas. Some of the charismatic leaders still proclaimed personal relationships, but the references were more circumspect. However, the prototypical theosophical representation of the Masters was established by Blavatsky, and in essentials, has remained entrenched as a fundamental doctrine of the theosophical Society.

The main thrust of these standard descriptions of the Masters/Mahatmas is that they are "supermen," or "perfected men," yet at the same time, "members of our own evolutionary group," "men who have evolved" to a higher plateau. They serve as paradigmatic role models, inspiring and encouraging even if considered in their more humanistic roles as "elder brothers," "guardians," and "teachers." This orthodox theosophical position comes directly from Blavatsky's portrayals (later substantially embellished by others claiming theosophical continuity), and represents an effort to humanise the supernatural by emphasising the Masters/Mahatmas as compassionate evolved humans. And, at the same time, trying to legitimate the belief and ideational

[5] Extensive discussion of the Krishnamurti discovery, anointment, and eventual repudiation of the role of World Teacher takes us beyond our timeframe. However, the theosophical movement was decisively affected by the controversies engendered. For various perspectives, see Pupul Jayakar, *Krishnamurti: A Biography.* San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986. Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975. Arthur. H. Nethercott, *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant,* Chicago/London/Toronto: University of Chicago Press, 1963. Gregory Tillet, *The Elder Brother*, New York and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982. Roland Vernon, *Star in the East: Krishnamurti, the Invention of a Messiah,* New York: Palgrave, 2000.

system with a special transcendent status by showing that the Mahatmas intended the Theosophical Society to set the example and lead the world in achieving further spiritual evolutionary objectives. Theosophical speculation has been dominated by this double image of compassionate, concerned, human elder brethren who are yet more authentic and active on non-physical planes of existence and part of a majestic occult hierarchy.

This traditional theosophical outlook therefore becomes an especially important quasi-private source of assurance and confidence for those attuned to the formally enunciated worldview. It presumes belief in the literal and factual existence of the Masters on the physical plane, but merely as a necessary convenience for compassionate purposes. While potentially accessible to the specially chosen and qualified few, they yet retain truer, more essential and transcendent identities that are far beyond the average capacity of comprehension. Their historical manifestations are purported to have been of the highest and most revered exemplary spiritual and progressive historical figures.[6] And their supreme spiritual status places them on a loftier level than normal humans, with powers and knowledge far beyond the scope of the average person. "They possess knowledge of nature's secret processes, and of hid mysteries, which to the average man may seem to be little short of the marvellous." As such, they acquire a certain mythical identity, although historical and human connections are always reiterated. They are thus pictured as humans who have ascended the last rungs of the evolutionary ladder, but in fact are idealised and heroic figures. And a further facet of the mythic image is the belief that they have been perpetually active through the entire history of the species, constantly involved in some (usually surreptitious) way during most seminal historical events. Finally, the special role of the Theosophical Society is linked to the hierarchy of Masters, via Blavatsky's self-proclaimed role as prophetess of their message.

[6] A multitude of important historical figures have been claimed as Masters by various expounders of this belief. Mostly religious founders, enlightened social reformers, past philosophers and mystics. Unanimity over core personages often dissipates when favourites of specific groups or individuals are accorded especial prestige or status. For a popular public presentation of the concept in 1889 by a one-time member of the Theosophical Society, see Edouard Schure, *The Great Initiates: Sketch of the Secret History of Religion,*. 2 vols. London: William Rider and Son, 1920.

6.2.2 Theory 2 – Historical Figures Known to Blavatsky as Disguised Models – Johnson's Contention

Another perspective, most recently propounded by Johnson[7] and seconded by Godwin[8] is that Blavatsky primarily modelled the Masters upon actual people she had known and who had a great personal influence on her in one way or another. Johnson carefully constructs a conceivable case wherein he distinguishes thirty-two historically identifiable individuals as variously either being the actual Masters (known solely as living physical entities) or serving as prototypical models or sources of inspiration for Blavatsky's creative embellishment. These individuals played a variety of roles at different stages of Blavatsky's life, mostly serving as sources of knowledge and stimuli for choices she made. Johnson primarily sees the most important of these teachers, mentors, sponsors, as having their own agendas and reasons for aligning themselves with Blavatsky, ranging from large scale altruistic objectives to personal political motives and the desire to effect social reform and change.

He reverses the orthodox theosophical position, in which the historical persona was thought to be the secondary facet of the Mahatmas identity. From the position inculcated by Blavatsky, the physical body and personality of the Master was only a small and minor indicator of the essential inner spiritual being. His real substantial identity was that of the spiritually advanced and maximally evolved entity, utilising specific corporeal bodies for the necessary purposes pertaining to his role. Johnson suspends judgment about such possible speculation and only concentrates on the historical facts as best he can ascertain. His own hypotheses however are often based on speculative leaps and logical inferences, at times connecting people and events only through circumstantial evidence or conjecture.[9] However, the overall portrayal of Blavatsky's influences, teachers, sponsors, does merit serious consideration in hypothesising about the sources of her belief in, and portrayal of, the Masters.

---

[7] See K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 244.
[8] Godwin, op. cit., p. 366.
[9] Johnson's theories have provoked many critical responses from proponents of the orthodox theosophical position. For example, see Daniel H. Caldwell, *A Closer Look at Some of K. Paul Johnson's Arguments Concerning H.S. Olcott's Testimony About the Masters,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online,

Johnson provides this overview of how he defines and characterises the Masters, and the parameters of his study.

> The definition of "Masters" … is based on objective, measurable factors. Most of these characters were authorities in one or more spiritual traditions; others were accomplished writers. They helped prepare HPB for her mission as a spiritual teacher and/or sponsored the Theosophical Society from behind the scenes. Although their teachings and example affected HPB's development, the extent of their influence was usually a secret. In a few cases the argument for their acquaintance with HPB is speculative, but usually the fact of a relationship is well established and the real question is its meaning. Because their "spiritual status" and psychic powers are inaccessible to historic research, these alleged criteria of "Mahatmaship" are treated with agnosticism. No claim to exhaustiveness is intended; surely HPB's quest was influenced by many persons yet to be discovered … the mystery of the Masters remains elusive. HPB deliberately concealed her personal history … [10]

The Masters so considered are thus only identifiable by "objective, measurable factors." This would automatically bracket out alleged occult, and hypothesised psychological elements of the mix, which would be considered supplemental to, or juxtaposed with, the primary historical figures. There is though, still an aura of inscrutability and ambiguity with these persons, because they allegedly operated secretly or obliquely. And Blavatsky sustained the cloak of mystery by continual reference to their alleged extraordinary powers and superior compendium of knowledge.

If Madame Blavatsky wanted to disguise or protect actual historical personages as Johnson suggests, then incorporating what information was deemed important into the broader ideational edifice was a matter of creative literary construction and careful exposition, with clever concealment of sensitive data. He says that his theory is not exhaustive, implying that there are other factors than the historical, which collectively contribute to the final theosophical image of the Masters. Johnson's efforts are specialised, concentrating only on what can be discerned from the historical records about the possible identities of the Masters.

Looking exclusively at the Masters as possible historical figures variously connected or acquainted with Blavatsky, Johnson stretches the theosophical definition of "Master" to virtually include all categories of known personal influence. These consisted

---

2002, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/johnsonparanormal3.htm>. (Accessed May 20, 2002).
[10] Johnson, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

of religious and occult teachers, peers in pursuit of esoteric knowledge, scholarly contacts and correspondents, selected friends, travelling acquaintances, political and social figures, and family confidents. Listing the thirty-two so-defined Masters roughly in the order they came into Blavatsky's life, he distinguishes the following individuals.[11]

The first person qualifying for status of Masterly influence was Blavatsky's grandfather, Prince Pavel Dologorukii, who was a Rosicrucian Freemason and maintained a large library, of which the young Helena availed herself. Another early Russian influence was Prince Aleksandr Golitsyn, also a Freemason and grandson of a religious prophet (of the same name) who suggested she venture abroad for the acquisition of occult knowledge.

In her early travels, she met in Cairo Albert Rawson, an American author, explorer and artist, also seeking out occult knowledge and who became a travelling companion. In later years he became an important inaugural member of the Theosophical Society. While in Egypt she also met Coptic magician Paolos Metamon, whom Johnson feels was the prototype for "Master Serapis Bey." Also while travelling she befriended Agardi Metrovich, a Hungarian opera singer and a member of the radical Italian Carbonari political group. They travelled together extensively during the 1860's in Eastern and Southern Europe, and reports of an intimate relationship including a period of marriage persistently circulated. As well, Giusseppe Mazzini, the Italian nationalist reformer and anti-cleric was said to have been an acquaintance and a potential Master.

Another associate from her travels in Egypt was Louis Maximilien Bimstein, later more renown as occultist "Max Theon." As well, Jamal Ad-Din Al-Afgani travelled to destinations Blavatsky also visited during the same time frame. He was known as the "Sage of the East," being a political activist, social reformer, student of Persian and Sufi philosophy, and interested in occult subjects. James Sanua, a journalist and author exiled to Paris was a disciple of Afgani, versed in Sufism and Masonry, and politically active as a sympathiser of Carbonari ideology. Another travelling companion was Lydia Pashkov, a fellow Russian who was a correspondent for *Le Figaro* in Paris. She was part of the Afgani circle, and had travelled together with Blavatsky and Sanua.

Johnson believes that Ooton Liatto was one of two adept visitors to Blavatsky and

[11] Ibid, pp. XI-XIII.

Olcott in New York, and subsequently became the figure known as the Master "Hilarion." He was a Cypriot magician with primary interest in the Ottoman regions, and may have been acquainted with Blavatsky in Greece and Egypt during her travels in the years 1870–1871. Marie, Countess of Caithness was a financial contributor to French Theosophy, having contributed twenty-five thousand francs for Blavatsky to spread theosophical teachings in France. She was the first president of the Societee Theosophique d'Orient et d'Occident in 1883, and combined feminist sympathies with occult and spiritual interests.

The renowned explorer, linguist, and author Sir Richard Burton was a friend of Blavatsky during his later years and became a Fellow of the Theosophical Society in 1878. His expertise in Sufism, Isma'ilism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism, the Kabala, and his mastery of Asian languages and of disguises made him a respected source of personal knowledge and experience. Abdelkader was a friend of Burton, a Masonic Sufi with an interest in mystical and altered states of consciousness. He led a confederacy of Algerian tribes in a war against the French and also is credited with saving the lives of thousands of Christians from a hostile mob in Damascus. Raphael Borg communicated with Blavatsky and Olcott in the 1870s and 1880s. He was British consul in Cairo and established the Masonic Star of the East lodge as well as two political parties.

James Peebles was a travelling American lecturer, involved in many organizations and movements, including Freemasonry, Spiritualism, and Free Thought. He introduced Olcott and Blavatsky to leaders of both the Hindu reform movement the Arya Samaj and Sinhalese Buddhism. Charles Sotheran was a long-time associate of Rawson, and also a founding member of the Theosophical Society. He was a British émigré to New York, where he became a respected journalist. He was a member of Freemason and Rosicrucian organizations. He knew Blavatsky in Europe before the founding of the Theosophical Society. Mikhail Katkov was the Russian publisher of articles written by Blavatsky, and a dominant figure in Russian journalism. He opposed British control of India, supported French models of democracy, and believed that Russia had a special destiny in its relations with Asia.

Swami Dayanada Sarasvati was the founder of the Arya Samaj. This organization was interested in both social reform and a return to a purified Indian religious system,

featuring his interpretation of the Vedas. At first he and his organization were thought to be allies of the Theosophical Society, but conflicts of intentions and beliefs eventuated in open hostility and mutual recriminations. Shyamaji Krishnavarma was a disciple of Dayanada, who went to Oxford to teach Sanskrit, but became a political activist and founder of the Indian Home Rule Society.

Ranbir Singh, the Maharaja of Kashmir, is said to be the model for the Master "Morya." He was an active political, social, religious, educational, and cultural reformer and innovator. He sponsored some of Blavatsky and Olcott's travels, and their association served mutually beneficial purposes. His genuine interest in theosophical objectives coincided with practical political and social ambitions, while his sponsorship helped effectively legitimise the theosophical presence in India.

Sirdar Thakar Singh Sandhanwalia is claimed by Johnson to be the real identity attributed to the Master "Koot Hoomi." He was the founder of the Singh Sabha reform organization, intent on purging the Sikh religion of superstition and corruption, and on political reform in India. Opposition to Christian missionaries was a sympathetic theme reiterated by Blavatsky, and entrenched in the theosophical position. The usefulness of allying themselves with the Theosophical Society was in the potential influence that might be exerted on British interests in India and as a cover for more covert political ends. By identifying the two major Mahatma sponsors of the Theosophical Society, "Morya" and "Koot Hoomi" respectively as Ranbir Singh and Sirdar Thakar Singh, Johnson sees a particularly special connection between the political objectives of these Sikh leaders and their need to subtly utilise the Theosophical Society as a vehicle at least partially intent upon contributing to those goals. Johnson identifies the October and November 1880 Punjab meetings between Olcott, Blavatsky and these Sikh leaders as the time when the infamous Mahatma correspondences began to appear. Those purported letters served important legitimating purposes as we shall see, and, according to Johnson, were at least partially explainable as an act of collusion between these "Masters" and Blavatsky.

Another figure qualifying as a Master was Maharaja Holkar of Indore. He was a ruler of a central Indian state who had shown an initial interest in theosophy, paying Olcott and Blavatsky's travel expenses in 1883. However he apparently lost interest and

finally refused to see Blavatsky even though he had sent her an invitation to his palace. Bhai Gurmukh Singh was a close associate of Thakar Singh, a co-founder of the Singh Sabha. A respected scholar, he remained loyal to the theosophical movement even after Blavatsky's death. Baba Khem Singh Bedi was a co-conspirator with Thakar Singh against the British. He was a wealthy conservative aristocrat who did not impress Blavatsky.

Sirdar Dayal Singh Majithia was a model for the Master "Djual Kul" according to Johnson. He was an influential journalist who started the Lahore Tribune, and was a strong influence on public opinion in the Punjab. He favoured liberal education, reformed religion, and women's rights. He was present in Lahore when important meetings took place between Olcott and others, and appeared at the 1884 annual Theosophical Society convention. Connections from that convention led to the formation of the Indian National Union, which later became the Indian National Congress. Surendranath Banerjea followed Mazzini's political views, but rejected violence. Based in Calcutta, he was the founder of the Indian Association and a co-founder of the Indian National Congress.

Sumangala Unnanese was the High Priest of Sinhalese Buddhists, and proudly witnessed Olcott and Blavatsky's public conversion to Buddhism. He accepted the position as Honorary Vice-President of the Theosophical Society. Sarat Chandra Das was an expert scholar of Buddhist literature and had travelled extensively in Tibet. He retrieved a number of rare Buddhist texts and was in friendly correspondence with Olcott, who assumed those texts were made available by the Masters. Das was later revealed to have been an intelligence agent working for the British government. Ugyen Gyatso was a Buddhist lama from Sikkim, a travelling companion with Das in his ventures to Tibet, and also employed as a spy, with expertise in surveying. He may have been introduced to Olcott in Darjeeling. Sengchen Tulku was the spiritual minister of the Panchen Lama, and host to Das when he visited the Tasholhunpo monastery. He presented Das and Gyatso with forty volumes of Tibetan manuscripts in 1879. When they returned in 1881, he authorised them taking two hundred manuscripts and block-prints back to India. His interest in cultural exchange with the outside world may have extended to authorising Das to show Tibetan scriptures to Blavatsky and Olcott. Possibly access to these genuine

Tibetan writings may have led to a certain reluctance on Blavatsky's part to utilise this source fully because of possible contradictions and anomalies with her previous alleged and disputable "Tibetan" materials. When Das later published his Tibetan discoveries, the repercussions for Tulku were tragic. Intense anger at the revelations led to Tulku's torture and execution. The final Master Johnson describes is Swami Sankaracharya of Mysore, an Advaita Vedantist guru, of whom Theosophical Society officer T. Subba Row became a disciple. A potential association with the Adwaita Society was negated when Blavatsky was publicly accused of fraud and Row withdrew from the Theosophical Society.

This list of direct and indirect contacts, friends, associates, teachers, and influences reveals a wide source of possible models and prototypes for the finished theosophical portrayal of the Masters. However, whatever the possible degree of accuracy or error in Johnson's speculation, he himself concludes that the historical dimension will unavoidably be blended with other constructive factors. This is his assessment.

> In fact, HPB's life provided continued encounters with spiritual teachers of various traditions and nationalities. Her pilgrimage took her from Masonic Masters to Sufi sheikhs, from Kabbalah to Vedanta, from Spiritualism to Buddhism in no particular order. From early childhood to the end of her life, she was constantly adding to her store of occult learning. Her Theosophy was a brilliant synthesis of elements from dozens of unrelated sources. But she mythologized her search for the Masters in such a way that her real quest remained secret. Due to her adolescent fascination with the mysterious world of occult Masonry, in which hidden Masters sent unquestioned orders from unknown Oriental locations, she presented her experiences according to an elaborate hierarchal model. In truth, her Masters constituted not a stable hierarchy but an ever-evolving network. [12]

Johnson's acknowledgment that the theosophical presentation of the Masters may be based on a fusion of different contributing elements still presumes that the historical component is the root source of the composite. The "ever-evolving network" primarily consists of the influences of real people. This perspective, while illuminating and valuable, is one of the three major positions. We have already discussed the orthodox theosophical vantage point, where the Masters are envisioned as part of a grand hierarchal cosmic operation. The historical position of Johnson accounts for people, events, diverse relationships and forms of human interaction that strongly impressed

[12] Ibid., p. 9.

Madame Blavatsky. And which collectively, once treated through Blavatsky's creative faculties, may have contributed to the personalisation of the image given to the Masters.

6.2.3 Theory 3A – Intentionally Created Fictional Figures – Controversies Surrounding the Hodgson Report

The third perspective has mostly been adopted by critics, both in depth where discussed, and more commonly, in the superficial and casual stereotyping based on public gossip and innuendo. That vantage point sees the Masters as purely or primarily imaginative figures, with little or no historical substance. There in fact are two versions of this perspective. The first is more hostile and accusatory, claiming that the fiction was perpetuated mostly deliberately and consciously, to further ulterior ends. The second would more likely equate the imaginative creation of the Masters to largely unconscious or spontaneous processes and motives. As well, opinions from these perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as both unconscious and conscious factors could together produce the kind of fictional product claimed by such critics.

There is no doubt though, that in the history of the theosophical movement, the most serious, far-reaching, and damaging accusations of intentional fraud came from the investigation conducted by Richard Hodgson on behalf of the Society for Psychical Research in 1884.[13] That investigation, and the questions surrounding the origins and composition of the alleged communication by the Masters to Society functionaries and associates (mostly the so-called "Mahatma Letters" and other similar productions) polarised many in the Society and further tarnished the public reputation of Blavatsky and the movement. The explicit conclusions of fraud by Hodgson provoked a still active defence based upon a different reading of events, as well as counter-accusations of premeditated motives of revenge, an incompetent investigator, and use of unreliable evidence.[14] In the end, faith in Madame Blavatsky's version of events and a point-by-

[13] See The Society for Psychical Research Committee, *Report of the General Meeting of the SPR on May 29, 1885: Hodgson's Report on Madame Blavatsky (Meeting 1),* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/spr52985.htm>. *Report of the General Meeting of the SPR on June 26, 1885: Hodgson's Report on Madame Blavatsky (Meeting 2),* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/spr62685.htm>. (Accessed May 12, 2002).

[14] See, Walter A. Carrithers, Jr., *Obituary: The "Hodgson Report" on Madame Blavatsky,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Foundation, 1963, < http://www.azstarnet.com/~blafoun/obituary.htm>.

point refutation based on criticism of the motives and methods of the accusers and the investigator eventuated in further entrenching polarised positions. The devout believers kept their faith, and claimed a counter-conspiracy, based on motives of revenge, while the sceptics rested their case on belief in Hodgson's original charge of a conspiracy initiated by Blavatsky of manipulation and fraud.

Madame Blavatsky's verbal and written assurances of personal connection to the Masters provided an initial impetus of extraordinary and special credibility for the ideas and beliefs she was proposing, and helped gain a degree of public interest and attention. The importance of the idea of the Masters was substantiated by claims that Blavatsky herself was in communication with them and directly acting on their orders. This statement reflects that captivation of interest in the early formative years of the movement.

> H.P.B. in her first challenges to public thought hinted at the existence of great and wise Men, who are possessed of super-human knowledge and power. Presently she began to write of a Great Brotherhood of such wise Men, with some of Whom she was in constant touch… Visitors to H.P.B. soon became aware that in and through her were displayed unusual phenomena, the power to accomplish which she attributed to one or more of Those to Whom as Teachers, she looked for guidance, and Whom she served with such intensity of purpose. [15]

Madame Blavatsky thus initially established her own authoritative basis of credibility by claiming a real relationship to the Masters that entailed the production of extrasensory phenomena at hers and their discretion. However, to the coterie of early Society associates, supporters, and workers who dealt with her directly or were considered potentially valuable allies, the desire for continued direct and tangible evidence and proof of the Masters existence persisted. During the growth phase of the movement, there appeared a steady stream of seemingly inexplicable phenomena alleged to be directly or indirectly produced by or attributable to her or the Masters. These included alleged materialisations and psychic delivery of messages to selected persons in diverse locations. As well, what were thought to be similar sudden, secretive, unexpected and mysterious appearances by the Masters themselves (or their "signs") were also testified to on some occasions. For the most part, the significant objects that were of most

---

(Accessed May 23, 2002).

importance were allegedly produced by an occult process of production called "materialisation," in which tangible objects seemingly appear and coalesce out of the air. The most frequent of these items included letters, often addressed to important societal figures like Colonel Olcott and A. P. Sinnett. Others who were involved on a shorter-term basis were also occasional recipients or observers of such messages and signs, believed to be coming from the Masters. Blavatsky's explanation was that they were "precipitated" directly by, or on the orders of, the Masters. Messages to Olcott and Sinnett were much more frequent and sustained, while most communications to others occurred during particular moments when they were actively involved with specific critical issues pertaining to the Society.[16] The contents of most of these letters dealt with both abstract theoretical and philosophical questions, as well as opinionated commentary concerned with the minutiae of the society. The individually addressed letters were personal in tone, often referring to private concerns and questions of the recipient. The most well known of these letters were compiled and classified as *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, and have been the object of extensive scrutiny and analyses from first appearance until the present day.

A number of incongruities, inconsistencies, and suspicions about the authenticity of these letters and other manifestations arose and were voiced in due course. One case involved what appeared to be an act of direct plagiarism on the part of the Masters. An article written by Mr. Henry Kiddle and published in the spiritualist journal *The Banner of Light* was later reproduced virtually verbatim in one of the letters from a Master. At first this was dismissed as irrelevant, but when demand for an explanation persisted, a response was forthcoming. The obtuse, laboured, and convoluted explanation given in another Mahatma letter is a cleverly crafted exercise in excuse making. Written with a seeming air of nonchalance, the blame is attributed to a combination of carelessness, imperfect psychic operational procedure, and accidental transference of words.

> The letter in question was framed by me while on a journey and on horse-back. It was dictated mentally, in the direction of, and "precipitated" by, a young chela not yet expert at this branch of Psychic chemistry, and who had to

---

[15] Ransom, op. cit., p. 42.
[16] See for example, A. O Hume, *A. O. Hume on Madame Blavatsky,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hume1884.htm>. (Accessed May 22, 2002).

> transcribe it from the hardly visible imprint. Half of it, therefore, was omitted and the other half more or less distorted by the "artist." When asked by him at the time, whether I would look it over and correct I answered, imprudently, I confess—"anyhow will do, my boy—it is of no great importance if you skip a few words." I was physically very tired by a ride of 48 hours consecutively, and (physically again)—half asleep. Besides this I had very important business to attend to *psychically* and therefore little remained of me to devote to that letter. It was doomed, I suppose. When I woke I found it had already been sent on, and, as I was not then anticipating its publication, I never gave it from that time a thought…
>
> Two factors are needed to produce a perfect and instantaneous mental telegraphy—close concentration in the operator, and complete receptive passivity in the "reader"—subject. Given a disturbance of either condition, and the result is proportionately imperfect. The "reader" does not see the image as in the "telegrapher's" brain, but as arising in his own. When the latter's thought wanders, the psychic current becomes broken, the communication disjointed and incoherent. In a case such as mine, the chela had, as it were, to pick up what he could from the current I was sending him and, as above remarked, patch the broken bits together as best he might … So I, in this instance, having more vividly in my mind the psychic diagnosis of current Spiritualist thought, of which the Lake Pleasant speech was one marked symptom, unwittingly transferred that reminiscence more vividly than my own remarks upon it and deductions therefrom. So to say, (the "despoiled victim's"—Mr. Kiddle's utterances) came out as a "high light" and were more sharply photographed (first in the chela's brain and thence on the paper before him, a *double* process and one far more difficult than "thought reading" simply) while the rest—my remarks upon and arguments—as I now find, are hardly visible and quite blurred on the original scraps before me…
>
> Well, as soon as I heard of the charge—the commotion among my *defenders* having reached me across the eternal snows—I ordered an investigation into the original scraps of the impression. At the first glance I saw that it was I, the only and most guilty party—the poor little boy having done but that which he was told…
>
> I transcribe them with my own hand this once, whereas the letter in your possession was written by the chela. I ask you also to compare this hand-writing with that of some of the *earlier letters* you received from me. Bear in mind, also the "O.L.'s" emphatic denial at Simla that my *first* letter had ever been written *by myself*. I felt annoyed at her gossip and remarks *then*; it may serve a good purpose *now*. [17]

In this explanation, a complex chain of causal factors, especially the difficulties of occult transmission methods, are proposed. As well, the fallibility of human conduct also is blamed for the mistake. Other suspicions about such purported Mahatma letters

[17] A. T. Barker, ed. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, New York/ Melbourne/ Sydney/ Capetown:

included questions about inconsistencies in handwriting, or the methods of delivery and reception. Blavatsky consistently claimed that the communications were legitimate messages from the Masters, and developed a standard explanation with some minor variations. Her story echoed the basics of the explanation proffered by Master Morya in the last citation. This was that the Masters expressed their thoughts indirectly or directly via the occult means most appropriate at the moment. This involved telepathically imprinting their thoughts directly onto paper or first transmitting them psychically to a chela, who later would commit them to writing. Madame Blavatsky herself often claimed to be the psychic amanuensis, serving as the passive receptacle to the thoughts of the Master, who transmitted them through the ether, onto the permanent psychic database of cosmic memory, or "akashic record," where she could first cognise their content, and then translate them to words and transcribe them herself. Delivery of these letters usually was via the process of psychic osmosis called precipitation, in which occult techniques defying the constraints of space and time were used to disassemble and reassemble the atoms of the letter. Often these messages would seemingly appear out of thin air, found dropping from ceilings, hidden under cushions, behind other objects, in unusual or unexpected locations. And at times, they seemed to display foreknowledge and private information about the intended recipient. Sinnett was the beneficiary of many of those letters, and confessed that the entire process was not the unequivocal and indisputable form of communication he had envisaged. He noted that Madame Blavatsky often played a direct role in the production of the letters.

> The letters were not, in the beginning, what I imagined them to be – letters actually written by the Master and then forwarded by occult means either to Madame Blavatsky or deposited somewhere around the house where I should find them. They were certainly inspired by Koot Hoomi (all in the beginning bore his signature) but for the most part, if not always, were dictations to a competent clairaudient amanuensis, and Madame Blavatsky was generally the amanuensis in question. [18]

Such phenomena and explanations provoked cynicism and suspicion, or reverence and awe, depending on the perspective of the individual. However, the onus on Blavatsky to prove that she was not the primary originating source of those communications became

---

Rider and Company, 1948, pp. 422–424.
[18] Cited in Johnson, op. cit., p. 175.

much more urgent after public accusations of fraud. A former acquaintance from Egypt, Emma Coulomb and her husband Alexis, accused her of being the mastermind of a hoax in which they were accomplices doing her bidding.[19] In desperate financial straits, they had sought help from Blavatsky, and had been reluctantly hired as household workers at the Theosophical Society headquarters at Adyar, India. In their accusations, they claimed that Blavatsky had engineered a number of the phenomena attributed to the Masters, and revealed details about the alleged method of operations. As well, they discussed a wooden cabinet built by Mr. Coulomb adjacent to Blavatsky's living quarters at Adyar. They alleged that manipulative mechanisms were used in deceiving visitors into believing that occult forces were operative. These included the building of secret compartments and false walls, the use of cracks in ceilings to drop letters from, and so forth. Another claim they made was that an improvised human-shaped bust manipulated on a pole was constructed on Blavatsky's orders and used under certain difficult lighting conditions to convey the appearance of a materialised Master. This Mahatma replica was referred to as "Christfolo," and allegedly brought out at opportune moments to reinforce impressions and suggestions of occult visitations. As well, the Coulombs' confessed to using other accomplices and methods of operation during their tenure with Blavatsky. She however categorically denied all accusations and claimed that all the stories had been fabricated, based on motives of resentment and jealousy. Theosophical supporters pointed out that the couple had a history of impropriety and were also working in conjunction with local missionaries, known enemies of Blavatsky and eager to discredit her. Critics of Blavatsky countered by accusing her of calculated deceit.

While this conflict was unfolding, the Society for Psychical Research sent first-time investigator Richard Hodgson to investigate the situation. After a methodical but controversial examination (his first for the Society), Hodgson concluded that Blavatsky had indeed been the perpetuator of fraud. He opined that the Masters were mere imaginative fictions, invented by Blavatsky, who, with other co-conspirators, set about the process for the purpose of deception.

The moralising may be left to the reader, who will see how collusion with a few

[19] See, Emma Coulomb, *Theosophy. Madame Coulomb v. Madame Blavatsky,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/coulomb1884b.htm>. (Accessed May 13, 2002).

> confederates has been sufficient for the generation of a large mass of Theosophical phenomena, and who will no doubt be wondering what has induced Madame Blavatsky to live so many laborious days in the fantastic work of imposture we have exemplified. This last problem was much more difficult of determination than the problem of how the Mahatma letters were integrated. Was the Theosophical Society but the aloe blossom of a woman's monomania? Was this strange, wild, passionate, unconventional being "finding her epos" in the establishment of some incipient world religion? Such a hypothesis was strongly negatived upon a better understanding of her character. There are forms of personal sacrifice and aspiration, the absence of which from Madame Blavatsky's conduct absolutely precluded any classifications where she might appear as belonging to the St. Theresa type. She is indeed a rare psychological study, almost as rare as a Mahatma (with whom she confused herself on one occasion, saying, "I had to correct" instead of "The Mahatma had to correct"). She was terrible exceedingly when she expressed her overpowering thought that perhaps her "twenty years' work" might be spoiled through Madame Coulomb, and she developed a unique resentment for the "spiritualistic mediums" whose trickeries she "could so easily expose," but who continued to draw their disciples while her own more guarded and elaborate scheme was in danger of being turned inside out. And I dare prophesy that the Theosophical Society will survive any process of turning, notwithstanding Madame Blavatsky's own sad utterance concerning herself that she was "played out." [20]

Hodgson's report was detailed, entailing two hundred pages, mostly devoted to investigation of the handwriting of selected Mahatma letters, the physical quarters at Adyar, interviews with Blavatsky, members, associates, critics, and accusers. It seems though his conclusions were to some degree conditioned by his personal impression of Blavatsky, whom he saw as a "rare psychological study." A seeming lack of empathy with her ambitions perhaps left him at a loss to account for the motives of "the wild, passionate unconventional being" In trying to determine the grounds for her behaviour and comprehend her persona, he was forced to veer away from more obvious lines of hypothesis and grasp for speculative explanations. His instincts led him to deduce a theory in which Madame Blavatsky was believed to be a Russian spy. By trying to make an argumentative link between Blavatsky's reactions to, and commentary on Russian current affairs, and the pattern of her past travels, he concluded that her activities were motivated by unknown political ends. Such logic has been used as an example of his fallacious reasoning and prejudice. At the time though, it was not altogether an

[20] Richard Hodgson, *The Theosophical Society. Russian Intrigue or Religious Evolution?* Retrieved from Blavatsky Archives, 1999, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hodgson11.htm#(3)>. (Accessed May 3,

unreasonable line of speculation given Blavatsky's intentional mystification about her past, her sympathetic (and often patriotic) references to Russian life, and some of her politically active acquaintances. However, the mass of investigative data compiled by Hodgson does not necessarily depend on this line of speculative reasoning to make a case suggesting episodes of fraud. And accusing Hodgson of a premeditated vindictive agenda seems a somewhat simplistic dismissal of his work. Before he began his investigation it was surmised that he approached his task with a non-confrontational attitude. Hodgson had been recognised as at least vaguely sympathetic or neutral to the theosophical orientation beforehand, and even was considered to be acting without malice by Blavatsky in the course of his questioning.

> In all fairness to Hodgson, it should be repeated that when he arrived in India to commence his investigations at the TS headquarters in Adyar, his attitude was one of friendliness, not scepticism and suspicion. British friends who knew him just before he came to India said he carried around in his bag Sinnett's Occult World and spoke with enthusiasm as to its Theosophical teachings. [21]

It would seem likely that suspicions of deception must have been aroused for Hodgson to develop signs of hostility and distrust during the course of the investigation, Or awareness of incongruities and inconsistencies may have occurred as details were discovered, testimony was taken, and conclusions were formed. Perhaps some of his suspicions were reinforced by the actions of Blavatsky's associates at Adyar too. For instance, a crucial piece of evidence in the charge of deception was the presence of a wooden cabinet with a secret compartment that her accusers say Blavatsky utilised in staging false phenomena. However, it was quickly destroyed almost immediately upon notification of the charges by a group of Theosophical Society officials, thus reinforcing suspicions of guilt by this kind of tampering with potential evidence.

In an article written after Blavatsky's death entitled *The Defence of the Theosophists*, he confronts theosophical objections issued by Besant, Judge, Olcott and others directly, refuting their objections issue by issue, and pointing out the vested-interest perspective that they wished to impose upon his investigation. This article has largely been neglected by critics, who maintain that his methodology and mindset were

---

2002).

[21] Cranston, op. cit., p. 277.

prejudicial and selective from the outset, and thus that his conclusions only reveal those presumptions. However, in the article Hodgson vehemently states that he attempted to be as objective as possible, and only came to his conclusions reluctantly through overwhelming accumulation of incriminating evidence. He summarises his conclusions in four points.[22] The first was that the primary testimony about the existence of a Brotherhood of Adepts with occult powers came from Blavatsky and her associates Damodar K. Mavalankar, Bhavani Shankar, and Babajee D. Nath. Hodgson concludes that they deliberately made false statements in their testimony. The second point was his conclusion that the handwriting allegedly of the Masters appeared to be that of Blavatsky and of Damodar in imitation of her. His third point was that no evidence of genuine occult phenomena could be adduced in his investigation in India because many of the witnesses revealed inaccurate memories and weren't stringent enough in accounting for the potential of fraud. And in the case of some witnesses, there were conscious misstatements and efforts to mislead and deceive. His final point was that not only was there insufficient evidence supplied by witnesses, but that his own investigation led him to the conclusion that the phenomena in question were perpetuated through fraudulent means.

The Hodgson report has been passionately scrutinised for over a hundred years, and today is still the object of intensely polarised opinion. Amongst theosophical supporters, Hodgson was rebuked for both his alleged personal deficiencies as the chosen investigator, for his presumed unsympathetic approach to the investigation, and for virtually every conclusion he reached. A number of critics of Hodgson's investigation have appeared over the years, but the most diligent and closely argued refutation came from Vernon Harrison in 1985, timed to correspond with the hundred year anniversary of the initial public release of the report. Harrison evaluates Hodgson's efforts this way.

> … whereas Hodgson was prepared to use any evidence, however trivial or questionable, to implicate HPB, he ignored all evidence that could be used in her favor. His report is riddled with slanted statements, conjectures advanced as fact or probable fact, uncorroborated testimony of unnamed witnesses, selection of evidence and downright falsity. [23]

---

[22] Richard Hodgson, *The Defence of the Theosophists*, in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, Volume 9, 1893 – 1894*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company Ltd. 1894, p. 157.

[23] Vernon Harrison, *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885*, retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1997,

Harrison basically says that Hodgson started the investigation with his mind already made up, intent to prove fraud, unwilling to allow for a sympathetic or neutral approach to the outstanding issues, and therefore conducted the investigation as a prosecutor. The bulk of Harrison's critique centres on the questionable way Hodgson treated the handwriting materials. Harrison concludes that the handwriting analysis of the letters in question does not lead to a justified charge of forgery or imposture.

> I find no evidence of common origin of the KH and M scripts and HPB's ordinary, consciously-made handwriting. That is to say, I find no evidence that the Mahatma Letters were written by Madame Blavatsky in a disguised form of her ordinary writing made for fraudulent purposes. What may have come through her hand in trance, dislocation, or other forms of altered consciousness is another matter. [24]

By identifying the definitive criterion as "HPB's ordinary, consciously-made handwriting" Harrison isolates one significant factor, but allows for possible mitigating circumstances. He rules out calculated intentional efforts at handwriting manipulation and forgery, but admits that during an altered state of consciousness such a conclusion cannot be ascertained. Therefore, it would seem that handwriting analysis by itself is not necessarily a definitive way of revealing the subjective nexus of energies that may possibly have been active in the psyche during the actual process of writing. Blavatsky was experienced with automatic writing, and admitted that she served as amanuensis, as well as volitionally inserting her own thoughts on occasion when giving shape to Mahatma communications. So absolute blanket conclusions seem somewhat inconclusive. Johnson quotes Blavatsky about her admitted active role in the shaping of content.

> HPB herself admitted in reference to other K.H. letters, "It is very rarely that Mahatma K.H. *dictated verbatim*," and confessed further that "when I thought my authority would go for naught, when I sincerely believed acting agreeably to Master's intentions and for the good of the cause" she had "insisted that such a note was from the Master" although it was "often something reflected from *my own mind*." [25]

Johnson distinguishes between the physical writing of the letters and their conceptual

---

<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/hpb-spr/hpbspr-h.htm>. (Accessed May 2, 2002).

[24] Ibid.

[25] Johnson, op. cit., p. 175.

composition, noting that she could have composed them and had them copied by a confederate, or else have written them but not necessarily been the composer.

In so far as other accusations of the Hodgson report are concerned, Harrison is sceptical and suspicious, distrusting conclusions founded upon a questionable methodology. And because of this belief in Hodgson's erroneous approach, perceived mistakes of handwriting analysis, and the lack of primary evidence for other charges, he refrains from further analysis, deeming it impossible to proceed.

> These downright falsities coupled with the procedural errors, make it impossible for me to accept as a fair, impartial statement of fact those parts of the Hodgson Report that I can verify from primary evidence. This being so, I may perhaps be pardoned for regarding with suspicion the remainder of the Hodgson Report for which supporting firsthand evidence is no longer extant. [26]

This a priori dismissal of Hodgson's conclusions largely because of questions surrounding the handwriting analysis is ironic, because Hodgson explicitly states that this issue was a minor factor, and that the major suspicions arose through the cumulative evidence of his overall investigation and through testimony furnished by theosophists of the time.[27] And refusal to even consider testimony given a century earlier because it is "no longer extant" seems a dubious way of ignoring all of Hodgson's investigative work with the assumption it was all based on a bad-faith vindictive campaign. Which Blavatsky and others theosophists did not themselves feel at the time. Presumption that Hodgson misrepresented or misconstrued evidence, or that he ought to have taken an entirely different tact in his approach ignores the fact that such criticism appeared only after the publication of the investigation. In the duration between the investigation and the publication, there was no overt indication that Hodgson was perceived to have been pursuing a vindictive agenda. As well, considering this wasn't a criminal case involving the legal system, Hodgson's first-hand in-field examination did in fact take place relatively quickly once accusations against Blavatsky were made public. It was not a later reconstruction, though a certain amount of deduction was unavoidable because of tampering with evidence by Blavatsky's associates and reluctance of individuals to self-incriminate. Regardless of Hodgson's personal speculation about possible motives, and

[26] Harrison, op. cit.
[27] See, Hodgson, op. cit., p. 136.

possible errors with facets of the case, the methodical amassing of accusatory details remains difficult to simply "explain away" as entirely built upon premeditated malice, conspiracy, or incompetent procedure. Even if only a portion of his report is accepted as the most probable explanation, the implications yet point to intentionally deceptive and manipulative behaviour on the part of Blavatsky and/or those involved in the machinations.

The theosophical efforts to deligitimise the conclusions of the report by attempting to discredit the investigator provided a counter strategy. If Hodgson's report was believed to be flawed even somewhat, then all of it could be considered refuted and worthy of dismissal. So belief that Blavatsky was exonerated and purely a passive victim of circumstances or conspiracy became a common theosophical position and justification for sympathetic revisions. The consensus belief amongst loyal theosophists was that Blavatsky herself was personally vindicated and proven innocent of intentional fraud. That process of attempted rehabilitation by supporters has been ongoing ever since the initial report was issued. And though conceivable arguments have been made to show that Hodgson did not conduct a perfect investigation and could have taken other approaches for particular issues, it is yet a leap of faith to assume that Blavatsky was entirely above board and the innocent victim of a prosecutorial agenda. In addition to his enunciation of problematic detail, Hodgson suggests that his final conclusions were influenced by his person-to-person interviews and discussions with Blavatsky. Regardless of the assessments of his motives by others, or the accuracy of his speculative hypothesis about ultimate intentions, he in fact did actively engage the main figures conversationally and inquisitively, and take into account their counter-claims and explanations. So his intuitions and instincts about Blavatsky's character and trustworthiness (and of her associates) factored into his conclusions. Regardless of their ultimate accuracy, they at least were closer to the source and based on personal observation unlike those of later critics who only have documentary and anecdotal data to use in attempted deconstruction of his arguments. In the end, contemporary supporters of Blavatsky made their counter-arguments and the public was given a choice of which side to take.

Hodgson's critical estimation had the most widespread and enduring influence on public consciousness. During the time frame the report was first circulated, the

repercussions for Blavatsky and the movement were severe. Particularly in terms of mainstream reputability and legitimacy. The controversy engendered by the Hodgson investigation most dramatically affected the credibility of the Theosophical Society itself as a purported objective, truth-seeking organisation. And it especially engendered even more severe deflation of Madame Blavatsky's public reputation amongst those of the academic, scientific, and intellectual community and the press who had been at least somewhat neutral beforehand. Although the ensuing notoriety added to an already disreputable mainstream image, theosophy itself yet retained its footing for those willing to look past such controversies and empathise with the belief system. For some, the sense of sympathy and willingness to accept Blavatsky's explanations added to her image as a victim of an unjust conspiracy, and enhanced her charismatic appeal. As a perceived victim of unmerited persecution, chronically misunderstood and under-appreciated by an unsympathetic and unenlightened mainstream consensus of cynics and scoffers, Blavatsky was able to elicit renewed sympathy from those yet loyal, who placed implicit trust in her character and integrity, and faith in her charismatic persona.

Despite the controversy however, one significant point was not in dispute. That was the admission that in many instances, the actual substantive contents of the Mahatma communications appeared in writing directly or indirectly through the issuance of Madame Blavatsky. The point of contention is whether she was, as claimed in the letters and by her, a virtually passive medium of psychic transmission, or as claim critics, the wilful originator and composer. That some unascertainable percentage of the letters did indeed manifest and filter through her mental/psychological apparatus is not in doubt. And assuming an independent originating source, many of the other communications purportedly were given linguistic form and transmitted through the psychic work of secondary parties (the chelas of the Masters), and therefore also would be subject to the intrusion of influences of personality, possibly diluting or altering the full intentions of the assumed primary Mahatma source. Therefore, whether the Hodgson claims of fraud apply and thus negate the entire supernatural explanation, or Blavatsky and/or others had at least an indirect role in the actual construction of those letters, it seems that the belief in a clear, direct, incontestable, personal line of communication from the Masters must be at least treated with caution.

Accusations of conspiracy from both sides seem to be a lasting legacy. Hodgson concluded that Blavatsky and her cohorts conspired to perpetuate the fraud of the Masters. Theosophical sympathisers claim the Coulombs' had personal motives and conspired with missionaries to frame Blavatsky. Later day attempts to rehabilitate Blavatsky's reputation and discredit Hodgson unavoidably depend entirely on secondary materials and can only be considered as possible hypotheses, reflecting the vested interests presumed in the very attempt to rehabilitate. And even making a plausible argument for questioning any of Hodgson's methods or conclusions does not automatically legitimise the orthodox theosophical narrative. Even if he drew particular unverifiable conclusions on some points, or conducted somewhat of a flawed examination, enough serious doubts were raised to treat the orthodox theosophical response with caution. Hodgson dealt with real issues of contention, which defy simplistic sophistic rationalisation. As well, simply reiterating Hodgson's conclusions without acknowledging the problematical circumstances under which they were formed likewise simplifies a complex issue.

6.2.4 Theory 3B – Unintentionally Projected Psychological Figures – Consideration of Archetypal, Neo-Jungian, and Evans' Perspectives

Another line of thought that shares belief that the Masters were non-existent as autonomous, self-sufficient, independent entities can be found implicit in the speculation of those who profess a primarily psychological basis for the concept. From this perspective, Blavatsky may have not intentionally invented fraudulent beings, however, she still would have to be considered as a purveyor of a complex imaginative notion, most likely deriving from unconscious energies and objectified through the creative faculties. The Jungian theory of archetypes is perhaps the most obvious generic psychological model for this form of explanation, which becomes even more hypothetical and speculative when treated from more radical offshoots of the Jungian school of thought. Jung's own thoughts about the nature of archetypal manifestations and the appeal of theosophy would appear to lead to the inference that Madame Blavatsky may very well have been subject to such intrusions.

When … psychic energy regresses, going even beyond the period of early

> infancy, and breaks into the legacy of ancestral life, the mythological images are awakened: these are the archetypes. An interior spiritual world whose existence we never suspected opens out and displays content which seem to stand in sharpest contrast to all our former ideas. These images are so intense that it is quite understandable why millions of cultivated persons should be taken in by theosophy and anthroposophy. This happens simply because such modern gnostic systems meet the need for expressing and formulating the wordless occurrences going on within ourselves *better* than any of the existing forms of Christianity, not excluding Catholicism … The syncretism of theosophy goes a long way towards meeting this need, and this explains its numerous successes. [28]

From Jung's perspective, belief in objective, independent, extraordinarily endowed beings as perceived in vision, dream, and trance, derive from numinous experience, and are manifestations of an archetype of the collective unconscious, objectified and perceived to subsist apart from the percipient. And while the theosophical Masters were not singled out specifically, their inclusion in this category would appear quite consistent with the general themes of that theory. Jung though sees theosophy as a hybrid (though compromised) syncretistic system that has been useful for some in providing an efficacious response in meeting spiritual needs since its modern inception.

The actual cultural representation of numinous experience emerges through the creative imaginative process of those committed to its articulation. However, in the speculative inquiries of some more willing to radicalise Jung's theory, the archetypal image may be perceived as belonging to a different category than either pure subjectivity or objectivity. The hypothesis of an intermediary state called "imaginal" has been propounded in various ways to account for the persistence of objectified numinous encounters without reducing the phenomenon to the status of a rationally contrived fiction or a pathological mental disturbance. This saves the experience from reduction to a "mere" act of fancy, and permits belief in a quasi-independent subsistence of the archetypal representations. Henry Corbin is usually credited with first using the term, and subsequent speculation by others has enriched the discussion.[29] For instance, Harpur begins with a premise that "Imagination" not only is the source of all images of sacred beings, but also effectively accounts for how and where those representations may

[28] C.G. Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, pp. 77-78.
[29] For discussion of the influence of Jung on Corbin, see Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, chapter 12.

appear.

> In this understanding of Imagination, we see another formulation of Jung's collective unconscious ... The sacred beings are the spontaneously appearing archetypal images. They are our gods and daimons. The advantage of Imagination as a model for daimonic reality is that it avoids the implication, however residual, of the term 'collective unconscious' that it is somehow purely interior, within us—when ... it is also external to us. Similarly, the model 'Soul of the World' implies the opposite, emphasizing externality over internality. The idea of Imagination draws these first two models together. Like the collective unconscious it is the source of autonomous sacred beings; like the Soul of the World, it locates these sacred beings just as often in the world as in our psyches (as in dreams, visions, etc.).[30]

By this line of reasoning, Blavatsky's characterisations of the Masters would not necessarily be reduced to intentionally embellished creations, but be seen perhaps as based upon "spontaneously appearing archetypes." Her own numinous experiences at times would thus appear to reveal "in the world" empirical entities and milieus, but in fact would be based upon unintentional and subconscious reification of subjectively derived archetypal material.

Blavatsky's penchant for objectifying and personalising the content of her imagination may have been motivated by the real-world influences that may have factored into her image of the Masters. However, insisting on the literal objective autonomy of the Masters as individual entities contributed to the confusion in discerning what portions of her ideas were spontaneous and what part were contrived. Hillman's observations on the nature of the image are instructive.

> We tend to literalize, to idolize, the image into a visibility … We perceive images with the imagination, or, better said, we imagine them rather than perceive them, and we cannot perceive with sense perception the depths that are not extended in the sense world. [31]

It is not inconceivable that Blavatsky inadvertently produced a mixed message in her creative efforts. This may have eventuated through ongoing personalisation of the image of the Masters. Especially in reference to their alleged attentiveness to internal Theosophical Society concerns. While at the same time, "perceiving with the

[30] Patrick Harpur, *Daimonic Reality,* London/New York/Ringwood/Toronto/Auckland: Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 122–123.
[31] James Hillman, *The Dream and the Underworld*, New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London: Harper & Row, 1979, p. 55.

imagination," and drawing upon more numinous and archetypal impressions to portray superior resplendent figures. So by mixing prosaic human qualities and detail with "depths that are not extended in the sense world," the archetypal image or symbol was given the specific and unique form of the theosophical Masters. And yet, the blending of unconscious and conscious elements may be unavoidable, an intrinsic fact of the creative process that ultimately produces the final representation.

> The creative act, the concentration upon the production of something of value that can be communicated to other people, requires entrée to the unconscious; it also requires ego participation. The fear of being taken over by the unconscious may be countered by the act of objectification … The visions then become manageable creations of his own mind. It is only by setting the inner world against the world of substance that visions can come to a fruitful relationship with values. [32]

It would seem that the particular theosophical doctrine of the Masters originally may have been the result of Blavatsky's attempt to incorporate the substance of what may have been subjective numinous experience with a broad assortment of residual occult information gleaned from a lifetime of travel, study, instruction, and speculation along similar lines. As well, in perusing the profiles of the Masters, it appears likely that certain of their traits and characteristics would be drawn from knowledge of real people, such as the list of sponsors and influences enunciated by Johnson. When combined with more purely imaginative contents, the final image appears less easy to define. Thus, the inclusion of all such factors would tend to suggest that during the creative period, Blavatsky was continually crafting a mythology of the Masters that included data based upon real-world knowledge and relationships as well as upon what she was able to objectify from her own store of archetypal experiences. So this kind of creativity is basically an imaginative process drawing together and assembling disparate sources of imagery, information, and emotionally laden psychic materials to create a novel and personalised cultural product.

> Creativity is imagination pure and simple, ever and anon producing its own shapes and configurations. [33]

The idea of the theosophical Masters that emerged from Blavatsky's articulation

---

[32] June Singer, *Blake, Jung, and the Collective Unconscious*, York Beach, Maine: Nicolas Hays Inc., 2000, pp. 244–245.
[33] Robert Avens, *Imaginal Body,* Lanham/New York/London: University Press of America, 1982, p. 128.

presented “its own shapes and configurations,” possibly based on both conscious and unconscious energies.

A more adventurous and tenuous line of speculation deriving from the same sort of evaluation can be found in the hypothesis put forth by Hilary Evans in *Visions. Apparitions. Alien Visitors*. Evans believes that the experience of confrontation with seemingly veridical extraordinary entities occurs as a result of deep psychological processing, mostly occurring at the subconscious level though exhibiting characteristics of purposefulness and meaningfulness for the individual subject. She calls this source “the producer,” a personification of these purposeful subconscious forces. The seemingly authentic and self-subsistent vision or apparition appears to the perceiver as a distinct autonomous entity, even though hypothesised to be originating purely in the psyche of the percipient. The creative and imaginative faculties help shape and define the form the image takes, but this occurs spontaneously rather than through intentional conscious manipulation. It is after such numinous visions are experienced that some more captivating and powerful images later become assimilated culturally and available for imaginative and creative representation and embellishment. The manifestation of veridical imagery is believed to be an intrinsic possibility of the human psychological condition, given the necessary triggering stimuli, though it is more likely to occur for those individuals who are more emotionally and imaginatively sensitised and susceptible (whether voluntarily induced or spontaneously occurring) to the abnormal states of consciousness enunciated by Gowan. Evans’ theory presumes a number of causal factors all seamlessly integrated in the process of visionary manifestation.

> Within our minds there exists a creative, intelligent, sympathetic and understanding capability, whose function is to fabricate non-real scenes and scenarios, for purposes only some of which can be guessed at. This capability, which for the sake of convenience we may call the producer, may plausibly be conceived as a parallel personality to our conscious personality.
> The producer has access not only to all our sensory input, both conscious and unconscious, but also to our mental and emotional attitudes and concerns; he also has access, whether constant or when the need arises, to information not available to our conscious minds…
> Using this material, the producer creates fantasies consisting largely of representations of people; these may be persons, living or dead, known to the percipient; or stereotypes whose identity is evident though they are not personally known to the percipient …or persons who, so far as the conscious mind can tell,

> are total strangers. They may appear as isolated figures or in realistic settings: in either case the manifestation is managed so skilfully that the entity is frequently assumed to be real at the time.
> There is no evidence so show that the creation of these imaginary scenes and entities is a continuous process, but unquestionably some are created at specific times for specific purposes.
> The non-real scenes are substituted for the reality reported by the senses; the substitution takes place somewhere between the sense organs and the part of the brain concerned with visual imagery. Or is effected so neatly that there is generally no discontinuity between reality and fiction. There is no reason to suppose it uses anything but the normal channels of communication, employing encoded signals.
> While the most memorable instances of this process are the made-to-order experiences that relate to a crisis or other event with a strong emotional overloading, 'accidental' tuning in to the material can be obtained in a number of mental states, which are not those of everyday consciousness – when intoxicated or drugged, in trance, delirium or mystical ecstasy…
> There is no evident limit to the range of material of the experience, but its nature will be determined by the percipient's personal preoccupations, his cultural background, and by the immediate situation. It will also be adapted to the context of time and place in which it occurs. [34]

This theory makes a number of hypothetical assumptions, particularly the belief that veridical encounters with the numinous arise from a value-oriented, causal interaction between conscious and subconscious levels of the psyche. This theory somewhat restates what would be seen in Jungian terms as a synchronistic underlying order of reality. The inherent drive towards realisation of the potential of the Self through individuation would provoke, when appropriate, compensatory archetypal manifestations via visionary forms of experience. What is distinctive though is the premise that strong emotional overloading or equivalent accidental trigger functions are the stimulus for the creation of fantasies that predominantly feature "representations of people." If these numinous fantasies feature the fabrication of "non-real scenes" highlighting these veridical entity representations, then any number of seemingly profound or solemn scenarios could appear subjectively authentic. Such visions would locate the numinous figure(s) in a congruent setting befitting their perceived status. The wide variety of people potentially represented through such internal operations of the psyche obviously derives from personal and cultural sources, whether historical, legendary, fictional, or imagined.

[34] Hilary Evans, *Visions. Apparitions. Alien Visitors*, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian

The cultural and historical milieu will shape the form the vision takes, but more critical, is "the percipient's personal preoccupations." Thus, the framework of familiar and personal ideational and emotional concerns and interests of each individual, and the worldview of his specific environment will shape the contents of his vision. Therefore, using this line of reasoning for hypothetical conjecture, it would stand that Blavatsky's visionary excursions would produce representations of persons that embodied her personal ideas, values, and beliefs. And these were mostly drawn from her absorption in occult and mystical matters and familiarity with the extensive resources and subject matter of those fields. Combined with residual imagery and associations from her past and her ongoing pursuits, it appears that her description of the Mahatmas, their eclectic esotericism, secretive Himalayan base, astral and transcendent operations, etc. etc. would be logical extrapolations utilised by her own subconscious "producer," or (Jungian) Self-function.

6.2.5 Origins of the Idea of the Masters – An Integrated Theory

When her statements about experiencing visions of a guardian (later interpreted as her Master) during crises situations earlier in her life are factored in, it would not be unreasonable to speculate that early in her life that such numinous visions served as the defining prototype by which later more mature visionary episodes were interpreted and classified. As well, the inclusion of detail drawn from actual historical personages, incorporated for immediate ulterior ends, and embellished by an active creative imagination could plausibly be seen to integrate with the primary numinous, visionary datum. With this hypothesis, Blavatsky's thoughts and actions concerning the Masters would justify both her proclamations of sincerity regarding belief in contact with spiritual entities as well as charges of manipulation and deceit. The issue becomes a question of degree, and of quantifying the admixture. What percentage of her portrayal and doctrinal representation of the Masters was based on the sincere assumption that she was engaged in authentic communication with self-subsistent spiritual entities? And what quotient was intentionally fabricated and utilised fraudulently? And, further, what portion of her theosophical career was motivated by belief that her communications with the Masters

---

Press, 1986, pp. 308–309.

was active and efficacious, and when did she feel the need to maintain the mythical apparatus through contrivance and manipulation, without visionary reinforcement? Even granting the prominence of visionary experience on an ongoing basis, can the numinous portion be separated from the self-delusional? [35] These rhetorical questions are proposed to illustrate the difficulty in treating the complexities of subjectively based claims of extraordinary experiences. Especially deriving from someone who engaged in continued intentional mystification and revision. Any hypothesis can only be tentative, based on evidence and logic that seems to provide a reasonable interpretation of the materials at hand. In any event, it must be noted that to Madame Blavatsky and orthodox theosophical exponents, the Masters have consistently been envisioned as autonomous existent humans, supremely evolved and oriented to a dimensionality inaccessible to the uninitiated and unqualified, but profoundly real nonetheless. Any hypothesis suggesting less than this advanced state of self-sufficiency would be regarded as heretical. Although allowance was made by Blavatsky and others to think of the Masters as ideals and symbols, the great thrust of the theosophical initiative was to emphasise their historicity and influence in world affairs and organisational concerns. [36]

Yet, any speculation about whether Madame Blavatsky's purported encounters with the Masters can be definitively accounted for through such a hypothetical framework of interpretation can only be tentative, although highly suggestive. Blavatsky's familiarity with esoteric traditions would provide a background of information about the theory of a secretive brotherhood of Masters. With Johnson's study, it seems that real historical figures played at least some role in the descriptions of the Masters, providing idiosyncratic personalised detail and imagery. As well, with a known propensity for engaging in a variety of altered states of consciousness, and a vivid and fecund imagination, it would seem plausible that numinous visionary episodes may have occurred in which the belief in the objectivity of the Masters was felt to be verified. And through application of the general Jungian methodology, the possibility of those numinous experiences being archetypal in quality may be postulated. So through the

[35] For a cogent analysis of the issue of self-deception, see Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation,* New York: Vintage Books, 1984, pp. 59–66.
[36] See for example, H. S. Olcott, *The Himalayan Brothers*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 1999, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcott11.html>. (Accessed May 19, 2002).

stimulus of crises situations or other triggers, the continuity of such visions would appear to confirm their veridical status. As well, from anecdotal accounts and the implications of the Hodgson investigation, it would be naïve to believe that no degree of fabrication or embellishment took place when it suited Blavatsky's purposes. Thus, factoring in all these contributing elements, it would seem that the formal theosophical doctrine of the Masters as enunciated by Blavatsky was a product of a number of discrete sources of input, giving the doctrine of the Masters wider socially legitimating authority and serve Blavatsky's personal agenda when required.

6.3 The Functional Utility of the Idea of the Masters

6.3.1 The Idea of the Masters Providing the Authority for Internal Organisational Structuring – Themes Discerned in *The Mahatma Letters*

For our purposes, what is important to note is the functional utility of the doctrine of the Masters. How it served in helping legitimate the larger theosophical worldview. The role that the idea of the Masters played within the theosophical ideational system attained an importance independent of factual origins. Blavatsky applied the claim of a secret occult brotherhood of Masters in two main ways. One was a quasi-private organisational function, mostly applied to the more senior and important society members and associates. Having to continually reiterate and reaffirm her personal role and special status as primary intermediary between Masters and members, it was necessary to show stability and that the link with the Masters was still operative. In her capacity as authoritative theosophical theoretician, it was necessary on an ongoing basis to confirm for the key Theosophical Society members and associates that the Masters were still proactive and supportive of the organisation itself as a special institution.

Whatever role Blavatsky played in the creation and transmission of the Mahatma communications is of secondary importance in this instance. Regardless of their origins, the Mahatma messages served an important supportive purpose for Blavatsky by regularly confirming the special role she played as liaison, as well as the generally correct way her activities conformed to Masterly intentions. The Mahatma letters in particular were a mix of theoretical and philosophical ideas and specific concrete organisational concerns. With the stamp of approval by the Masters for particular objectives and

potential lines of action, the Theosophical Society could more efficiently be directed along lines intended to conform to those aspirations. Conversely, where signs of disapproval or warnings about possible choices came from the communications of a Master, a heavier weight was placed on the process of decision-making. So the seemingly inordinate amount of attention in the Mahatma letters directed to apparently mundane internal societal minutiae could only be reasonably justified by rationalising more esoteric, impersonal, and universal purposes beneath the surface of the everyday concerns. Also, at this "insider" level, demands or expectations of tangible proof and personal contact with the Masters was anticipated, and therefore had to be taken into account. We shall look at some of the ways the communications from the Masters provided institutional directives and reaffirmed Blavatsky's special status.

As well, the doctrine of the Masters also served another practical purpose. This was a more public function, directed at the average theosophical membership, sympathisers, and curious public. These would be people more likely to be reading the articles, pamphlets, newspaper references, and books, attending lectures, holding discussions, and so on, but not necessarily part of the "inner circle" of the Theosophical Society. The utility of the theory of the Masters was mostly normative and inspirational, providing paradigmatic ideal types to serve as role models as well as further legitimating the theosophical claims to special status as an institution sanctioned by supernaturally connected sources.

6.3.2 The Idea of the Masters Providing an Idealised and Alluring Public Image

We begin with the way belief in the possibilities of communication with the Masters served to shape institutional affairs. A perusal of the Mahatma letters reveals two major themes, often discussed in the same letter. One major focus of interest was the provision of occult knowledge and information, often phrased in personal advisory terms for the intended recipient. This content was both about theoretical and philosophical matters as well as practical issues pertaining to personal conduct and training for chelaship. The other was almost an obsessive interest in the minutiae of organisational affairs, filed with advice, recommendations, gossip, opinion, judgment of character, speculation about procedural options, elaborate and convoluted explanations for allegedly

fraudulent activities and so on. Despite the questions of the source and means of authorship, the writings themselves served as important indicators to recipients that the Masters were actively concerned about them personally and the Theosophical Society as an entity. This provided legitimating authority for their contents, and inspirational encouragement for the recipient, who (if believing in their supernatural authenticity) was able to proceed, feeling that he or she was privy to a special and unique source of truth.

Another consistent secondary undercurrent to many letters is the approval given to the activities of Madame Blavatsky. Although often spoken of irreverently and pityingly, those kinds of characterisations appear almost purely rhetorical when viewed over the span of the letters. Beneath the caustic comments about her physical limitations, temper, and questionable personal habits, she is almost always portrayed as loyally and effectively trying to follow the advisement of the Masters as best she can. Her mistakes are never a matter of bad faith, betrayal, egotism, or selfishness. They are a result of tempestuousness, over-eagerness, physical or mental incapacity, circumstantial and unexpected variables. And, underlying even these fallibilities and character flaws, is the built-in excuse of "her karma," justifying the unusual and problematic ramifications of her activities. So by linking the desires and objectives of the Masters to Blavatsky's endeavours, she is portrayed as a struggling though determined messenger who yet reveals a message more significant and worthy than could be attributed to her own devices. [37]

Let us illustrate some of those functions of the Mahatma letters. We begin with by looking at how the purported Masters differentiated between roles as supernaturally sanctioned authoritative teachers of esoteric wisdom, and their subsidiary status as Theosophical Society functionaries and advisors. The continuity of these kinds of presumed relationships provided the foundation of trust and faith upon which the credibility of the transmitted knowledge as well as advisement for the movement, rested.

The so-called "Mahatma Letters" were physical letters, seemingly hand-written, that appeared mysteriously and unexpectedly in the environs of A.P. Sinnett, a notable member of the London lodge of the Theosophical Society. The explanation for the

[37] See L. Gordon Plummer, *H. P. Blavatsky, The Mystery*, in *H.P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine*, ed. Virginia Hanson, op. cit., pp. 166–177 for the standard theosophical occult rationale for Blavatsky's unusual personality traits and unconventional behaviour. Also see Cranston, op. cit, pp. 149–150.

unorthodox method of delivery was that occult means were used throughout the process, from composition to delivery. Ostensibly expressing the thoughts of the Mahatmas on arcane knowledge and Theosophical Society plans, they provided an early outline of basic theosophical doctrine and intentions. The Masters (primarily Koot Hoomi or Morya) stress that they are elite representatives of an esoteric/occult/spiritual tradition, utilising the Theosophical Society to advance a different worldview and change the habitual perceptions common to Western society at this moment of cyclical evolution.

> If, for generations we have "shut out the world from the Knowledge of our Knowledge," it is account of its absolute unfitness; and if, notwithstanding proofs given, it still refuses yielding to evidence, then we will at the End of this cycle retire into solitude and our kingdom of silence once more… We have offered to exhume the primeval strata of man's being, his basic nature, and lay bare the wonderful complications of his inner Self … It is our mission to plunge and bring the pearls of Truth to the surface… For countless generations hath the adept builded a fane of imperishable rocks, a giant's Tower of INFINITE THOUGHT, wherein the titan dwelt, and will yet, if need be, dwell alone; emerging from it but at the end of every cycle, to invite the elect of mankind to co-operate with him and help in his turn enlighten superstitious man. And we will go on in that periodic work of ours; we will not allow ourselves to be baffled in our philanthropic attempts until that day when the foundations of a new continent of thought are so firmly built that no amount of opposition and ignorant malice guided by the Brethren of the Shadow will be found to prevail. [38]

Cautious of the ramifications of radical change, and because they do not trust in the capacity of the masses to properly comprehend the true significance of this new worldview, the Masters must work cautiously and carefully. However, by utilising only trusted allies and loyalists, The Masters will be able to disseminate their message via the theosophical apparatus. Becoming an accepted chela though is difficult. Not every aspirant has the capacity for self-sacrifice and dramatic change in lifestyle. The rare exception may aspire to the highest ranks, but the less accomplished or dedicated must settle for playing lesser roles. And the onus is on the prospective student to seek out, properly impress, and surrender autonomy to the Master.[39]

However, once accepted as even a peripheral or minor associate of the Masters, one's entire future cosmic and existential destiny changes. The conscious volitional decision to partake in the work of the Masters, places one in an entirely different sphere

[38] Barker, op. cit., p. 51.

of relationships, responsibilities, and priorities. The Masters will exert their influence as they deem necessary, and the commitment to their work transcends any other former primary interest or concerns. However, because the conditions are different for each person, responsibilities and relationships cannot be simply abandoned. The obligations of this new bond will manifest in ways chosen by the Masters according to their plans and their needs. The long-term effects on the karma of the new associate will now be significantly altered by this relationship, as the commitment to their work places the aspirant on a new footing in the quest for spiritual development. The influences will be felt through subconscious impressions during sleep, unexpectedly during the activities of the day, and indefinitely extended through future lives. The following comment is instructive in its emphasis on the way commitment is portrayed as form of psychological possession, or surrender of autonomy. "Crossing the mystic line" is a threshold that forever changes both the immediate conduct of life and the future destiny of the reincarnating Self.

> Your strivings, perplexities and forebodings are equally noticed, good and faithful friend. In the imperishable RECORD of the Masters *you have written them all.* There are registered your every deed and thought; for though not a chela, as you say to my brother Morya, not even a "protégé"—as you understand the term—still, you have stepped within the circle of our work, you have crossed the mystic line which separates your world from ours, and now whether you persevere or not; whether we become later on, in your sight, still more living *real* entities or vanish out of your mind like so many dream fictions—perchance an ugly night-mare—you are virtually OURS. Your hidden *Self* has mirrored itself in *our* Akasa; your nature is—yours, your essence is—ours. The flame is distinct from the log of wood which serves it temporarily as fuel; at the end of your apparitional birth—and whether we two, meet face to face in our grosser *rupas*—you cannot avoid meeting us in *Real Existence*. Yea, verily good friend your *Karma* is ours, for you imprinted it daily and hourly upon the pages of that book where the minutest particulars of the individuals stepping inside our circle—are preserved; and your *Karma* is your only personality to be when you step beyond. In thought and deed, by day, in soul-struggles by nights, you have been writing the story of your desires and your spiritual development. This, everyone who approaches us with any earnestness of desire to become our co-worker, he himself "precipitates" the written entries by the identical process used by us when we write inside your closed letters and uncut pages of books and pamphlets in transit. … During the past few months, especially, when your weary brain was plunged in the torpor of sleep, your eager soul has often been searching after me , and the current of your thought been beating against my protecting barriers of Akas as the lapping

[39] Ibid., pp. 8–9.

> wavelets against a rocky shore. What that "Inner Self," impatient, anxious—has longed to bind itself to, the carnal man, the worldlings' master has not yet rectified: the ties of life are as strong as chains of steel. Sacred, indeed, some of them are, and no one would ask you to rupture them. There below lies your long-cherished field of enterprise and usefulness. Ours can never be more than a bright phantom-world to the man of thorough "practical sense"… [40]

This graphic description is personalised in such a way to suggest that there is a dramatic gulf between merely human cognisance and will, and the superhuman capacities of the Masters, who are capable of penetrating the private subjective spheres of under-evolved supplicants to discern their true eternal essence. The "Inner Self" is presumed exposed as a self-sufficient supervening presence distinct from the social self and psychological persona to those skilful and experienced in manipulation of supersensory faculties. And the phrases "you are virtually OURS," "your essence is—ours," explicitly indicate that discipleship to the Masters is a process wherein egocentric self-interest is relinquished and replaced by the priorities inculcated under Masterly guidance. The specific tone noted for Theosophical Society operatives is that embarking on this path and crossing the threshold is in fact a logical and progressive step furthering an already predetermined destiny encompassing multiple incarnations.

For those who desire to commit completely to the work of the Masters and undertake the process of applying as a chela, the obligations are strict, rigorous, uncompromising. And absolute faith in the supernaturally legitimated authoritativeness of the Masters and their teachings is necessary to ever hope to attain the desired objectives. The Masters in fact insist that it is only through unconditional faith in their intentions, knowledge, and transcendental status that "Truth land" can be reached.

> Believe me faithful friend, that *nothing* short of full confidence in us, in our good motives, if not in our wisdom, in our foresight, if not omniscience—which is not to be found on this earth—can help one to cross over from one's land of dream and fiction to our Truth land, the region of stern reality and fact. [41]

By asserting that their credibility as teachers/gurus/mentors/super-evolved beings was validated by their roles in the occult hierarchy, the contents of the worldview espoused in their communications acquired special authoritative status. Sinnett utilised

[40] Ibid., p. 267.
[41] Ibid., p. 358.

much early theoretical material emanating from such letters of the Masters in his books, *The Occult World* and *Esoteric Buddhism*. The contents of their teachings presented the same general ideational skeletal structure expounded by Blavatsky in her writings, with virtually no contradictions or disputes on essential principles. Essentially, theoretical speculation in *The Mahatma Letters* encompasses a wide variety of topics concerning the occult vision of the universe and of man. Most of the doctrinal discussion dealt with the details pertaining to the cyclical basis of cosmic, natural, and human evolution.[42]

The Masters explication of evolutionary and involutionary macrocosmic and microcosmic processes, dynamically integrated, causally related, and evolving through cosmic, species, racial, and personal cycles and stages became accepted as a fundamental ideational pillar of theosophical thought. Along with Blavatsky's writings, *The Mahatma Letters* have maintained their authoritative status for most traditional factions of the theosophical movement. The Masters sketched out many of the particulars about specific issues in their letters Included were comments about the nature and destiny of the individual; the procedures and stages of emanation from God/the Absolute to the lowest material planes; the characteristics or conditions by which the gods/cosmic energies/entities etc. may be identified or distinguished; the operations of subtle and material cosmic and natural forces and powers; the metamorphoses through different kingdoms; the dynamics of karma, etc. etc. The letters of the Masters served the purpose of providing first Sinnett and his Theosophical Society associates, and later, indirectly through his books, a wider public, specific doctrinal content upon which the broader worldview was built.

However, despite the possible attractiveness or plausibility of the worldview itself as a self-contained system of thought and framework of belief, it yet retained its defining allure because it was alleged to have the special legitimating status of the Masters. Acceptance of the premise that the Masters were authentic representatives of a transcendentally grounded spiritual hierarchy of real and proven efficacy sanctified and glamorised the contents of their teachings. Even if the worldview itself was found to be internally consistent, logical, emotionally satisfying, and a credible option, it was not presented as merely a product of human thought or insight. From its very first

[42] For an encapsulated example of this broad sweeping vision, see Ibid., pp. 45-46.

enunciation, it was inexorably linked with the necessary belief in a wisdom tradition maintained by an extraordinarily evolved and spiritually advanced elite brotherhood. Their directive purpose was said to have continuously endured through the history of the species and even, the preceding evolutionary rounds and cycles. Thus, although efforts to legitimise the theosophical worldview purely on grounds of plausibility, logic, and emotional persuasiveness have at times minimised the transcendent and occult characteristics of the Masters and their hierarchy, the original impetus was dramatically dependent on just those elements to establish a position of special status for the emergent Theosophical Society. If the Society was especially founded on their behest, then that would give it a distinguished and noble legitimacy, inviting to those inspired by its ideals and objectives and desirous of joining the ranks of a spiritually pioneering vanguard.

The special elite status of the Masters and the occult system of knowledge they sanctioned helped inculcate a feeling of unique purpose for front-line Theosophical Society organisers, theoreticians, and activists. As well, the Masters apparently took more than a detached and impersonal overview of Society operations and strategies. Despite their lofty spiritual roles within the hierarchy of the Brotherhood of Adepts, they seemed to spend an inordinate amount of attention and thought concerned with all aspects of the movement. Through their letters and communications they seem extraordinarily alert, concerned, and sensitive to every subtle or explicit nuance relating to individuals or situations involving the organisation. They were apparently aware of diverse conversations, written correspondences, secretive motives of various individuals, and did not hesitate in bold and blunt judgment and recommendations. From their secret retreat in the Himalayas, they try to micromanage the movement through suggestions, warnings, and entreaties to follow, reject, or modify particular lines of action. The tendency to manipulate operations of the Theosophical Society or related enterprises through advisement and judgment about others is found constantly in their presumed correspondence. For example, here advice is given in which the motives of one party are virtually demonised by the suggestion that they in fact reflect hidden malignant influences.

> A cloud does lower over your path … He whom you made your confidant—I advised you to become but his co-worker, not to divulge things to him that you should have kept locked within your bosom—is under a baleful influence, and

> may become your enemy. You do right to try and rescue him from it, for it bodes ill to him, to you, and to the Society. His greater mind fumed by vanity and charmed by the pipings of a weaker but more cunning one, is for the time under a spell of fascination. You will easily detect the *malign power* that stands behind *both* and *uses them as tools* for the execution of its own nefarious plans. The intended catastrophe can be averted by redoubled vigilance and increased fervour of pure will … [43]

Warnings of caution, planting the seeds of distrust and suspicion, petty and cynical character observations for those opposed to a Blavatsky endorsed line of conduct appear as common threads of Masterly advice.

> One word of advice—an earnest warning from both of us: *trust not little Fern—beware of him*. His placid serenity and smiles when talking to you … are all *assumed.* His letter of penitence and remorse to M—which he sends you to keep—is not sincere. If you do not watch him closely, he will mix the cards for you in a way that may lead the Society to ruin, for he swore a great oath to himself that the Society will either *fall* or *rise* with himself. If he fails next year again—and with all his great gifts, how can such an incurable little Jesuit and liar help failing?—he will do his best to pull down the Society with him… [44]

Disgust and disappointment in those who have either rejected their overtures or have turned from actual or potential supporters to critics is also evident throughout the Mahatma correspondences. Often expressed as a steady undercurrent of gossip and innuendo.

> Mr. Hume—who once promised to become a champion fighter in that Battle if Light against Darkness—now preserves a kind of armed neutrality wondrous to behold … C.C. Massey? But then he is the hapless parent of about half a dozen of illegitimate brats … Dr. Wyld?—a Christian to the backbone. Hood?—a sweet nature … yet, no worker. S. Moses? Ah! Here we are. S.M. has nearly upset the theosoph. Ark set afloat three years back: and he will do his level best to do it over again… [45]

And here we see a proposed Machiavellian plan to appease those restless with the Society as it stood, and desirous of instituting a competing organisation. The threat of a cessation of communication is issued if a solution is not found.

> Shall I tell you the future of that new body? It grow and develop and expand and finally the Theos. Soc. Of London will be swamped in it, and lose first its

[43] Ibid., p. 268.
[44] Ibid. p. 303.
[45] Ibid. p. 39.

> influence then—its name, until Theosophy in its very name becomes a thing of the Past… The evil may yet be averted—let the Society exist in name till the day it can get members with whom we can work *de facto*—and by the creation of another counteracting cause we may save the situation. The hand of the Chohan alone can bridge it, but it must be *yours* that places the first stone for the work. How can you do it? Think of it well if you care for further intercourse. They want something new. A *Ritual* to amuse them. [46]

And most interestingly, Mahatma Koot Hoomi took a very proactive position in advising Sinnett to continue with his plan in founding a new esoterically oriented Anglo-Indian journal, *The Phoenix*. The Master involved himself extensively with financial and logistical advice. However, despite original encouragement, when the venture showed signs of being unsuccessful, he denied any blame or responsibility, professing discomfort and distaste for involvement with the enterprise. And when facing questions of accountability, he charged Sinnett with racist motives.

> I stepped outside our usual limits to aid your particular project from a conviction of its necessity and its potential usefulness: having begun I shall continue until the result is known. But in this uncongenial experience of meddling in a business affair, I have ventured within the very breath of the world's furnace. I have suffered so much from the enforced insight at short distance into the moral and spiritual condition of my people; and been so shocked by this nearer view of the selfish baseness of human nature … I have seen so distinctly the certainty that it cannot be helped—that I shall henceforth abstain from any repetition of the unbearable experiment. Whether your paper should succeed or not—and if the latter, it will be due to *yourself* exclusively … I shall have no more to do with the financial side of these worldly affairs; but confine myself to our prime duty of gaining knowledge and disseminating through all available channels such fragments as mankind in the mass may be ready to assimilate. … The great pain that you have afflicted upon me, shows clearly that either I understand nothing in the fitness of political duties and therefore, could hardly hope to be a wise business and *political* "control" or that the man whom I regard as a true friend, however honest and willing, will never rise above English prejudices and the sinful antipathy towards *our race* and colour. [47]

Another theme found in the purported communications of the Masters was the admixture of minor criticisms and thankful gratitude directed towards the figure of Madame Blavatsky. On the one hand, her fallibilities, temperamental personality, and physical debilitations are noted as constraining factors for the cause. On the other hand, admiration for her loyalty, dedication, gumption, effort, and willpower is expressed.

[46] Ibid., pp. 265-266.

Essentially, the criticisms appear superficial in light of the spirited admiration reflected for her as an agent of the Masters. To the recipients of the contents of these messages, Madame Blavatsky is portrayed as absolutely trustworthy and fully authenticated as a representative of the Masters. Although her flaws may be irritating, and her behaviour embarrassing or detrimental at times, in the long run her importance is unequivocally confirmed. Blavatsky's mission is given special status and sanctification through the Masters supernatural authority, while her own seemingly discomforting approach is revealed to be the result of a mysterious occult process. A theosophical tenet was that the effects of personal karmic debt became compacted and intensified as one advanced further along the spiritual path. So her personal idiosyncrasies, while not condoned, are excused as inevitable and unavoidable side effects or by-products of the accelerated training she was undergoing under the auspices of her Master.

Here we see her being portrayed in both her exasperating and endearing modes, shown as a complex individual who is not fully understood or appreciated. However, for all the external flaws of personality, the qualities of her inner self are revealed to be much more substantial and estimable. The contrast between the "eccentric" and the "most delicate and refined" aspects of "HPB's mind" indicate a tendency towards inner struggle, and thus provides a likely explanation for the discrepancies of her behaviour.

> Of course she is utterly unfit for a *true adept*: her nature is too passionately affectionate and we have no right to indulge in *personal* attachments and feelings. You can never know her as we do, therefore—none of you will ever be able to judge her impartially or correctly… In your opinion, HPB is, at best, for those that like her despite herself—a quaint, strange, woman, a psychological riddle: impulsive and kindhearted, yet not free from the vice of untruth. We, on the other hand, under the garb of eccentricity and folly—we find a profounder wisdom in her *inner* Self than you will ever find yourselves able to perceive. In the superficial details of her homely, hard-working, common-place daily life and affairs, you discern but unpracticality, womanly impulses, often absurdity and folly; we, on the contrary, light daily upon traits of her inner nature the most delicate and refined, and which would cost an uninitiated psychologist years of constant and keen observation, and many an hour of close analysis and effort to draw out of the depth of that most subtle of mysteries—human mind—and one of her most complicated machines—HPB's mind—and thus learn to know her true *inner* Self. [48]

---

[47] Ibid., pp. 384-385.
[48] Ibid., p. 314.

6.4 - Analysis of Blavatsky's Article *Mahatmas and Chelas*

The functional utility of the Masters for Theosophical Society loyalists and organisers lay in providing supernatural legitimation for the content of their communications and credibility to their suggested plans and advisements. As well, the personal relationships of teacher/mentor to pupil/advocate often was phrased in terms and with references mostly applicable to only a small selective group of people. Advice about possible lines of private conduct, steps to be taken towards fuller spiritual development, potential actions involving the Society, all presumed a degree of confidentiality. The wider circle of theosophical supporters and sympathisers as well as the mildly curious public-at-large could not presume to be privy to such direct communications. What they knew of the Masters and their message came from indirect secondary proliferation of such information and the explicit written or verbal commentary of those claiming first hand contact, such as Sinnett, Olcott, Blavatsky.

The value of the idea of the Masters was somewhat more diffused and general when presented to the wider public than it was when confined to the self-interested Theosophical movement insiders. Here, primarily as expressed in the writings of Madame Blavatsky, the Masters were represented more as paradigmatic ideal types. Though they were depicted as living, spiritually superior and advanced humans, they generally were portrayed enigmatically and shown to be dealing with world and cosmic concerns far beyond the purview of the uninitiated. The somewhat self-interested, pedantic, and manipulative sides shown in direct communication with useful associates is now more muted and generally depersonalised. The usefulness of the idea of the Masters then for a wider less committed audience is more along the lines of inspiration and reassurance, and for the authoritative legitimation of the ideational contents of the theosophical worldview.

To examine this more formal theosophical presentation of the Masters, intended for a broader public, we shall look at a representative article written by Madame Blavatsky. Entitled *Mahatmas and Chelas*, it was published in the July 1884 issue of the *Theosophist*. She begins with a definition.

> A MAHATMA is a personage, who, by special training and education, has evolved those higher faculties and has attained that spiritual knowledge, which ordinary humanity will acquire after passing through numberless series of reincarnations during the process of cosmic evolution, provided, of course, that they do not go, in the meanwhile, against the purposes of Nature and thus bring on their own annihilation. This process of the self-evolution of the MAHATMA extends over a number of "incarnations," although, comparatively speaking, they are very few. [49]

Essentially, the status of Mahatma is attained as the result of the successful completion of the self-willed thrust towards personal spiritual evolution. This process apparently is not initiated or stimulated by intrinsic or instinctive biological factors, but by individual volition and intentional choice. By voluntarily deciding to undertake "special training and education," the individual may ultimately reach the desired objective of spiritual insight, thus differentiating himself from the mass of humanity. The "higher faculties" must be cultivated over a vast time period extending through multiple incarnations. This process thus is more intensive and demanding, requiring non-compromised dedication and diligence. However, it is a quicker route than that facing the majority of the race. Rather than passing through indefinite numbers of lives of slow incremental progress, only a smaller and more compacted series will be needed when the accelerated approach is taken. However, there is a real element of risk, because achieving the status of full spiritually evolved Mahatma is not automatic or guaranteed. Defying the natural course brings severe consequences. Continued rebellion against those purposes by individuals will eventuate in their own self-destruction.

Once the process of reincarnation is introduced, the speculation becomes more metaphysical. Madame Blavatsky explains what she says she is permitted to of the occult doctrine concerning post-mortem existence and reincarnation. This basically is a restatement of the theosophical views about the sevenfold constitution of man. She says that the first three principles are primarily associated with the body, and dissipate with its death. The fourth, and lower part of the fifth, endure longer, subsisting for a relatively temporary but indeterminate period in/at "Kama Koka," popularised as the "astral plane" in later theosophical and occult literature. Eventually, when the karmic scales are balanced, these intermediary personal principles also will disintegrate. However, the

[49] H. P. Blavatsky, *Mahatmas and Chelas*, retrieved from Blavatsky Net Foundation, 1884, < http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/MahatmasAndChelas.htm>. (Accessed May 3, 2002).

"higher Manas, the pure man" is properly associated with the spiritual nucleus of the sixth and seventh principles. That purified essence of transcendent selfhood reverts to a more spiritualised locale, "Devachan," where it partakes of an even more refined and ethereal existence, assimilating the lessons of the most recent incarnation. Eventually though, the necessity of reincarnation reasserts dominance and the cyclical operations of nature resume for the particular monad/self/entity. Each incarnation in theory is assumed to most likely add lasting wisdom, maturity, insight, and character development that cumulatively will eventuate in individuals who will explicitly and intentionally commit themselves to the path of accelerated spiritual evolution. The continued reiteration of this process is portrayed with an almost mathematical inevitability, as evolution from the unawakened state to the condition of enlightenment occurs. Blavatsky sees it this way.

> Now, an entity, that is passing through the occult training in its successive births, gradually has less and less (in each incarnation) of that lower Manas until there arrives a time when its whole Manas, being of an entirely elevated character, is centered in the higher individuality, when such a person may be said to have become a MAHATMA. [50]

When such a state is achieved, the Mahatma is no longer conditioned by the influences of the body and personality, but lives attuned to his higher being. When he dies, he is cognisant via his perpetually elevated state of spiritual consciousness of the processes involved and is able to partake of alternative evolutionary options. If he reincarnates again, it is a voluntary choice, motivated by compassion and desire to stimulate the evolution of others. While thus incarnate, he has extraordinary control over his body and the capacity to consciously utilise supersensory skills. The accelerated and intensified training of those extraordinary powers is guided by the tenets of the esoteric tradition. And because the theosophical system is considered an entirely credible and authentic extension of this philosophy, it should enable those devoted and loyal adherents to progress substantially on the path to becoming a Mahatma.

Blavatsky addresses the frustration expressed by others in not being able to directly see the Mahatmas in the flesh. According to her, the very desire is based on misinformation. People do not understand how to frame the question properly. The true distinguishing criteria of the Mahatmas are spiritual qualities, not physical appearances.

---

[50] Ibid.

By simply looking for the physical entity they are simply going to see a similitude of the reality. And even if they would happen to meet them physically, they have no idea about what really defines such exalted beings. All they may see is external appearance, which is ultimately illusory. The uninformed observer just doesn't know enough to judge accurately. To acquire that understanding, the individuals simply must place themselves on an equal footing by becoming more spiritualised and intuitive.
Fundamentally, Blavatsky urges personal spiritual growth, because only by raising consciousness to the requisite state can one truly comprehend. Clarity of perception, the dispelling of illusion, and pure intellectual vision are the only ways to legitimately place oneself in position to cognise the Mahatmas as they truly are. And when so prepared, the Mahatmas will be more readily accessible to the specially qualified individual.

Consciousness is permeated by a sense of new cognitive abilities, allowing intuitive recognition by the Mahatmas regardless of physical location. Because they function primarily as spiritual agents, unhindered by three-dimensional constraints, they are effectively omniscient in terms of their powers. And from their lofty vantage point the Mahatmas are potentially capable of keeping themselves sensitised and attuned to all of humanity via the operations of their special psychic powers. However, although capable of maintaining this subtle form of collective rapport, they apparently function with certain internal constraints, and limitations. Thus the Masters are unable to indefinitely maintain psychic contact simultaneously with all attuned entities. The exception would be the outstanding or notable individual who is distinguished and worthy enough to stand out from the others. And because their objectives are directed towards all of humanity, they are particularly sensitive to the flow of energies directed towards spiritual evolution. So, the most efficacious way that an individual must approach them would be by establishing a co-operative mindset in harmony with such objectives. By attuning themselves to the same spiritual frequency that the Masters operate on, individuals may thus be eventually noticed and drawn into the sphere of a Master's influence.

Blavatsky equates this approach with "faith." Though not "blind faith," which indicates belief without perception or understanding. She feels belief should be accompanied by knowledge, because true knowledge reinforces justified faith. The true essence or transcendent qualities of man (consisting of higher intellectual, intuitive and

spiritual principles) collectively provides opportunity to obtain mystical comprehension of reality. And by awakening those latent faculties, what was inaccessible or improperly cognisable through normal consciousness and personality configurations now becomes lucid and self-evident. . Attaining this ideal state of spiritual development should be the main objective, properly begun by applying for chelaship under the Masters. And only by proper education and understanding of occult beliefs about nature and the cosmos will real spiritual progress be possible.

> Thus the desire, which should prompt one to apply for chelaship, is to so far understand the operations of the Law of Cosmic Evolution as will enable him to work in harmonious accord with Nature, instead of going against its purposes through ignorance. [51]

This article recommends long-term and unconditional dedication to the goal of personal spiritual evolution. This is a prerequisite necessary to obtain the attention of the Masters initially, and subsequently needed for proper development of psychic and mystical states of consciousness. Only by achieving that level of awareness and insight can the Masters be recognized for who they really are, not just superficially or partially envisaged. The gulf between the Masters and the average non-committed inquirer is revealed to be qualitative in terms of the contrast in levels of development and maturation, as well as quantitative in terms of the amount of time and number of incarnations needed to reach comparable status. Only be intensified effort and radical re-prioritisation of values can the average theosophical sympathiser or members ever hope to attract personal attention from a Master. However, once commitment is given to chelaship, the opportunities become more of a tangible possibility. By establishing the Mahatmas as both supremely evolved entities as well as ideals of the spiritual evolutionary process, they serve as both paradigmatic role models and case examples of those who followed the prescribed path to evolutionary perfection.

6.5 The Legitimating Significance of the Idea of the Masters.

The idea of the Masters clearly was a crucial legitimating component of the theosophical ideational system as well as a dominant source of inspiration and

[51] Ibid.

motivation. Although there are a number of distinctive though plausible explanations for their origins, they are not strictly mutually exclusive. In fact, the practical value of the blending or reconstruction of mythical, historic, symbolic materials relating to the Masters can be found in how those ideas were utilised within the movement. For the organisational leaders and thinkers of the Theosophical Society, promised contact with the Masters provided an incentive for more intense dedication, loyalty to the leaders, and confidence in Madame Blavatsky as the bona fide intermediary and messenger of their intentions. As well as supernaturally sanctified authoritative figures who set the parameters for proper behaviour and belief. For the average theosophist or sympathiser, the enticement was also along the same lines, but more idealised and doctrinally configured. The path of chelaship was presented as the most viable method of establishing bona fide personal contact, though intensely demanding and all consuming.

Together with unique treatments of knowledge and experience, the notion of the Brotherhood of Adepts as ultimate authority figures and paradigmatic role models served an important purpose in the process of legitimating the theosophical worldview. And defined the movement for decades after Blavatsky's death. The subsequent disputed claims to legitimacy of succession were directly linked to conflicting interpretations of presumed Masterly intentions. As well, the early theosophical definitions and narrative enunciated by Blavatsky, Olcott, Sinnett and other confederates was later amended and revised by such figures as Besant, Leadbeater, Judge, Bailey, Arundale, and others to reflect their own insights and interests.

Another significant component of the theosophical ideational construct necessary for sustaining confidence and justifying belief was the presence of a body of authoritative writings produced by Madame Blavatsky. In particular, her major books *Isis Unveiled, The Secret Doctrine*, and *The Voice of the Silence.* These served to define the field of inquiry and consolidate theosophical doctrine. In effect, serving as the equivalent of "sacred texts" for the movement, intended to enlighten, provoke interest, and proffer an extensive alternative worldview. We shall now explore the literary consolidation effected in Blavatsky's main works.

Chapter 7

An Examination of Blavatsky's Major Literary Works

7.1 The Importance of Accessible Literary Representations of the Theosophical Worldview

The theosophical worldview was expounded most authoritatively and explicitly in Madame Blavatsky's writings. Her personal correspondences amplified particular issues for selected individuals. Her stream of articles presented to the public general and specific new or reactive assessments, evaluations, interpretations, theories, lines of speculative interest at particular points in time. However, it was in her major books that she left a lasting legacy, systematically articulating and defining what could be considered as the authoritative ideational structure of the theosophical worldview. In her articles, attention could be given to the particular issues and concerns of the moment. As the theoretical, practical, and social ramifications of the worldview permeated into a wider public milieu, current controversies, disputes, and topical themes were attended to through the publication of articles addressing such specific points. However, in her three most significant works, [1] the substantive content and ideal objectives of this worldview were presented in more structured and logically organized form. There were specific ostensible intentions underlying the production of each of these works. *Isis Unveiled* was intended as refutation of contemporary entrenched Western religious and scientific worldviews, and the introduction of a re-synthesized occult option. *The Secret Doctrine* was intended as a systematic exposition of that worldview, a synthesis of knowledge outlining the processes of cosmological and anthropological evolution, considered from an occult perspective. *The Voice of the Silence* was meant as an inspirational and instructive stimulus to personal spiritual development. Collectively, these three books can be viewed as the most explicit and calculated attempts of representing the theosophical worldview to the public as a consistent, encompassing and internally coherent body of knowledge. The maintenance of Madame Blavatsky's status as the pre-eminent theosophical spokesperson in part rested with the belief that she was the legitimate

[1] Another book, *The Key to Theosophy* is also considered a major work. However, it was intended as a more of an introductory book, simplifying and restating ideas found to be obtuse to the public, and thus not as iconoclastic or provocative.

messenger of a supernaturally sanctioned message, and that she possessed the requisite supersensory abilities and esoteric knowledge to confirm that assumption. However, her major writings were intended to attract interest and ideally, win over converts from those who found the worldview credible and appealing on its own merits. Thus, constructing a logically coherent, intellectually defensible, and emotionally alluring ideational edifice was essential if the theosophical alternative was to be considered a trustworthy option. As we have noted throughout, in attempting to legitimate the alternative theosophical worldview, Blavatsky drew from a nexus of experiential influences while attempting to use rational and intellectual arguments, materials, and procedures to enhance the presentation of her envisioned worldview for public consideration. Her works thus were mixtures of facts, conjecture, opinion, and expression of personal feelings and insights, with allusions to secretive sources of knowledge and other arcane forms of information. The framework of a mythologized narrative followed by extensive analytical commentary and explication was the written procedure mostly followed.. For the most part, the credibility of her major literary works rest on the quasi-private "master-key" of symbolic interpretation that is claimed to reveal a coherent and consistent esoteric truth encoded in purposely enigmatic exoteric forms. The synthesis she sought to reveal derived from her application of this interpretative master key to the disparate esoteric sources at her disposal. The literary representation of this ideational system was a work (extending through her major books) of the imagination and the intellect, drawing upon all resources of the creative psyche (conscious and unconscious). The success of her method was dependent upon the capacity to argumentatively and rationally articulate a logical and coherent schema to defend her vision from critical perusal. Inspired by her motivational objectives and self-assured in her personal beliefs, the process of translating the vision of her worldview into an intended authoritative opus involved careful and methodical intellectual crafting and organisational effort. Ironically, for someone attempting to present a highly personalised and idiosyncratic worldview, Blavatsky was indebted to others for the final schematic forms of her two largest books, *Isis Unveiled and The Secret Doctrine.* Many other people were directly involved in the various production stages of the books, from supplying details about content to the collation and editing processes. As well, others were more indirectly involved in attending to logistical and

household affairs, allowing Blavatsky the comfort, time, opportunity and resources to embark upon her intensive literary pursuits. So though her major works were the manifestation of her own insights and vision, they emerged from a real-world support-system made up of those who were mostly fervent supporters, attracted or captivated by her personal charisma and the message she was delivering.

7.2 Blavatsky's Books – The Embedding of Charisma and the Evocation of Emotion

Before dealing with the specifics of these books, another issue must be addressed. As is the case with the messages espoused by many charismatic and inspirational leaders, the constellation in writing of their worldviews often provokes intense emotional reaction. Their words are perceived to be extensions of themselves, and retain a degree of the power of persuasiveness and assurance attributed to the person. A revealing instance of this phenomenon is how the process of discovering, reading, and reacting to the written word of Madame Blavatsky has at times stimulated such a response. Even decades after her death, and by those who may have had minimal acquaintance with theosophical history. In the case of Madame Blavatsky's systematic writings, it was not unusual to find that they have had a singularly powerful effect, akin perhaps in some sense to the triggering of a conversion or initiatory experience. Let us look at a few typical expressions of this attitude. First, by Boris de Zirkoff in the preface to the first volume of her collected writings.

> We commend her writings to the weary pilgrim, and to the seeker of enduring spiritual realities. They contain the answer to many a perplexing problem. They open wide portals undreamt of before, revealing vistas of cosmic splendors and lasting inspiration. They bring new hope and courage to the fainthearted but sincere student. They are a comfort and a staff, as well as a Guide and Teacher, to those who are already travelling along the age old Path. As for those who are in the vanguard of mankind, valiantly scaling the solitary passes leading to the Gates of Gold, these writings give the clue to the secret knowledge enabling one to lift the heavy bar that must be raised before the Gates admit the Pilgrim into the land of Eternal Dawn. [2]

> H. P. Blavatsky was the bearer of mighty ideas, and with a mighty pen she bequeathed to this and the coming centuries a vision, a purpose and, greater than

[2] H.P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, op. cit.

> all these, an example of courage and steadfast trust in the law and in the wisdom of her teachers. [3]
>
> We need to have our own inner dialogue with the text if it is to come alive in us. If we do, we become aware that we indeed participate in a universal process. The essence of the SD, together with that of her classic The Voice of the Silence, must be experienced rather than read. [4]
>
> When the student has awakened to the significance of nature, of himself, and of the Wisdom-Religion, he is, one could say, at the turning of the evolution of the individual soul. It is for him that The Secret Doctrine was written. He finds himself swimming in a shoreless ocean of light and life and law…
> Isis may be thought of, therefore, as a personal book; The Secret Doctrine as the book of life eternal. Now he will read The Secret Doctrine as it was written to be read: The record of his own path and purpose, through all times and circumstances, and as he studies the external record, the inner memory will waken in him—and he will know. [5]

What we discern in these statements is that the writings of Madame Blavatsky are considered to be embedded with meaning and value beyond those attainable through any mere superficial or prosaic reading. Apparently, the sway of her charismatic presence was at least somewhat encapsulated in her idiomatic writing style and in the originality of expression and speculative meandering. Her major literary efforts are successfully expressions of her personality in that the reader often feels a rapport or awareness of Blavatsky the person as well as intuiting the contents of her message. The books themselves are felt by such so attuned to be illuminating and revelatory, instructive and consoling. They "contain the answer to many a perplexing problem," bring, "new hope," "courage," "comfort," serve as a "staff," a "Guide" and a "Teacher," and for the most empathetic and intuitive, supply "the clue to the secret knowledge" leading to spiritual realisation. The potential convert or supporter is pictured as one already seeking alternative and more emotionally satisfying worldview options. This aspirant is a "weary traveller," a "seeker of enduring spiritual realities," a "fainthearted but sincere student." Even those more veteran and experienced seekers who may be "in the vanguard of

---

[3] Grace F. Knoche, *Prologue to HPB Special Issue (1997),* retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1993, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sunrise/46-96-7/hpb-gfke.htm>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).
[4] I. M. Oderberg, *The Dawn of a New Age*, retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1991, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sunrise/40-90-1/sc-imo6.htm>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).
[5] Anonymous, *Isis and the S.D*., in *THEOSOPHY*, Vol. 74, No. 7, May, 1986, retrieved from Wisdom

mankind" are in need of guidance and teachings. The cognition of the secret knowledge hinted at in those writings will effect a radical transformation on the perceptions of the newly initiated. Those newly discovered "wide portals" reveal "vistas of cosmic splendour," that will provide "lasting inspiration."

And in her inspired writings, Blavatsky wields a "mighty pen" which reveals "mighty ideas," which will serve as a lasting legacy for "this and coming centuries." The "vision and purpose" she bequeaths will endure for generations, changing the fundamental orientation to the world for many. The new worldview will be based upon the "law and the wisdom of her teachers," essentially, an embodiment of the theosophical vision. Her "courage and steadfast trust" in that spiritual worldview will reap justified rewards when future generations validate her mission. Thanks to her mighty pen, those foundational insights were made accessible and transmissible, thus giving her writings special legitimacy.

However, deciphering and properly digesting the theosophical message is not necessarily a straightforward process. It requires personal involvement, commitment to reaching fullest understanding, and an "inner dialogue with the text." An existentially objective and open approach is required to make the meaning of the text "come alive in us." If that process unfolds satisfactorily, a new state of awareness will prevail. "We become aware" where we previously were dormant or circumscribed by previous conditioning. Conviction "that we indeed participate in a universal process" leads to recognition that there are spiritual energies active throughout all phases of existence. The essence of Blavatsky's systematic and inspirational books is meaningful on a non-verbal level. The habitual method of reading only supplies a partial, conceptual understanding of the spiritually dynamic processes pertaining to macrocosmic and microcosmic activities. Experience provides a personal means of validation for the type of worldview Blavatsky tried to present as a more authentic option.

To truly appreciate the meaning of Blavatsky's works, it is first necessary to be properly attuned and receptive. When "the student has awakened" and recognized that inner and outer sides of reality are spiritually grounded, he is at a transitional threshold, "at the turning of the evolution of the individual soul." And when he attains that

---

World, <http://www.wisdomworld.org/setting/isis.html>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).

consciousness of purpose and direction, he becomes aware that "it is for him that The Secret Doctrine was written." This profound gestalt moment brings with it recognition that a different perceptual configuration of reality must be enabled because older entrenched perspectives seem less stable and assuring. Overwhelmed by the new vision, a period of consolidation and adjustment is necessary. "He finds himself swimming in a shoreless ocean of light and life and law …" *Isis Unveiled* is directed to the elements of this alternative worldview from the point of view of the individual newly cognisant of this option. *The Secret Doctrine* is a revelation of the spiritual reality as such, "the book of life eternal." Once properly sensitised and attuned to this level of cognition or consciousness, it is much more than a verbal or discursive document. It is a repository of spiritual content, properly meaningful only by reading "*The Secret Doctrine* as it was written to be read." When approached from this direction, it is seen as embodying transcendental truths, "through all times and circumstances." For the elite student, it is "the record of his own path and purpose," a stimulant to awaken deeper levels of the enduring entity." As he studies the external record, "the inner memory will waken in him—and he will know." Thus, as a seemingly innocuous book, *The Secret Doctrine* does not reveal its fullest meanings. But through proper approach it will waken deeper levels of the psyche and "inner memory" will be revived or brought to consciousness. There will be no doubt about the credibility of this awakening on the part of the subject, "he will know" with the certainty of personal conviction.

These examples show how Madame Blavatsky's major writings could be perceived to be more than ordinary books. This kind of awe, veneration, and emotional commitment of course was not unanimous, even amongst supporters. However, for those who endorsed the theosophical position or found her books appealing, respect and admiration were often abundant. Besides such reactions to the contents of those books, much of the mystique and glamour associated with them come from the circumstances under which they were produced. Questions about the methods of authorship, the sources of information, and style of composition were raised repeatedly. Particularly for *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, each of which were mammoth tomes intended to dramatically impact upon the currents of popular thought. In fact, disputes about the credibility of their composition and production were often inseparable from assessments

of their contents. The subsequent notoriety, while entrenching the disreputability of Madame Blavatsky amongst many (especially those whose enmity she provoked), also helped add to a mystique that was based on claims or presumptions of supernatural activity or intervention.

7.3.1 *Isis Unveiled* – Controversies and Circumstances Surrounding Its Composition

Let us first look at *Isis Unveiled*. Published in 1877 after two years of often-controversial production, it set the tone for the movement and became the first authoritative embodiment of the theosophical worldview. The ambivalent circumstances of its construction have since become entrenched as part of the lore surrounding Blavatsky, used to demonstrate supernatural intervention by admirers, or suspicious manipulations by critics. The first thing noted in traditional theosophical accounts of the genesis of this work was that it was written on instruction from, or inspiration by, the Masters. It was intended to serve as a critique of traditional religious and scientific worldviews, with support offered to legitimise an occult perspective. All efforts to physically produce and organise the book were motivated by desire to fulfil this intention, hence apparently unorthodox methods of research, scholarship and literary production were used when needed.

> HPB mentions that when she was called upon by her teachers to write so extensively, she was at a loss, for although she spoke several languages fluently, she did not feel at home in English. Judging from the over 30 articles previously published in various newspapers and periodicals, however, her English was more than adequate and she wrote with gusto. That same style appears in Isis Unveiled, where she was never hesitant in coming forward when she felt a principle was being compromised. Having only a small library, HPB was aided by her teachers in finding material. Several other people also helped her, notably Colonel Henry S. Olcott—principal co-founder of the Society—who assisted her for months in organizing and editing the manuscript, and Dr. Alexander Wilder, scholar and Platonist, who helped to write the introduction, corrected foreign terms, added valuable material here and there in both volumes, and cut out much extraneous matter. Even so, its two volumes comprise some 1,300 pages. [6]

This "calling" was believed to have been a stimulus from her Masters. To her, an

[6] John P. Van Mater, *Unveiling Isis: HPB's First Book*, retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1997, <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-isisj.htm>. (Accessed July 10, 2002).

extraordinarily justifiable rationale for embarking upon a task recognised as controversial and confrontational at the outset. If she had initial reservations and felt doubtful about adequately completing the intended objective, that hesitancy quickly dissipated as the work progressed. The means by which she was helped by her teachers, and by Olcott, Wilder, and others have been disputed, provoking controversy since work first began on her books. The complaints have centred on the one hand, on the alleged supernatural aid and/or inspiration, and on the other, about her apparently naïve approach to scholarship. Eyewitnesses to her working procedures had their own recollections and interpretations. Especially, Colonel Olcott.

> One day in the summer of 1875, HPB showed me some sheets of manuscript which she had written, and said: "I wrote this last night 'by order,' but what the deuce it is to be I don't know. Perhaps it is for a newspaper article, perhaps for a book, perhaps for nothing: anyhow, I did as I was ordered." And she put it away in a drawer, and nothing more was said about it for some time. But in the month of September she went on a visit to her new friends, Professor and Mrs. Corson, of Cornell University, and the work went on. She wrote me that it was to be a book on the history and philosophy of the Eastern Schools and their relations with those of our times. She said she was writing about things she had never studied and making quotations from books she had never read in all her life: that, to test her accuracy, Prof. Corson had compared her quotations with classical works in the University Library, and had found her to be right. [7]

Here we see that Blavatsky claims to have essentially been a passive instrument, writing "by order," not admitting conscious volition, claiming she doesn't know the intended objective of the project. She claims that she complied unquestioningly with the orders. Either fully convinced of being the vehicle for the cause of the Masters or else possibly consciously or subconsciously inflating the sense of embarking on a privileged endeavour for Olcott's benefit. She recognized that the writing she had produced would be meant for use at some future time, and resumed the project within a few months in a different location. By this time, more clarity as to its purpose was being revealed. The subject matter was "the history and philosophy of the Eastern schools," which likely encompassed different past esoteric and occult traditions and thinkers. But by adding "and their relations with those of our times," it seemingly suggesting comparison and evaluation of more contemporary proponents of similar beliefs. By claiming that "she

[7] Cited in Daniel Caldwell, *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky*, op. cit.

was writing about things she had never studied," and quoting from "books she had never read in all her life," she was either describing an extraordinary supersensory cognitive phenomenon or perhaps was exaggerating and posturing with a calculated air of naivety.

Much of her life had in fact been devoted to studying, reading, seeking out experience and advice in the field of esoterica. Either way, the impression given is that she was involved in a process quite different than normally assumed in the endeavours of authorship, playing a role in a process initiated outside her own personality and ego. The anecdotal observations about her working habits suggest that when fully engaged in the creative process she may have been subject to episodes of trance or other forms of abnormal or extraordinary experience. Possibly, she may have consciously or unconsciously dramatized the ongoing process of literary production to instil a sense of its critical importance. By implying that the Masters were feeding her privileged information and allowing her supersensory access to otherwise unavailable information, Blavatsky sets the stage for a book with special sanctification and profound revelations.

The acceleration of the literary work increased and became more methodical once new living quarters were acquired and a routine of labour became possible. Although already experienced as a writer, she had never undertaken such a massive literary undertaking, and thus had to adapt to a more demanding and disciplined schedule. However, Olcott does admit that during the daytime he was absent, and thus is not in position to comment on whatever activities Blavatsky may have been engaged in, or whether she may have been in contact with others. He assumes, based on her statements, that she was by herself, working one-pointedly around the clock on that project. But he himself was not in position to confirm or deny whether that indeed was accurate. Olcott though was impressed as he observed her in the process of composition, engaged in the creative flow of ideas and the time-consuming effort of reworking and fine-tuning her work. Olcott sees Blavatsky intensely engaged in the creative process, drawing upon her subjective imaginative and intellectual resources, putting her thoughts, intuitions, observations into coherent articulate form.[8] The laborious and detailed crafting of words to express as best as possible exactly what was desired appears to contrast with the initial

<http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/books/esotericworld/chapter06/index.html>.

[8] See Gomes, op. cit., pp. 123 – 125 for Olcott's observations of Blavatsky's writing routine.

spontaneous flow of imaginative and intuitive materials. However, even the self-corrections and revisions often were not felt to be satisfactory in expressing the desired thoughts. Blavatsky turned the production of the book into somewhat of a collaborative affair, serving as creative source and supplying the content and initial organisational shape. Olcott also played an editorial role, correcting her manuscript, proofreading, searching for quotations and supplementary materials, and trying to help embody ideas in the appropriate English terms. These duties were modestly noted to be of secondary importance. Corrective and auxiliary work rather than creative. Blavatsky was the ultimate arbiter however. She already knew what she was looking for in terms of supportive or illuminating ideas, but Olcott helped provide shape and linguistic coherence when she asked him to in his assisting role.

Despite his input and efforts, Olcott felt that he did not contribute creatively to the final outcome. Blavatsky in his opinion was operating on conceptual and cognitive levels far more elevated than he and other less attuned individuals were capable of reaching. He considered Blavatsky especially gifted and skilled in occult matters and thus a trustworthy source of privileged knowledge. Whether obtained directly via her own supersensory activities or by virtue of the help of her Masters.

> … the book is hers alone, so far as personalities on this plane of manifestation are concerned, and she must take all the praise and the blame that it deserves. Then, whence did HPB draw the materials which compose Isis, and which cannot be traced to accessible literary sources of quotation? From the Astral Light, and by her soul-senses, from her Teachers—the "Brothers," "Adepts," "Sages," "Masters," as they have been variously called. How do I know it? By working two years with her on Isis and many more years on other literary work. [9]

On one hand, based on the normal criteria of authorship, the work is credited entirely to Blavatsky However, because the information contained was said to have been revealed, or inspired by her Masters, then she in some ways is able to step back and claim only to be the messenger. So all conventional methods of scholarship and research become debatable variables. If Madame Blavatsky claims the Astral Light, her soul-senses, and the Masters as the three primary sources of knowledge, then she is apparently accessing information in a more unmediated, direct, and vivid manner than normally possible. Whether from within her own psyche and unconsciously objectified, or via external

influences. However, responsibility and accountability for the written content falls to the person engaged in its real-world production. So Madame Blavatsky was in fact the creative source, and responsible for the content though dependent on others for editing and organising.

Olcott recounts his experiences and gives his impressions of the way this process appeared to him.

> To watch her at work was a rare and never-to-be-forgotten experience. We sat at opposite sides of one big table usually, and I could see her every movement. Her pen would be flying over the page, when she would suddenly stop, look out into space with the vacant eye of the clairvoyant seer, shorten her vision as though to look at something held invisible in the air before her, and begin copying on her paper what she saw. The quotation finished, her eyes would resume their natural expression, and she would go on writing until again stopped by a similar interruption. [10]

Olcott's observations seem to indicate that Blavatsky indeed entered a state of intense absorption, fixated or entranced as she focussed on her task. His interpretation though is conditioned according to the frame of reference supplied by Blavatsky. As well, he gives examples of what he felt was proof of supernatural intervention. This took place when she directed him to look for books that he did not remember seeing before and then discovering them in unexpected places. The possibility of other than occult causes is rejected because those seemed the more believable according to his line of reasoning. [11]

He then gives additional examples indicative of the dissociated or rapt state of consciousness that seemed to envelope Blavatsky as she wrote, including distinctive stylistic changes in her handwriting as she continued to produce written copy. Supporters have often interpreted these variations and transitions as proof of supernatural intervention, the sign of Mahatma influence or control. It would seem that if authentic, these distinct variations indicate that under certain circumstances Blavatsky entered some form of altered or abnormal state conducive to such phenomena. If this kind of handwriting transition were intentionally practiced, then it would show a high level of manipulative skill. Madame Blavatsky's capacity to change scripts extended even beyond her waking consciousness. At times Olcott would leave Blavatsky apparently asleep at

---

[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] See Meade, op. cit., p. 172 for discussion of possible theories for Olcott's corroborative stance.

her writing desk, only to find the next morning dozens of pages of polished manuscript, without need of revision. She told Olcott that they had been written by a Master using her body. Olcott, who believed that the manuscripts were written for her, not by her, takes the assumption of an intervening possessive supersensory presence as the most likely explanation.[12] It was assumed that while in sleep the astral body or abiding intelligence of a Master or a chela would "take over" and use her as a vehicle to produce the manuscript.

Whether she may have created and written them herself under a normal or abnormal state of consciousness is not considered in light of the appeal of the Master option. However, Olcott does contemplate the possibility that Blavatsky was subject to alterations of personality and behaviour, indicating to him transformations in state of consciousness.

> Now it was a curious fact that each change in the HPB manuscript would be preceded, either by her leaving the room for a moment or two, or by her going off into the trance or abstracted state, when her lifeless eyes would be looking beyond me into space, as it were, and returning to the normal state almost immediately. And there would also be a distinct change of personality, or rather personal peculiarities, in gait, vocal expression, vivacity of manner, and, above all, in temper. HPB would leave the room one person and return to it another. Not another as to visible change of physical body, but another as to tricks of motion, speech, and manners; with different mental brightness, different views of things, different command of English orthography, idiom, and grammar, and different—very, very different command over her temper, which, at its sunniest, was almost angelic, at its worst, the opposite. [13]

Olcott sees a causal connection between the changes in manuscript and her "going off into the trance or abstracted state." This description, if accurate, reveals that Blavatsky was apparently subject to phenomena associated with multiple personality and entranced states of consciousness. If, as seems to be the case in such descriptions, the ego were absent during the duration of the experience, then perhaps Gowan's characterisation of parataxic phenomena would apply here. Clearly, while intensely committed to legitimating her cause and her calling, the psychological pressures must have been profound. Whatever the causes, it seems undeniable that under those sustained conditions that the likelihood of abnormal or extraordinary manifestations would be more probable.

[12] See Caldwell, op. cit., chapter 6.

Conforming to the triggering conditions enunciated by Evans regarding the proclivity for visionary manifestations.

Olcott pondered the possibilities, noting that Blavatsky's condition was unlike that of mediums in that she exercised more volitional control than normally found in the production of similar phenomena. That she was able to replicate mediumistic phenomena consciously through her own willpower was a judgment that Olcott made based on his assessment of what he saw and how he interpreted it. He asks whether Blavatsky wrote *Isis Unveiled* as an ordinary spiritual medium. He uses the criterion of conscious and controlled will to differentiate between Blavatsky and more common mediums. However, he also had noted that much of her literary production came under less than conscious wilful control. Manuscripts apparently were produced in her sleep. Her body was allegedly used as a vehicle by other more advanced spiritual entities according to her explanations. She herself, when writing, seemed to display symptoms of multiple personality, trancelike states, extraordinary modes of cognition. So under what capacity she wrote was a matter of conjecture and judgement for Olcott. However, his faith in the authenticity and powers of the Masters led him to conclude that even when entranced or in multiple personality state, Blavatsky in fact was demonstrating Masterly behaviours and attitudes, hence not "really" pathological, but merely acquiescing voluntarily to the will of her teachers.

Olcott's personal assumptions were strongly coloured by his desire to believe in Blavatsky's special status, and his faith in her honesty.[14] What is important to note though is how matter-of-factly he simply presumes that each personality shift indicates a self-subsistent independent possessing presence, imprinting personality traits as alter egos of hers. As he watched her personality apparently fade away, he simply believed that each of these identifiable alter egos was the inhabiting intelligence of the moment, distinct from her own psyche. Any possibility of deception by Blavatsky or hypothesis of purely pathological processes at work was dismissed. His own frame of reference conditioned the expectations, and provided a readily available theory of explanation that reinforced the beliefs that he and Blavatsky were guiding their lives by. Whether Olcott's

---

[13] Ibid.

[14] See Washington, op. cit., pp. 43–44 for the theory of "mutual need" as a basis for Olcott's trust.

view is a perfectly conceivable and factually accurate explanation is not the main point. What is important to note is that within a self-contained alternative ideational climate, radically unconventional minority frames of reference may prevail as the most credible and self-evident approach to problem solving and provision of meaning.

Olcott hypothesises about Blavatsky's apparent susceptibility to possession, interpreting what would appear as the manifestation of multiple personalities as an elaborate mechanism implemented by the Masters to use her body "as one might a typewriter." [15] With this theory, Olcott surmises that Blavatsky's consciousness/ego/inner self vacates her body via the astral form to attend to other pressing cosmic business. While thus "unoccupied," various Masters and chelas took turns producing the text of *Isis Unveiled*. Olcott felt that he could detect specific personalities corresponding to the resident occupier of the moment, even designating them by names. These apparent self-sufficient entities were so identified, and treated as objective beings by himself and Blavatsky, who confirmed that hypothesis for him.

With this presumption of supernatural intervention, we see how Olcott was able to feel validated in his faith about the special nature of the theosophical enterprise. In his interpretation, Blavatsky had demonstrated her importance as the messenger of the Masters. He presumes that she initially volunteered for the task and allowed her personal self to vacate possession of her body as other higher-ranking entities took turns using it as their instrument. During those times that Olcott believed such transference was in operation, an explanation was needed to account for the diminution of Blavatsky's normally dominant personality. The reassurance that she "had gone off on other occult business that she could transact in her astral body"[16] was accepted at face value, reaffirming belief that Blavatsky herself was yet an important hierarchal operative, even when relinquishing her body to others. The assumption though seems to contradict his statement that she was in wilful control of the phenomena occurring during the production of *Isis Unveiled*. Even when Olcott became attuned to the nuances of the different personality types that appeared to possess her body, he still assumed he was conversing with independent highly evolved separate intelligences. The manner of his

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

conversational encounters with each of the alter egos is treated very casually and mundanely, without the slightest doubt that he might not be talking to the distinctive beings he was conditioned to expect. It simply never crossed his mind that the framework of interpretation enunciated by Blavatsky could be questioned. Hence, even in speaking to the alter egos about the "absent HPB," he assumes an ulterior purpose to the bodily occupation. To the observer not sharing the same frame of interpretative reference, it would seem difficult to explain Olcott's casual and unquestioning acceptance of, at the least, either the spontaneous manifestations of multiple personalities, or the sudden passivity of Blavatsky's normally intense will and ego.

Blavatsky herself, in a letter to her sister, notes the phenomenon of split personality, dissociation, and possession.

> Someone comes and envelops me as a misty cloud and all at once pushes me out of myself, and then I am not 'I' any more—Helena Petrovna Blavatsky—but someone else. Someone strong and powerful, born in a totally different region of the world: and as to myself it is almost as if I were asleep or lying by, not quite conscious, not in my own body but close by, held only by a thread which ties me to it. However, at times I see and hear everything quite clearly: I am perfectly conscious of what my body is saying and doing—or at least its new possessor. I even understand and remember it all so well that afterwards I can repeat it and even write down his words. At such a time I see awe and fear on the faces of Olcott and others and follow with interest the way in which he half-pityingly regards them out of my own eyes and teaches them with my physical tongue. Yet not with my mind but his own, which enwraps my brain like a cloud [17]

What is significant is that Blavatsky describes sensations of both cognisance and passivity. She feels that she is not really in wilful control of her bodily activities but it is the new occupant who initiates activity. However, although she feels a sense of detachment and remoteness, she still has full cognisance, lucidity, and is able to maintain memory. But she is completely passive, not able to assert her ego when traits of the ulterior personalities appear. The new dominating presence appears construed from elements drawn from memory, from imagination, from the depths of the psyche. The possessor is perceived as a strong and assertive male, with an exotic and mysterious background who appears accustomed to a leadership role. And while appearing to others as somewhat intimidating, he is a superior intellect who feels remote from lesser-

[17] Ibid.

developed individuals. It is this other nexus of personality traits that is accredited with initiating actions and having access to privileged knowledge. Her own ego remains totally static and incapable of exerting will, helplessly passive as a spectator within her own body as the experience endures. Simply by her description, it would appear to an outside observer that a certain degree of subjective projection has contributed to the image of the possessing intelligence because it embodies similar traits attributed to the figure of her guardian Master, envisioned constantly since childhood. Her own interpretation, and that accepted by Olcott and other uncritical theosophists, was more straightforward and unequivocal. She was, through occult means, temporarily possessed by the controlling intelligence of a more elevated being, recognised as a member of the Brotherhood of Adepts.

Questions about Blavatsky's sources and technique of literary construction have polarised critics and supporters over the years. While she claimed to visualise passages in books by occult means, she also felt the need to legitimate her claims and theories by reference to a wide spectrum of authoritative sources. On the one hand, for supporters and sympathisers, the confirmation of the role of the Masters as active contributors via occult techniques provided the substantive material a unique quotient of supernatural credibility. Yet, to gain widespread public acquiescence, a sound argument had to be presented which supported theosophical principles while reasonably showing the weaknesses of established mainstream traditions. Thus, emulating accepted and respected scholarly methods by using supporting documentation and verifiable citations of recognised authorities, was a logical procedural strategy.

Blavatsky inadvertently sent a mixed message however. Knowledge was allegedly acquired via occult means, but this information could not be presented solely on that authority and yet publicly be considered reputable. So it was necessary to find supportive sources and show the connection between what could be discerned by occult methods, and what had already been revealed and documented by others throughout history. So the presentation of what was already presumed to be verifiable through supersensory investigation had to be filtered through the lens of multiple often oblique and obscure texts.

And by undertaking the work (or appearing to do so) of massive and thorough

scholarly erudition, the hope was that that serious attention would be paid to the new ideational system. So input purportedly derived from supersensory cognition, dissociated states, automatic entranced writings, the impressions provided through the occult auspices of the Masters, the unique esoteric decoding of symbolism etc., required the admixture of supportive materials considered reputable in mainstream traditional schools of thought. To gain the appearance of a legitimately reasonable option for the public at large, selective scientific, scholarly, philosophical, theological quotes, citations, references, allusions were necessary. And to further try and impress the sceptic or cynic, *Isis Unveiled* was presented with the hope that massiveness and eclecticism would be equated with soundness of argument and proof of truth.

In 1891 an article written by William Emmette Coleman called *Unveiling of Isis Unveiled* was published in a small spiritualist magazine, *The Golden Way*. Coleman, a critic of theosophy and Blavatsky, claimed that she conducted acts of plagiarism on a large scale. Blavatsky answered in her last article, *My Books*, written eleven days before she died. She responded by claiming that her command of English was inferior when the book was written; that she was unschooled and unaware of proper scholarship methods; that she was inexperienced in writing English; that her knowledge of literary rules was minimal; and that she started the project without a clear idea of what it would become. She claimed that there were communicative and technical problems between her, Olcott, and editor Professor Wilder as the book take its final form. Coleman though issued a more succinct critique in 1895 entitled *The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings*, first appearing as an appendix to *A Modern Priestess of Isis* by Vsevolod Sergyeevich Solovyoff, a former friend of Blavatsky turned critic.

The theme of Coleman's critique was that Madame Blavatsky tried to allude to a greater scholarly erudition than she possessed by referring to authors and materials that she did not in fact directly have access to. He claims that she copied two thousand passages from other books without giving credit, and that a nucleus of about a hundred books that were in her possession were used to imply familiarity with thirteen hundred more, and used as sources for many unaccredited quotes and citations. He also claims that this was the procedure used for all her books, with the intent being to suggest greater scholarship than she actually possessed.

> By this means many readers of Isis, and subsequently those of her Secret Doctrine and Theosophical Glossary, have been misled into thinking Madame Blavatsky an enormous reader, possessed of vast erudition; while the fact is her reading was very limited, and her ignorance was profound in all branches of knowledge. [18]

Coleman lists the sources he feels Blavatsky was most indebted to and the number of times she drew from them. The most came from the works of Dunlap, Ennemoser, Salverte, Des Mousseaux, Jacolliot, Mackenzie, Hone, Cory, and Howitt. Coleman however was a spiritualist, and an avowed hater of Blavatsky for her critique of spiritualism. He saw theosophy as an erroneous distortion, and sought to discredit the movement and Blavatsky's credibility by demeaning her techniques of assimilation and composition. However, debate about what Coleman's charges in fact means has persisted.

> What was important for him was that H.P.B. be discredited, and his charge of plagiarism was but the latest in a string of weapons that had been so far ineffective. Ironically, all his charge amounts to is that she read at least a hundred scholarly works, massive tomes rivalling her first book in size and content, most now hard to obtain, some still untranslated into English. She then supposedly assembled over 2,000 quotations (crediting their original sources) from these books, which were, as Coleman describes them, "quotations from and summaries of the writings of other authors." She did this in such a way that not even he could assail her arguments but merely protested against her means of presentation. [19]

It appears that Blavatsky, may have embarked upon the creative literary process while enduring any number of induced or involuntary shifts in states of consciousness. But cognisant of the persuasive value of a reputable presentation, proceeded (with the help of others) by assembling a corpus of supporting materials to bolster the prestige of the book. How much of her idiosyncratic method was intended to suggest a greater degree of scholarship cannot be ascertained. And it appears that on particular points other collaborators brought up the need for further amplification or detail, though she took responsibility for incorporating data and determining the lines of argumentation.

It seems a common sense assumption that she would have wanted to associate her product with the most respected authorities in the effort to make the theosophical option appear attractive and substantial. The meticulous crafting of its shape, the constant

---

[18] William Emmette Coleman, *The Source of Madame Blavatsky's Writings*, retrieved from Blavatsky Archives, 2001, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/colemansources1895.htm>. (Accessed July 14, 2002).
[19] Gomes, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

revisions, physical cutting and pasting of sentences, reorganization of topics and so on contrast with Blavatsky's claims of a seamless supernaturally guided dictation process. It would seem that the primary intention was to produce an intellectually impressive and appealing book, with the end results justifying the means of production. However, it also seems likely that Blavatsky simply was following a method of citation and reference that appeared to be a useful and legitimate way of conveying a positive impression for ideas and beliefs she felt demanded full public consideration.

One of the motives of the undertaking was to draw attention to neglected, obscure, exotic schools of esoteric thought, so concealment of sources would seem to be a counterproductive approach. What Coleman's dissection does do is reveal that Blavatsky operated with a limited number of resources and materials that were used to suggest even greater erudition. It would seem that to Blavatsky, this was not a major point, because she felt that she had experiential confirmation of her major claims and that her training and apprenticeship in esoteric circles provided supporting validation. Appearances of scholarly erudition were meant for public consumption, as well as for legitimately provoking renewed interest in obscure and discredited forms of speculation. And yet, by boasting to her acquaintances of effortless access to the psychic version of those books, she still tried to glamorise and romanticise the creative process. It seems more plausible to assume that those core hundred books provided most of the secondary references, which were integrated into her exposition and used to support her own thematic claims and arguments, already ruminated upon and believed authenticated by experience prior to this literary enterprise.

7.3.2 *Isis Unveiled* -Deconstructive and Reconstructive Objectives - Challenges to Religion and Science and the Legitimation of the Esoteric Perspective

The dominant theme running through *Isis Unveiled* was that the ideational status quo found in mainstream Western culture was unsatisfactory. That it presented a misleading and inauthentic vision of reality while intentionally in some cases, and inadvertently in others, denying or distorting the more legitimate and revolutionary truths of the esoteric orientation. Blavatsky singles out two dominant authoritative institutions, the Christian Church (particularly, Catholicism) and science (specifically, the supporters

of materialism) of being guilty of perpetuating inaccurate and demeaning worldviews. And in contrast, she tries to rehabilitate a worldview based on neglected or misrepresented occult and mystic traditions, as well as a more properly defined acknowledgment of spiritualist phenomena. The confident willingness to challenge conventional assumptions is sounded in a tone of argumentative self-righteousness in the preface to volume one, where an uncompromising commitment to rehabilitate the intrinsic truth of ancient esoteric sources is posited against entrenched popular prejudice, scientific misconception, and religious hypocrisy.

Blavatsky immediately indicates a personal experiential base of authority for her discourse, through her "intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science."[20] Establishing this credential at the outset will indicate throughout the work that her expertise and authority extend beyond what may appear in written form. In fact, throughout the book, she makes reference to being allowed to only reveal selected and limited portions of the occult compendium of knowledge, even that purposely kept enigmatic and symbolic. Hence, even what may appear confusing and unconvincing is embedded with hints of a greater meaning, which Blavatsky has indicated she possesses. The reader, from the very first line of the preface, is therefore made aware that the author claims a unique and privileged status, and that her book cannot be judged by familiar criteria alone. Allowance must be made for the possibility that the science of the "Eastern adepts" is a source of superior authoritative knowledge.

As well, the justification of a self-righteous critique of established institutions is confirmed by belief that this alternative ideational option is "right" while the others are essentially "wrong." Blavatsky confidently and earnestly feels that she is presenting and defending "the Truth." Even if it may not be easily accessible and must be sought "wherever it may be found," those convinced of its legitimacy must be brave and determined, and willing to work to change popular opinion. The willingness to confront the majority position is supported by assurance that the perennial wisdom of the esoteric tradition is indeed more accurate and superior than represented by unenlightened contemporary authorities.

---

[20] H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, retrieved from Theosophical University Press Online, 1877, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu1-00in.htm#preface>. (Accessed July 11, 2002).

Blavatsky tries to give assurance that she undertook the project objectively and impartially, without prejudice. At the same time, she is adamant and determined to aggressively challenge where she feels justified, showing no patience for established mainstream positions. Those would respectively encompass scientific and religious orthodoxies felt to be antithetical to the objective of discerning pure truth. Her critique thus is motivated by desire for objectivity. As well, she demands retroactive validation, and credit for the truth ignored by majority worldviews, with proper acknowledgment of previously derided or dismissed minority cognitive traditions. With these objectives then, she feels that her deconstruction is warranted, but that it is selective and specific, and ultimately intended to rehabilitate a neglected source of spiritual wisdom.

7.3.3 *Isis Unveiled* – An Overview of Thematic Contents and Points of Emphasis

An outline of the contents of the book gives an indication of the way entrenched worldviews were critiqued as well as the fundamentals of an alternative spiritually grounded occult reconstruction. The subtitle is instructive, "A MASTER-KEY TO THE MYSTERIES OF ANCIENT AND MODERN SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY." [21] Reference to this "master-key" is threaded throughout her writings and is a crucial pillar of her systematic exposition. This useful tool provided the justification for how she interpreted all pertinent material, and the basis for associating diverse items within what she feels is a consistent and unified syncretism. In fact, when looked at in application, the master key is essentially Blavatsky's particular way decoding symbols and of presenting and interpreting data. It is based upon her understanding of occult, religious, philosophical, scientific sources. And though claiming to justifiably be a nineteenth century update of the esoteric wisdom tradition that has spanned ages and civilisations, it is eccentric and inconsistent. Blavatsky presumes that she is able to explicate the "real truth" of occult and mystical signification symbolically hidden in the output of such diverse schools as ancient Egyptian mythology, Neoplatonic philosophy, Hermetic texts, Vedanta philosophy, and many other allegedly esoteric sources. For her purposes, disparities and inconsistencies, and the influences of unique historical and cultural contexts were considered unessential and exoteric factors, distracting from the deeper

esoteric meanings that were always felt to be fully harmonious and congruent. She also reiterated that what may appear to be nonsensical or erroneous in esoteric materials may have been intentionally crafted that way to insure secrecy and confuse the profane from meddling in sacred matters. Madame Blavatsky called such procedures "blinds," and admits to using this approach herself at times to safeguard private information. For those, like her, initiated into the elite minority of properly qualified symbolic decoders, access to the master key allowed the most innocuous of statements or events to be classified as esoterically relevant. But those who do not have the proper frame of interpretative reference are considered potentially dangerous because they spread false information and continually degrade what, properly understood, is vital spiritual knowledge. In *Isis Unveiled*, the tone is aggressively confrontational when challenging those felt to be most responsible for the misconstruing of esoteric knowledge. Her major targets of criticism are continually singled out and held accountable for supporting the exoteric worldviews felt to be the unsatisfactory repercussions of this misplaced orientation. Christianity and science are charged with much of this blame, particularly, Catholicism and materialism.

Dissatisfaction with the options offered by the dominant worldviews initiated a search for a more feasible alternative. She admits that her own personal objective was a personal religious quest, which extended beyond the boundaries of contemporary Western authoritative tradition. Intent on grappling with questions about the nature of God, the human spirit, and immortality, and rejecting traditional Western options, she sought practical as well as theoretical solutions, seeking an experiential foundation that would provide personal conviction and assurance.

> It was while most anxious to solve these perplexing problems that we came into contact with certain men, endowed with such mysterious powers and such profound knowledge that we may truly designate them as the sages of the Orient. To their instructions we lent a ready ear. They showed us that by combining science with religion, the existence of God and immortality of man's spirit may be demonstrated like a problem of Euclid. For the first time we received the assurance that the Oriental philosophy has room for no other faith than an absolute and immovable faith in the omnipotence of man's own immortal self. We were taught that this omnipotence comes from the kinship of man's spirit with the Universal Soul—God! [22]

---

[21] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu1-00in.htm#contents>.
[22] Ibid.

The praise of such extraordinarily qualified and competent "sages of the Orient" suggests that they hold authoritative status. Their instruction is presented as a fusion of science and religion, by which the deepest and most baffling questions of mankind are affirmatively answered and decisively demonstrated. "The Existence of God and immortality of man's spirit" are no longer enigmas, obscured through misrepresentation or misunderstanding, but objectively demonstrable like a mathematical formula. And so, a unique opportunity to promote a verifiable mystical equation is presented in the "Oriental philosophy." With a confident sense of assured belief, and implicit trust in the superior knowledge of her mentors the Oriental sages, Blavatsky felt competent in undertaking a comparison of contemporary positions with that of the occult/Oriental tradition.

In the first volume, science was the target. The volume was sarcastically entitled "*THE 'INFALLIBILITY' OF MODERN SCIENCE."* Themes included her interpretation of the history of scientific inquiry and its magical basis; the understanding of natural forces and energies in light of their psychic foundations; explanations of phenomena associated with spiritualism and occultism; discussion of subtler classes of beings associated with phenomena and processes of nature; the inner constitution of man; the mechanics of marvellous occurrences; the differing approaches of modern Western science from that of ancient non-Western cultures; the superiority of ancient Egyptian and Indian approaches; and similar topics.

The thrust of this volume is that much of what has been considered superstition or been dismissed as unscientific or unworthy of attention in fact does deserve reconsideration from a more enlightened perspective. And when considered from the broader occult orientation, a much more profound understanding of the operations of the universe and of the potential of human experience will be effected. Blavatsky tries to rehabilitate the worthiness and relevance of magic, old mythologies, the Kabala, the Vedas, the thoughts of Egyptian Hierophants, Buddhist thinkers, ancient philosophers, alchemists, astrologers, mystics, and other discredited or misconstrued traditions and individuals. The distinction between esoteric and exoteric perspectives was also a major point that she was intent on establishing. The exoteric mode served conventional social purposes and conformed to the general worldview of the culture. The esoteric or "arcane"

perspective was a more limited, secretive, and non-conformist way of interpreting reality, primarily supporting mystical beliefs and insights. Blavatsky's interpretation of history is basically guided by this approach, allowing her to use or infer esoteric meanings where she feels that they are required. For instance, she claims that many ancient philosophers, particularly Pythagoras, Plato, and his later followers were also initiates in the mystery schools and cognisant of esoteric content and techniques.

> The speculations of these philosophers upon matter were open to public criticism: but their teachings in regard to spiritual things were profoundly esoteric. Being thus sworn to secrecy and religious silence upon abstruse subjects involving the relations of spirit and matter, they rivalled each other in their ingenious methods for concealing their real opinions. [23]

This belief that "ingenious methods for concealing their real opinions" was a common practice amongst those she feels represented this tradition marks much of her thought. She sees a secret, carefully concealed minority tradition that maintains continuity throughout the ages, and a less informed, less spiritually sensitised majority who can't arrive at the fullest understanding. And, according to her speculation, the procedure of concealment was approached as a competition or personal challenge, as each esoteric expert apparently spent significant time and effort thinking of "ingenious methods for concealing their real opinions." Blavatsky also surmises that much subsequent scientific confusion comes from not recognising the esoteric option and stubbornly dismissing its possibilities.

One of the principles she tries to support is that magic is a legitimate and natural operative force in the universe. Much of what science is trying to understand would be more effectively accomplished if allowing for even the hypothetical plausibility of such a premise. The concept of a gradationally extensive multidimensional universe with a wider spectrum of powers and phenomena than conventionally understood was a major point of emphasis. And the nature of man likewise was believed to include principles and functions belonging to more subtle levels of existence but dramatically debilitated because of the restrictive influences of the physical body and the earthly plane of existence. Blavatsky ranges far and wide providing examples that she feels support her contentions. She explores such conventionally marginal subjects as the oddities of nature,

[23] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu1-01.htm>.

enigmas of myths, the secrets of snake charming, rites of ancient mysteries, witchcraft trials, vampirism, psycho-somatic examples, spiritualist phenomena, and so on. Ultimately, Blavatsky admits that her objective of rehabilitating the materials supporting this alternative esoteric tradition was to stimulate new interest in the subject matter of esotericism, and to gain a more respectful appreciation of the wisdom embedded in ancient and obscure texts and schools.

> The whole of the present work is a protest against such a loose way of judging the ancients. To be thoroughly competent to criticise their ideas, and assure one's self whether their ideas were distinct and "appropriate to the facts," one must have sifted these ideas to the very bottom. It is idle to repeat that which we have frequently said, and that which every scholar ought to know; namely, that the quintessence of their knowledge was in the hands of the priests, who never wrote them, and in those of the "initiates" who, like Plato, *did not dare* write them. [24]

This protest against conventional ways of treating "the ancients" ultimately faces a dilemma. If "thoroughly competent" criticism can only be tolerated after their ideas were "sifted to the very bottom," then it assumes that full and comprehensive access to those ideas is possible. However, this seems to be an intrinsic impossibility "which every scholar ought to know." Quite simply, access is virtually impossible through conventional means. If the quintessence of their knowledge was in the hands of the priests, who never wrote them, and in those of the "initiates who, like Plato, *did not dare* write them," then how can judicious evaluation occur? If the esoteric meanings are unwritten, hidden, inaccessible, or incomprehensible without the proper master key, then it becomes a matter of faith accepting what that master key may reveal.

Even where common themes and patterns found in different cultural sources may be identified in broad outline, often the specific details and nuances of meaning are less than perfectly equable. The very real differences and subtleties pertaining to local context and environment are usually treated as superficial, classified as "exoteric," and therefore of minimal concern. Blavatsky is unconcerned with the historical and social details or their determining influences and ramifications. She is fixated on metaphysical concerns. And yet her version of esoteric interpretation is presented as merely a very limited revelation, with more profound mysteries still being guarded by the Brotherhood of Adepts for the protection of unqualified and unreceptive humankind. What knowledge

[24] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu1-13.htm>.

that was revealed was always qualified as but a "partial glimpse" beneath the veil of Isis. The hint of veil after veil or ever deepening mystery was often used in Blavatsky's rhetoric.

But even the incomplete sketch in *Isis Unveiled* was alluded to as less than straightforward. Blavatsky notes that initiates who encode the messages have the choice of several optional symbolic keys by which to operate, and are constantly vigilant about maintaining the tradition of secrecy. She stresses that historically only a very small minority of dedicated and experienced sages have been privy to the deeper meanings and solemn truths. So accepting her logic, it would follow that she thought herself a qualified expounder of privileged wisdom, and thus legitimately entitled to use whatever form of concealment to insure only the desired quotient of wisdom be accessible to the properly receptive reader. So some readers may discern more subtle layers of meaning than others, although even the surface reading will still be elucidative on the major points.

The second volume is also scathingly subtitled "*THE 'INFALLIBILITY' OF MODERN RELIGION."* The Christian Church is targeted as an institution that has consistently and methodically repressed and punished alternative forms of spiritual seeking and expression. And, in the process, has seriously misrepresented and demeaned the content of other alternative traditions and the esoteric strains found embedded within its own history.

> An analysis of religious beliefs in general, this volume is in particular directed against theological Christianity, the chief opponent of free thought. It contains not one word against the pure teachings of Jesus, but unsparingly denounces their debasement into pernicious ecclesiastical systems that are ruinous to man's faith in his immortality and his God, and subversive of all moral restraint.
> We cast our gauntlet at the dogmatic theologians who would enslave both history and science; and especially at the Vatican, whose despotic pretensions have become hateful to the greater portion of enlightened Christendom. The clergy apart, none but the logician, the investigator, the dauntless explorer should meddle with books like this. Such delvers after truth have the courage of their opinions. [25]

The teachings of Jesus, considered to be the moral foundation of Christianity, are spared from her wrath, but not the dogmatic doctrinal structure institutionally sanctified and propagated by the Church. One of her criticisms is that "debasement into pernicious

[25] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu2-00-c.htm>.

ecclesiastical systems" is detrimental to authentic religious sentiment. Not only is it antithetical of free and open thought, but also it is considered subversive and discouraging, leading to abandonment of moral restraint as well loss of faith in belief in God and immortality. In her interpretation of history, the Vatican especially is seen as a negative, anti-progressive force, animated by "despotic pretensions." And, spoken with irony, those who lack independence of thought are advised to refrain from reading books like hers that undoubtedly will raise questions about their own fundamental assumptions..

The themes in the second volume include a challenge to ecclesiastical authority; accusations of crimes and oppression committed by the Church; the comparative superiority of "heathen" positions; the divisiveness and non-uniformity of early Christianity; the comparisons between Oriental and Biblical cosmogonies; an interpretation of the Kabala; Christian distortions of Buddhist esoteric beliefs; evidence of esoteric tendencies in early Christianity; the connection between Masonry and the Jesuits; comparisons of the Vedas and the Bible; the origins of the myth of the devil; and an evaluation of Christianity in light of Buddhism.

Blavatsky feels that both the Catholic and Protestant Churches, for their own reasons, are opposed to admitting that there is legitimacy in phenomena traditionally classified as miraculous and that have been appearing in contemporary times within the spiritualist environment. The Catholic Church denies the credibility of principles that it has historically repressed, distorted or condemned. The Protestant Church is vociferously critical of the claims of spiritualism, because admittance of the miraculous in any unsanctioned form would compromise its integrity. Blavatsky makes it a major objective to show that much of what is shunned, derided, denied in Christian orthodox mainstream traditions did in fact have historical roots or associations within that ideational stream, and that those Christian manifestations, references, symbols, doctrines, are equivalent to what is found in pagan, ancient and Eastern thought. Only through a massive, concerted, and comprehensive effort on the part of the Church have those roots and associations been excised or transformed, forcibly dissociated from their authentic meanings and origins. Her accusations of intentional fraud, persecution, conspiracy, wilful and intense hatred and fear are made manifest on almost every page. And she proposes an alternative approach that will rehabilitate what has been deligitimised.

> … every Christian dogma has its origin in a heathen rite, … Besides, we propose to examine these facts from a different and perhaps rather novel point of view: that of the old philosophies as esoterically understood. These we have barely glanced at in our first volume. We will use them as the standard by which to compare Christian dogmas and miracles with the doctrines and phenomena of ancient magic, and the modern "New Dispensation," as Spiritualism is called by its votaries. [26]

Again, Madame Blavatsky trusts that her "novel point of view" is fully justifiable, and an accurate way of presenting objective truth. The "old philosophies as esoterically understood" once more require trust and faith in the trustworthiness of her interpretative method. Esoteric understanding was in fact her particular method of deconstructing symbolic data, which was presumably endorsed by the Masters and taught to their students. The intended undertaking of comparing Christian "dogmas and miracles" with magical and spiritualist doctrines and phenomena requires conviction that her frame of reference (that taught by Oriental sages and discerned in discredited and obscure sources), provides a more conceivable and enlightening set of explanations.

Blavatsky sums up the theoretical implications of *Isis Unveiled* by listing ten major points emphasised in the work. Firstly, that there is no such thing as a miracle, since all that occurs does so as a result of natural law. Next, she states that nature is divided into three components. A visible objective side, a more subtle confluence of energies and forces, and an abiding spiritual dimension. The third point is that man too has a threefold nature. The physical body, the astral body or soul, and an enduring transcendent spirit. Then she claims that magic, when studied as a science, is the true way of understanding the forces of nature. And that learning to control those powers by the individual is an art, requiring proper training and discipline. Next, that esoteric or arcane knowledge may be used beneficially and called magic, but if used selfishly is sorcery. The sixth point is the difference between mediumship, which is passive, and adeptship, which exhibits complete wilful control and mastery of supersensory powers. Next is her claim that the astral light records all temporal events, past, present and future, and that the skilled adept may be able to read that record. Following comes the claim that each of the separate human races has different propensities towards development of psychic skills. Her ninth point is that one of the conscious magical skills of the adept is intentional

[26] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/isis/iu2-01.htm>.

withdrawal of consciousness to the astral body. The final major point is that a thorough practical knowledge of magnetism and electricity is needed to fully understand and properly apply magical skills.

Isis Unveiled was an unexpected success, quickly selling out its first edition of a thousand copies, and eliciting both favourable and critical reaction. It became the first major authoritative theosophical compendium, explicitly proposing an alternative esoteric reading of history and the symbolic interpretation of much cultural data. This esoteric approach attempted to establish that a common origin of primeval transcendent wisdom was instituted by superior spiritual beings at the dawn of human incarnation during this global cycle. And that this sacred knowledge was transmitted and embedded within ancient religious traditions and other cultural forms, but only cognisable in its truest sense by morally qualified elite specialists fluent with the occult and mystical subject matter that was believed to be symbolically encoded. It may perhaps be fair to say that the impression that *Isis Unveiled* suggested to the reader was that whatever hinted at a greater, more mysterious, and spiritually satisfying reality than represented in conventional worldviews was eagerly (and perhaps indiscriminately) incorporated into the framework of the emerging alternative orientation. Thus, in the effort to show the limitations of the dogmatic, rationalist, and materialist perspectives, any piece of information apparently substantiating the credibility of abnormal, unusual, inexplicable experiences or occurrences was incorporated into the theosophical challenge. Everything that seemed to justify the premises of an esoteric perspective in any way possible was blended into the argumentative mix, bolstering a bold and aggressive challenge to orthodoxies in Western religious and scientific traditions. But since many of the points of contention were ultimately irresolvable, being matters of opinion and interpretation, the impact of the book was to stimulate debate and reconsideration of ideas commonly considered unworthy of serious attention. *Isis Unveiled* served to bring many disputable and disreputable issues and practices to the forefront, and treat them with dignity and respect. For theosophical purposes, it provided Blavatsky with a platform from which her vision was communicable in a more comprehensive manner than before. By presenting the rudiments of a coherent worldview, she hoped to make a convincing argument for adopting that option rather than remaining comfortably within the traditions she was

verbally combating. However, although a major objective was the attacking of Christian and scientific premises, the presentation of the main principles and doctrines of the theosophical worldview was not yet fully fleshed out in an integrated, comprehensive, or systematically enunciated coherent whole.

7.4.1 *The Secret Doctrine* – Its Esteemed Status as Blavatsky's Magnum Opus

It took eleven more years and the publication of *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888 before the theosophical worldview was presented to the public in the form of a self-contained and systematic exposition. From the orthodox theosophical position, the embarkation on a fuller and more explicitly defined worldview exposition was seen as a strategic step, needed to insure consolidation of support from those who were sympathetic to the vision presented in *Isis Unveiled*, but wanted a more thorough and detailed articulation of the ideational system.[27]

When *The Secret Doctrine* is mentioned virtually anywhere theosophical sympathies lie, it is invariably praised as a significant monument in the history of human thought, a dramatic and revolutionary framework for interpreting the nature of reality. And Madame Blavatsky is most often accorded utmost praise, respect, esteem, admiration for being able to access and assemble the knowledge, and present it in an engaging and captivating literary style. There is no doubt that *The Secret Doctrine* has usually been accorded the privileged status of being considered the most definitive, authoritative, and important expression of the theosophical vision. The book often is so closely associated with Blavatsky the person that its perusal has often evoked a sense of her mystique and commitment. And the inspirational and invigorating effect of this literary production for those finding the option most satisfying, plausible, and convincing is apparent in many of the statements made about *The Secret Doctrine*. Let us look at a few examples.

> H.P.B.'s *magnum opus* is intended to present a wholly coherent outline of an ageless doctrine, a system of thought based upon occult facts and universal truths inherent in nature and which are as specific and definite as any mathematical proposition. The teachings of that system as a whole cannot be deduced from, or

[27]See for example, Kirby Van Mater, *The Writing of the Secret Doctrine*, retrieved from The Theosophical University Press Online, 1998, <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-kvms.htm>. (Accessed July 11, 2002).

> found in, any of the known exoteric religious or philosophical schools of ancient or more recent times, although separate ideas and single tenets can be occasionally found, or at least hinted at, in the works of ancient writers, suggesting the existence of a parent doctrine carefully hidden from view.[28]

Here we see that *The Secret Doctrine* is recognised as more comprehensive, systematic, and expansive than *Isis Unveiled*, and an estimable and authoritative "*magnum opus*" of the theosophical worldview. The knowledge it conveys is felt to be an authentic derivation or extension of "an ageless doctrine," with the content of that knowledge consisting of universal occult truths, and thus fully trustworthy and reliable. And yet, the historically familiar exoteric sources of knowledge do not provide the same depth of meaning, though sporadic references may sometimes be discerned. To the interested reader, this stupendous revelation is presented for consideration and evaluation. Blavatsky's book is thought to be unique, an organic synthesis of supersensory visionary experience and revelations of privileged knowledge. It is considered to be stimulating, challenging and provocative. In fact, the contents are felt to be so revolutionary and profound that it is assumed that they must have a special authoritative legitimacy. Blavatsky's explanation about being the specially qualified and selected messenger for the particular historical cycle would carry the imprint of truth because it satisfactorily provides the kind of emotionally reassuring conviction such knowledge would seem to demand. And therefore, any other possible hypothesis must be rejected as incomplete.

> The *Secret Doctrine* sets forth what purports to be the root knowledge out of which all religion, philosophy, and science have grown. The sub-title—"The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy" reveals the daring aim and scope of the undertaking. It is an effort to present and align certain fundamental principles in such a way as to render possible a synthesis of all knowledge. [29]

In this observation, the same basic feelings are shared. It is believed that the knowledge expounded is a special expression of undisputable truth. Religion, philosophy, and science are recognised as distinct forms of knowledge, capable of being harmonized and blended into a more comprehensive total worldview. This potential goal of a

[28] Boris De Zirkoff, *The Sources of The Secret Doctrine*, in *H.P. Blavatsky and The Secret Doctrine*, op. cit., p. 8.
[29] Alvin Boyd Kuhn, *Theosophy:A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom*, op. cit., <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/kuhnthesecretdoctrine.htm>.

"synthesis of all knowledge" is the bold aim of the undertaking, covering a broad scope of topics and concerns. Blavatsky's intentions in pursuing the goal of a synthesis was to both confront existing dominant worldviews in the three critical categories of knowledge, deconstructing what she felt was misappropriate, as well as setting out the foundations for a reconstructed spiritually oriented alternative. This view of the book emerging as a special response to the urgent circumstances of a perceived spiritual crisis is noted here.

> The Secret Doctrine was written for the Western world to stem the tide of abject materialism. No messenger made his appearance in glowing aura to impress the multitude and, if he had, he would probably have been completely ignored. Instead, we have a book designed to gain acceptance in the minds of thinking men for many long years to come. The form and content of the S.D. is such that the student is constantly referred to the thoughts and ideas of hundreds of authors, all of whom are generally tending in the same direction. [30]

From here we see that the book format was felt to be the most efficacious way of gaining attention. *The Secret Doctrine* was seen as a necessary tool intended to combat materialism. Using the literary form to present a comprehensive and logically consistent exposition of this alternative ideational orientation would have seemed the optimum way of facing the challenge. The emphasis is on a gradual, incremental conversion via reasoned comparison and reflection upon the principles so expounded. The synthetic and eclectic form of the book is valuable because it hints at and suggests parallels and similarities found in a multitude of sources. They may not display absolutely identical thoughts, but they are "generally tending in the same direction."

7.4.2 *The Secret Doctrine* – Compositional Mystique and *The Stanzas of Dzyan*

The methodology of Blavatsky's authorship of *The Secret Doctrine* again takes on semi-mythical quality. This book was stated to not just be a straightforward treatise, compilation, or speculative product of the physical authoress. Major parts of its substance too were said to have been transmitted through supersensory and occult means from the Masters to Blavatsky [31]

> Considerable portions thereof were dictated to her by one another Adept, not as an employer would dictate to his secretary, but by direct transference of ideas from

[30] Richard I. Robb, *Access to Great Ideas*, retrieved from *Theosophy Northwest*, 1975, <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-sdref.htm>. (Accessed July 14, 2002).
[31] See Charles J. Ryan, *H.P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement*, op. cit., chapter 16.

> one mind to another in the condition of *tulku.* Other portions are descriptions by H.P.B. of what her trained spiritual consciousness actually saw in the akashic records marshalled before it. These incredible records were either evoked by her own powerful will or unfolded under the superior will of the Adepts, in those cases where she was unable to do it herself. Still other portions of the manuscript were precipitated by one or another of the Initiates she was working under, and worked over by her, edited, rearranged and incorporated into her work. [32]

So, as with *Isis Unveiled*, theosophical loyalists believed that the core of the newly construed magnum opus was supernaturally legitimated and sanctioned.

During the period when the *Secret Doctrine* was being written, Madame Blavatsky's chronic health problems worsened. At one stage during a medical crisis, her very survival was in doubt. Her subsequent dramatic recovery was quickly turned into another element of the personal myth that perpetuated her legendary status. She explained her quick return to better health as the work of the Masters, who gave her the option of relinquishing her physical existence and gaining spiritual respite, or else continuing to live so that *The Secret Doctrine* might be completed and her obligations of service fulfilled. The narration of her story by others added to the mystique and supernatural legitimation of the book as an especially necessary and intended theosophical statement. The following words reflect this outlook.

> … ill health could not break her spirit, and she fought on to complete her work—no matter how severe were her pains, so long as it was possible. However, it seemed as if even her indomitable will would have to yield at last, for her complication of diseases finally reached another dangerous crisis. In the spring of 1887, while at Ostend, the doctors gave her up, and she sank into unconsciousness. But her work was not completed, and again the Master intervened and she was enabled to use that worn-out body for another four years. Awaking out of what seemed her last sleep, she said: "Countess, come here. . . . Master has been here; He gave me my choice, that I might die and be free if I would, or I might live and finish The Secret Doctrine. He told me how great would be my sufferings and what a terrible time I would have before me in England (for I am to go there); but when I thought of those students to whom I shall be permitted to teach a few things and of the Theosophical Society in general, to which I have already given my heart's blood, I accepted the sacrifice, and now to make it complete, fetch me some coffee and something to eat, and give me my tobacco box." … When viewed in retrospect, it is hardly too much to say that the situation at the time H.P.B. decided to make the sacrifice of going on to complete her work was a critical turning point for the welfare of humanity. The Adepts had chosen the one available messenger whose special endowments, such

[32] de Zirkoff, op. cit., p. 3.

> as her sympathetic and penetrating knowledge of her fellowmen, her indomitable determination and her occult training, enabled them to write a saving clause of brotherhood in world affairs. [33]

This quasi-martyr complex was expressed often by Madame Blavatsky, who interpreted the disreputability accorded her and the complications of personal karma as necessary stages to be endured, fought through by willpower, and decisively conquered. In her personal role, Blavatsky was perceived to be "making the sacrifice," as well acting for "the welfare of humanity." And being allowed to "live and finish The Secret Doctrine" obviously heightened anticipation and the expected worth of the book, while reinforcing Blavatsky's supernaturally sanctioned authoritarian role as messenger of the Masters.

The logistical difficulties of editing, collating, revising, organising the variety of written materials that she produced eventuated in having others help collaborate to prepare the final product. During this time, a select number of friends and associates contributed to the overall physical arrangement of *The Secret Doctrine*. The two most active participants were Bertram Keightly and his nephew Dr. Archibald Keightly, theosophists who financially supported Blavatsky on her relocation to London. They, along with Edward Douglass Fawcett provided much day-to-day editorial assistance.[34] As well, Blavatsky asked for consultation on various topics from others with specialised knowledge. The Keightly's for instance were instrumental in proposing the topical structure by which the book was organised, with separate volumes suggested for cosmological, anthropological, historical, and practical themes.[35] Clearly then, the actual physical labour of literary organisation, editing, arrangement was not a solo effort, but a matter of Blavatsky supplying the content and depending on advice and creative input from others to properly shape and organise it.

The important new component in her presentation was the claim that she now would be commenting on a mysterious, ancient, and obscure sacred text called the *Stanzas of Dzyan*. Originally, this material was either considered, as Blavatsky proposed, a revelation of privileged and supernaturally sanctioned esoteric knowledge. Or else, as

---

[33] Ibid.,

[34] See Bertram Keightly, *Mr. Bertram Keightly's Account of the Writing of the Secret Doctrine,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2001, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/keightleyb1893.htm>. (Accessed July 13, 2002).

critics charged, a conglomeration of fraudulent plagiarised or invented material.[36] The explanation given by Blavatsky of a transmission from the spiritual hierarchy to an esoteric school in Tibet, or the assumption by critics of a purely fictional or plagiarised origin, have predominated for decades as the most viable explanations for the source of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*.

> However, in 1975 H.J. Spierenburg … identified the Books of Kiu-te as the Tibetan Buddhist Tantras—the correct transliteration of the Tibetan title is Gyud-sde, but 'Kiu-te' is a good approximation of the pronunciation. In 1981, another theosophical scholar, David Reigle, independently came to the same conclusion regarding the identity of the Books of Kiu-te. [37]

By tentatively locating the *Stanzas of Dzyan* within the Tibetan *Kanjur*, questions arise regarding the correlation between Blavatsky's exposition and commentaries and the purported source material. Though showing similarities in themes and subject matter, there apparently was not an exact duplication of known text material.

> The Kâlachakra Tantra is the only Buddhist Tantra whose subject matter resembles the cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis of The Secret Doctrine. According to Reigle, 'Dzyan' is a Tibetan phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit jñâna (wisdom), the result of dhyâna (meditation), and 'Jñâna' is the title of the fifth and last section of the Kâlachakra Tantra. However, none of the stanzas that Blavatsky quotes from the Book of Dzyan has so far been located in the abridged Kâlachakra Tantra or in verses from the root Kâlachakra Tantra quoted in other Buddhist writings. [38]

Questions about how or when Madame Blavatsky may have come in contact with authentic esoteric Tibetan materials have not been definitively answered. To orthodox theosophists, her inflated biography suggests that she had both physical and occult access to Tibet, and had visited privileged and secret seats of learning by travel and in her astral body. Sceptics question whether she ever actually entered Tibet, or had opportunity to obtain the kinds of knowledge she claimed. Johnson suggests two possible means of acquisition of the knowledge that may have formed the basis of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*. He theorises that Das and Gyatso, whom he named as possible sources of her Mahatmas, may have been permitted to reveal some of the scriptures they took from Tibet to India.

---

[35] See Caldwell, op. cit., chapter 18
[36] See Meade, op. cit., p. 379.
[37] David Pratt, *The Book of Dzyan,* retrieved from Exploring Theosophy, 1998, <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dp5/dzyan.htm>. (Accessed July 15 2002).

Alternatively, he feels that another possible Master personage, Ranbir Singh, who had arranged for the translation of the *Books of Kiu-te* into Sanskrit, may therefore have provided the source by which Blavatsky familiarised herself with the information.[39]

Madame Blavatsky provided her own phraseology, sequencing, and interpretative commentary, using the *Stanzas of Dzyan* as a framework for discussion of her eclectic cosmological and anthropological theories. By crediting the source of the stanzas to the original transmission to humankind by the spiritual hierarchy, her presentation acquires more mythical persuasive allure and legitimating authority. Not only is she the chosen vehicle for communication and transmission of the message of the Masters, but also, her new primary written source is said to be imbued with sacred esoteric significance. Even if a legitimate derivation from a traditional Tibetan Buddhist school can be traced, the focus is not on the Buddhist religion per se. She draws from every possible source that she feels is pertinent, with the Tibetan Buddhist accreditation used as a legitimating factor, a starting position within which to conduct the systematic delineation of cosmological and anthropological theosophical principles.

7.4.3 *The Secret Doctrine* – An Overview of Thematic Contents and Points of Emphasis

In the exposition of the work, Madame Blavatsky begins by noting the ground she wants to cover. In the preface she immediately states her intention

> The aim of this work may be thus stated: to show that Nature is not "a fortuitous concurrence of atoms," and to assign to man his rightful place in the scheme of the Universe; to rescue from degradation the archaic truths which are the basis of all religions; and to uncover, to some extent, the fundamental unity from which they all spring; finally, to show that the occult side of Nature has never been approached by the Science of modern civilization. [40]

Her intention then is to rehabilitate the disputed and disreputable “occult side of Nature” and reveal that there is an underlying spiritual stratum that is primary and common to all religions. This can only be done by challenging the ensconced Western traditions that deny the primacy of esoteric spirituality. Her work however is not unique in its themes

---

[38] Ibid.
[39] Johnson, op. cit., pp. 202-203.
[40] H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, retrieved from Theosophical University Press Online, 1888, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd1-0-co.htm#preface>. (Accessed July 15 2002).

and sentiment. It is a revised and reworked presentation of ideas and beliefs that have been expressed in many places over the history of the human race. Blavatsky claims that she is presenting an integrated and coherent synthesis of knowledge that has only been cognised as such by the very privileged and spiritually qualified few throughout history. What had been inaccessible to the public was now being somewhat revealed through her writings.[41]

Blavatsky anticipates a cynical and sceptical reception for her new primary source, the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, recognising that others will feel it is a purely fanciful fiction. However, she still is adamant in claiming its authoritative status, and in the integrity of the worldview symbolically embedded. In the Proem that follows the introduction, Blavatsky imaginatively sets forth the premise of the true cyclical evolutionary schemata by which universes and all varieties of life proceed. She uses a poetical narrative style to establish a mythical tone in the initial phase of her presentation, alluding to symbolically encoded deeper meanings capable of extrapolation by the properly attuned and trained esoteric specialist.

Setting forth the evolutionary theory of periodic cyclical manifestations in symbolic and metaphorical form, *The Secret Doctrine* methodically proceeds with discussion of the various cosmic elements, processes, and interrelationships in their manifold aspects. *The Stanzas of Dzyan* are next enunciated one by one, again in poetical, allusive, suggestive mythical form. And from there, Blavatsky engages in her commentaries and observations as they relate to the Stanzas.

The first volume, *Cosmogenesis*, [42] is devoted to discussion of the processes and phenomena of the cosmos perceived as a multidimensional whole, in which the familiar natural universe is contained as a lower emanation generated by the power of the Absolute. The volume is divided into three main sections, each of which includes several chapters. In the first section, the topics of cosmic evolution; the differentiation of the One into the many; the unfolding of cyclical necessity; the orderly procession of the distinctive globes, rounds, and races; the nature of the presiding hierarchies; the composition of man's inner being; and so forth are discussed. Part II of the first volume

[41] Ibid.
[42] For the Cosmogenesis portion, see H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine,* Theosophical University Press Online, 1888, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd-hp.htm#pt1>. (Accessed July 15, 2002).

concentrates on various facets of symbolism, including the various keys of interpretation needed to discern the meanings encoded in pictographic, linguistic, mythic, and other forms of representation. Part III of the first volume is devoted to showing the contrast between the scientific and the esoteric approach. Modern scientific procedure is critiqued and shown to be incapable of adequately accounting for all the mysterious phenomena and enigmas found in nature. Occult-grounded hypotheses are posited as being more accurate and revealing, but often incompletely understood and inaccurately represented by modern science.

In restating the major points of the first volume, Blavatsky concentrates on the themes she was most interested in pursuing. The first was the confirmation that the knowledge dealt with in *The Secret Doctrine* was only attainable and decipherable by those who were especially trained and spiritually qualified to unveil the deepest level of meaning embedded within the symbols and outer form.

> The Secret Doctrine is the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages, and its cosmogony alone is the most stupendous and elaborate system: *e.g.,* even in the exotericism of the Puranas. But such is the mysterious power of Occult symbolism, that the facts which have actually occupied countless generations of initiated seers and prophets to marshal, to set down and explain, in the bewildering series of evolutionary progress, are all recorded on a few pages of geometrical signs and glyphs. The flashing gaze of those seers has penetrated into the very kernel of matter, and recorded the soul of things there, where an ordinary profane, however learned, would have perceived but the external work of form. But modern science believes not in the "soul of things," and hence will reject the whole system of ancient cosmogony. It is useless to say that the system in question is no fancy of one or several isolated individuals. That it is the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and to verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another, of the teachings of higher and exalted beings, who watched over the childhood of Humanity. [43]

The firm conviction that there is an unbridgeable gulf between that group of "exalted Seers," with their infallible insights and the "ordinary profane" who perceive "but the work of external form" is reiterated. However, these Seers are portrayed as energetic and eager technicians of the sacred, not content to merely transmit ideas of the past, but ever vigilant in continued research and refinement of ideas. And diligently active in providing independent evidence confirming the basics of the ancient wisdom. Blavatsky thus is trying to show that this "uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations"

deserves to be evaluated as a depository of objective knowledge, tested experientially in a way that would be condoned by scientific authority. If only it would accept the premise that nature was intrinsically spiritual as a working hypothesis.

The second point emphasised by Blavatsky was that there was but a single encompassing spiritual source from which all else emanates. The conception of an impersonal but subsuming and inclusive "homogeneous divine Substance-Principle" [44] from which manifest existence emerges and which is beyond categorisation itself, was a common mystical/Idealist philosophical theme. It has been non-the-less conceptualised and expressed in different ways through ideational systems such as the Upanishads, Vedanta, and esoteric Buddhist schools, and found in Western sources such as Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Hermetic teachings, and various Idealist philosophical offshoots as well. It justifies the belief that the notion of substance is essentially an illusion that applies only in manifest existence, but reverts to status of a principle of latency when considered in abstraction apart from manifestation.

The third major point was to emphasise the invariability and inevitability of cyclical law and the spiritual basis of the universe. Again the difficulty of struggling with conceptual phrasing for mystical and abstract theories makes expression a bit laboured. Human intellect can only recognise the manifest phase of cosmic process, conceiving the universe once removed from its unconditioned and absolute mode. As the "veil" rather than the essence, as it were, which cannot be conceptually represented. One thing that is taken as a given though is the belief that the periodic cycles of involution and evolution, stasis and activity, are essential facets of the total cosmic whole.

The fourth point was that the phenomenal world of appearances was illusory. The dualistic theme continues, as the "temporary," "ephemeral," "evanescent ever-changing forms" of the conceivable universe is characterised as illusion, or "Maya." In contrast, the changelessness and eternal immutability of the One remains perpetually constant and beyond verbal comprehension. Yet, on the plane of normal existence, the Universe seems to appear real enough, when perceived through the consciousness of its beings. However, ultimately all is Maya, and individuals "are as unreal as it is itself." [45]

---

[43] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd1-1-13.htm>.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

Fifth, she stated that all entities maintain their own form of consciousness. Here, Blavatsky takes a radical pantheistic approach, attributing all "kingdoms" in the universe with delimited forms of consciousness proper to their own plane of perception. In searching for "noumenal essence" rather than surface appearances, she argues that universals are more substantive and enduring on an Ideal plane than "the particulars which existed only in name and human fancy." [46] So here we have a slight foray into Platonic-Absolute Idealist thinking. What appears phenomenally is classified as mere "appearance" and is considered less substantive than what is determined through reason and logic.

The sixth point was that the universe operates via internal law rather than external causes, and is directed and guided by spiritual intelligences. With this line of reasoning, feeling, thought, and will are stated to be the primary causal agencies on the human microcosmic scale. And on the macrocosmic stage, the operative laws of the cosmos were initiated at more spiritualised stages of emanation, necessitating an "almost endless series of Hierarchies of sentient Beings." [47] These other sentient orders are constantly active in enabling and implementing the "Karmic and Cosmic Laws" that provide structure and coherence on all the discrete planes of being.

The second volume of *The Secret Doctrine* is titled "Anthropogenesis," and roughly takes the same form as the first volume, being divided into three sections with a number of separate chapters within each part.[48] The first section likewise describes and then comments on a number of specific stanzas. The focus now is more specifically on the subject of human evolution, treated from the occult perspective. The format of the second volume follows the plan of the first. It begins with some preliminary notes and then sets the outline for part one, also expressed in the idiom of symbolically encoded mythical stanzas The discussion concentrates on an explication of the beginning of sentient life, with extensive and detailed speculation about the discrete phases of the evolutionary process. A major premise of Blavatsky's evolutionary narrative was that ancient mythologies, religions, and folklore in fact refer to the existence of a

[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid.
[48] For the Anthropogenesis part, see see H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine,* Theosophical University Press Online, 1888, http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd-hp.htm#pt21>. (Accessed July 15, 2002).

scientifically unconfirmed and contrary prehistory, extending through various phases of proto-human development, considered predecessors to the human race. Blavatsky describes the conditions in alleged former dominant "antediluvian" civilisations of Lemuria and Atlantis, as well as yet more distant precursor environments on the newly formed earth. Even pre-earthly cycles on the occult similitude of the moon are incorporated into her narrative. A plethora of purported explanations of the greatest enigmas of anthropology, archaeology and history are proffered as well. In most of these cases, Blavatsky proceeds by literally interpreting mythic and legendary materials as disguised historical fact, using her symbolic master key to support her speculation. Literary references and presumed geological clues to mythical beasts, giants, angels, fairies, lost civilisations, and the like are purported to be proof of an alternative esoteric historical record that confirms the outline of her narrative

The essentials of this line of thought are summed up in the three propositions she enunciated at the start of the second volume.

> As regards the evolution of mankind, the Secret Doctrine postulates three new propositions, which stand in direct antagonism to modern science as well as to current religious dogmas: it teaches (*a*) the simultaneous evolution of seven human groups on seven different portions of our globe; (*b*) the birth of the *astral,* before the *physical* body: the former being a model for the latter; and (*c*) that man, in this Round, preceded every mammalian—the anthropoids included—in the animal kingdom… [49]

Blavatsky proposes a number of controversial theories pertaining to biological, social, historical and geographical development. The three propositions that are proffered are explicitly noted to "stand in direct antagonism" with both science and religion, and hence, represent a distinctive worldview. The contents of those propositions presuppose the validity of the type of evolutionary theory she was propounding, by which familiar, natural, and organic processes are subsumed within a vaster schema. The theory of seven simultaneous racially distinct evolutionary divisions is based on the belief that earthly evolution is but a stage in a much more extensive cosmic round, and that the entities incarnating in these distinctive races have common psychic, mental and bodily evolutionary characteristics and traits which distinguish each from the other. According to the sequence of emanations, the astral body is believed to have preceded and informed

the physical and to have been the main vehicle of consciousness prior to the earthly cycle. The evolutionary process works itself through more planes/dimensions than the merely physical through the duration of the macrocosmic cycle, with the successive ethereal levels and stages of this unfolding movement appearing progressively more spiritually infused. The notion that man preceded mammal likewise is based on belief that the evolutionary process is not just a matter of growth and development of bodily form, but that intelligence and spirit subsist prior to incarnation.

Besides enunciating her theories on purely conceptual terms, Blavatsky attacked the ideational status quo from a different platform. On the one hand, she availed herself of as much empirical data as she could reasonably manipulate for supportive purposes. But another key part of her methodology was a defence based on the trustworthiness of her symbolic interpretations of diverse streams of data. To support many of her theories, she stated that she was using the most authoritative and definitive method of symbolic interpretation, explicating the most accurate and succinct meanings of legends, stories, and myths from the accumulated resources found throughout the cultures of the world, past and present. Her supporting premise was that there were "seven keys" to the proper understanding of a primordial sacred symbolism, and that by applying those keys there would be no doubt that the most baffling enigmas and mysteries would be decisively deciphered. Blavatsky, although recognising that using this kind of unverifiable methodology would prove problematic, yet insisted upon its credibility and validity.[50]

The symmetry suggested by repeated usage of the number seven leads Blavatsky to believe that symbolic analysis takes place on seven possible levels, requiring the seven keys for appropriate interpretations. She also feels assured that with the mastery of the mystery language, science will follow the same interpretative path and confirm that the essentials of the primordial wisdom tradition are sound. Yet, applying this method as she felt justified, Blavatsky essentially interpreted a plethora of mythological and legendary materials in a strictly linear historical manner, Despite the insistence on the presence of multiple levels of symbolic meaning, *The Secret Doctrine* is often reductive, insisting that a common cosmological narrative underlies all traditional myths and folklore. This

[49] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd2-0-pn.htm>.
[50] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd1-2-02.htm>.

attempt to find "the" meaning of such materials was not unique or original. Nor was the belief that a common universal impetus lay behind such cultural efforts. However, rather than discerning solar, phallic, animistic or other disguised primal root patterns, Blavatsky postulated a theory wherein myth was believed to be a method used by advanced spiritual beings of encoding the true story of the history and destiny of the human race. What was found veiled in ambiguity, or allusive and metaphorical in ancient traditions, was, with the help of Blavatsky's interpretative keys, now given precise meaning. As well, the familiar interpretations found in religious institutions were dismissed as exoteric and intended to pacify the unenlightened. Only the few elite spiritual specialists of any time or place were felt qualified to transmit the esoteric perspective via symbolic representation.

Blavatsky's approach to symbolic interpretation is crucial in understanding the way she justified her speculation. With the accumulation of massive amounts of diverse materials in support of her evolutionary theories, a common connecting link was needed to validate their inclusion. The way she justified using seemingly disparate and dubious materials was by claiming that there existed esoteric hidden meanings that weren't discernible through exoteric readings. Only by application of the proper methodologies of interpretation would the "real" meaning be explicable. And when this approach was practiced, the underlying themes and details would provide another body of credible evidence in support of the evolutionary theories enunciated in *The Secret Doctrine*.

> There is no purely *mythical* element in any of the ancient religious texts; but the mode of thought in which they were originally written has to be found out and closely adhered to during the process of interpretation. … How is it to be expected that the merely profane thinker, however great his erudition in *orthodox* symbolism, so to say—*i.e*., in that symbolism which can never get out of the old grooves of Solar-myth and sexual-worship—shall penetrate into the arcana. behind the veil. One who deals with the husk or shell of the dead letter, and devotes himself to the kaleidoscopic transformation of barren word-symbols, can never expect to get beyond the vagaries of modern mythologists. [51]

This view of symbolic interpretation reveals how Blavatsky felt justified in utilising seemingly discredited or irrelevant supportive data for her systematic exposition. She assumes initially that so-called exoteric readings of religious and cultural texts are

[51] Ibid.,<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sd/sd2-1-19.htm>.

fundamentally limited and incapable of revealing deeper hidden messages.[52] However, she feels that they in fact signify more than is apparent to the non-initiated. This would seem to indicate that she placed minimal importance on the possibility that they may possibly be primarily or entirely directed towards local, immediate, historically and socially determined priorities. In her view, there unequivocally always existed a secret hidden esoteric meaning which only the properly qualified and initiated elite could discern and deal with. And by extension, this would assume that in each culture and historical environment, representatives of this unbroken chain of the occult wisdom tradition were in deed represented, and capable of covertly wielding influence to assure that multiple levels of meaning were properly symbolised and encoded. The presumption that secret records were regularly attended to over the entire historic span, and could be deciphered by the properly trained initiate, also suggests that the same underlying message was constantly being perpetuated, and would be immediately cognisable despite cultural, historical, racial, or geographical variances.

Madame Blavatsky identifies seven layers of meaning that would be recoverable through the properly trained occult expert in esoteric symbolic decoding. However, only three levels of meaning are apparently available for possible access by current uninitiated humanity. The other planes transcend the average consciousness and cannot even be properly symbolised in linguistic terms. The three planes of thought that could be symbolically encrypted were the Realistic, Idealistic, and purely Divine or Spiritual. The procedure of actually encoding symbolic meanings in texts followed five possible methodologies. These apparently changed as preferences historically, and respectively were the "symbolical," "emblematical," "parabolic," "hieroglyphical," and "logo-grammatical." And, presumably, the adequately prepared symbolic decoder would be the only source of the most comprehensive interpretation, because only the initiated can presume to know the fullest truth. The "merely profane" erudite thinker or scholar is believed to be incapable of transcending the parameters of his own theoretical framework, unable to "penetrate into the arcane behind the veil." Ultimately, the

[52] For a critique of the credibility of theosophical claims to represent an authentically esoteric perspective, see Rene Guenon, *East and West*, Ghent, New York: Perennial Wisdom Series, 1995, pp. 157 – 158. For explanation of Guenon's rationale, see Mircea Eliade, *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press Ltd., 1976, p.66.

definitive criterion is whether the interpreter of symbols is spiritually attuned, empathetic with the premises of occult philosophy, and properly trained in esoteric methodology. If he is qualified, then his interpretation will always be more authentic than those who only deal with "barren word-symbols" and the "husk or shell of the dead letter." In other words, a personal spiritual commitment to the occult worldview always will be superior to academic, modern, or purely intellectual analysis, which is restrictive and limited to the "vagaries" of current theories and schools of thought.[53]

Throughout *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky carefully collates an enormous quantity of what she feels are case examples confirming particular facets of her evolutionary schemata. As well as drawing from the available factual and hypothetical data base of ancient and modern philosophies and sciences, the majority of her supporting evidence comes in the form of religious, mythological, folkloric, fictional, speculative, imaginative, anecdotal materials. Interestingly, she states "there is no purely *mythical* element in any of the ancient religious texts."[54] From her perspective, what passed as mythical in fact signified a more secretive, esoteric set of meanings. Thus every scrap of information deriving from past cultural sources was reinterpreted through the prism of her form of symbolic analysis and used to corroborate the premises of her system. Rather than "demythologise," she in fact unintentionally "re-mythologised" much of her data to integrate it into her evolutionary narrative. By turning legendary and mythical materials into alleged occult "facts" and then reinstating them into her new synthesis via esoteric interpretation, they in a sense moved from one form of mythical status to another

Perhaps this can be characterised as a change from spontaneous naïve imaginative expression to a more sophisticated intellectual crafting of that very same data. *The Secret Doctrine*, then, essentially substitutes a new encompassing myth for the diverse elements found unconnected in extant mythical sources. Ironically, Blavatsky could not see that the integrated synthetic systematic worldview she presented as historical fact was essentially a restructured and expansive creation myth, a recitation of origins and a speculative overview of human purpose and destiny as understood within the parameters of that myth, expressed largely through the imaginative language of the *Stanzas of Dzyan* but

[53] For a critical view of the credibility of the symbolic method employed by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, see Geoffrey Ashe, *The Ancient Wisdom,* London: McMillan Ltd. 1977, p. 27.
[54] Ibid.

then treated purely by intellectual exegesis. By maintaining that skeletal outline as the basis of her cosmological and anthropological narration, she in fact did utilise mythical form, but by extrapolating the kinds of intricate rational and empirical deductions felt justified via esoteric symbolic analysis, the vast majority of *The Secret Doctrine* is an exercise in clever arrangement of seemingly consonant thematic materials. In compiling supporting examples from a variety of different sources, Blavatsky mostly minimised or dismissed the actual historical and contextual associations pertaining to each datum as exoteric, and thus flawed or irrelevant. With charismatic authoritativeness, she was able to claim privileged insight or access to the definitive esoteric interpretations, so the views expounded in The Secret Doctrine were not assailable by those who could not claim that same qualifications and expertise.

All elements drawn from myth, legend, literature and other imaginative creations were accorded literal linear historical status somewhere within the broad schema. Even though the historical time frame of the worldview is enormous, encompassing astounding sets of complex interrelated cycles, globes, chains, planes of being, races, sub-races, kingdoms of nature, etc., the narrative still reads as a process of unfolding linear history. Planetary chains are occupied and abandoned, a variety of organic forms develop and evolve, races succeed each other, civilisations rise and fall, and so forth, in the staggering evolutionary pageant. The destiny of humanity was seen extending from the germinal state of the remotest past to the expectant fully evolved collective spiritual maturation of the distant future.

Working within this enormous cosmic scale, Blavatsky had to provide case examples to illustrate the credibility of her theories. Pure conjecture and hypotheses alone would not provide convincing assurance. So facts had to be arrayed to support the theories. And she thus had to draw her evidence wherever it could be found. Hindu and Buddhist cosmology, European fairy-tales, Hellenistic mystery-religions, alchemical treatises, fringe-scientific speculation and other materials were incorporated into the new mix. Using the justification of esoteric symbolic interpretation, much material categorised as imaginative in some form or other was reclaimed and relocated within the newly elaborated system. Though in fact she was consolidating the elements of a new myth, Blavatsky proceeded by using quasi-scientific references and attempts at logical

argumentation to support the speculation derived from the primary sources.

> Once more we address only those who, doubting the general derivation of myths from "the contemplation of the visible workings of external nature" . . .. think it, "less hard to believe that these wonderful stories of gods and demi-gods, of giants and dwarfs, of dragons and monsters of all descriptions, are transformations, than to believe them to be inventions." It is only such "transformations" in physical nature, as much as in the memory and conceptions of our present mankind, that the Secret Doctrine teaches. It confronts the purely speculative hypotheses of modern Science, based upon the experience and exact observations of barely a few centuries, with the unbroken tradition and records of its Sanctuaries; and brushing away that tissue of cobweb-like theories, spun in the darkness that covers a period of hardly a few millenniums back, and which Europeans call their "History," the Old Science says to us: Listen, now, to my version of the memoirs of Humanity. [55]

Motivated to convincingly present and defend a worldview that was thoroughly and absolutely grounded on mystical and occult spiritual principles, Madame Blavatsky carefully, methodically, and systematically crafted an intricate web of ideas, beliefs, claims, and assumptions, supported by her method of symbolic extrapolation applied to a wide range of materials. When she addresses “only those” who would rather believe that myths are inventions rather than “the contemplation of the visible workings of external nature,” she reveals that she in fact does believe that there is an objective factual basis of myth. Her point of contention is that the conventional view of myth as “fictions” does not do justice to the subject matter. Rather, she feels that they refer to “transformations” which occurred in “physical nature.” In some shape or other, whether distorted, rationalised, disguised, faintly recalled, myths are considered to be latent or vestigial elements of the collective unconscious, “as much as in the memory and conceptions of our present mankind.” However, rather than deducing that psychological or cultural functions may be primary factors, Blavatsky instead concludes that they are more properly reflective of actual “transformations” witnessed in the physical world at some far distant past. This is the view of myth as understood esoterically and that “the Secret Doctrine teaches.” Science, conversely, with “the experience and exact observations of barely a few centuries,” is comparatively ill equipped to make authoritative claims. The dismissal of science as manifestly unfit to provide credible explanations is based on belief that its “purely speculative hypotheses” are not as trustworthy as a more

authoritative source of knowledge. The "Old Science" on the other hand, "with the unbroken tradition and records of its "Sanctuaries," can confidently provide a more accurate and compelling narrative of the esoteric "version of the memoirs of Humanity."

The Secret Doctrine then can be seen as an ambitious and bold attempt to rehabilitate ancient and obscure sources of information by reinterpreting their meanings in light of a more modern rendering of esoteric occult and spiritual ideas and theories. As well, the injection of selected elements of contemporary thought, such as evolution, progress, electro-magnetic discoveries, data from diverse fields of scholarship from archaeology to zoology and so on, were intended to give additional legitimacy to the main premises. The choice of separate cosmological and anthropological narrative structures, each first introduced by mythical phraseology from the *Stanzas of Dzyan* and later thoroughly commented upon through rational and empirical arguments, allowed the system to appeal to both imagination and intellect. Blavatsky begins the enterprise by establishing her source of authority, stating that the knowledge conveyed carries supernatural validation, since it derives from impeccable occult sources, both past and present.

As well, her own charismatic presence is established when she describes her own special role as a confidante, student, emissary, or acquaintance of these elite spiritual experts. She initially sets a tone of anticipation by simply translating her version of the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, allowing the reader to establish empathetic connection with those ambivalent and suggestive mythically phrased statements. Then, the transition from passive imaginative attentiveness to careful analytical scrutiny is effected when Blavatsky embarks on her extensive commentaries and analyses. The myth of creation now becomes subject to clever intellectual extrapolation, exegesis, amplification, supported by examples drawn from different sources. The justification for extracting such materials from their cultural contexts is that they do not actually mean what they seem to mean, or say what they seem to say. The vast majority of humanity only cognises exoteric meanings. However, an elite minority of esoteric experts have mastered the specialised skills of encoding and decoding multiple layers of symbolic meaning. Invariably, these esoteric analyses refer to the occult and mystical realities that dominate

[55] Ibid.,

the worldview being legitimised. So full justification is felt in linking seemingly discredited, disreputable, discarded and dismissed data and theory because, esoterically interpreted, they embody truths not discernible via exoteric evaluation. Thus, all varieties of imaginative and speculative materials may be sifted through to find enough commonality to create an eclectic synthesis.

And in both cosmological and anthropological narrations, a linear historical framework of progressive spiritual evolution is assumed. Even when broken into cyclical formats, each succeeding incarnation or manifestation shows continuity, resuming at a somewhat different stage than where the previous one ended. Whether it is the progression of matter through successive kingdoms; the spiritual progress of individuals locked in the causal loop of karma/reincarnation; the succession of different root races; the transitions between different rungs of the spiritual hierarchy from cosmic manifestation to cosmic manifestation; etc., the common theme is progressive continuity. The synthesis of all supporting data to legitimise this orientation eventuated in the establishment of a newly reconstructed myth. However, Blavatsky did not treat her system as primarily an imaginative vehicle, meant to evoke empathetic resonance only through intuitive and emotional reaction. Although those elements were intrinsic by virtue of the narrative structure, she firmly and unyieldingly insisted upon establishing legitimacy based upon the logical and intellectual credibility of her claims. The bulk of her exposition is devoted to explaining how and why the esoteric occult orientation is superior to the dogmatic, rational, and scientific worldviews.

Her arguments consistently take the form of comparisons, by which other approaches are deemed inferior. Thus, she is often fixated upon trying to use reason, logic, appeal to common sense, to suggest flaws in traditional orientations and more plausible solutions via the esoteric approach. And, in establishing and defending the theosophical worldview as a deserving alternative to current traditions, it was necessary to show that such a way of interpretation had sustentative factual validity as well as a firm logical basis. Thus, Blavatsky found it necessary to claim a historical basis for the system. Rather than present an ideational structure intended to gain support through faith and emotional connection, she always insisted that her system was true in a literal and factual way, and could be both intellectually as well as emotionally compelling. The

Masters were real historical entities intimately involved influencing world history on multiple levels. The esoteric tradition extended unbroken from the very first appearance of proto-humanity. The claims of occultists have always had an empirical factual basis of some sort, even when extended beyond the artificial boundaries of science. Myths and legends were reflections of actual occurrences in nature from somewhere in prehistory. Progressive spiritual evolution could be discerned as a constant objective by proper symbolic decoding of cultural materials by trained esoteric experts, regardless of environment.

For Madame Blavatsky, everything symbolic and imaginative always was filtered through the exact same wavelength within the exact same interpretive spectrum, and invariably reduced to supporting stature for her basic premises. The one-pointedness with which she defended the occult orientation was based on belief in the literal validity of its principles. In fact, it would not be too radical a speculative surmise to say that she believed in a form of occult fundamentalism.[56] Incorporating much of the stance of conventional Victorian era morality, history was conceived as an unfolding drama, with the occult forces of "good" locked in perpetual battle with the baneful influences of the "dark" on multiple spheres of being. The existence of hierarchies struggling to influence the fate of mankind was felt to be a given, with hidden conspiratorial potential a real likelihood. Believing in the critical significance of this struggle, there was urgency in convincingly and unequivocally establishing that the occult reality was in fact a literal fact, and that one's choices and line of conduct did have real repercussions, both personally and in the occult travails of humanity.

7.5.1 *The Voice of the Silence* – Its Specialized Objective and Unique Format

While *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* are presented as explicit challenges to the defenders of the dominant worldviews, expressed both as critical and constructivist options, *The Voice of the Silence* falls into a different category. It was said to derive from the same original source as the *Stanzas of Dzyan,* from a Mahayana Buddhist instructional text called *The Book of the Golden Precepts*. While her two other major

[56] For discussion of Blavatsky's penchant towards this kind of outlook, see Theodore Roszak, *Unfinished Animal*, New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London: Harper Colophon Books, 1977, pp. 122-123.

works were massive undertakings, directed towards the systematic repudiation of the criteria of the dominant worldviews, this book is a sparse epigrammatic portrayal of a path towards spiritual realisation. Blavatsky again claims to present a translation of portions of an authentic though rare religious text, which she claims to have memorised while a student in Tibet. Though Blavatsky's assertions about physically entering and dwelling in Tibet for extended amounts of time have been disputed, the contents of this book have been noted to reflect authentic Buddhist sentiment, even if not universally acknowledged as a pure Buddhist historical document.

7.5.2 *The Voice of the Silence* – Compositional Factors

The composition of this book, as with her other major works, once again was considered to have occurred under somewhat intriguing and mystifying circumstances. Annie Besant was a visitor during the period in 1889 when it was written.

> She wrote it in Fontainbleu, and the greater part was done when I was with her, and I sat in the room while she was writing it. I know that she did not write it referring to any books, but she wrote it down steadily, hour after hour, exactly as though she were writing either from memory or from reading it where no book was. She produced in the evening that manuscript that I saw her write as I sat with her, and asked me and others to correct it for English, for she said that she had written it so quickly that it was sure to be bad. [57]

In the preface, Blavatsky indeed claims that she had memorised selected portions of the ninety small treatises that made up *The Book of the Golden Precepts*. Whether her creative literary methods actually included exercise of supersensory skills or not, the impression was conveyed to theosophists that she was composing via extraordinary means. As per Blavatsky's other main books, this too helped consolidate her authoritative status and reaffirm her active relationship with the Masters and the hidden brotherhood.

7.5.3 *The Voice of the Silence* - An Overview of Thematic Contents and Points of Emphasis

The form given to the book is roughly similar to that used in *The Secret Doctrine*, with enunciation of the fragmentary lines followed by more detailed commentary and

[57] Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Talks on the Path of Occultism*, Volume Two, Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1926, pp. 14-15.

analysis. The major difference though is that here, the critical dynamic is mostly absent. Blavatsky is not concerned with comparing, defending, justifying the contents, or challenging the entrenched mainstream orientations. Now, the length of the book is less than one tenth the size of the other two main works, with commentary mostly in the form of definitions of terms and explications of verses. As well, the Buddhist terminology and frame of reference is exclusively maintained throughout, not used as an example of eclectic synthesis to be integrated with similar ideas from other cultures or disciplines. The verses themselves are somewhat cryptic and poetically allusive, while the commentary is sparse and direct. Her main objective is to elucidate for the individual spiritual aspirant a distinctly inspirational path leading towards mystical realisation. Focus is firmly on the details of the steps to be taken; the possible hindrances that may be encountered along the way; the subjective states of mind that will prevail during the process; and the considerations relating to achievement of the ultimate goal of liberation.

The *Voice of the Silence* is divided into three sections, each based on a separate fragment from the *Book of the Golden Precepts*. These are respectively entitled "The Voice of the Silence," "The Two Paths," and "The Seven Portals." In the preface, Blavatsky states her belief that the original precepts had a legendary origin and were transmitted through various Eastern mystical schools. She said that the original precepts come from a primordial occult source, partially transmitted through an entirely symbolic language based on ideographs and taught in Tibet at the highest level of esoteric training. The knowledge discussed in the fragments is explicitly devoted to the attainment of mystical states of consciousness, but only a selected portion could be entrusted to the contemporary world because of its cynical stance regarding such matters.

> Nor could they be all translated and given to a world too selfish and too much attached to objects of sense to be in any way prepared to receive such exalted ethics in the right spirit. For, unless a man perseveres seriously in the pursuit of self-knowledge, he will never lend a willing ear to advice of this nature. [58]

However, for those who are serious and willing to devote themselves to such objectives, the book is meant as a practical compendium of advice and insight.

---

[58] H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, retrieved from Theosophical University Press Online, 1889, <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/voice/voice.htm>. (Accessed July 17, 2002).

> Therefore it has been thought better to make a judicious selection only from those treatises which will best suit the few real mystics in the Theosophical Society, and which are sure to answer their needs. It is only these who will appreciate these words of Krishna-Christos, the "Higher Self." [59]

Identification of "Krishna-Christos" as the "Higher Self" clearly signifies that the subject matter is mystical in content, and that though phrased in Buddhist terms, the substitution of equivalent terms and concepts is acceptable for those in the Theosophical Society who assume a syncretistic position.

The first fragment, "The Voice of the Silence," abounds with succinct advisory statements, preparing the student to break away from habitual patterns of thought and conduct and develop an intuitive understanding that appearances are illusory. Not by intellectual deliberation, but by listening to the "inner ear" and learning to discern what is real from alluring appearances.

> Before the soul can comprehend and may remember, she must unto the Silent Speaker be united just as the form to which the clay is modelled, is first united with the potter's mind.
>
> For then the soul will hear, and will remember.
>
> And then to the inner ear will speak—
>
> THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE [60]

The advice continues along similar lines, mostly warning about becoming entrapped by the senses and the intellect. The "Waters of Renunciation" must be entered and all desires, vices, sins left behind if real progress is to be made. Mention is made of the "five impediments," the "four modes of truth," and other references to various specific stages on the ascending path. And while many lines refer to psychological and existential dynamics in an oblique or metaphorical way, there are also numerous isolated stanzas that appear to be simple platitudes, non-specific and indirect at best in amplifying the main themes. For instance these lines seem to be thrown out to sustain mood rather than add to content, or else appear laboured and contrived metaphors (that often refer to phenomena of nature) when expressed in English.

---

[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

> The rose must re-become the bud born of its parent stem, before the parasite has eaten through its heart and drunk its life-sap.
>
> The golden tree puts forth its jewel-buds before its trunk is withered by the storm.[61]

The uneven poetic rhythm fluctuates between passages that convey strong devotional tones, practical advice, and suggestive references to spiritual content and those that seem devoid of the same inspiration. And when turning to the type of commentary used by Blavatsky, we mostly find brief footnotes of amplification that are only referential to the specific point in question. A must sparser approach than in her earlier books. Here is an example.

> The "four modes of truth" are, in Northern Buddhism, *Ku* "suffering or misery"; *Tu* the assembling of temptations; *Mu* "their destructions" and *Tau,* the "path." The "five impediments" are the knowledge of misery, truth about human frailty, oppressive restraints, and the absolute necessity of separation from all the ties of passion and even of desires. The "Path of Salvation"—is the last one." [62]

Looking at the second fragment, "The Two Paths," we find that the focus shifts to a different subject. The main issue at hand is deciding which is the proper direction to proceed once enlightenment has been obtained. There are two Paths, three great Perfections, and six Virtues that lead to mystical enlightenment. In choosing which direction to follow, there are two distinct options in terms of the type of knowledge that may be obtained. One revolves around the "Doctrine of the Eye," and consists of the contents of exoteric knowledge. That is the Buddhism presented for the masses. The other involves "the "Doctrine of the Heart," which consists of orally transmitted esoteric knowledge for the elite.

> False learning is rejected by the Wise, and scattered to the Winds by the good Law. Its wheel revolves for all, the humble and the proud. The "Doctrine of the Eye"… is for the crowd, the "Doctrine of the Heart," for the elect. The first repeat in pride: "Behold, I know," the last, they who in humbleness have garnered, low confess, "thus have I heard" …
>
> "Great Sifter" is the name of the "Heart Doctrine," O disciple. [63]

---

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/voice/voice2.htm>.

The distinction between pride for intellectually derived exoteric knowledge and humility for privately transmitted intuitive understanding reveals a scenario in which the latter is held in higher esteem and evaluated to be more spiritually authentic.

> The Dharma of the "Eye" is the embodiment of the external, and the non-existing.
>
> The Dharma of the "Heart" is the embodiment of Bodhi,* the Permanent and Everlasting.
>
> [*True, divine Wisdom.] [64]

For those having decided to follow the "Dharma of the Heart," and who proceed via the esoteric teachings, mystical realisation will occur in due course. Then, the newly enlightened aspirant must decide between two options in so far as his future course of action is concerned. He may take the "Open Way," enter the state of Dharmakaya and withdraw into private Nirvanic peace, or else he may choose the "Secret Way," deferring bliss until the end of the current cycle while continuing to incarnate out of a sense of compassion for those not yet awakened. The choice is up to the individual, though obviously the "Secret Way" is presented as the more noble and esteemed option. Renunciation based on compassion for others embodies the highest moral standard.

> Sweet are the fruits of Rest and Liberation for the sake of *Self;* but sweeter still the fruits of long and bitter duty. Aye, Renunciation for the sake of others, of suffering fellow men. [65]

As well as the explicit exhortations and clear enunciations of guidance and knowledge, the second fragment also is infused with abundant examples of overly laboured metaphors.

> The Lamp burns bright when wick and oil are clean. To make them clean a cleaner is required. The flame feels not the process of the cleaning.[66]

The main themes of the second fragment were the differentiation of the paths of study, and the enunciation of the two options available to the enlightened adherent. The third fragment, the "Seven Portals," returns again to the obstacles to be confronted and methods of achieving Nirvanic enlightenment.

---

[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

Those who choose the Eye Doctrine must take the path of "four-fold Dhyana." Though difficult, it is not as demanding or intensive as the "six Paramitas," or "gates of virtue," leading to "Bodhi and Prajna," the seventh "step of Wisdom." This is the challenge for those opting for the Heart Doctrine. These portals are "Dana," or charity; "Shila," or harmony; "Kshanti," or patience; "Virag," or indifference based on the conquest of illusion; "Virya," or the energy expended searching for truth; "Dhyana," or the path of pure knowledge; "Prajna," or wisdom sustained as an elevated state of consciousness. Mastery of these keys leads to successively higher stages of inner development. However, at each level there are specific impediments and "snares" to overcome. Only through self-mastery, the conquest of illusion, and the nullification of the passions will true realisation be attainable. Yet even at that advanced stage, a final obstacle must be overcome. That is the feeling of pride.

> A sense of pride would mar the work. Aye, build it strong, lest the fierce rush of battling waves, that mount and beat its shore from out the great World Maya's Ocean, swallow up the pilgrim and the isle—yea, even when the victory's achieved. [67]

And even after surmounting all apparent obstacles and reaching the threshold of "victory," there are still dangers to be wary of. The possibility of a relapse induced by infatuation with new modes of experience and exercise of supersensory powers is real.

> Beware, lest in the care of Self thy Soul should lose her foothold on the soil of Deva-knowledge.
>
> Beware, lest in forgetting SELF, thy Soul lose o'er its trembling mind control, and forfeit thus the due fruition of its conquests.
>
> Beware of change! For change is thy great foe. This change will fight thee off, and throw thee back, out of the Path thou treadest, deep into viscous swamps of doubt. [68]

The collapse of discipline, loss of mind control, fascination with supersensory forms of knowledge, and the difficulties of coping with new changes will potentially lead to lack of assurance and doubt. Yet if persistence prevails and this crisis is surmounted, true enlightenment will be achieved. And when it is, there is no room for doubting its

[67] Ibid., <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/voice/voice3.htm>.
[68] Ibid.

authenticity.

> He standeth now like a white pillar to the west, upon whose face the rising Sun of thought eternal poureth forth its first most glorious waves. His mind, like a becalmed and boundless ocean, spreadeth out in shoreless space. He holdeth life and death in his strong hand.
>
> Yea, He is mighty. The living power made free in him, that power which is HIMSELF, can raise the tabernacle of illusion high above the gods, above great Brahm and Indra. *Now* he shall surely reach his great reward!
>
> Shall he not use the gifts which it confers for his own rest and bliss, his well-earn'd weal and glory—he, the subduer of the great Delusion?
>
> *Nay,* O thou candidate for Nature's hidden lore! If one would follow in the steps of holy Tathagata, those gifts and powers are not for Self. [69]

Again, it is stressed that by achieving that state, the reward of personal rest and bliss is not considered the appropriate option. The moral commitment towards providing enlightened compassion for those still wrapped in ignorance is the highest good conceivable, in this hypothetical weighing of alternative idealised lines of action.

> Now bend thy head and listen well, O Bodhisattva—Compassion speaks and saith: "Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry?" [70]

Providing personal leadership in educating the suffering masses about the true good of enlightenment is the moral obligation and duty of those who personally have earned that privileged status for themselves.

In this comparatively direct and minimalist book, Blavatsky conforms more rigorously to a traditional Buddhist approach, both in spirit and in form. Whether the precepts were authentic Buddhist teachings translated verbatim, or creatively embellished and expressed in her own metaphorical terms, they yet provided a literary vehicle legitimising a mystical orientation.

This book can be seen to be compatible with the principles of the entire theosophical worldview as expressed in her other writings, but it also stands more than the others as a direct expression of pure religious sentiments and beliefs. There is no argumentation or laborious effort to logically and empirically prove that the content

[69] Ibid.

deserves outside acknowledgment. The preface begins by admitting that most of the world would not be receptive to the real message. This is grudgingly accepted without provoking the kinds of massive legitimising efforts intended to win converts that usually characterised her writings. Here, she knows who her intended audience is and addresses them directly without her usual rhetorical style. These are the minority within the minority, the theosophists who are serious about approaching a path of personal discipline leading to growth of consciousness and character. The cosmological and anthropological principles enunciated in great detail earlier are now implicit, and don't get in the way of the main theme of personal transformation. Despite possible questions about sources and authorship, the authenticity of the tone of the teachings and the expression of the sentiments have extended beyond the purely theosophical and occult milieu, garnering independent respect from such as William James, D. T. Suzuki and the Ninth Panchen Lama. [71]

7.6 Blavatsky's Major Books – Their Qualified Influence on Posterity.

Collectively, Madame Blavatsky's three major works provide the essential literary corpus of a comprehensive worldview. They confront the mainstream, authoritative traditions and attempt to deconstruct the foundations upon which they have established their dominance. They offer a detailed alternative option, constructed upon clearly enunciated principles and premises. And a path towards attainment of the most esteemed state of consciousness was described for all who were interested. Those who empathised with the orientation embraced the internal consistency of the theosophical worldview in those major works. Yet despite often laudatory reception and rapid sales of the books, they still did not create the dramatic impact on society-at-large that was desired. This partly was due to both external and internal issues. The disreputability of portions of Madame Blavatsky's private life, accusations of plagiarism in *Isis Unveiled,* and charges of fraudulent activities regarding psychic phenomena gave her a certain notoriety that mitigated against serious consideration by many And internally, the premises about the personal involvement with the Masters, the unorthodox treatment of her materials, the

[70] Ibid.
[71] See Cranston, op. cit., pp. 83-86.

disputable evidence and logical inferences for some of her theories, as well as other factors perhaps made her works appear less self-evident than was hoped for at large. For every challenge to entrenched authority and tradition, enemies were confronted. And there were many who took great zeal in finding just or unjust ways of discrediting the theosophical option. Her major works thus can be seen as "successes" in so far as they embodied the ideational system intended. But as revolutionary statements of a universally appealing worldview, they did not convincingly supplant dominant religious, philosophical or scientific traditions. Their influence was pervasive on a less massive scale, permeating through different social and intellectual milieus, broadening the popularity of occult and mystical knowledge. And the main literary works have remained the primary legacy of Blavatsky for posterity. Something of her charismatic personality is reflected through the idiosyncrasies and the nuances of her style, the clever and creative eclectic linking of materials, the impassioned and emotionally committed tone of her rhetoric, and the spiritual vision that animated her writings. Yet, despite the mixed historical results of her writings, the importance of providing a bold confrontational challenge in *Isis Unveiled*, a major theosophical opus in *The Secret Doctrine,* and a succinct spiritual guidebook in *The Voice of the Silence,* cannot be overlooked. These books have continued to be definitive sources of inspiration and erudition for a minority who feel resonance with this form of esoteric representation. We shall now look in more detail at the historical and sociological factors specific to the theosophical leadership and its "clientele."

Chapter 8

Historical and Sociological Analysis of the Early Theosophical Movement

8.1.1 Blavatsky as Initiator of the Modern Theosophical Movement

To gain a different perspective that accounts for some of its unique historical convolutions, the theosophical movement can be examined more directly as a sociological phenomenon. The preliminary assessment of the theosophical movement as an alternative, minority worldview, based upon deviant cognitive knowledge, can be expanded by introduction of some of the more familiar categories proper to the sociology of religion. We shall first try and examine some of the more significant internal historical dynamics of the theosophical movement before discussing how it may be categorised in the broader sociological context. We shall limit our historical framework to roughly the first thirty-five years of the movement, the most volatile and intriguing phase of its history. This period covers the time of the formation of the Theosophical Society through to the power struggle after Blavatsky's death and the ultimate ascendancy of the Besant-Leadbeater faction.

The first and most critically identifiable fact we can distinguish is that the nineteenth century theosophical movement was mostly shaped and defined through the vision and conceptual apparatus provided by Madame Blavatsky. And without her charismatic leadership and uncompromising promotion of the theosophical agenda, it appears unlikely that the movement could have attained its unique form. Although spiritualist theory and other occult and mystical materials were part of the contemporary minority alternative cognitive mix, it was Madame Blavatsky who quickly became noted as a knowledgeable, experienced, and flamboyant authority within the genre.[1] In fact, some of the first public descriptions of her character, background, and interests that appeared in America were written by future Theosophical Society co-founder Henry Olcott, whom she first met while they both were in Chittenden Vermont in October 1874 observing the phenomena surrounding the Eddy séances.[2] He introduced her as an expert

[1] See for example, Anonymous, *About Spiritualism (An Interview With Madame Blavatsky),* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2001, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/aboutspiritualism.htm>. (Accessed March 3, 2002). Also, Anonymous, *A Miracle Worker of To-Day,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcottpmg84.htm>. (Accessed March 2, 2002).

[2] The Eddy brothers, William and Horatio, gained notoriety as mediums capable of producing elaborate

on spiritualistic phenomena, which she claimed was based on extensive first hand knowledge and experience. Her critique of the belief that discarnate spirits were the primary source of spiritualist phenomena immediately drew attention from others as she and Olcott began their association. He quickly deferred to her claims of expertise, setting the tone of their respective roles and professional relationship. Madame Blavatsky became identified as both authoritative theoretician of the Eastern/occult/esoteric tradition and first-hand psychic/medium/mystic. Olcott on the other hand, because of his strong organisational and analytical abilities and his skill at public speaking, fit more comfortably within the administrative and proselytising sphere. His subsequent belief that he had in fact made personal contact with some of the Masters via Blavatsky's occult manipulations and through ostensible personal messages and signs furthered his assurance that there was a factual basis that confirmed and legitimated her claims and theories.

Thus, with confidence that there was a basis of supernatural credibility supporting her claims, Olcott was able to proceed firmly convinced that he was devoting his efforts to a worthy and revolutionary cause. His trust of Madame Blavatsky was based on her personal charisma, shaman-type skills, belief that the Masters sanctioned her ideas and intentions. However, that implicit trust did not sustain itself to the fullest during the entire duration of their activities. In his later reflections, though firmly committed to the theosophical worldview and esteeming Blavatsky as a specially designated messenger, he admitted a degree of naivety in his past uncritical approach.[3] Olcott to many contemporaries was in fact regarded as a dupe in Blavatsky's schemes, noted as an honest and forthright person who simply fell under her sway. His desire to partake in what he perceived was a special cause, revelatory of a transcendent wisdom, was thought to have obscured his better judgment. [4]

Madame Blavatsky was widely reputed to have been regularly engaged in

---

showings of psychic manifestation. These would often include simultaneous appearances of multiple allegedly ghostly entities of diverse backgrounds that would interact with the spectators gathered to observe such phenomena. The séances took place in a small room on their farmhouse, featuring a specially constructed cabinet in which the active medium sat. Olcott was writing a series of investigative articles for the *Daily Telegraph* in which he concluded that at least a portion of the phenomena appeared to be genuine.

[3] See H. S. Olcott, *The First Leave of T. S. History,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcott1890.htm>. (Accessed March 7, 2002).

[4] See Richard Hodgson, *Col. Olcott and Mr. R. Hodgson,* retrieved fromThe Blavatsky Archives Online,

extraordinary experiences characterised generically as supersensory, or mystical in form. As well she was noted as the primary methodical and rational expounder of theory and doctrine. From a sociological point of view, she thus can legitimately be classified to some degree exhibiting experiential/visionary characteristics of "prophet" "seer" and "magician" on the one hand; as well as fulfilling a distinctive though limited "priestly" function of doctrinal formalisation and technical exposition on the other. She was the prophetess/seer bringing a new religiously grounded and supernaturally sanctioned vision and message (albeit largely based on a different way of treating extant materials), while yet being endowed with what were interpreted as magical/supersensory powers shaped through numinous experiences in her own life. And yet she was the thoroughly rational, methodical, doggedly determined systematic architect, eager to debate and dispute the minutiae of a bewilderingly eclectic range of topics. She was a co-founder of the first organisational incarnation of the movement; the liaison between the supernatural sponsors and the public; the main source of theoretical and conceptual teachings; as well as an individual who was acknowledged as having a life history of non-prosaic behaviour and extraordinary experiences. A non-conventional innately charismatic and exotic "outsider" who yet pointed to a pedigree of noble birth and social standing. [5]

8.1.2 Olcott and the Charisma of Office

Olcott more properly exhibited the "charisma of office" than of personality or by virtue of his own extraordinary experiences. Although subsequently developing an ability to perform acts of healing, his theosophical functions were more along administrative and "priestly" lines, including extensive teaching, public speaking, and propagandising as well as organisational planning and administration. His relationship with Blavatsky began with him in obvious awe of her alleged personal relationship with the Masters and capacity to perform psychic phenomena. It also appears clear that with time his suspicions grew about the credibility of some of her claims and demonstrations.

2001, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hodgson2.htm>. (Accessed May 4, 2002).

[5] For examples of contemporaneous opinions of the early impression made by Blavatsky, see Anonymous, *Madame Blavatsky's Power. Events in the Career of a Remarkable Woman,* retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2001, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/anonmadblapower.htm>. (Accessed March 8, 2002). And, Anonymous, *The 'Complex Character of Madame Blavatsky*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/anoncomplex.htm>. (Accessed March18,

However, his loyalty to the cause and principles of the movement remained steady as he focussed on particular concerns of special interest. In his own right he was a significant figure in the revival of Buddhist pride and a contributor to educational reform.[6] His strength lay in practical action, and though believing in the authenticity of the Masters and their cause, he deferred to Madame Blavatsky as the more privileged and specially designated decipherer of the plans intended by her "bosses" (as she referred to the Masters on occasion).

8.1.3 Blavatsky's Charismatic and Authoritative Leadership Qualifications – Conformity to the Taxonomy of the Shaman

For sociological purposes, the possible verification or refutation of the contents of Madame Blavatsky's extraordinary experiences is of only tangential relevance. What is important is simply recognising that she indeed claimed to be capable of wilfully initiating as well as serving as a passive subject for various forms of non-rational and extraordinary modes of experience. And on multiple occasions, she was observed by witnesses to be apparently engaged in what appeared to be such activities. Whether under trance, through some form of self-induced technique, or initiated via other inexplicable means. Regardless of cause or verifiability, the consensus public opinion was that Madame Blavatsky possessed, claimed to possess, or was thought to possess the capacity to consistently enter unusual states of consciousness and to be able to reveal privileged esoteric information. Even if those states were nothing more than involuntary spontaneous hallucinatory intrusions or abnormal delusions on the one hand, or if they were manifestations of more transpersonal and significant levels of apperception on the other, her reputation as a psychically skilled and active practitioner was established for public consumption. Her notoriety and enigmatic appeal were perpetuated by her reputation and enhanced by her charismatic behaviour.

Blavatsky can be seen to exhibit a mix of prophet/ seer/magician characteristics and to be possessed with a super-ordinate amount of personal charisma. Even the prophet

---

2002).

[6] See Ransom, op. cit., pp. 242–244, and Howard Murphet, *Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1988, pp. 132–152 for example of Olcott's Buddhist related activities.

must be endowed with charisma, which in itself pertains to special and rare qualities of personality. The vast majority of anecdotal recollections from those having met her abound with comments about her magnetism, vivacity, psychological complexity, inclination to always be the centre of attention, captivating conversational skills, intense emotional makeup, passionate concern for her causes, and so on. The consensus opinion would indicate that in the eyes of others she was imbued with a significant amount of charisma.[7] Weber has this view of the connection between charisma, magic, and the prophet.

> … it is only under very unusual circumstances that a prophet succeeds in establishing his authority without charismatic demonstration, which in practice meant magic. At least the bearers of "new" teaching practically always needed such validation. [8]

Wach sees common psychological predispositions underlying the categories of prophet, seer, and magician, which converge in the recognition of a special charismatic status for the individual.

> Psychologically, these three types of religious activity are similar in possessing the same nervous susceptibility and sensitiveness, the same disposition to trances and ecstasy, and the same inclination to vision, audition, and "clairvoyance." In so far as these gifts are regarded as congenital, a part of the "natural" equipment of the individual, the charisma resulting from it is a personal one. [9]

Blavatsky demonstrated her charismatic/magical/prophetic nature in many ways. Via public episodes of purported occult demonstration, by appearing to be in trance and possessed by other intelligences, by proclaiming to be privy to insights and knowledge attained through supersensory means, and so on. Also, as we have noted, she possessed the traits of systematic priestly rationalist. However, in her case, classification in the priestly category would appear to be a supplementary function. Although proactive with most major organisational matters, her public institutional functions were limited. Even though a co-founder with Olcott of the Theosophical Society, she accepted the modest title of Recording Secretary in the original societal division of offices. Her major public

---

[7] See for example, Laura Holloway, *Madame Blavatsky: A Pen Picture*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives, 2001, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/holloway4.htm>. (Accessed March 30, 2002).
[8] Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1963, p. 47.
[9] Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 354.

functions more properly were undertaken via the written word or conversationally as teacher, expounder of sacred wisdom, proselytiser, and social critic. But these activities were clearly supportive of her defining and unique role as the chosen messenger and liaison between the esoteric and the exoteric domains. Late in her career she took more of an active structured role within the Society as leader of the Esoteric Group, giving semi-private instruction and teaching for a selective elite portion of the London lodge of the Theosophical Society. In this regard the following words from Wach partly apply.

> As the guardian of tradition, the priest is also the wise man, the adviser, educator, and philosopher. His various administrative duties are derived from his cultic activities. [10]

Blavatsky , in part because of her personal eccentricities, charismatic persona, and unconventionality did not conform to such a conservative and institutionalised image. She was though, most explicitly the guardian and defender of the esoteric occult tradition of knowledge that she was propagating and disseminating, as well as "advisor, educator and philosopher" in a personalized idiosyncratic style. As noted earlier, Madame Blavatsky and other theosophical spokespersons were adamant about stating that theosophy was "not a cult." From their perspective, because part of the motivation of the movement was a broad syncretistic assimilation and distillation of selected thematic materials from both sacred and secular sources, the Theosophical Society consensus opinion was that it should not be classified in traditional religious terms. Since there was no uniform and binding profession of faith required, no necessary adherence to ritualistic procedure, a voluntary option of accepting or ignoring individually defined forms of worship, theosophists felt that they had escaped typical religious classification. However, the thrusts of those objections mostly were intended to show that the theosophical movement was categorically unlike schismatic groups that deviated from mainstream religions. The internal feeling that they were not a sect or a cult does not negate the fact that the movement itself yet displays characteristics conforming to such forms of analysis

The theosophical movement and its subsequent institutions appears to have arisen primarily because Madame Blavatsky was able to galvanize the interest, and provide a comprehensive worldview encompassing a broad range of occult, spiritualist, mystical

[10] Ibid., p. 366.

and similar minority cognitive subjects. Because of her charismatic persona, her claims of expert knowledge, reputation for fluency in supersensible experience, and privileged relationship with the Masters, she seamlessly assumed a role of authority figure. An informal but dedicated cult of personality grew around Madame Blavatsky and other psychically endowed leaders during the duration of the movement. Blavatsky (the human being) was venerated during her lifetime by the most devout theosophists as a specially chosen messenger, a liaison with more advanced beings. Although the mystification and mythologizing of her role led many to feel that she as the "true adept" was an equal with her Masters, Blavatsky herself constantly deferred to their superior status. She consistently referred to herself as the messenger, the vehicle, the body, used to transmit knowledge and initiate plans made higher up in the occult hierarchy. Although she clearly aimed to demonstrate her qualifications for this intermediary role, she never claimed to be an equal to the Masters. Although utilising purported demonstrations of supersensory phenomena to enhance her own psychically grounded mystique and image, this was in support of the larger cause of the Masters. She saw her own primary role as their messenger and prophet of their message about the urgent need for a change away from the status quo of dogmatic religion, stultifying rationalism, and dehumanising materialism, towards an esoteric spiritual worldview.

As well, Blavatsky had no administrative duties per se other than nominally suggested by her Recording Secretary title.[11] Within the theosophical movement, she was recognised primarily for her charismatic qualities and as the authoritative messenger and liaison with the supernaturally sanctioning hierarchy said to be sponsoring the Theosophical Society. In this sense she clearly can be seen as a prophet of the coming new world-order, expressed as the impending shift in evolutionary cycles and sanctified by the privileged visionary insights vouchsafed to her by the Masters. Weber's distinguishing prophet criteria of a personal call and personal revelation seem to be met in Blavatsky's case. She certainly acted as if her chosen role was to proclaim the wisdom of the Masters and her status as messenger, and that this had been revealed at least at times through supersensory and visionary means.

[11] See Symonds, op. cit., pp. 84–85 regarding the nominal duties of Blavatsky as "Corresponding Secretary" and her primary role as authoritative theoretician.

Her exposition and consolidation of the ideational content, though based on reason and logic, nonetheless was partly legitimated by emphasising mythic and extraordinary associations. As a co-founder of the Theosophical Society, she acted largely informally rather than in any official capacity when advising, suggesting, and often insisting upon embarkation along particular lines of action. At times, her administrative input was expressed purely from the personal viewpoint, at other times, she claimed decisions should be made because the Masters so desired. Yet it is important to recognise that her interest in the minutiae of Theosophical Society matters was extensive. By no means was she a "hands off" aloof personage, removed from the day-to-day occurrences and issues. She in fact took very opinionated positions about all facets of the Society. Her justification would be that "the objectives of the Masters" must be the primary criteria for decisions made and actions taken. And she presented her own motives as extensions of those of the Masters. [12]

During her lifespan and beyond, she was sometimes casually and derisively referred to as a "priestess" by cynics in the public and the media. And though the loose and imprecise appellation was more for sensationalistic public consumption than anything else, her efforts at proselytising and doctrinal construction do connote some of the associations of the priestly office. So it would seem fair to say that Blavatsky performed certain functions that were "priestly," but her dominant role was as the supernaturally sanctioned, extraordinary, psychically endowed movement leader.

Carrying on the enunciation of leadership characteristics, we find that Nelson [13] provides a more inclusive categorisation when he redefines the role of shaman to include all religious leaders who posses what are believed to be mystic abilities and psychic powers, and whose leadership depends on the possession of personal charisma.
The categories Nelson delineates are mystics, prophets, mediums, healers, and sorcerers. Each of these has a specific relationship with the domain of the supernatural, although the distinctions are somewhat malleable and an individual may be fluent in more than one form of shamanism. These however are presented as ideal types. The mystic professes familiarity with ultimate reality as the result of a profoundly personal and intense

[12] See Meade, op. cit., pp. 234–239 for discussion of Blavatsky's use of the Masters for her own motives.
[13] Geoffrey K. Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 246-247.

experience of the sacred. The prophet functions as the human voice or communicator of what is believed to be transcendent intent. The medium is the source of contact with spirits on intermediate planes of reality. The healer has limited capacity to access the realms of the supernatural, restricted to functions dealing with human health. The sorcerer has the facility of utilising supernatural or magical forces to induce physical and psychological alteration. It is the cumulative sum of personal experience founded upon exercise of his natural abilities that gives the shaman his status. And his authority derives from, and is legitimated by, his personal experience of the sacred. Predominately, the shaman is clearly a strongly charismatic person.

It is important to note that position and authority derive from the possession of natural spiritual powers or gifts, and that leadership is based on charisma. Blavatsky apparently conformed in those ways. As well, the experiential basis and legitimation via personal contact with the sacred likewise were criteria that Blavatsky seems to have met. The five categories delineated by Nelson can also be applied to Blavatsky. Of those, the category least common would be of healer, though some indirect instances may be inferred. The mediumistic/magical elements are well documented in the statements regarding her fluency in trance, possession, and other altered states of consciousness. Interpreting the sorcerer criteria, it may be fair to consider Blavatsky's familiarity with such practices having been obtained during her extensive travels and exposure to different esoteric sources and teachers. And many of the phenomena attributed to her, regardless of their origin and operational mechanics, could be interpreted as examples of sorcerer-type behaviour when perceived by others.

Interestingly, although an outspoken proponent of an ultimately mystical worldview, there is minimal explicit detail about having her own mystical experience, though some personal grounds do appear likely from inferences in her writings and statements.[14] Blavatsky doesn't talk in any great detail about subjective experiences with

[14] See Cranston, op. cit., pp. 55–60, for examples of how Blavatsky undertook the quest for demonstrable occult power in hopes of subsequently acquiring more transcendent knowledge and irrefutable "mathematical" proof of mystical premises. Her own experiences are believed to be alluded to or disguised in her fiction and travel narratives, but refer more to occult phenomena than revealing classical mystical characteristics. Her most explicit reference to the techniques of mystical realisation are in *The Voice of the Silence*, which was not intended as a personal statement, but was purported to be a translation of an esoteric Tibetan text. See also Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, *Talks on the Path of Occultism. Volume Two. The Voice of the Silence*, Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1991, for a later

the classical mystical symptoms such as merging/union of self in the Absolute/God, sense of temporal and spatial transcendence, blissful rapture, and so on.[15] Her most personal hints of mystical experience pertain to her devotion to her Master and associated sensations of awe, reverence, and emotional satiation. In her writings and discussions she enthusiastically endorses such overt mystical systems as Vedanta and Neoplatonism, as well as the mystical strains in all other traditions, but her own reputation and recollections seem more grounded upon occult, magical, and other similar forms of extraordinary sensory-extended experience. [16]

The prophet role appears to be the major element of her shamanistic credentials, since much of her rhetoric pertains to defence of the Mahatmas and exposition of their message. In fact, the very effort of trying to institute a new worldview based on the authority of the Masters can be seen as a prophetic enterprise, since she is anticipating a radically different spiritually grounded future based upon a disavowal of the profane and dogmatic present. Weber says this about the role of prophet.

> For our purposes here, the personal call is the decisive element distinguishing the prophet from the priest. The latter lays claim to authority by virtue of his service in a sacred tradition, while the prophet's claim is based on personal revelation and charisma. [17]

Blavatsky's calling, as it were, has been recounted by her in describing how she believed that her Master had instructed her to form an organisation dedicated to meting out selected portions of the wisdom-tradition. Her revelation had allegedly come about through an incremental process of progressively more profound and enlightening initiations and instructions involving her Masters in their occult functions. Her charisma derived from her personality and demeanour. And even traits such as her Russian accent, allusions to exotic travels, familiarity with obscure customs and mores, as well as her idiosyncratic appearance and mannerisms may have added to her charismatic allure. Such "foreign" and "defect" factors do enter into the equation in the makeup of charismatic

---

neo-theosophical occult interpretation of this text. See Corona Trew, *The Nature of Consciousness* in *H.P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine*, op. cit. p. 67 for a view of Blavatsky as inspired by others with mystical insight rather than use of the criterion of personal experience.

[15] See as an example of many such analyses, the characteristics enunciated as "core" by W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, London: Macmillan and Company, 1961, pp. 41–133.

[16] In Meade, op. cit., pp. 464–466, the argument is made that Blavatsky's presumed psychic capacity was less dramatic than assumed, with hypnotism posited as a more prominent explanation.

leaders.

> Without a foreignness, then, that still manages to carry a flavour of familiarity and to symbolize one's roots, and without a subtlety of defect, a leader's potential for an image of charisma is seriously imperilled… Such a semi-independent leader is not as aloof or remote as he would like us to believe: we sense, from our own imagery, that he needs us as we need him. [18]

Blavatsky may be seen to have demonstrated the characteristics and exhibited behaviours consistent with most of the types enunciated by Nelson during the span of her career. Classifying her within this broad taxonomical definition of the shaman, it is clear that in her early public days she must have appeared especially charismatic and intriguing to those searching for authoritative personal expertise on occult, parascientific, mystical, and other such unusual deviant categories of experience. While spiritualism was a prominent topic of curiosity and speculation, she met Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and others who soon formed the originating nucleus of the Theosophical Society. Her conversational expertise on Eastern thought, Masonry, Rosicrucianism, Western Occultism, and other subjects, as well as engaging discussion of exotic travels, mysterious teachers, and unusual experiences helped entrench her charismatic reputation.

As well as the traits of charisma and the varieties of shaman-type experiences, there are other categories that seem to typify her behaviour. Ellwood has presented an interesting interpretation of Blavatsky and Olcott as exemplifications of the liminal religious personality, perpetually embarking upon spiritual quests in which physical wanderings and change of locations reflect an inner striving. This ultimate motivation is for a transformation of consciousness from the prosaic to an enhanced spiritual state of being. And the personality configurations of such a role are characterised by such terms as sacred misfit, wandering friar, holy man, clown, court jester, or shaman. This individual is an "outsider" living on the fringe of conventionality, and stands as an indicator of the possible inversion of normal social structures and values.

> All her life, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-91) personified the vocation of permanently dwelling in or near liminality. With her exotic accent, hints of an adventurous past, imported cigarettes, rough-edged tongue, amazing psychic phenomena, and aura of being an envoy of mysterious powers, she was always a wanderer, a colourful misfit in whatever society she found herself. She spoke, like

---

[17] Weber, op. cit., p. 46.
[18] Irvine Schiffer, *Charisma*, New York: The Free Press, 1973, pp. 32-33.

> a magus of old, of having received occult initiations in the East and of wandering to arcane shrines of wisdom…
>
> Both Blavatsky and Olcott had backgrounds of status within the established social structure, as different as those backgrounds were… Neither of the future Theosophists, however, found the status satisfactory. [19]

The peculiarities of her demeanour and her introduction as a multilingual Russian noblewoman turned spiritual adventuress, who had penetrated deep into the hidden mysteries of those exotic locales likewise added to this mystique.

8.2.1 Early Theosophical Society Membership

While gaining a reputation as an expert via her articles and discussions on such topics, a circle of the earnest, the curious, and those seeking an alternative spiritual worldview soon gravitated towards Blavatsky. Some of the people she had met as speculative enquirers searching for spiritualistic, occult, parascientific and mystical knowledge played important parts in the early establishment of the Theosophical Society The formation of the Society itself came about as a logical extension of informal meetings and gatherings, often with Blavatsky as the centre of attention.

> Topics of conversation, galvanized by Blavatsky's profound and witty comments included "the phallic element in religions; recent wonders among mediums; history; the souls of flowers; Italian characters; the strangeness of travel; chemistry; poetry; Nature's trinity; Romanism; gravitation; the Carbonari; jugglery; Crookes' new discoveries about the force of light; the literature of magic"… [20]

From such gatherings and subsequent publicity engendered by newspaper interviews and word-of-mouth dissemination, Madame Blavatsky's reputation spread, making her what might be considered as a minor "underground" celebrity amongst those attracted to consideration of alternative philosophies and theoretical opinions.[21] The idea of forming a society for more formal discussion was proposed during one of these gatherings by

---

[19] Robert S. Ellwood Jr., *Alternative Altars*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 106-107.

[20] Gomes, op. cit., p 84.

[21] See for example, Anonymous, *A Visit to Madame Blavatsky*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/commericialgazettecinnnati.htm>. (Accessed March 7, 2002). Also, Anonymous, *Theosophy in New York. Facts About Mme. Blavatsky, Her Powers and Her Religion*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/nyworld1886.htm>. (Accessed March 9, 2002).

Olcott, and confirmed by Blavatsky "nodding assent." [22]

The original members [23] consisted of W.L. Alden, an editorialist with the New York Times who later became a critic and disavowed his connection. Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, a veteran spiritualist medium and author of a book called *Art Magic*, which appeared at the same time as *Isis Unveiled* and discussed similar themes and concepts. She too became a later enemy, threatening a lawsuit when her book was linked to the Theosophical Society, later charging that *Isis Unveiled* was in fact based on a stolen manuscript. Her husband, Dr. W. Britten, publisher of the spiritualist paper *Nineteenth Century Miracles* also was an original member who quickly dropped out of the Society. John Storer Cobb was an English Barrister and Doctor of Laws, a leader in the Cremation Movement who also lost interest and withdrew. George H. Felt was a New York engineer and lecturer on the esoteric side of ancient architecture who similarly disappeared from the Society. His lecture on proportion in the Pyramids immediately preceded the motion for forming the Society. William Quan Judge was a twenty-four year old law clerk at the time, and later became a major Society figure, leading an American secession after a bitter leadership dispute with Olcott and Besant. Dr. E. De Lara was a European scholar who remained a member. C. M. Massey was an English barrister with a strong interest in spiritualism. His professional reputation was besmirched when it was discovered that an experiment of Blavatsky's involved him as recipient of alleged psychically materialised letters. He later became a founding member of the Society for Psychical Research and testified against and disavowed Blavatsky when she was under investigation. Herbert D. Monachesi was a New York newspaper writer who dropped out of the Society. Henry J. Newton was a wealthy New Yorker, president of the Society of Spiritualists and an expert on photography. He was elected the original Treasurer of the Theosophical Society, but quickly left the organisation when he realised that revelations of the miraculous would not be immediately forthcoming. Dr. Seth Pancoast was a former professor at a medical college, and an expert on the Kabala. Psychically sensitive, he wrote for spiritualist publications and remained a member his whole life. Charles

[22] Gomes, op. cit, p. 86.
[23] For an insider perspective, see R. B. Westbrook, *Reminiscences of Original American Theosophists*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2002,
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/westbrook.htm>. (Accessed November 26, 2002).

Southeran came from a famous family of booksellers. A political activist, his public appearances were felt inappropriate by Blavatsky, and his resignation was accepted. He denounced Blavatsky publicly and provoked a reaction in the Society necessitating the use of secret handshakes, passwords and signs. He later apologised and returned to the Society, aiding Blavatsky with literary work during the time she was writing *Isis Unveiled*. However, he again became an enemy and departed from the Society. Judge R.B. Westbrook was a professor of philology and a Vice-President of the Society. However, he appears to have played an inconsequential role and is not mentioned subsequently. Rev. J.H. Wiggin was the editor of the Liberal Christian, but resigned in a matter of months. C. E. Simmons, M.D. was a New York physician, and did not significantly figure in organisational events. Neither did James. Hyslop, or H.M. Stevens.

From this group of original members, it can be seen that the cross-section of educational and professional backgrounds was relatively sophisticated, and mostly drawn from middle and upper classes. However, by the percentage of those original members who did not remain a part of the Society for very long, and may have found explicit points of grievance, it also appears that the emerging Society was unable to adequately prove viable enough to retain interest and loyalty. The very general intent of the Society as it approached inception was this.

> In consequence of a proposal of Col. Henry S. Olcott, that a society be formed for the study and elucidation of Occultism, the Cabala, etc. [24]

Once the constitution, by-laws, objects, offices, and institutional elements had been settled upon, it seemed that specific objections and complaints were more likely to lead to dissent than the original non-specific "study and elucidation" intentions.

8.2.2 Olcott and Blavatsky's Leadership of the Theosophical Society

The real Theosophical Society leadership came from Blavatsky and from Olcott. They were effectively co-workers in the effort to provide what they considered more credible legitimation for psychic phenomena than currently prevailed within the spiritualist environment itself. In a sense then, the theosophical movement may be viewed

[24] Ibid.

as a schism of spiritualism in the sense that the spiritualist movement provided an existing framework that was partly amicable to some of the tenets incorporated into theosophy. Blavatsky stressed that there was an authentic occult basis for much of what manifested in the spiritualist milieu, but that the explanations used by spiritualists was often simplistic, naïve, distorted by Christian and scientific categorisations. In attempting to rehabilitate the psychic element from popular interpretations and integrate it within her own eclectic theoretical mix, she incurred intense wrath from a segment of the spiritualist base. On the other hand, her efforts at presenting a broader frame of reference and quasi-scientific objectivity attracted a number of supporters and admirers. While drawn to Blavatsky initially by her charisma and apparent depth of knowledge on occult and related topics, Olcott was gradually informed of the wider mystical/occult hierarchal worldview that encompassed spiritualist phenomena and provided a more profound interpretative rationale.

> Madame Blavatsky, whom he now saw frequently, was sowing in his mind the seeds of an idea that spread beyond the horizons of the meagre spiritualistic philosophy. Gradually she let him know that, scattered in different parts of the world, but united in aims and work, that there was a secret Brotherhood of Adepts. There were advanced yogins with many supernatural powers. Even the *chelas* (pupils) of these Adepts had developed extrasensory powers. Adepts, and some of their *chelas*, could, for instance, travel astrally in full consciousness, and if necessary materialize their astral bodies. In other words they could, if they wished, appear as a phantom to anyone…
> Eventually she told him that this mysterious Brotherhood was, for its own high purposes, to some extent using the new upsurge of spiritism in the modern world…
> Well, who could say what occult forces worked behind the scenes? If, as Madame said, a secret Brotherhood of White Magicians existed… and was using its special powers, and spectacular phenomena, as shock tactics to lead to the spread of a non-materialistic philosophy of life, then that is what the world of the 1870's needed. [25]

Olcott made a personal commitment to Blavatsky and the cause of the Masters, withdrawing from his family, rearranging and eventually abandoning his legal career, finding and then sharing lodgings with Blavatsky. They were soon cohabiting together for practical purposes as they sought to initiate the theosophical enterprise in earnest. The

[25] Howard Murphet, *Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1988, pp. 45-46.

official theosophical position was that the relationship was an entirely Platonic and fraternal friendship, based upon mutually beneficial and reciprocally useful needs. Olcott was able to bring organisational leadership and focus to the movement while at the same time being available to help Blavatsky in her literary efforts. She was able to attain the security and routine needed to produce a thorough and extensive exposition of the theosophical stance and do the work of the Masters. As well, Olcott's commitment was reinforced by the mysterious and alleged occult reception of letters from the Masters, urging him to put all his efforts into the cause, abandon his current way of life, and implicitly trust in Blavatsky's claims, actions, motives.

The relationship was also one in which gender roles did not clearly define the division of power and office. Blavatsky was noted by many contemporaries to behave in a "man-like" manner, both in terms of her demeanour and her appearance. Puttick, for example, classifies Blavatsky as "male-identified" because of her masculine role-behaviour. [26] She surmises that in spite of this, as a woman Blavatsky was more likely to be denigrated than Olcott, even though she was clearly the more valuable contributor.

> Blavatsky outshone Olcott both as a charismatic leader and formulator of Theosophical doctrine, and is much better known than him, but has widely been condemned as a charlatan—a fate perhaps more likely to fall on female than male leaders. [27]

The presence of strong charismatic and visionary female theosophical leaders has been a common phenomenon in the history of the movement.[28] Comprehensive discussion of the possible reasons for this would involve hypotheses taking us far beyond our delimited topic, though it should be noted that in the history of the broad theosophical movement, many such leading figures indeed were of this feminine type. From Blavatsky rival Anna Kingsford and contemporary Emma Britten to subsequent individuals as Annie Besant, Katherine Tingley, Alice Cleather, Alice Bailey, Elizabeth Prophet, Dion Fortune, and others, charismatic female leadership representatives have often been in the forefront.

---

[26] Elizabeth Puttick. *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality and Spiritual Power*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, p. 192.
[27] Ibid. p. 184.
[28] For discussion of Blavatsky, Besant, and Tingley, and the inferences drawn regarding Blavatsky's androgynous characteristics, see James Santucci, *Women in the Theosophical Movement*, retrieved from Theosophical History, 1990, <http://www.theohistory.org/womenints.html>. (Accessed November 12, 2002).

However, in practical implementation, female leadership has also been most effective with an efficient male partner. Kingsford and Maitland; Blavatsky and Olcott; Besant and Leadbeater; to a lesser degree, Judge and Tingley; Mark and Elizabeth Prophet. Narrowing our focus to the two pairs under consideration within our time span, perhaps differing conclusions may be reached. Blavatsky was the dominant visionary with natural charisma while Olcott was the efficient practical organiser, adapting to his role and acquiring the charisma of office. With the other pair, Leadbeater was the primary visionary with strong charisma while Besant emerged as a natural fit in the position of institutional leader. However, her charisma may have equalled or surpassed that of Leadbeater while Olcott was less innately qualified or effusive than Blavatsky. However, in both cases, the female was publicly recognised as the natural and authoritative leader of the partnership.

In the initial partnership, the relationship between Blavatsky and Olcott has been represented as a harmonious and mutually respectful collaboration. The traditional theosophical narrative of the faith, vision, dedication, selflessness of the Founders in their work to actualise the ideals of their cause has received more critical treatment in later years. Besides the salacious aspersions of enemies and opponents, which may or may not have any factual basis and cannot be definitively treated, questions have arisen about the gullibility of Olcott in his response to the claims of Blavatsky and the Masters. In writing his memoirs decades later, Olcott admitted in retrospect that he might have been misled or deceived. And Blavatsky mentions in her letters that Olcott was a "psychologized baby," [29] an apparent reference to possible hypnotic suggestion, or at least, easy manipulation and control. In the letters purported to come from the Masters, at times an almost intimidating and self-interested tone can be detected about matters which bear no connection to their ostensible aims or reflect their supposed spiritual supremacy. Here is Godwin's view about the intent of the letters of "Master Serapis."

> Viewed in such a context, Serapis's letters to Olcott have little of the reverence and the high moral tone one might expect of an adept, and virtually no indication of how the disciple might proceed on the quest to perfection, beyond indulging in a fascination with occult phenomena. They read more as the advice of a Machiavellian schemer than as the words of a "Master of Wisdom." Serapis… seems mainly concerned to bind Olcott to his cause by way of occult promises

[29] Godwin, op. cit., p. 298.

and financial ties. [30]

Olcott's fascination with occult phenomena apparently made him susceptible to the sway of Blavatsky's charisma and the authority that her own psychic/shamanistic talents implied. When the communications from the Masters were accepted as genuine productions of supernatural forces, he was able to commit on an emotional and a rational basis to the cause enunciated by Blavatsky and sanctioned by the Masters. His role as Theosophical Society President began based on trust in the authenticity of the hierarchy of authority, extending from spiritual planes through the Masters, into the Theosophical Society, which thus gave his own office special self-sufficient charismatically endowed status. [31]

If the Masters are the hidden sponsors of the Theosophical Society, then the role of President must carry with it assurance that the line of communication remains efficacious. However, initially the office of the President was mostly a symbol of authority rather than the real seat of power. Olcott conducted institutional business, made practical and financial arrangements, presided at meetings, gave speeches, and accepted responsibility for organisational affairs. However, he was, as President, more subservient and passive regarding long term planning and overall strategy, dependent on Blavatsky as prophetess of the cause, and on communications from the Masters to validate decisions or suggest directions for activity. Ironically, after leaving America, settling in India, and converting to Buddhism, his own sense of self-confidence and justification in the role as President led to more independent exercise of authority. This incremental distancing from Blavatsky caused increasingly greater conflict between them, especially during the latter years of her life.

Still exercising organisational sway via personal charisma, a record of supersensory experiences, expertise and authority in occult and mystical knowledge, status as emissary of the Masters, the damage to her reputation in the Hodgson exposure created a credibility gap for many. Her disreputable notoriety delegitimised her own position and the reception of the theosophical worldview for many. However, it also

[30] Ibid., p 291.
[31] See K. Paul Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters*, op. cit., pp. 198–201, and Ransom, op. cit., pp. 286–315.

accented her charisma and added to her mystique for others. From the point-of-view of sceptics, the continual allegiance and loyalty directed to Blavatsky in spite of her public disgraces seemed incomprehensible. As well as her relentless efforts to maintain the belief in the supernatural agencies allegedly operating for promotion of theosophical objectives. Here is a representative sceptical position

> Even if one cannot accept the orthodox Theosophical explanations of these phenomena … one is left in a state of wonder at their magnitude. Surely the physical and mental effort expended in incessant letter writing in various hands, and the production of multi-volume works of incomprehensible philosophy and pseudo-anthropology, the continuous behind-the-scenes arrangement of marvels – and interspersed, the seeming placid at-homes charged with quiet electricity, delighting the most unsusceptible of guests—surely all this was more than a great hoax or a great joke. Blavatsky was, at the least, one of history's supreme role-players. She was completely unendowed with the very physical attributes of an actress. She never, in fact, faced audiences—it was Olcott who performed in public—yet in *tete-a-tete*, or in the privacy of her own room, she convinced her followers and ultimately herself of the reality of a cast of characters far more fascinating than those found on most of the world's stages of the 1880s. Whether she achieved this with the help of hashish or by sheer imaginative paranoia matters little. The performances were convincing enough, and satisfying enough, to carry her through all manner of exposure and denunciations, to new triumphs over and over again. She had one other attribute of a great actress. She had periodic moments of pure sanity in which she was amused, pleased, or terrified at her own performances. It was their quality that removed her above her disciples, most of whom had not a grain of humour, and were either dupes or foils or conscious accessories. [32]

This view suggests that Blavatsky was driven by a desire to be the centre of attention, to manipulate, control, and exert influence over others through staged performances. However, even if a valid interpretation, it is not contradictory to the possibility of Blavatsky being motivated by authentic religious impulses. From her perspective, it is conceivable that any means were felt to be justified, and sanctified by her calling, and thus fair in promoting her spiritual vision of reality. Apparently firmly convinced and assured of the superiority of her beliefs and ideas, she may have utilised all of her innate abilities and all possible techniques to try and support her position. As well, the very use of deceptive and misleading methods to make what is felt to be a more important existential statement conforms to the profile of the shaman and the psychology of the

[32] Warren Sylvester Smith, *The London Heretics: 1870 – 1914*, London: Constable, 1967, pp. 154-155.

trickster.

Ellwood implies that, rather than being an aberration and atypical of her personality, her penchant for indulging in trickery and disruption was part of an overall psychological complex.

> Three ways in which this trickery can be related to Madame Blavatsky's vocation come to mind. First, she was like a shaman, with her preternatural guides, and shamans commonly employ both sleight-of-hand and inflated narratives about their own supernatural inclinations to facilitate belief and confidence in their clients. Second, she was … like a trickster in that she enjoyed fooling people and thereby deflating the pretensions of society, a labor congenial to the genuine outsider and denizen of two worlds—the trickster is at once righteous, comic, and amoral. Third, the evidence suggests she may have had at least a mild case of dissociation or multiple personality … While pathological if extreme, some degree of multiple personality may comport with many important religious phenomena: visions, possessions, and inspiration. When one learns how to "trigger" the shift, even while attributing it to supernatural overshadowing, it facilitates mediumship and shamanism. [33]

Ellwood notes three components that may, collectively, account for Blavatsky's behaviour. These are that "she was like a shaman," that she was "like a trickster," and that "she may have had at least a mild case of dissociation or multiple personality." These three traits may be supported by noting some of the themes of our earlier discussions. Nelson's classification of shaman characteristics appear to generally represent Blavatsky's public persona and support the theory that she did, indeed, within the framework of her late nineteenth century environment, exhibit shaman-like characteristics. The behavioural predilections of the trickster are here adduced to account for Blavatsky's tendencies to indulge in trickery and deception. And use of Gowan's taxonomy supports the theory of dissociation or multiple personality being directly related to discrete kinds of numinous and visionary experience. If we include Evans' theory of transitional triggers and the Para-Jungian speculation about the contents of imaginal experience, further hypotheses about the specific forms of her experience may be suggested. And factoring in what was motivationally relevant to her (namely, the legitimising of the theosophical worldview), we may get a fairly comprehensive look at the number of influences that were operative when Blavatsky was engaged in defining

[33] Ellwood, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

the theosophical mindset. [34]

Olcott meanwhile had grown into a more comfortable fit as President, particularly in his activities geared to reviving Buddhist pride and tradition as well as promotion of other Eastern cultural and educational projects. His belief in the cause had gradually become a matter of personal conscience and principle, less dependent on Blavatsky's authoritative interpretations. And though not totally estranged, a certain element of cautious distancing grew between them. Particularly when Hodgson's critique and other accusations of suspicion were factored into his overview. At one point when Blavatsky's machinations became too overbearing, he offered his resignation. A compromise agreement was reached in which Blavatsky permanently left India while he remained president at Adyar. In subsequent years, particularly with the introduction of Annie Besant into the Society and the presidential ambitions of W.Q. Judge becoming more pronounced, issues of leadership became the primary concern of the movement.

8.2.3 Theosophical Society Organisational Dynamics

During Blavatsky's lifetime the Theosophical movement was broader than just the Theosophical Society. Disputes about content and direction as well as jealousies and struggles for organisational power and status ensued virtually from the outset. A major bifurcation developed in the movement as the tone and content of Blavatsky's writings shifted in emphasis and empathy. The major thrust of *Isis Unveiled* was the rehabilitation and promotion of an esotericism grounded in Western occult and mystical sources. Reincarnation is almost completely absent from the text, though later enthusiasts have tried to show that it was mostly implied. However, by the time of *The Secret Doctrine*, a much more Eastern oriented presentation emerged. As well, the transference of the Theosophical Society headquarters (and Blavatsky and Olcott) to India was interpreted as a prioritisation of Eastern interests. Many who did not share the apparent transfer to a more Eastern frame of reference rebelled or left the Theosophical Society to forge more accommodating systems.[35] Amongst those who at first tried to change the orientation,

[34] Gowan's typology was discussed in chapters 5, and pertinent elements of the theories of Evans and the Para-Jungians in chapter 6.

[35] A notable example was Rudolph Steiner, who formed his own theosophical offshoot, The Anthroposophical Society. See Geoffrey Ahern, *Sun At Midnight: The Rudolph Steiner Movement and the*

but instead created her own organisation was Anna Kingsford. Intellectually equal, at least, to Blavatsky, and actively experienced in psychic and visionary experience, she was noted as a charismatic and passionate speaker. At first she agreed to an uneasy accommodation with the Theosophical Society by keeping a separate lodge dedicated to a Western esoteric orientation in distinction to the official lodge in London controlled by A,P. Sinnett. However, distrust of Blavatsky and her claims about Masterly sanctions, and the unhappy with the emphasis on Eastern doctrine, she defected from the Theosophical Society. [36]

This and many other withdrawals, transferences of allegiance, casualties of power struggles were in large part exacerbated by the very organisational structure of the Theosophical Society. The institutional structure featured grass roots local groups in different cities or areas known as lodges, each of which was individually sanctioned on receipt of official charter from the world body headquarters at Adyar. Within the lodge structure, decisions were made by democratic vote. And as the number of lodges in different countries grew, they were organised into national sections, each with its own decision-making ruling council. Though the lodge members elected the councils of the sections, a power struggle between all three levels of organisation often ensued. Section councils frequently fought against both the local lodges and the international corporate leadership as cliques and individuals sought to gain ascendancy, implement their own policies, and promotion of their particular interpretation of doctrines and objectives. In 1886 Judge led the first American section, with other countries likewise instituting their own sections. England in 1888, India in 1891, Australia and Sweden in 1895, New Zealand in 1896, the Netherlands in 1897, and France in 1899, with other countries following in the course of the next three decades. Because the initial objectives and methods of achieving those goals were never precisely enunciated in the early Theosophical Society manifesto, enough legitimate discretionary territory remained for factions to arrive at their own formulations. And with Blavatsky's death, the cohesiveness localised around her persona quickly dissipated into an ongoing series of battles,

---

Western Esoteric Tradition, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press, 1984.

[36] See Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford, Madame Blavatsky, and the Theosophists*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2001, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/maitland1913.htm>. (Accessed October 22, 2002).

accusations, personality conflicts, clashes of ambition, genuine disagreements about treatment of content, direction to pursue, and goals to prioritise.

8.2.4 Problems of Succession and the Criterion of Masterly Sanctification

Despite the fluid and malleable organisation structure, a shared criterion for legitimising claims of theosophical leadership was the stamp of Masterly approval. The legitimacy of authority in the Theosophical Society always was grounded upon the prerequisite of Masterly approval and sanction. By initially stating that the Theosophical Society was formed by order of the Masters to help effect a change in public worldviews towards a more spiritual orientation, any line of action or statement of principle would have to be justified by conforming to those sentiments. Whoever could therefore prove or establish by evidence or logical reasoning that they were legitimately acting according to the will of the Masters would thus be in position to wield power. The office of President was assumed to automatically carry with it that assurance. However, where dissenting opinion was supported by purported evidence of the Masters intentions, the question then became a matter of deciding which claim was more authentic and believable. Madame Blavatsky, as the first prophetess of the Masters for the Theosophical Society was in the unique position of having been acknowledged as their emissary and co-worker. However, the office of President also carried with it the assumption of Masterly sanctification. As well, the existence of the presumed independently emitted “Mahatma letters” to selected individuals provided another seemingly reliable ground for interpreting their will.

Another channel of contact with the Mahatmas was through alleged personal conversation or apparitional presence. Blavatsky, Olcott and others claimed to have had normal in person conversations with the Masters. In addition, a number of apparitional encounters were believed to have occurred. And perhaps most problematical in so far as credibility is concerned, it was an accepted and taken-for-granted assumption that “astral visits” via clairvoyance and dreams was a legitimate and cognitively trustworthy means of communication with the Masters. The premise that the inner self was cognisant and active in astral form during sleep was a basic theosophical tenet. Thus, claims about out-of-body meetings with the Masters during sleep were admissible arguments. No matter how allusive, elusive, or non-verifiable the contents of those purported meetings may

have been. Disputes over the credibility or authenticity of all of these sources of possible Masterly communication plagued the future history of the theosophical movement. [37]

8.2.5 Leadership Dispute and Conflicting Endorsements

After the death of Madame Blavatsky in 1891, the theosophical movement entered a phase of leadership conflict. During her lifetime, it was assumed by Society loyalists that despite "outsider" debunking of her claims to supernatural communication with the Masters, Madame Blavatsky was yet the most authoritative representative of their will and intentions. With the loss of her personal charisma and expertise, the Society was left to stand on the beliefs, principles, ideals built into its ideational structure and the leadership skills and charisma of others. Olcott retained the stature of his office, but without exuding the same charismatic presence of Blavatsky. Questions quickly arose from critics who felt that the supernatural endorsement from the Masters would be withdrawn or diminished. In his own conscience he believed he was conducting Society business the way the Masters had intended, and that his subjective communications via occult or astral channels was yet legitimate. In 1892 for example, during a period of internal leadership struggle, Olcott believed that the Masters had been in direct communication with him.

> On 10 February the president clairaudiently received a message from his Masters to the effect (a) that a messenger from Him would be coming … : (b) that the relationship between Himself, H.P.B. and myself was unbreakable: (c) That I must be prepared for a change of body, as my present one has nearly served its purpose: (d) That I had not done well in trying to resign prematurely: I was still wanted at my post, and must be content to remain indefinitely, until He gave me permission to abandon it: (e) That the time was not ripe for carrying out my scheme of a great international Buddhist League … : (f) That all the stories of Him having cast me off and withdrawn his protection were false, for he kept constant watch over me and would never desert me. [38]

This enunciation of messages was believed to be an authentic announcement from the

---

[37] Blavatsky, Olcott and other theosophical figures have claimed to have had person-to-person discussions with entities they claimed or believed were Masters. See K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Brotherhood,* op. cit., pp. 1–15 for examples of such scenarios. The importance of purported dream or "astral" communication grew under the leadership of Besant, Leadbeater and Arundale. See for example, Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Inner Life.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1978, pp. 1–31. Also, K. Paul Johnson, op. cit., pp. 193–194.
[38] Ransom, op. cit., pp. 287–288.

Master, and allowed Olcott to feel morally and objectively justified in believing that he still was upholding the legitimate work of his office, sanctified by Masterly approval. In any event, confident in the Masters authoritative commendation, Olcott confronted Judge in the struggle for presidency of the Theosophical Society.

Judge, who in 1888 had been made Vice-President of the entire society, had increased American membership to over six thousand, and made that section the most profitable. He claimed to be the legitimate inner esoteric heir of Blavatsky, while Olcott was considered only the outer exoteric corporate leader. Judge too needed to show Masterly endorsement of his own candidacy. The office of President was such that the prerequisite qualification required that the leader have direct access to the Masters. Judge had made claims of such connections, especially in letters that he said he had received. However, despite Theosophical Society members belief in the continued proactive interest of the Masters in their organisation, and the continuity of their relations, cynical suspicion of motives appeared to become an unavoidable issue in such struggles for power. Judge now was accused of using fraudulent letters to give the impression that the Masters favoured him as president.

> A certain amount of opinion had formed that Mr. Judge was issuing letters purporting to be in the handwriting of a Master, with His signature, and some had upon them the impress of the "seal" bought so long before at Delhi by Col. Olcott, because he thought it resembled the Master M's cryptogram. Judge denied having done so. A little later he asked the Colonel not to force an inquiry into the "bogus letters" and the "Lahore brass" i.e. the Delhi seal. [39]

With claim and counter-claim carefully construed to reflect the alleged wishes of the Masters, and defended by clever and obtuse arguments, leadership of the Theosophical Society became as much a matter of trust and faith in the individual as it did on disputable pieces of evidence said to reflect the will of the Masters.

8.2.6 The Veneration of Blavatsky and the Basis of "Blavatskyism"

Another new factor entering the equation was the emerging veneration of Madame Blavatsky as an avatar, or sainted presence, now raised above the delimiting flaws intrinsic to her human personality. Since her output had come to an earthy

[39] Ibid., p. 289.

cessation, all her writings, teachings, instructions, opinions, attained the status of "holy writ" for a portion of the theosophical movement. As the final authority on matters of doctrine, the Masters, and organisational objectives, it was felt that the "true transmission" of theosophy had been received relatively self-contained and intact. And the goal of the movement should be to further clarify and embody her vision rather than venture into unexplored speculative territory. This was especially so in regards to the Masters, who were felt to have been working with and through Blavatsky, but might not be readily accessible or active in a different organisational configuration. The faction mostly loyal to Judge generally expressed that perspective.

Olcott was first thrown into conflict with those who considered that the theosophical movement as it had existed under Blavatsky had now become a closed and complete self-contained system. He began to keep a diary to try and clarify his memories and observations on the changing dynamics of the movement.

> His object in writing this work was not to provide material for future historians but to "combat a growing tendency within the Society to deify Madame Blavatsky." There were disturbing signs that a new sect was springing up around her memory – a sect of people who, when challenged on the intrinsic reasonableness of one of their statements, would answer with restrained breath, "But you know she said so …" as if that closed all debate.
> This raised the Colonel's bristles. To him *no* person should be taken as final authority on matters occult and spiritual. In this he was true to the teachings of his Master and his late colleague. For this freedom of thought, this absence of authoritarianism, he had continually fought.
> "It was but too evident," he writes … "that unless I spoke out what I alone knew, the true history of our movement could never be written." … [40]

The fear of a "sect springing up around her memory" did not materialise into a formal organisation replete with rituals or worship. Although for some devotees the personal veneration extended quite deeply. However, the legend of her life story acquired more of a mythical status within theosophical circles. The importance of her role as messenger of the Masters, her own calling and extraordinary skills, and the revelation of the large content of knowledge and theory that was her legacy became the primary elements pertaining to that narrative.[41]

---

[40] Murphet, op. cit., p.251

[41] See, Daniel H. Caldwell, *"Bear Witness!" Who Was the Real H.P.B.?*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2002, < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/whitelotus2000.htm>. (Accessed April 10,

Olcott recognised the possible dangers of a revisionist historicism when he noted that the true history of the theosophical movement could never be written from the vested vantage point of a mythologized interpretation of events. And part of that trend to special veneration and esteem eventuated in what was characterised as the "back to Blavatsky," "Blavatskyism," or "pure theosophy" movement. That trend drew sharp distinction between the theosophical claims and ideas propagated by Blavatsky and the later derisively labelled "Neotheosophy" which emanated from the Theosophical Society under the Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater ascendancy. There also were more general social and philosophical differences which may have been implicit before but which began to surface with Blavatsky's exit. The Judge forces, which consisted of most American and some British and European groups, preferred a focus on the Western occult and mystical tradition and were less than sympathetic with Indian causes and doctrines. The official Adyar-based organisation, led by Olcott first and Besant next, were more attuned to Hindu and Buddhist thought and terminology, and became more directly involved with Indian social issues. As well, the Besant and Leadbeater embellishment and revision of Blavatsky formulated myth and doctrine ventured along lines felt inappropriate, delusionary, and even heretical to the pure and original teachings. For example, this quote from a pamphlet on recommended books for study illustrates the strong emotional reaction felt by those maintaining loyalty to a " pure Blavatsky" version of theosophy.

> Lists have been prepared by those who prefer Neo-theosophy and psychic trash. An analysis of these lists shows that the majority of the books are by those who prefer to forget Blavatsky and the Masters, and are intent on destroying real Theosophy. The purpose of this list is to show what are real Theosophical works, to those who have been led to believe the psychic and religious rubbish of the Neo-Theosophists … . The works of H.P. Blavatsky have served as a nucleus, which H.P.B.'s students used for their material. [42]

8.2.7 The Besant-Leadbeater Faction

The schism in the movement began with Blavatsky's death and the battle for control between Olcott and Judge. The arrival of Besant and Leadbeater as major Theosophical Society influences however occurred during the last years of Blavatsky's

---

2002).

life. Leadbeater, an ex-clergyman who at that time made no claims of possessing extraordinary psychic powers, was hurriedly given Blavatsky's assurances that he had been accepted as a chela of the Masters after his continued entreaties.[43] And in lieu of the usual seven-year probationary period, he was put to use as a multi-purpose aide, performing various (often menial) tasks set by Blavatsky and Olcott over the next few years in different (mostly Eastern) locales.

During this time he claimed that during a forty-two day span, through intensive effort and the help of his Master, he was able to make a dramatic breakthrough and highly cultivate his psychic powers. It was upon the claim of advanced clairvoyance that his future organisational status and authority was founded. In recounting his life history, Leadbeater painted a picture in which his attraction to theosophy (and that of his organisational associates) appeared destined to occur at that particular historical juncture. According to his clairvoyantly-inspired narratives, their collaboration was a continuation of similar collective activities undertaken in past lives amongst the same group of elite theosophists. Subsequently, it was established that much of his early biographical storyline had been embellished and romanticised. Rather than living a youthful life of exotic travel and adventure, he grew up conventionally in England, and through the help of his uncle, became a curate in Hampshire. His main interests before discovering theosophy were working with young people and exploring spiritualism and psychic phenomena. [44]

Besant was a high profile social reformer, gifted orator, and proponent of Free Thought. After some preliminary hesitant ponderings on the claims of theosophy, she delved deeper when reviewing *The Secret Doctrine,* later meeting with Madame Blavatsky on a number of informal occasions. After expressions of reciprocal respect, and recognition of mutual needs and opportunities, she unexpectedly announced her conversion to theosophy and her personal devotion to its leader. Blavatsky recognised in Besant a kindred soul, and made every effort to assure her ascendancy within the London

---

[42] Robert A. Hughes, *A Study Course in Theosophy and Occultism*. n.p., n.d.
[43] See Hugh Shearman,, *Charles Webster Leadbeater: A Biography*, London/Ojai/Sydney: The St. Alban Press, 1980, pp. 7–9.
[44] See Washington, op. cit., pp. 115–125.

branch of the Society.[45] The depth of affection in the relationship between these two strong-willed, charismatic and blunt speaking women has been the topic of much analysis, beginning almost immediately upon Besant's conversion. Those that were familiar with her before her conversion were surprised at the choice of belief she adopted, but not necessarily surprised at her tendency to passionate and full emotional commitment to a cause.[46] At the time, Blavatsky was in the midst of a public dispute with Olcott and was trying to rehabilitate her personal reputation and her professional credibility. A sincere and effusive show of faith and support from a well known and opinionated but respected figure like Besant renewed her public image and provided personal moral support and enthusiasm. Besant quickly ascended to a position of power, and obtained Blavatsky's endorsement as a leader of the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society after her own death. A post she deemed to share with Judge even though Blavatsky had explicitly sanctioned her as sole successor.

Besant's official duties were set by Blavatsky while she was still alive, and later by Olcott. They included much in the way of travel and lectures, including official Theosophical Society representation at the American convention of 1892 and at the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. During Judge's challenge to Olcott, based on unspecified and most likely accusations about his moral conduct, Besant had originally taken his side, but the charges were dropped. Subsequently she withdrew support for Judge in light of the suspicious nature of his letters claiming endorsement from the Masters. In June of 1894 the conflict between factions widened, and illustrates how Theosophical Society leadership struggles ostensibly were about legitimacy of succession, but more realistically were based on clashes of personality and differing ways of interpreting and furthering the theosophical agenda. [47]

8.2.8 Schism and Division – The Judge Secession

A compromise resolution was reached during a meeting of the Judicial Committee investigating the allegations surrounding Judge's letters of Masterly endorsement. This

[45] See Cranston, op. cit., pp. 361–364.
[46] George Bernard Shaw was one who came to such a conclusion. See Anne Taylor, *Annie Besant: A Biography,* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 243.
[47] See Ransom, op. cit., pp. 286–315 for events of this period.

stated that since the accusations were brought against Judge in his official capacity as a Vice-President of the Society, he would have to have been found guilty of official misconduct. However, he claimed to be acting merely as a private member, entitled to his own personal beliefs like every other member. And officially declaring the existence or non-existence of the Masters would be in breach of the non-sectarian and non-dogmatic nature of the Society, and hence outside of their jurisdiction. This legalistic defence cleverly orchestrated by Judge did not satisfy critics however. Judge had declared that though the letters were in fact written in his own handwriting, he in fact was acting as a chela, utilising extrasensory powers in precipitating the psychically transmitted intentions of the Masters. Besant agreed with the rationale of this explanation, but pointed the finger of guilt at Judge for not disclosing this in advance, and letting the assumption stand that the letters were totally independent productions of the Masters. [48]

The schism in the Society did not heal with this debate, but split the factions further apart. Judge had declared that the Masters endorsed him as the sole head of the Esoteric Section of the Society and that Besant no longer had a place in it. They had shared leadership after Blavatsky's death. The rationale used by Judge was even more obtuse and dependent on faith in the credibility of his supersensory insights and information. To discredit Besant, he claimed that she was under control by the "dark side," malevolent occult forces that wished to destroy the Theosophical Society. Judge declared that Besant had come under the hypnotic spell of certain Indian Brahmins, particularly, Gyanendra N. Chakravarti, a scholar who was well received at the Parliament of Religions. Judge's views were seconded by one of his major supporters, Archibald Keightly, who claims to have witnessed a radical transformation of Besant's personality after extended contact with Chakravarti. Olcott took Besant's side, and the matter was again debated in the annual 1894 convention. Besant denied the accusations and asked Judge to resign, which he refused to do. Confusion increased when it was discovered that Judge himself was an admirer of Chakravarti until receiving a communication entitled "By Master's Direction," which turned him in the opposite direction. [49] Further complications about these events ensued years later, when a fervent

[48] See Murphet, op. cit., pp. 264–276.
[49] See William Q. Judge, *By Master's Direction*, retrieved fromThe Blavatsky Archives Online, 1894, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/judgebmd1894.htm>. (Accessed October 29, 2002).

Judge supporter, Alice Cleather, said that Judge himself had fallen under the influence of a powerful medium, Katherine Tingley, who herself had orchestrated the plan of an American secession. This eventuated with all but ten American Lodges falling under the control of Judge and his associates. The Judge faction believed that they were the legitimate line of succession through which the Masters were working, and retained the Blavatsky-centric orthodoxy of theosophical doctrine. Tingley succeeded Judge after his death in March 1896 with the leadership of the largely American-based "Theosophical Society, the Western Hemisphere." However, opposition to Tingley's increasingly formalistic and ritualistic obsessions arose, and a further schism in 1909 produced the United Lodge of Theosophists led by Robert Crosbie. The Adyar-based Theosophical Society likewise insisted that the Masters were still communicating with its leaders, particularly Olcott and Besant. However, the input of new theosophical doctrine initiated by Besant and Leadbeater (her now psychically empowered occult mentor) shifted emphasis within the worldview enunciated by Blavatsky. [50]

8.2.9 Legitimation of the Besant-Leadbeater Rationale

With full legitimacy only accorded theosophical leaders who convincingly claimed to be in contact with the Masters, it was necessary for Besant and Leadbeater to show that they were authentic members of the occult hierarchy, personally approved by the Masters as trusted and valuable exponents of their message and work. For Besant, it seems that her private experiences of Masterly communication were mostly in the form of emotionally tinged visions, often perceived in dreams or states of suggestibility. From her perspective, reflecting upon the nature of her own intrusions into the private subjective domain of extraordinary experiences, a firm and assured sense of confidence in their credibility persisted throughout her life.

> And let me say that more than all I had hoped for in that first plunge has been realised, and that a certainty of knowledge has been gained on doctrines seen as true as that swift flash of illumination. *I know* by personal experience, that the Soul exists, and that my Soul, not my body, is myself; that it can leave the body at will; that it can, disembodied, reach and learn from living human teachers, and bring back and impress on the physical brain that which it has learned; that this process of transferring consciousness from one range of being, as it were, to

[50] For the change in Theosophical Society orientation under Besant, see Johnson, op. cit, pp. 193–201.

> another, is a very slow process… and that my own experience of it, still so imperfect, so fragmentary, when compared with the experience of the highly trained, is like the first struggles of a child learning to speak compared with the perfect oratory of the practiced speaker: that consciousness, so far from being dependent on the brain, is mire active when freed from the gross forms of matter than when encased within them: that the great Sages spoken of by H.P. Blavatsky exist: that they wield powers and possess knowledge before which our control of Nature and knowledge of her ways is but as child's play. All this, and much more, have I learned, and I am but a pupil of low grade, as it were in the infant class of the Occult school: so the first plunge has been successful, and the intuition has been justified. [51]

What is notable about this candid statement is that Besant consistently refers to her own limited psychic capacity. She says she is "a pupil of low grade," her own experience is "so imperfect, so fragmentary." It seems reasonable to assume that she must have had higher expectations of deeper and more continuous experience. Whether her expectations were based on her own feelings and desires entirely, or perhaps based on what others claimed or suggested is uncertain. However, she notes that "when compared with the experience of the highly trained" she does not possess the same degree of insight or visionary depth. The fact that C.W. Leadbeater was acknowledged as her psychic mentor and collaborator would indicate that she might have had him in mind as an example. However, despite feelings of a certain inadequacy, the qualitative fullness seems to have been considered "successful" and "justified." Her sense of the validity of the essentials of the theosophical worldview is expressed in no uncertain terms. And she explicitly states that she has personal experiential knowledge of the Masters and has been accessible to their teachings and communications.

As in the case of Blavatsky and all who claimed first hand psychic rapport and interaction with the Masters, any number of psychological, historical, extraordinary, and other factors may have contributed to their own personal mixes of belief. Here is one estimate of Besant's state of mind when susceptible to such occurrences.

> She was to report many such meetings with astral guides throughout her life as a Theosophist; they appeared at convenient times and gave the messages she wanted to hear. But it would go against all we know of her character to suspect her of simple lying. She had grown up in a family that took the supernatural for granted; … Later she learned from C.W. Leadbeater, her guide in matters occult, that whatever she saw in her imagination was a veridical vision; imagine a

[51] Annie Besant, *Annie Besant*: *An Autobiography*, London: The Gresham Press, 1908, pp. 345-346.

Master, and you have seen him. [52]

Whatever the possible source of her visions, it seems undeniable that Besant sincerely believed that she was in personal occult communication with the Masters, and thus a legitimate operative in the grand evolutionary plan. Motivated by her sense of partaking of a specially legitimated world-transforming mission, in public Besant usually exhibited a sense of poise and an earnestness about the theosophical cause. As well, driven by a passionate concern for social justice and equality, she became deeply involved in the movement for Indian independence. However, to many both within and outside the theosophical movement, her public political aspirations were considered to be indistinguishable from her private theosophical beliefs. Especially in seeking the realisation of the first Object of the Society, the pursuit of universal brotherhood. Before being elected President in 1907, she and Leadbeater had become mainstays of the movement by demonstrating charismatic demeanour and authoritative leadership within the Theosophical Society. Leadbeater had been temporarily forced to resign when charges of sexual misconduct became public. However, sympathising with his claims of pedagogical and occult motives, Besant endorsed his reinstatement.[53] As President, she added the authority of office, insuring that the link between the Theosophical Society and the Masters was still in place, but re-interpreted and reformulated according to new occult insights deriving from her own, and especially, Leadbeater's experiences.

Besant and Leadbeater were the dominant Theosophical Society authorities through the first three decades of the twentieth century, and directed the movement towards a prioritisation of millenarian beliefs within a modified theosophical vision of the impending new reconfiguration of the occult hierarchy. Their legitimation of what was termed Neotheosophy by critics was based on the criteria of personal supersensory exploration and communication with the Masters. Materialisations, bodily meetings, physical signs and portents were rarely referred to. The preferred locale was now the "astral plane," where through occult technique or during sleep, an ongoing succession of initiations and meetings with a variety of esteemed hierarchal personages was said to

[52] Rosemary Dinnage, *Annie Besant*, Harmondsworth/New York//Markham/Ringwood/Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986, p. 83.
[53] For the history of this episode, see Gregory Tillet, *The Elder Brother,* New York and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,1982, pp. 77–102.

have been occurring. Leadbeater often would prompt others about their recollections of such alleged meetings, and hint at scenarios and fill in details, to which they acquiesced. Or he would amplify and embellish dream recollections of others with his own interpretations, thus reconfirming the current Theosophical Society position on the intentions of the Masters. And while the "back to Blavatsky" element rejected such radical revisionism, elsewhere in and on the fringes of the theosophical movement during the twentieth century, others also claimed more personal contact with the Masters.[54] Pursuing that avenue of historical and doctrinal transition and deviation, while fascinating as a topic unto-itself, carries us beyond the scope of our inquiry, which is primarily concerned with Blavatsky's influence and nineteenth century movement dynamics. Having outlined some of the important historical developments of the early stages of the theosophical movement, it may be useful to try and augment that perspective by seeing how more traditional sociological theories and terms may be applied.

8.3 Sociological Classifications

8.3.1 Sociological Definitions of Religious Movements - Introduction

The identification of classifications based on distinctive traits and characteristics found in religious movements and organisations have been a major area of focus by many scholars. Most commonly analysed have been the major forms of church, sect, and cult, with even further subdivisions, subcategories, and criteria of definition being proffered. [55] As well, the term NRMs (new religious movements) has in recent years become another useful methodological classification. Extensive analysis, evaluation, and comparison of the particular scholarly schemas falls beyond our purview. However, although usage of terms sometimes is nuanced, and varies from analyst to analyst, similar phenomena are often being described along somewhat different lines. We will try to utilise the categories

[54] See, Alice Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Heirarchy,* New York: Lucis Press, 1968. Hariette Augusta Curtiss and F. Homer Curtiss, *The Message of Aquaria: The Significance and Mission of the Aquarian Age,* Washington: The Curtiss Philosophic Book Co., 1947. Benjamin Creme, *Maitreya's Mission,* Amsterdam/London/Los Angeles: Share International Foundation, 1990. Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Great White Brotherhood in the Culture, History and Religion of America,* Livingston, MT: Summit University Press, 1987.

[55] For discussion of the definitions of the terms NRM, church, cult and sect, see Lorne L. Dawson, *Comprehending Cults: The New Sociology of Religious Movements,* Toronto/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press. 1998, pp. 30–40.

and definitions that seem most pertinent and applicable in explaining the particularities of the theosophical movement. Although some of the references refer to later historical stages, the significant characteristics identified do appear to encompass dynamics present during the formative years of the theosophical movement. The confusion over the use of terms and definitions is unavoidable, so we must therefore examine particular analyses and try and see the terms and categories of reference that are deemed applicable to the theosophical movement.

8.3.2 Church, Cult, Sect, New Religious Movement – Points of Theosophical Conformity

Let us begin with a generalised overview of some of the defining characteristics of the various classifications. A church provides continuity and sustains tradition within a given society, representing the religion of a mainstream social clientele. A sect is a smaller voluntary loyal and dedicated alliance, featuring strict and focussed leadership. The sect will try and ensure that it remains as insulated as possible from the influence of other groups. Historically, the majority of modern religions originated as sects, acquiring many of the characteristics of churches as they became more socially entrenched over time. A further classification has been noted in the form of the cult. While the sect in many cases can be considered a derivation of a dominant church, the cult is seen as a more subjectively oriented and socially detached minority group.

> … cults … being small groups geared toward inner spiritual fulfilment with little relation to historical society at all (e.g. Theosophy, Self-Realization Fellowship and other Asian-based meditation centred groups). The distinctions are Western. In broader non-Western perspective we must admit that there are nearly as many kinds of religious institutions as there are communities and sub communities. [56]

Here, theosophy is seen conforming to a general cultic definition because it was a (relatively) small group that prioritised "inner spiritual fulfilment" and has "little relation to historical society at all." The first point seems accurate. The aims and interests of theosophical teachings have always been directed towards effecting progressive spiritual development of individual followers, through suggested paths of conduct, study, disciplines, and techniques. The second point is not entirely accurate. The first object of

[56] William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1988, p. 59.

the Theosophical Society was to strive towards the realisation of universal brotherhood. This ideal, and the belief that societies and races were distinct evolving entities with collective karma and destinies meant that historical events were interpreted in light of specific beliefs and expectations. Although theosophical organisations believed that social and political concerns were addressable more by changes in worldview and a re-orientation of values, at various times theosophical leaders have expressed partisan opinion about world events. For instance, Annie Besant was a major figure in the movement for Indian independence, though questions arose when it appeared that she was blurring the distinction between her opinions as an individual and her role as President of the Theosophical Society. And, at times, differences in political stance bred conflict when attempting to apply theosophical sanctions to specific historical situations. Yet, ultimately, the emphasis was on individual spiritual development, with social progress perceived not as an end unto itself, but more the by-product of a more enlightened understanding.

The primary importance in theosophy of individual spiritual fulfilment via an eclectic syncretism can be considered an example of a means of salvation, indicated in this quote from Bryan Wilson.

> … the new cults propose to take the individual out of his society, and to save him by the wisdom of some other, wholly exotic body of belief and practice. [57]

This reference perhaps is more accurate regarding more recent scenarios than that of the early theosophical movement, though it does appear at least somewhat applicable. On the one hand, Blavatsky, Besant, and many theosophical leaders excessively pandered to facets of Eastern esotericism to illustrate the contrast with entrenched Western conventional thought. And even those who were more focussed on the materials of Western esotericism in a sense were reconstructing "the wisdom of some other, wholly exotic body of belief and practice" by reviving and revising discredited and disputed concepts.

We also may move from consideration under the term "cult" to that of "sect." In Wilson's sevenfold division of sects, the most applicable category for theosophy would

[57] Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 98.

be as a "manipulationist sect." Hexham and Poewe define this as a sect that prioritises this-worldly salvation, especially acquired through success in mental self-improvement. These sects are primarily individualistic rather focussed on communal or familial objectives, emphasising mental hygiene. The growth of these sects occurs principally where the goals of personal achievement predominate and where emphasis is on personal accomplishment.

> The West is riddled with groups of this kind—Transcendental Meditation, EST, Theosophy, Christian Science, Scientology, and so on.
> … Wilson contends that they … attract that segment of the population that is semi-sophisticated in their ability to imitate the general reasoning of philosophers and scientists. … They are articulate and eager for shortcuts to prestige and power. [58]

The objective of improving the mind would be considered consistent with theosophical belief, though this was perceived as part of an overall strategy towards attaining greater degrees of consciousness and more advanced spiritual status. Theosophy was primarily presented as a private inner-directed personal option, with worldly success and social achievement criteria of peripheral or indirect interest in the formative years of the movement. An important factor in acquiring public credibility and serious respect was by obtaining favourable endorsement from those considered esteemed or respected in society at large. Thus, when such successful individuals made positive statements, or joined as members, their social or professional status was often noted and used to suggest prestige for the movement. Even today, there is a continual effort to show that theosophy must have some enduring worth if people such as Yeats, Einstein, Gandhi, Kandinsky, and so forth have at one time, said something favourable about any facet of the theosophical worldview. Even if just a casual reference or remark.

As an older manipulationist sect, theosophy did not concentrate on issues of physical health in attracting interest of the public, but more significantly, aspired to affect a shift in worldview to a more fluid and open-ended occult and spiritual orientation. And though not conceived as dissociated ends unto themselves, but integral elements of the wider belief system, expansion of consciousness and mental hygiene were definite criteria of the theosophical outlook. Encouragement in partaking of yoga, morally based

[58] Irving Hexham and Karla Poewe, *Understanding Cults and New Religions*, Grand Rapids: William B.

recommendations of vegetarianism, abstinence from alcohol, and other "right living" practices were seen as part of the proper theosophical self-disciplinary way-of-life, befitting the ethical values of the belief system and providing the proper setting for cultivation of spiritual objectives.

The late nineteenth century was a time when the kind of individualistic, secular, modern attitude that valued personal achievement was already in force. People like Blavatsky, Olcott, Besant, Judge, and many others can be seen as strong willed, clearly focussed, goal-oriented. Although the content of their cause lauded supra rational states of consciousness, a strong rationalistic attitude was used in systemising and promoting that vision. And the types of persons who were perceived as potential clients and sympathisers were also expected to be objective and thoughtful individuals, with an interest in the perennial mysteries of life. The theosophical demographic ideally was "that segment of the population that is semi-sophisticated in their ability to imitate the general reasoning of philosophers and scientists." The list of original members perhaps reveals the clientele that Blavatsky hoped to attract to the movement. Mostly professionals with respectable educational credentials, all aspiring to find a credible spiritually oriented worldview that could not be debunked by the arguments of science. Yet, Blavatsky's writings, though attempting to challenge and accommodate scientific and scholarly disputes with the semblance of depth and erudition, did not in fact convert the vast majority of experts and authorities. Rather, when not totally scorned or ignored, her major works were usually dismissed or superficially patronised. Examples of her pretensions at superior expertise can be found in her critique of famed scholar Benjamin Jowett for allegedly failing to discern Plato's "real" intents and her attempt to gain the endorsement of respected scholars like Max Mueller for her esoteric interpretation of Hindu and Buddhist texts. Here Mueller diplomatically explains his disinclination to concur with Blavatsky's perspective in a letter to Olcott.

> I felt it my duty to protest against what seems to me a lowering of a beautiful religion. Her name and prestige were doing real mischief among people who were honestly striving for higher religious views, and were quite willing to recognize all that was true and beautiful and good in other religions. Madame Blavatsky seems to me to have had the same temperament, but was either deceived by others

---

Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1987, p. 129.

> or carried away by her own imagination. [59]

And here is the justification underlying her dispute with Jowett.

> Well, Dr. Jowett is a great Greek scholar, let us say one of the first in England; but this does not make of him an authority on ancient history or geography. I, for one, have "the sublime audacity" of setting Dr. Jowett's claim of knowing Plato's *inner* thought, and his authority on the *spirit* of Platonic and other philosophies, at naught. [60]

As well, the general lack of esteem accorded theosophy in scholarly circles was reinforced by Madame Blavatsky's disreputability. An example is this reaction from William James in commenting about Hodgson's investigation.

> By the way, who is Mr. Richard Hodgson? … I am glad of his demolition of that jade, Blavatsky … [61]

8.3.3 Typecasting of Theosophical Followers

A steady flow of apologists and expounders have continued over the years to insist that those works do indeed merit credit as profound and intellectually sophisticated productions. The question arises about the depth of sophisticated intellect and analytical skills of those followers who insist on the veracity of Blavatsky's works. Were critics too harsh, snobbish, elitist, and unsympathetic, or was the average theosophist perhaps less inclined or capable of scrutinising the ideational system thoroughly enough? Washington suggests that theosophical followers in fact were not necessarily prepared to judge critically or objectively when occasion demanded. Speaking of Blavatsky's books, he draws this impression of the demographic of the early theosophical movement.

> But the point of *Isis Unveiled* was not to please reviewers and scholars. It appeals instead to passionate amateurs and spiritual autodidacts: readers too concerned with answers to important questions to be bothered with academic quibbles about authenticity and internal coherence. Blavatsky's book answered to deep needs at a time when religious doubt was fuelled by the first great age of mass education. The late nineteenth century produced a large, semi-educated readership with the appetite, the aspirations and the lack of intellectual sophistication necessary to

---

[59] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life and Times of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Mueller. P. C*., London: Chatto and Windus, 1974, p.329.
[60] H.P. Blavatsky. *Is Theosophy At Bay?*, retrieved from The Blavatsky Archives Online, 2000, <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/blav89itab.htm>. (Accessed November 8 2002).
[61] Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou. ed. *William James on Psychical Research*, Clifton, New Jersey: A.M. Kelley, 1973, p. 64.

> consume such texts. It was the milieu portrayed so vividly in England by Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, George Gissing and Hale White: the world of autodidacts, penny newspapers, weekly encyclopaedias, evening classes, public lectures, workers' educational institutes, debating unions, libraries of popular classics, socialist societies and art clubs … where nudism and dietary reform linked arms with universal brotherhood and occult wisdom. [62]

Such a sweeping typecasting of course cannot be totally inclusive, though it would appear to be generally applicable in terms of the social environment that many theosophists emerged from.

> Basically, it seems fair to say that Theosophy represented a spiritual home for persons like Blavatsky, Besant, Tingley, Olcott, or Bailey who came from respectable, in some cases high-status, backgrounds, but who nonetheless found themselves intellectually and spiritually ill at ease. Typically they seem to have been people of deep mental interests in religious and philosophical topics, but without conventional education in them—perhaps without access to it—they were the kind of people who read a lot of serious books, but in the library or at home rather than the university classroom. They were "status inconsistent" persons whose outward life, however comfortable, was at odds with what they inwardly sensed themselves to be. [63]

The "deep mental interest" without the discipline and perspective of "conventional education" of course does not negate the worth or credibility of any theosophical doctrine or belief. Personal spiritual vision and intuition are not necessarily acquired through conventional channels of education. However, perhaps the attempt to create a wide eclectic synthesis legitimated from disparate sources revealed a lack of depth and proper context in the understanding and treatment of those materials. The urgency of a spiritual calling and the desire to articulate that vision in a form that would be widely respected intellectually as well as emotionally alluring perhaps eventuated in presentations that were deemed less self-evidently truer than hoped for.

Conversely though, to those empathetic or receptive to the particular line of argumentation, presentment of detail, framework of premises and speculative inferences, the theosophical worldview did in fact appear to be intellectually sound and credible. For instance, Ellwood presents a thoroughly lucid and well-reasoned exposition of his personal preference for the theosophical worldview. He begins by stating that his

[62] Peter Washington, op. cit., p. 53.
[63] Robert Ellwood Jr., *Theosophy*, in *America's Alternative Religions*, ed. Timothy Miller, Albany, New

attraction to theosophy was the result of a mid-life realisation that long pondered metaphysical and philosophical questions were most attractively and plausibly answered from within the theosophical framework of explanation. He feels that the deep and perplexing questions that he has spent much of his life seeking satisfactory answers for are not beyond the scope of human inquiry, but are most adequately and meaningfully answered via the theosophical worldview.

From Ellwood's point-of-view, he recognised that the theosophical perspective provided a personally satisfying explanation for problems he was unable to reconcile through other ideational systems, and thus provides a level of comfort for conduct in everyday living. The perennially perplexing problems that have perpetually plagued all of humanity's best efforts at resolution appear to be at least capable of a comprehensive and satisfying treatment, even if the final answers are illuminating rather than necessarily absolute. For Ellwood, the theosophical tradition is a positive and optimistic one in which it is believed that there can be discerned a real understanding of the true nature of the cosmos.[64]

Another interesting fact was that over time, "middle aged and urban women" did become a significant portion of the movement.[65] Wilson notes this phenomenon as well.

> It is not surprising, emerging when they did and couching their doctrines and discourses in intellectual literary form, that Christian Science, Theosophy and the Vedanta movement should have attracted something of a leisure class—middle-aged, increasingly functionless, relatively well-to-do women. [66]

With a history of strong and charismatic women leaders, and a subject matter emphasising personal spiritual development, it is not surprising to find that women were inclined to take an interest in the theosophical movement.[67] The "leisure class" description may also be applied more broadly considering that theosophy was directed to middle and upper classes, and thus would find a certain percentage of both sexes with

---

York: State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 322.

[64] Robert Ellwood, *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of Wisdom of the Ages*, Wheaton/ Madras/London: Quest Books, 1986, p. 2.

[65] For the convergence of theosophy with other feminine interests in Russia, see Maria Carlson, *Fashionable Occultism* in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997, p. 141.

[66] Wilson, *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism*, op. cit., p.240.

[67] See Johnson, op. cit. pp. 161–207 and James Santucci, *Women in the Theosophical Movement*. Theosophical History, 1990, < http://www.theohistory.org/womenints.html>. (November 12, 2002). for

enough leisure time to become active contributors to the movement. Whether intellectually, organisationally, financially, or in other ways. It does thus appear that women provided an inspirational and motivational resource from which leadership figures emerged. And a number of "relatively well-to-do women," did provide crucial patronage and support. Wealthy patrons of both sexes did have important logistical roles in the history of the movement, especially during the career of Madame Blavatsky. Housing, travel, and other expenses were often taken care of by such wealthy supporters as Lady Caithness, Countess Wachtmeister, the Keightlys, various Indian and other patrons and sponsors. The land and buildings of the Adyar headquarters of the Theosophical Society was such a gift.

In addition a certain portion of the theosophical clientele came from the aesthetic domain. The influence was largely at the creative level for individual artists, inspiring particular forms of experimentation and thematic exploration.[68] Whether the aesthetic productions faithfully evoked resonant theosophical sentiments cannot be estimated because of the fusion of subjective factors at the percipient stage. However, there is no doubt that a number of major figures through a number of artistic mediums did in fact incorporate into their works insights, intuitions, feelings, impressions that had occurred as a result of theosophical influences. These include Yeats, Kandinsky, Scriabin, and many others who were directly influenced by theosophy in one way or another.[69] So this permeation of new ideas into the aesthetic sphere attracted a clientele interested in the theosophical analysis and description of the inner self and the spiritualised cosmos both for personal edification as well as for creative stimulus.[70]

8.3.4 Further Refined Definitions and Points of Theosophical Conformity – Excursus Religion, Gnostic Sect, Alienation, Counterculture, Psychic Deprivation, Client Cult, Prototype NRM, Cosmological Communion

---

discussion of the importance of Women within the movement.

[68] Extensive discussion of the influence of theosophy and other esoteric influences on abstract painting in particular can be found in *The Spiritual In Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985*, ed. Edward Weisberger, New York: Abbeville Press, 1986.

[69] See Cranston, op. cit., pp 463–498 for a list of some of the more notable figures.

[70] See, Shearer West, *Fin de Siecle: Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty*, Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 1994, pp 113–118.

Ellwood introduced another useful classification for theosophy. He classifies the movement as a non-normative form of excursus religion, a minority and alternative movement away (or, "excursus") from the familiar dominant and established social forms of religion by individuals or small groups. The primary objective is a more personalised and psychologically oriented quest for depth of experience and spiritual fulfilment. And in the process, cognisance of another alternative symbolic universe emerges that may engender alienation and conflict with the familiar social self and environment.

> Consider Helena Blavatsky … Though she was brought up in Aristocratic circles in Orthodox Russia, and though she occasionally had wistful yearnings towards conventional faith and life, the major features of her inner life were occult initiations, communications with transcendent masters, and the paranormal powers they worked through her—all of which created in her non-social self that could only be socialized through new sets of relationships centring on its own phenomena.
> This personality was intertwined with a long-standing sense of alienation from society and tension from it. [71]

The content of knowledge that identified theosophy as a distinct movement has been noted to pertain to esoteric, occult, mystical, and similarly designated experiential materials. From the sociological perspective, groups defined by prioritising such specialised subject matter appears to fit the classification introduced by Wilson as "gnostic sects." Towler here characterises this orientation.

> … *gnostic* sects are those which impart to their members a special knowledge which radically changes worldly life. By these esoteric means life on earth is transformed, and eternity begins here and now. [72]

A critical characteristic of the theosophical message imparted from Blavatsky and all major spokespersons indeed was that a special esoteric message was being disseminated. Although that special knowledge could be uncovered within specific extant religious, philosophical, and scientific sources, the common exoteric readings did not provide the essential key to proper comprehension. It was only via the esoteric interpretation that the purported deeper, spiritually grounded blueprint to noumenal reality could be explicated. Blavatsky insisted that this esoteric mode of envisioning reality did "radically change worldly life" and reveals the true basis of the human enterprise. And adopting that

[71] Ellwood, op. cit., p. 54.
[72] Robert Towler, *Homo Religiosus*, London: Constable, 1974, pp. 123–124.

worldview and acting and thinking accordingly would effectively transform life. Taking the first steps on the path towards consciously willed spiritual evolution would significantly alter the karmic dynamics, and, in a sense, be a new beginning "here and now" towards Mahatmaship.

In another sense, the term "gnostic" has a more specific bearing on the philosophical slant enunciated by Madame Blavatsky. Her radically dualistic orientation in which spirit and matter; the permanent soul principle and the body; the forces of good and of evil; white and black magic; selfishness and selflessness; and so on, were polarised and uncompromisingly contrasted, revealing an attitude consistent with traditional gnostic belief. The following description seems to be a fair assessment of Blavatsky's perpetuation of a gnostic mindset.

> Gnosticism, originally a philosophy of radical world-denial emanating from Pythagorean metaphysics, Neo-Platonism and various occult schools, looked upon the empirical universe as the abode of pain, darkness, and wretchedness into which the human soul, a fragment of the divine *pleroma* had fallen inadvertently , imprisoned in time and bodily circumstances. The soul was enjoined by Gnostic teaching to flee the world of sense and return to the celestial "home" … Gnosticism is, of course, typical of both the ascetic and ahistorical mentality of certain "perfectionist" movements. The Gnostic imagination and its kindred world is among such religious groups as the Cathars of the Middle Ages, the Rosicrucians, the Theosophists, and the Christian Scientists… [73]

Though later theosophical commentaries and doctrinal interpretations tried to place a more positive emphasis on the spiritually enhancing value of "this world" accomplishments and opportunities, the influence of Blavatsky's gnostic valuation remained intrinsic in her writings, and is embedded in the theosophical worldview as first articulated.

A further categorical classification that expands on the ramifications of a gnostic orientation may be introduced. In *Natural Symbols,* Mary Douglas presents a schema of sociological analysis based upon the dynamics of interaction between individuals, smaller social groups, and society at large.[74] She uses the two main categories of classification, grid and group, which are fluid and variable, and figuratively intersect horizontally and vertically at discrete points on an axis between extreme positions. Defining the nature of

[73] Carl A. Raschke, *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness,* Chicago: Nelson – Hall, 1980, p.20.

the self or ego according to public or private criteria of meaning represents a horizontal continuum. And dependence on social or individual systems of classification expresses a vertical range of options. The various configurations emerging from analysis by this methodology are classified according to their intersectional location along the axis.

What can be derived from this theoretical framework is that the theosophical mindset clearly represents a preference for spiritual rather than material values; the prioritisation of personal goals and ideals rather than collectively oriented social objectives; the valuation of ideas, beliefs, principles that are privately felt to be meaningful rather than the uncritical acceptance of the dominant social worldviews. Douglas also extends her categorisation by identifying the different forms of symbolic reaction to the human body. Theosophy, with its preference for the subjective domain and the personal spiritual concerns of the individual, would naturally and inevitably express the gnostic bifurcation exemplified in Blavatsky's thought and intrinsic to the theosophical position. Spirit is hypostatised as unconditionally pure and transcendent. The body is entirely negative, a prison that confines and restricts mind, soul, spirit. As well, Douglas discerns an element of alienation implicit in this sort of gnostic view.

> I am suggesting that the symbolic medium of the body has its restricted code to express and sustain alienation of a sub-category from the wider society. In this code the claims of the body and of the wider society are not highly credited … The body is despised and disregarded, consciousness is conceptually separated from its vehicle and accorded independent honour. Experimenting with consciousness becomes the most personal form of experience, contributing least to the wider social systems and therefore most approved. This is where the dichotomy of spirit and matter become an instant theme. [75]

Incorporating this form of analysis, it may be surmised that theosophy's intrinsic gnostic position may at least in part reflect a certain degree of alienation from mainstream social worldviews in which material, impersonal, and collective values are embedded while the spiritual, subjective and personal concerns are accorded secondary status. And as a minority cognitive alternative option, considered intellectually disputable and disreputable by mainstream legitimating institutions, it seems that a certain amount of alienation would be inevitable.

---

[74] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
[75] Ibid., p.164.

Recognition of the factor of alienation also brings up the question of whether theosophy may be considered a counterculture. The term emerged in the late nineteen sixties in specific response to the phenomena surrounding the emerging youth culture of Western societies, and remains characterised by references to topical and historical issues. As such, the term implies too specific a set of associations to be fully applicable for our purposes. However, it may yet prove useful if the topical context is bracketed out. For example, Roszak has this definition of a counterculture.

> Meaning: a culture so radically disaffiliated from the mainstream assumptions of our society that it scarcely looks to many as a culture at all, but takes on the alarming appearance of a barbaric intrusion. [76]

The connotations of this definition suggest an extreme sense of alienation. The intention of radical change is clearly explicit. Not an attempt to legitimise or justify a dissenting perspective, but a wholesale substitution of another incongruent minority option. This definition obviously shows a polarised set of extreme stances. However, the reference to the countercultural environment is not wholly applicable for theosophical analysis. The theosophical movement was not primarily age related or overwhelmingly demographically determined, but more based on shared empathy of ideas and beliefs. Thus it was more ideological and theoretical than it was practical and lifestyles related, although those factors did apply under certain circumstances, and were legitimate systemic elements. Another definition that has some application is the following.

> We will regard as countercultural only a set of beliefs that is contrary to the very roots or foundation upon which the dominant culture rests... A counterculture rejects, particularly at its beginning, rationality itself, the fundamental root of societies, particularly those of contemporary Western Europe and North America....
> The social change that would have to take place in the dominant society (namely a removal of its rational basis) before that counterculture could find it acceptable is so extensive and drastic that the behavioural alternative a counterculture prescribes is a sectarian one ... Countercultural beliefs lead to their adherents cutting themselves off from mainstream society and severing the ties that bind them to the dominant order. A counterculture that would be satisfied with some modification of the wider culture is no counterculture at all. [77]

---

[76] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1969, P. 42.
[77] Kenneth Westhues, *Society's Shadows: Studies in the Sociology of Countercultures*, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd. 1972, pp. 10–11.

Here, we find that the "set of beliefs that is contrary to the very roots or foundation upon which the dominant culture rests" may reasonably be said to apply to the theosophical orientation when the esoteric perspective is invoked. The "rejection of rationality" also can be recognised, in the sense of it being superseded by promotion of more spiritual and higher orders of consciousness. And "Western Europe and North America" was pretty much the same geographical environment the theosophical movement initially attempted to work in. Even when relocating Theosophical Society headquarters to India and incorporating more Eastern based doctrinal elements, the theosophical message was largely directed to the Western world, where the ensconced worldviews of religion, philosophy, and science were constantly under challenge and critique. And though Eastern values and insights were promulgated as superior in many instances, they were used as ideals meant to stimulate reassessment of Western perspectives as much as for their own intrinsic merit.

The objective of an "extensive and drastic social change" was not really part of the program, which was more directed to a change of attitudes and conduct by private individuals. Social change was expected to follow as a natural and logical consequence of the adoption of the theosophical worldview, with its belief in an enlightened valuation of spiritual development. A quasi "trickle down" systemic approach was assumed, in which the reaping of positive karma and attaining spiritual enlightenment would naturally and inevitably lead to a more equable and compassionate society. Focus was on changing the orientation of mind first; hoping subsequent improvement in social behaviour would follow. So that once the ultimate objective of attaining spiritual realisation was achieved, the new and absolute way of perceiving true relationships would fall into place.

> …the only way in which we can interpret our realization of unity in the world of the relative is through love of all creatures; just as any unkind or hurtful action is a denial of the Reality in which we all are one, so are self-sacrifice, love for all that lives and service of our fellowmen the expression in the world of relativity of that supreme Reality which can never be fully expressed here, the utter unity of all that is. Love, indeed is the nearest approach to Reality we can find in the world of the relative…
> *Justice is the demand of those bound in the world of illusion, love the joy of those who know Reality.*
> … Life is not concerned with the questions and errors of our illusion-bound

> consciousness; *life is more than just, life is one*. In the unity of all that is, the problem of the justice of life is transcended; the reality of the unity of life is experienced. [78]

The "removal of its rational basis" was a dominant theosophical theme, part of the overall objective of instituting a new, spiritually grounded worldview based upon a wider interpretation of human potential. And the sectarian charge is also ambiguous. As mentioned earlier, theosophy as such did not reject traditional religions or systems of thought, but attempted to reveal a new way of understanding and acting based on a different interpretation of ideational materials. Yet, as an independent organisation with its own doctrines and ethical precepts (even if drawn from other sources) it yet did provide a self-contained alternative system of belief. In some sense then it did "lead to their adherents cutting themselves off from mainstream society and severing the ties that bind them to the dominant order." However, that "cutting themselves off from the mainstream" pertained more to the realm of subjective belief than objective disruption of lifestyle. Although, particular theosophical ethical precepts certainly did encourage changes in the routines of individuals. For instance theosophical leaders enunciated stances on causes like the promotion of vegetarianism, anti-vivisection, proto-feminist rights, racial equality, religious tolerance, improvement in labour conditions, and other topical social issues. However, the espousal of theosophical opinion was to suggest the necessity of broader compassionate and selfless values becoming part of the prevailing mindset rather than either a revolutionary destruction of the existing order or a collective withdrawal from the world. Although Blavatsky did at times idealise world-renunciation and an ascetic lifestyle, she usually qualified her opinion by admitting that it wasn't an option that the majority of theosophists could realistically pursue. In the end then, theosophy, if defined this way as a counterculture is "no counterculture at all" because although desirous of radical sweeping changes in worldview and conduct, still was "satisfied with some modification of the wider culture." The belief in evolutionary stages, gradual hierarchal progression, metaphysical roots of societies and peoples, and so on, provided justification and rationalisation for acceptance of a long-term and incremental transformation. Although the main objectives of the Theosophical Society implied a

[78] J. J. van der Leeuw, *The Conquest of Illusion*, Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books, 1968, p. 198.

quasi-utopian future of equality, tolerance, and spiritual values, those ends were believed to be achievable through steady progressive modification and the cumulative effects of individual enlightenment.

Another analytical term that accounts for the factor of alienation a somewhat different way is that of "psychic deprivation" as enunciated by Glock and Stark. They see theosophy falling under the category of a cult because it does not necessarily conform to the stricter definitions of church or sect. They have this comment in reference to cults.

> These are religious movements which draw their inspiration from other than the primary religion of the culture, and which are not schismatic movements in the same sense as sects, whose concern is with preserving a purer form of the traditional faith. … it does not provide a way to account for Theosophy … [79]

Glock and Stark distinguish the criterion of deprivation as a contributing factor towards the appeal of cults, and list five specific kinds. These are economic, social, organismic, ethical, and psychic. They believe that psychical deprivation arises when individuals are in situations where their systems of value break down and the worldview by which they derived purpose and meaning no longer is felt to be effective. Thus, to compensate and reacquire a viable and comforting orientation, they seek out alternatives that appear to embody the values and beliefs they find meaningful. As well, the attraction of an alternative framework of belief may be in the kind of "way to salvation" that is offered. Theosophy is considered a system that appeals to a portion of such psychically deprived individuals.

> Whether the movement is secular or religious, responses to psychic deprivation are generally extreme because it constitutes a rejection of the prevailing value orientation of the society. … When they take up a religious solution it will typically be of the cult variety … The entire occult milieu … is made up of persons afflicted with psychic deprivations. Movements born in this setting such as Theosophy … are essentially religious innovations that reject dominant … traditions, and are classified as cults. [80]

Rejection of the dominant dogmatic and materialistic worldviews represented by mainstream traditions of religion, philosophy, and science was a common denominator for many of the early theosophists. Especially Blavatsky and most of the major

[79] Glock and Stark, op. cit., p.245.

theoreticians of the movement.

And by interpreting theosophy under the definition of cult, other possible features may be discovered. For instance, the classifications of "audience cult," and its more formal derivation "client cult" appear to be valid frameworks for analysing certain theosophical traits. Dawson gives the following descriptions of these categories, noting that client cults evolve from audience cults, and then "cult movements" may emerge in particular instances. He says this about audience cults.

> The label refers to the loosely structured events at which individuals lecture and distribute literature about a variety of esoteric, mystical, eccentric, and occult topics. At various conferences and meetings certain sets of ideas and certain lecturers may attract a consistent following. But no formal and persistent organization results. The audience for the ideas in question remain mere consumers of cultic goods …
> At a more organized level, these situations may develop into 'client cults,' or such arrangements may arise independently… The services of the cult leader or leaders may become quite highly organized… Theosophy began this way…
> Finally, with success, an audience cult may become a 'cult movement'… Examples of cult movements are Theosophy in its maturity, Krishna Consciousness, and the Unification Church. [81]

We can see that theosophy fits fairly comfortably within this framework. Prefatory to the formal inception of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky and Olcott became known for hosting "conferences and meetings" at their joint residence in New York, nicknamed "The Lamasery." Various small circles of likeminded individuals, drawn together by common interest in spiritualistic phenomena, occultism, esoteric topics, fringe scientific interests, religious, philosophical and scientific issues and theories congregated there and elsewhere. Lectures, discussions, promotion and recommendation of favoured written materials helped foster a sense of solidarity and common ideational empathy. Blavatsky stood out as the most charismatic presence, and the informal associations led to the next step, the formation of the more highly organised Theosophical Society. With consolidation of a basic platform of beliefs and objectives, and the popularisation of the theosophical worldview through writings, lectures, discussions, media reports, the theosophical cause became entrenched as a minority cognitive option, specialising in an esoteric, gnostic, syncretistic orientation. The worldview eventually extended beyond the

[80] Ibid., p. 254.

confines of the official Theosophical Society when schisms and disputes eventuated in reconfigured or reappraised systemic admixtures after Blavatsky's death. Thus the movement attained a self-sufficiency of its own, with Blavatsky's legend attaining semi-mythical status and her writings serving as the definitive authoritative statement of the initial theosophical worldview.

What had essentially begun as an audience or client cult emerged more formally institutionalised, and spread beyond the single definitive body into a broader movement. And as such, the movement that Madame Blavatsky began may be classified as an important foundational legitimator of later NRMs, directly or indirectly influencing other schools, groups, individuals, and thus, spreading elements of its ideational structure into society at large. That conclusion appears to be confirmed by the following quotes.

> Another fountainhead of ideas and movements that have become part of the current NRM scene is Theosophy… Theosophy is particularly important for understanding several other religious groups that are still extant. Rudolph Steiner's Anthroposophy, Krishnamurti, J.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky all stem directly from activities of the Theosophical Society, and the development of modern Buddhism, both in its western forms and especially in its indigenous form on present-day Sri Lanka, is largely due to Olcott's work. [82]

> Theosophy is important for several reasons. One, it has become the most pervasive form of Gnostic occultism in the Western world. More than one hundred occult organizations can be traced directly to Theosophy, and they perpetuate its teachings or slight variations. The names of the overwhelming majority do not refer to Theosophy, and many adherents seem quite unaware of the theosophical heritage in which these groups are rooted. However, through the many books published by the Theosophical Society, the Gnostic tradition has been passed to the modern world. In the contemporary atmosphere of religious and intellectual freedom Gnosticism has been reborn.
> Two, the Theosophical Society has also been a major factor in preparing the West for the influx and acceptance of Eastern ideas and spiritual practices. Such acceptance inspired the spread of belief in reincarnation and the revival of interest in astrology….
> Throughout the decades, Theosophy also provided a nurturing home for astrology, and many of the early leading astrologers began in theosophical lodges.
> Three, theosophical teachings led to the New Age movement…
> The resulting New Age movement helped popularise several theosophical ideas…
> The movement also provided a community in which channelling was encouraged and channels nurtured. Because theosophical Gnosticism provided the intellectual

[81] Lorne L. Dawson, op. cit., pp. 36–37.
[82] George D. Chryssides, *Exploring New Religions*, London and New York: Cassell, 1999, p. 87.

> base for the New Age movement, it was not surprising to see the new channels teaching the variations as they assumed leadership positions in the movement. [83]

Since we are concerned with the early phase of the theosophical movement, in depth analysis of the decades after the Besant/Leadbeater ascendancy are outside our range of inquiry. However, the legacy of theosophy includes this role as a historical precursor, "intellectual base," and entrenched alternative source of spiritually grounded ideas for subsequent NRMs.

What is instructive however is the statement that "the movement also provided a community" that encouraged and nurtured ideas and behaviours consistent with the theosophical esoteric, occult, mystical worldview. The concept of a shared ideational orientation based on common, deeply felt religious or spiritual ideas, values, and beliefs provide the opportunity to introduce another applicable term. That of "cosmological communion."

> A central organizing feature of communion has been cosmological, or religion in the broadest sense: a shared set of beliefs, values, and behavioural orientations… People the world over "quest" for cosmological communions as they search for, create, join, and maintain relationships which afford social and psychic bonding, while the specific content of interaction and belief will vary with time, place and circumstances… The communions people create represent but a small segment within the larger social universe. In other words, communions are organized around selected segments of the social universe, while other aspects of social existence may be perceived as secondary to primary communion. [84]

It would seem fair to characterise the efforts of those who were part of the early theosophical sect/cult/ proto-NRM as a "quest for cosmological communion." While the specific ideational content was a variable within that "social universe" that happened to have been largely comprised of gnostic, occult, and mystical materials, it provided an attractive plausible and satisfying option for those who sought social and psychic bonding within the parameters of that movement. "Primary communion," or the shared values and ideals of the theosophical platform, took precedence over what were interpreted as secondary and peripheral aspects of social life. Thus, the type of full-scale commitment

---

[83] J. Gordon Melton, *Finding Enlightenment*: *Ramtha's School of Ancient Wisdom,* Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing Inc., 1998, pp. 43–44.
[84] Robert C. Ness, *New Religious Movements in Historical Perspective,* in *Cults and New Religious Movements,* ed. Marc Galanter, Washington D.C: The American Psychiatric Association, 1989, pp. 46-47.

sought by Blavatsky highly prioritised a radical and uncompromising adoption of the criteria enunciated in theosophical doctrines. These would ultimately require consistent adherence to actions and thoughts that helped further the three major objectives of the Theosophical Society. As well as an ever-vigilant struggle to wilfully tame the passions, submerge the ego, and allow the selfless and intuitive higher aspect of the spiritual self to emerge fully. The quest for cosmological communion ideally, from the theosophical perspective, would be the collective harmonious choice of likeminded individuals consciously entering fully upon the evolutionary path towards progressive spiritual enlightenment

The sociological dynamics of the theosophical movement can thus be interpreted and categorised according to a number of explicit theories and by application of a variety of terms. Our brief discussion has not been intended as exhaustive, but merely an indicator of some of the pertinent treatments than can be accorded theosophy. What Blavatsky constructed was built to challenge “dogmatic religion” and “materialistic science,” while legitimating all forms of esoteric, archaic, Eastern, magical, mythical, occult, mystical, forms of thought and belief.

Chapter 9
Summation and Conclusion

It is time to recapitulate what we have discussed and to offer final reflections. The theosophical movement did not emerge out of a vacuum, nor was it randomly and haphazardly created. Charismatic leadership was required to instil inspiration and provide motivational impetus. Madame Blavatsky in particular was seen as a strongly charismatic figure familiar with extraordinary modes of experience, cognisant of a wide body of esoteric information, skilled and shrewd at communicating her vision and in inspiring others, and eager to aggressively challenge conventional ideas and beliefs.

We have examined the motivational factors stirring Madame Blavatsky personally, and articulated and fine-tuned as the ostensible objectives of the Theosophical Society. Blavatsky was clearly driven by personal convictions that the mainstream worldviews of religion, philosophy and science prevalent in nineteenth century Western society were fallacious. And even worse, that debased, degraded and demeaning visions of humankind and the universe were the undesirable results of such misconstrued procedures. Blavatsky's own motivation was inspired by belief that she was fulfilling a higher calling by challenging the status quo and proffering an esoteric vision of reality prioritising pure and uncompromising spiritual values and the authenticity of supersensory and mystical forms of knowledge and experience. Despite the cynicism of critics, Blavatsky continually insisted that her motives were altruistic and intended to benefit humankind. She explained her conviction of a personal calling and special mission by stating that she had been designated as the messenger for the current age by representatives of a secretive occult hierarchy of transcended Masters, who have as their ongoing concern the improvement of the spiritual status of the human race. To theosophists, the belief in Blavatsky's special role as transmitter of the intentions of the Masters provided special motivation, inculcating the sense that working towards the transformation of worldviews was in fact a necessary step in the evolutionary process of humankind. We have shown that the tact taken by Blavatsky and earlier theosophists to legitimise their emerging worldview was twofold. It was necessary to follow through with a critical strategy by deconstruction of the premises of the established positions. As

well, an appealing and credible alternative was needed as an option to entrench support. And so a constructive promotion and justification of the principles of the alternative vision was followed. We have shown that in Blavatsky's writings, the rhetorical alteration between criticism and promotion is clearly evident as she constantly moved from one approach to the other, ever seeking to attack the status quo positions while ready to present what was believed to be a more preferable and accurate option.

As well, we have found that the motivational intentions stimulating the early theosophical movement can be explicated by examination of the changes in wording of the by-laws and objectives of the Theosophical Society. The continual fine-tuning and rephrasing reveals subtle changes in prioritisation, with the intention of presenting the most attractive and relevant public statement of purpose. And to clarify for members more specifically the goals and areas of particular concern, we have noted early focus on the desire to investigate paranormal phenomena and the laws of nature, and that a fascination with the happenings of spiritualism was a strong factor in early theosophical speculation. As well, we have identified a broadening of intentions to promote universal brotherhood and non-Western sources of knowledge. The ideal of the equality of all humans was instituted as a defining objective of the Theosophical Society, encompassing positions on gender and race that had previously been treated separately. The promotion of Eastern religions and philosophies as well as neglected esoteric sources elsewhere was explicitly encouraged as a necessary alternative to the mainstream Western sources of knowledge. And the original investigative interest in psychic phenomena was diversified to focus on personal spiritual development as well as establishing the prerequisite guidelines necessary for awakening of latent supersensory powers. Although there were no radical shifts to entirely new lines of thought, there were continual efforts made to present the theosophical worldview as a progressive and meaningful entity, promoting values and ideas not prioritised in mainstream systems.

Taking into account the belief in Blavatsky's special calling, her critical and constructivist efforts, and the explicitly formulated objectives of the Theosophical Society, we have concluded that in effect, the underlying motivational thrust was to institute a new encompassing spiritual worldview that was felt to be more plausible and satisfying than those contemporaneously dominant at the time. So, if a prevailing

intention of the theosophical movement was to provide an alternative, spiritually grounded, comprehensive way of envisioning reality, the dynamics of worldview composition must be considered. By noting that Madame Blavatsky seemingly instinctively chose the subtitle of *The Secret Doctrine* as *The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, we have found a clue indicating the importance of those three specific fields of knowledge. We have shown that to Blavatsky and other theosophists, each of those three categories was believed to have an exoteric and an esoteric side. It was believed that the dominant worldviews of Western Society were entirely guided by the exoteric perspective, while the esoteric orientation was more legitimate and deserving of greater public endorsement. Yet despite this difference in perspective, those three categories were felt to be the most credible and authoritative sources of knowledge. The fundamental ways of representing reality.

The very process of worldview construction was addressed, illustrating how distinctive orientations emerge. We have recognised that the interaction between individual, social group, and cultural repository of information shapes how reality will be perceived. And that there is a difference between sophisticated and pre-given facets of worldviews. Blavatsky's attempt to affect a synthesis of knowledge was an effort to construct a sophisticated and systematic worldview It was also necessary to show that ascendant and alternative configurations may exist simultaneously, and that worldviews are open to critique and transformation. Analysis has shown that the theosophical orientation can be classified as a cognitive minority position, an alternative secondary worldview, indebted to an ideational body of deviant knowledge when compared to mainstream majority perspectives.

In discussion of the contents of sophisticated worldviews, we compared the positions of Sorokin and Burtt, noting similarities in structural and historical descriptions. The three major categories of cognitive knowledge, "intuitional," "rational," and "empirical," were embodied respectively as the "Truth of Faith," Truth of Reason," and "Truth of Sense." And have generally been represented respectively through the social institutions of religion, philosophy, and science. In attempting to create an attractive, appealing, convincing, alternative to the worldviews inherent through those traditional ideational edifices, we have shown how Madame Blavatsky felt the need to convincingly

show how her vision was superior by substituting what was called an esoteric perspective for conventional interpretations of truth and knowledge. Thus, it is no coincidence that her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, sets as the measure of its success the production of a plausible and convincing synthesis of those three categories of knowledge interpreted in occult and mystical terms.

It was shown that each of those three fields of knowledge (in their perceived common exoteric forms) was believed by Blavatsky and theosophical supporters to be antithetical to spiritual values and affronts to the true dignity of humankind. Christianity was viewed to be sterile and dogmatic. Philosophy was seen as a mere intellectual indulgence. Science was considered the propagator and defender of mechanistic and materialistic theories of reality. Blavatsky abhorred the contemporary mainstream worldviews mostly represented by these institutions, and was intensely motivated to challenge their assumptions and offer what she felt was a more accurate alternative.

It also was observed that concurrently there existed a number of less well-known or respectable streams of thought. These included the growing awareness of Eastern religions and philosophies, new theories of myth, a variety of occult teachings, Neoplatonic, Hellenistic, Hermetic, Rosicrucian, alchemical, magical, mystical, fringe-scientific, spiritualistic, and other discrete influences. Blavatsky was familiar with most, and utilised portions of their teachings to consolidate what she called (amongst other uniquely utilised referential hyphenated, capitalised, and hybrid terms) “Truth.” It was demonstrated that this mix of influences supported her constructs, and allowed her to justify her claims of representing an older, perennial, wisdom tradition in which an esoteric perspective in some form or other could be demonstrated to have been active over millennia. Blavatsky was not the only exponent of a worldview based on esoteric principles, as other contemporaries extolled particular themes and drew upon their own portions of esoteric ideational materials. However, despite her disreputable reputation, her charismatic and enigmatic personality continually attracted attention and curiosity. She was the most successful in promulgating that orientation because she was able to integrate more elements of the esoteric mix into an alluring, persuasive, integrated, and systematic vision.

We have found that to try and gain public approval and support for the theosophical vision, critical and constructivist approaches were necessary. The established authoritative institutions representing the habitual and ensconced worldviews had to be shown as ineffective, and debunked of their pretensions. This meant explicit confrontation with the leading theories and exponents of the mainstream religious, philosophic, and scientific traditions. We have shown how each was in turn attacked for propounding what Blavatsky referred to as the exoteric version of their specific form of knowledge. As well, it was noted how the alternative contents of the theosophical worldview had to be presented as logically sound, viable, and more efficacious in providing meaningful answers and framing a convincing picture of reality. Madame Blavatsky was the primary source of distinctly theosophical knowledge, and through her prolific article writing, voluminous correspondences, and self-proclaimed monumentally important major books, created what most theosophists accepted as the definitive systemisation of that worldview.

It was seen that in the treatment of knowledge the purpose of argumentation was in emphasising the need for a radical reorientation away from dogma, rationalism, and materialism and the provision of more preferable and conceivable options. Ideally for theosophical purposes, a substitution of the esoteric for the exoteric and a new reading of the priorities and objectives of religion, philosophy and science. We have shown that to aspire to intellectual respectability and help legitimise the theosophical worldview, it was critical that Blavatsky confront the prevailing authoritative positions ensconced in the respective fields of knowledge.

We have seen that in her critique of religion she decried obscurantism, dogmatism, the ulterior motives of religious institutions and leaders. Religious knowledge was presented in fact as the highest and most inclusive form when understood esoterically. It was established that to Blavatsky and other theosophists, reality was believed to be ultimately mystical, so therefore all authentic knowledge must confirm that basic premise. Otherwise it is at best only partially valid and at worst, entirely devoid of real worth. We have seen that to Blavatsky, the Christian dependency on blind faith and dogmatic determinations of truth rather than on the input of personal numinous experience and the proper esoteric symbolic decoding of traditional religious materials

were considered prime negative factors. Mainstream religious institutions were said to be custodians of a corpus of hidden esoteric knowledge, but were unaware (Christianity especially) that such deeper symbolic decipherment was even possible.

It was observed that philosophy and science were recognised as legitimate forms of truth when conceived esoterically, but not in their exoteric familiar forms. Philosophy in its exoteric role was considered intellectual indulgence without metaphysical Idealism supporting its application. However, when seen as a method of furthering spiritual ambitions and acquiring wisdom, it had a more favoured function. When considered as part of the search for wisdom, philosophy was validated as a means of pursuing the path to spiritual enlightenment. However, only Idealist variants were accepted as real examples of philosophy, because the a priori starting premise was that the universe is intrinsically spiritual. Therefore, stating anything contrary would be seen as sophistic or an abandonment of the true purpose of philosophy.

We have shown that according to Blavatsky, scientific inquiry was also perceived in two ways. It was respected and idealised for its stated desire for a purely objective and experientially based methodology. However, when used to support materialistic positions, was judged a limited and deceptive means of glorifying sense data at the expense of spiritual principles. We noted that Blavatsky attempted to show that the scientist could be useful as an investigator of paranormal phenomena if able to develop the supersensory capabilities believed to be latent in each person. Potentially, the scientific methodology then would be capable of exploring dimensions and planes inaccessible through normal states of consciousness, as well as reveal the more complex and subtle workings of nature. But this would be possible only if each individual scientist followed the prescribed path towards attainment of wisdom and mastery of higher faculties. Otherwise, according to Blavatsky as we have seen, scientific activity without spiritual commitment would only provide superficial insight into the authentic esoteric roots of nature. Understood exoterically, science provided, at best, a very limited understanding of the nature and powers of the universe. But if understood esoterically, a much vaster, multi faceted picture would emerge, ultimately revealing sacredly grounded inter-connections and relationships between its constituent elements. All exoterically identified phenomena, entities, energies, and forces would be seen as but partial

manifestations of much more complex processes extending through many more subtle planes.

We have stated that another equally important stratagem of the legitimising process helpful in making a stronger case for the credibility of the theosophical plausibility structure was to ascertain that theory was substantiated by experience. Postulating a theory of knowledge that emphasised that the enhanced potentiality of human experience extended beyond the known and familiar parameters of ordinary consciousness helped establish an attractive hypothesis for public consideration. It was noted that this esoteric orientation could gain additional persuasive appeal and allure if it were believed that practical demonstration or credible proof of the reality of such theory was in fact forthcoming, or, at least, had already been established. We have shown that it was necessary for Blavatsky to appear personally fluent and familiar with the kinds of extraordinary mystical and supersensory experiences that pure theosophical theory was built upon in order to be recognised for authoritative expertise based on practical grounds. We have reiterated that the theosophical worldview depended on the acceptance of the legitimacy of extrasensory and mystical modes of consciousness as authentic and objectively referential forms of cognition. Despite the attempt to emulate a scholarly and philosophical defence of principles, the theosophical edifice was critically dependent on the premise that supersensory and mystical states of consciousness were legitimate transpersonal modes of advanced or enhanced cognition, revealing authentic truths about the universe. Our conclusion was that without confidence in a leader claiming personal cognisance of the extraordinary, and privileged insights of higher truth, the theosophical system of ideas would lack maximum emotional allure and distinction.

It was demonstrated that throughout her life, Madame Blavatsky appeared to be susceptible to voluntary or involuntary lapses into a variety of abnormal states of consciousness. We have seen that from childhood on there is anecdotal testimony or personal recollection of such occurrences. The topic is a complex one, and defies simplistic explanations. As well, later interpretations are not necessarily helpful, often coming long after the fact and reflecting vested interests of the moment. However, given such qualifications, it yet still seems that she may have engaged in a number of true numinous encounters. We have chosen Gowan's taxonomy of numinous experience as a

model, only looking at examples drawn prior to her phase of public notoriety to avoid peripheral issues arising from theosophical controversies. From application of this model, it would appear that Blavatsky might have engaged in experiences that were of the subconscious, supersensory and transpersonal variety, though interpreted by her and her associates to conform to the orthodox narrative of her life that was inculcated as part of the theosophical mythos. It was hypothesised that numinous experiences were perceived in light of her personal store of images and symbols, and presented to reflect her predispositions and beliefs. And a key recurring theme was the belief that a psychically operative, dominant, awe-inspiring self-subsistent personage had taken an especial interest in her. And throughout her life had made his presence known, especially at times of crisis. We have noted how she interpreted this phenomenon as an encounter with her Master, which subsequently recurred regularly, and apparently at times indicated traits similar to those found in devotional mysticism.

It was confirmed that Blavatsky firmly believed in the reality of supersensory powers and prioritised the goal of mystical enlightenment. Although she explicitly warned about the dangers of the pursuit of occult powers as ends unto themselves without strong moral convictions and willpower, she acknowledged that such an approach was a temptation for many. We have shown that she believed that such undisciplined ambitions would only lead to dreadful and enduring results, extending many lifetimes. In assessing the gist of her ethical outlook, we have concluded that as a rule, she generally expressed a philosophy strongly reflective of gnostic dualism, insisting upon an absolutely uncompromising position regarding the prerequisite of moral and spiritual maturity for any attempted acquisition of occult skills. While promoting a worldview that sought to legitimise belief in the supersensory and transcendent possibilities of humankind, she yet presented the ostensible path to their mastery as one requiring intensive self-discipline and commitment to a quasi-ascetic lifestyle. It was shown that the model of “Atma-Vidya” was used as the paradigmatic prototype for aspirants, while those enticed by the thought of easy and inconsequential acquisition of paranormal abilities were derided and warned of the folly of such behaviour.

Our analysis revealed that another important component of the legitimating apparatus was the role that the idea of the Masters played. As well as presenting a

worldview featuring distinctive objectives, theory of knowledge, and orientation to experience, the legitimising effort required endorsement through a source of supernatural or unequivocally singular transcendent authority. We have shown that Blavatsky's leadership qualities were based on charisma, expertise, and experiential qualifications. However, to attain more entrenched leadership authority, we have suggested that she had to show linkage with a source of power and prestige unassailable by normal human standards. The idea of the theosophical Masters filled that role. By establishing her special position as mediator between the domains of the supernatural and the natural, she was able to justify her intentions for the movement as really originating with the Masters.

It was stressed that the topic of the Masters has constantly been a critical one in theosophical history, often provoking divisiveness and conflict. We have emphasised that Blavatsky's firm and unwavering insistence that the Masters were supremely evolved spiritual beings, who voluntarily appeared as real and distinct physical entities with special interest in the Theosophical Society had a number of crucial effects on the movement. Particularly, it was shown how controversies about the communicative methods of the Masters led to accusations and charges of fraud against Blavatsky. Her position, and that sustained by the Theosophical Society, was that though active on more subtle planes of existence, the Masters existed in the physical world, and communicated both via occult means and through more conventional methods when possible. We have seen how the rationale most commonly adopted was their special interest in sponsoring the theosophical movement was said to have been in response to the low ebb of spirituality prevalent in the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century. A scenario anticipated as part of the cyclical unfolding of human history and in which Madame Blavatsky was said to have been specially chosen and trained to counter the materialistic and spiritually vapid tendencies of the age. The Masters it was claimed, endorsed her as their messenger, acknowledged her occult skills and sanctified her role as their representative.

It was noted that while this orthodox theosophical position envisaged the Masters as more properly supernaturally endowed members of the cosmic hierarchy than as ordinary mortals, other viewpoints were also held. Johnson more recently has been the leading proponent of the position that the Masters were normal human beings whom

Blavatsky had been acquainted with in some way. These included a variety of occult specialists, friends, political and social activists, Eastern religious figures, travel companions, and so forth. We have shown that Johnson believed that Blavatsky drew upon her knowledge of such individuals and incorporated strands of real-life experience to creatively fashion new identities as specific Masters. He divests the Masters of their superhuman lustre, and sees a mythology built upon a historical foundation.

Our analysis also revealed that a more cynical perspective was voiced during Blavatsky's lifetime, in which it was surmised that the Masters were purely fictional inventions. We have shown that this line of speculation may be pursued in two ways. As an intentional effort to deceive, or as the objectivation of subconscious images and energies. The more common of these theories is the former, wherein Blavatsky was accused of acting fraudulently by inventing fictitious characters and perpetuating hoaxes intended to suggest their actual presence. An acquaintance whom she had originally known when visiting Egypt and more recently given employment, claimed that she and her husband were co-conspirators acting on Blavatsky's orders. Emma Coloumb testified that she and her husband were instructed to build a variety of mechanisms intended to fool others into believing that the Masters were actively present. Although her credibility was compromised by personal motives of jealousy and resentment, the charges led to a full-scale investigation by Richard Hodgson of the Society for Psychical Research. It was noted that also part of the investigation were the so-called *Mahatma Letters*, ostensibly written by the Masters directly or indirectly via occult means and allegedly precipitated without hindrance of time or space.

We have shown that though inexperienced, Hodgson conducted a detailed first-hand investigation that included interviews with Blavatsky and other witnesses. His final opinion was that Blavatsky was guilty of intentional fraudulent behaviour. His methods, attitude, and conclusions have been vehemently critiqued by theosophical supporters over the years. However, when released to the public, Blavatsky's already dubious personal reputation was dealt a severe blow. As was the credibility of theosophy amongst the general populace.

It was observed that Hodgson's report reinforced the view that Blavatsky merely acted out of cynical motives, intent on perpetuating deceit. However, we have shown that

by looking at some of the theories found in the broad Jungian speculative milieu, it is possible to hypothesise that Blavatsky may have objectivated images drawn from numinous experience and sincerely believed that at least a significant quotient of her experiences were veridical. Evans' theory of a subconscious creative impetus is particularly intriguing as a possible explanation

We have pointed out that these different theories appear to be mutually exclusive, but also hypothesised that it may be possible to see an admixture of influences collectively accounting for specific theosophical image of the Masters. Our line of speculation revealed that Blavatsky, since childhood, had personal familiarity with the notion of Masters from Freemasonry, Rosicrucian, literary and other sources. That she was apparently very susceptible to a variety of extraordinary kinds of experience, whether of the subconscious variety or of more lucid forms. That the numinous element appears to have been at least somewhat of a factor in some such episodes. It is conceivable that under some circumstances when triggered by the internal operations of her psyche or stimulated through external techniques, she felt that she was experiencing veridical visionary cognisance of entities conforming to her expectations. And apparently the emotional impact was at times intense, reinforcing the assumption of supernatural presences and religious sentiment. Possibly, these qualitative states were infrequent or not equally intense or convincing. It is conceivable that Blavatsky may have more consciously drawn upon her memories of known figures to embellish her recollections and enhance the images that had appeared more spontaneously. It was also suggested that the dual image of the Masters as both humanised with personal idiosyncrasies and as self-subsistent transcendent entities may possibly derive from a fusion of influences.

Our conclusions were that regardless of source, the idea of the Masters served a number of important functions. We have seen that in the correspondence with A.P. Sinnett, the contents of those *Mahatma Letters* conveyed the first semi-systematic authoritative version of theosophical doctrine. As well, it was pointed out that excessive attention to the minutiae of theosophical operations and personal advisement to Sinnett were found in the letters, indicative of the especial interest supposedly taken by the spiritual hierarchy in the affairs of the theosophical organisation. We have concluded that it elevated the Theosophical Society to special elite status as a pioneering group

dedicated to accelerating the spiritual evolution of humanity, giving the organisation a sense of transcendent legitimacy and purpose. It therefore provided a supernaturally sanctioned basis of authority from which Blavatsky could claim unique status.

We have also shown that with the concern for the success of the Theosophical Society allegedly shown by the Masters, individual members felt that their own personal progress and welfare was important within the extended hierarchy of spiritual activists. It also allowed creative leeway in how individual members envisioned themselves and in the choices they made by providing an idealised paradigmatic image for emulation and inspiration. It has been emphasised that belief in the commitment of the Masters to the Society stimulated enthusiasm within the upper echelons of the movement while the theory served as an attractive rationale for the general membership and interested sympathisers. We have established that the Masters were essential as supernaturally sanctioned sponsors of the Society, and their endorsement (in whatever manner it was alleged to have been obtained) providing special legitimating authority for its objectives and worldview. And, as the special "chosen messenger," Blavatsky retained a special stature in the eyes of her followers, often used to justify eccentric or controversial behaviour and claims.

Our analysis revealed that while the idea of the Masters provided authoritative legitimation by invoking the sense of supernatural support, the theosophical worldview yet required a more explicit and accessible authoritative form of representation. The specific ideas, values, and beliefs that distinguished the theosophical worldview from others necessitated systematic consolidation and organisation to establish the grounds of its uniqueness. We have shown that while not presented as sacred scripture, Blavatsky's major literary efforts were accorded near-equivalent status by enthusiasts, and have provided the definitive formal exposition of the theosophical worldview.

A variety of contemporary and older literary materials dealing with the various aspects and branches of the esoteric tradition were in existence during the formative years of the Theosophical Society. However, Blavatsky and other early theosophists laid claim to a more inclusive and definitive synthesis of knowledge, especially relevant for their specific times. It was pointed out that to disseminate the particular theosophical vision of reality, it had to be expressed in communicable form and be readily available to the

interested public. Some of the writings of Blavatsky, Olcott, Judge, Sinnett and others reflected their roots in spiritualist and other esoteric sources, with distinctive theosophical content gradually emerging and acquiring its own identity. Sinnett expounded a hybrid version of esoteric Buddhism and occultism. Judge wrote commentaries on the Bhagavad-Gita and the aphorisms of Patanjali. Olcott had written about his investigative work in the spiritualist milieu. It was stated though that Blavatsky was a prolific writer, author of numerous articles, continually engaged in personal, polemical and substantive disputes and correspondences. We noted that the elements of the theosophical mythos had been discussed and promoted, but not systematically consolidated until Blavatsky produced her major books. Our conclusion was that for the movement to acquire more credibility as a distinctive entity, then more explicit, comprehensive, and authoritative exposition was needed to reinforce the perception of uniqueness and comparative superiority. It was noted that legitimacy in part is acquired by gaining public acquiescence and acknowledgment of the plausibility or reliability of the views expressed.

We have shown that the importance of Blavatsky's major works had been made apparent by the reaction of her followers, who mythologized the compositional process and accredited the works with multiple levels of hidden meaning. We have looked at Blavatsky's three major written works, *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine*, and *The Voice of the Silence* and seen the controversial circumstances under which they were created and the thematic and logical approaches taken. It was explained that the events surrounding the production of *Isis Unveiled* became part of theosophical lore, as Blavatsky and Olcott claimed that a succession of enigmatic proceedings was indicative of the intervention of higher beings in the compositional process. We have shown that the book itself set the tone for an aggressive critique of mainstream beliefs and established the ground intended as the foundation for a new esoterically based worldview. Traditional Christianity and materialistic science were the main targets of criticism, constantly cited for emphasising the exoteric and mundane at the expense of the esoteric and the sacred. By the unabashed enthusiasm and esteem for alternative sources that prioritise the mysterious, the magical, and the mystical, our analysis indicates that

Blavatsky was willing to incorporate any materials she could find to debunk tradition and entrench her own view of reality as thoroughly sacred

It was shown that the circumstances surrounding the production of *The Secret Doctrine* were likewise reputed to involve supersensory forces and inexplicable phenomena. Blavatsky appeared to have envisioned *The Secret Doctrine* as the definitive compendium of theosophy, a literary legacy that would serve posterity as the most thorough, authoritative, and systematic exposition of theosophical materials. We have observed that the structural form is built around the use of allegedly primordial mythical excerpts from the mysterious and obscure *Book of Dzyan.* However, it was noted that the main substance of the work is in the form of closely argued and extensively annotated commentaries by Blavatsky. We have stressed that a key premise in her exposition was that she was cognisant of a symbolic master key that revealed the purported true esoteric meanings disguised in myths and symbols. However, our conclusion was that her method of symbolic decoding in fact was to argue for an occult fundamentalist linear interpretation of legendary and mythical materials. We have observed that myth was demystified and then reified again in a novel configuration, claiming to reveal an underlying and extensive evolutionary narrative discernible only through proper decoding of disguised and neglected symbolic content.

We have pointed out that *The Voice of the Silence* also was presented with its own aura of compositional mystery, allegedly being translations of portions of a rare ancient Tibetan Buddhist text. In contrast to the other two massive major books, this one appears as a sparse, streamlined epigrammatic instructive guidebook, expressed in Buddhist idiom and intent on establishing the parameters for realising enlightenment and engaging in the highest states of mystical consciousness. We showed that Blavatsky was content to let the verses speak for themselves, and refrained from excessive commentary. Her observations are found mostly in the notes to the verses, and are restrained and succinct. It was noted that the major intent of this book was to provide guidance and advice in the ongoing quest for spiritual enlightenment.

Isis Unveiled was the first major theosophical statement, and thus predominantly critical of established beliefs and in rehabilitating disputable sources of knowledge. Its importance lay in being the first explicit theosophical challenge to traditional worldview

authority. In our discussion of *The Secret Doctrine,* we have shown that it was meant to serve as the most authoritative compendium of theosophical knowledge, and thus attempts to present a coherent and systematic position. We established that it provided the definitive formal ideational elucidation of the theosophical worldview, and entrenched Blavatsky as the pre-eminent theoretician. *The Voice of the Silence* was shown to be an inspirational and practical offering, meant most specifically for the individual willing to embark upon the disciplined path towards the goal of enlightenment. We confirmed that collectively, Blavatsky's most important books stood as the most authoritative written expositions of the theosophical worldview, each intended to address perceived needs at their time of publication.

Having examined motivational factors, worldview construction, the unique early theosophical treatment of knowledge, experience, supernatural authority and literary legacy, our concluding observations dealt with the sociological and historical dynamics of the early phase of the movement. We have shown how Blavatsky was the central figure of the theosophical imperative. When she began her theosophical career, she had already had an extensive familiarity with a variety of occult, esoteric, and alternative sources. We have noted that she was well versed about the subject matter and self-assured about the importance of her mission. It was found that her charismatic personality was the dominant trait, while her fecund intellect, eclectic interests, and enigmatic background provided a constant source of fascination and curiosity that was largely responsible for attracting others to the incipient movement. As well, it was observed that she was capable of provoking intense hostility and disdain, and arousing the enmity of her enemies.

Our analysis indicated that the charismatically effusive Blavatsky appeared to embody most of the taxonomic characteristics of the shaman, as well as function in the roles of prophet and priestess. Her fluency with a wide range of altered states of consciousness and numinous encounters enhanced her public persona as an authoritative leader, with privileged access to the domains of the sacred and to communication with higher entities. It was reiterated that her justification for initiating the theosophical movement was expressed as compliance with a direct initiative from those transcended Masters, of whom she claimed to be the current earthly messenger. And her expertise in

all things esoteric allowed her to pursue an exhaustive course of intellectual argumentation in support of the principles of the theosophical worldview. In addition, we have found that Madame Blavatsky can also be said to embody characteristics of the trickster archetype and the "outsider" personality type, which would account somewhat for her propensity towards manipulation, mystification, and audacious behaviour.

It was shown that she and Olcott can also be viewed as examples of liminality as they seemed destined to doggedly pursue the path of theosophical propagation and promotion. Olcott, though not as personally charismatic as Blavatsky, reflected the charisma of office as President of the Theosophical Society. Though gullible and easily influenced by Blavatsky, he yet proved to be efficient in organisational affairs and was seen as an honest and forthright spokesperson for the movement. However, with Blavatsky's death, conflicts arose about the right to succession. We have established that the most important criterion sought for by competing factions was the requisite endorsement of the Masters, though power struggles, personality clashes and ideological differences were also significant divisive factors. It was shown that Olcott believed he was still the intended leader, though William Q. Judge claimed his own proof of Masterly sanctification in the form of a letter allegedly from a Master. Subsequently, his evidence was rejected as inauthentic, though a compromise based on nuanced semantic interpretation allowed him to remain a member. However, we noted that when Annie Besant succeeded Olcott, claiming Masterly endorsement, Judge and his faction seceded from the Theosophical Society, forming a new, mostly American, theosophical organisation.

It was shown that with schisms and secessions occurring after Blavatsky's death, the original movement became roughly divided into "Back to Blavatsky" and "Neotheosophy" camps. Those of the "Back to Blavatsky" camp such as in the Judge group, professed loyalty to the theosophical worldview enunciated by Blavatsky and represented in her writings, and rejected later amendments and revisions to theosophical doctrine. They also believed that the Masters were no longer utilising the Theosophical Society as their favoured pioneering vehicle. But the proponents of "Neotheosophy," found within the leadership of the Theosophical Society, particularly Besant and her mentor, C.W. Leadbeater, felt that ongoing clairvoyant investigations were legitimate

grounds for supplementing the details of the worldview proposed by Blavatsky. More controversially, it was stressed that Besant and Leadbetter claimed to be in regular astral contact with the Masters, and that they and other Theosophical Society elite were working continuously in preparation for the transition from the old cycle to the new. As well, predilections towards Eastern and Western forms of esotericism also resulted in secessions and splinter-movements. The syncretic synthesis sought by Blavatsky endured more as an ideal than a reality.

Our examination of the theosophical movement as a sociological phenomenon revealed that there are points of conformity with a variety of analytical models. The divisions of church, sect, and cult are useful broad definitions for differentiating between religious groups, while the more recent term NRM (new religious movements) is also useful in locating the theosophical movement as a predecessor to more recent forms. It was shown that the theosophical movement could be interpreted as a kind of cult, because of its prioritising of personal inner spiritual fulfilment rather than of social goals. And the dependence on an eclectic, exotic body of doctrine for achievement of this form of spiritual fulfilment can be interpreted as a means of salvation that doesn't depend on content found in the local social environment. We have shown that the theosophical movement can also be classified as a sect. Particularly, a manipulationist sect. Again, focus is on this-worldly salvation via methods of self-improvement of the mind and progressive achievements along the path towards personal spiritual realisation.

It was shown that the kinds of people drawn to this kind of manipulationist sect have been characterised as semi-sophisticated intellectually, interested in philosophical and scientific knowledge, but not necessarily capable of understanding all the depth and detail fully. They are prone to look for shortcuts and non-intensive means of obtaining the desired results. Our analysis indicated that this profile would seem to apply at least somewhat to the type of early theosophical enthusiast, but not necessarily exhaustively. As well, we noted that a certain portion of early theosophists were wealthy and of the leisured class. And a significant portion of such patrons appear to have been female. However, a more middle-class representation seems to have been the norm for the early theosophical movement. As well, it was confirmed that the theosophical worldview was of interest to some individuals within the arts as well as to some who were eccentric and

sought out a variety of non-traditional alternatives.

Our analysis showed that as a movement deviating from the mainstream, theosophy can be viewed as form of excursus religion. A minority protest against the status quo, emphasising personal spiritual development, and which may provoke a sense of alienation when the contents of the new orientation are seen to be in conflict with the old. It was shown that when the new worldview is accepted, and its special claim to privileged knowledge is contrasted to the old, a new intensive commitment may be engendered. We noted that the gnostic sect especially may convey the feeling that a radically new chapter of life has begun, based on a new orientation to reality. Our analysis indicated that for many early theosophists, the enthusiasm shown for their new worldview when contrasted to the old seems to equate with the characteristics of this classification.

It was emphasised that the theosophical orientation reflected values and beliefs that embodied Blavatsky's gnostic outlook. The extreme contrast felt between the spiritual and the worldly allowed little room for compromise. With the obvious disconnectedness between the imperfections of a secularly oriented world contrasted with the idealised vision of spiritual harmony, those loyal to the theosophical worldview would inevitably feel some degree of alienation from the mainstream environment. Yet whether theosophy can be classified as a counterculture is debatable. The ambition of radical and quick social change was not a dominant active priority. Changes in the social order were believed to be inevitable, based upon the permeation of a spiritually enlightened consensual outlook. We noted though that in the early theosophical movement, there was more of a world-denying attitude and a focus on personal spiritual concerns. The ideal of universal brotherhood was a major objective, but not an urgent issue demanding immediate action. Our analysis indicted that the theosophical movement may have engendered a sense of alienation, but not to the extent that it endorsed radical change in the social order.

The sense of alienation was dealt with in another way, by introduction of the concept of psychic deprivation. With the feeling that the values and beliefs of the majority worldviews are inadequate, compensation is sought through alternative options that may provide more satisfactory methods of salvation. It was found that Theosophy

may be interpreted as a cult that embodies a sense of alienation towards the dominant worldviews, and consists of members experiencing psychic deprivation.

As well, it was shown that theosophy can be viewed as beginning as an audience cult, transmitting their message mostly through lectures public speaking engagements, and other informal channels. As it became more organised and developed a corpus of authoritative literature, it became a broader cult movement. And as a movement promoting a unique esoteric worldview, it served as the major predecessor to later twentieth century NRMs. As well, our observation was that because the theosophical worldview was intended as a more authentic and spiritually meaningful alternative to mainstream Western options, it was intended to be a shared communal orientation to reality. In that sense, it can be seen as a form of cosmological communion, through which those who are empathetic derive maximum spiritual satisfaction in their envisioning of reality.

In conclusion, we have followed the process of articulation, shaping, and presentment of a distinctive worldview that emerged as a specific response to dissatisfaction with the way reality was represented through the mainstream traditions of knowledge in the late nineteenth century. We have shown that alternative worldviews have existed simultaneously with those more socially pervasive and dominant, reflective of different configurations of values, beliefs, and ideas than those necessarily prevalent at any time within the more mainstream social environments. Dissatisfaction with the tenets of what was characterised as “dogmatic religion, rationalist philosophy and materialist science” stimulated the emergence of a variety of dissenting individuals, groups, and movements. We have concluded that the ostensible motivation of Blavatsky and her fellow theosophists was to offer as a preferential option a view of the universe that was thoroughly and uncompromisingly spiritual, and more emotionally and intellectually attractive than other contemporary orientations. Our analysis showed that she was the most successful in so promulgating that orientation because she was able to incorporate more elements of the esoteric mix into an alluring, persuasive, integrated, and systematic vision. This was maintained by a charismatic personality, expertise in specialised knowledge, fluency with extraordinary forms of experience, and claims to supernatural endorsement. And we have noted that she was able to so represent the theosophical

worldview in literary works deemed sacredly inspired or abetted, and of monumentally significant import for the edification of posterity. As was noted, Blavatsky's particular background, capabilities, and affinities pertained to the subject matter of the esoteric. Thus it is not surprising that the substance of the incipient worldview consisted of materials drawn from the entire esoteric spectrum, the premises of which were considered highly debatable when judged by mainstream criteria of truth.

The attempted legitimation of disputable ideas and beliefs was an earnest ambition that galvanised the movement, as one of the dominant motives was to rehabilitate esoteric content and prove its credibility. Yet as a minority cognitive position, the appeal of the movement was limited to those willing to accept the starting premises about the superiority of esoteric principles. Or at least suspend judgment and attempt an objective assessment. And how the worldview was presented and by whom it was represented also significantly determined the degree of its acceptance.

Finally then, perhaps the most provocative aspect of the early theosophical movement was the way Blavatsky's personal disreputability impacted upon the reception of the worldview itself. As has been confirmed in our analysis, she was an inscrutable and charismatic leader, most singularly recognised as the predominant authoritative theosophical personage. Yet despite her imposing persona, we have noted that it was her disreputable status and continued controversies that engendered scepticism about the reliability of theosophical claims. The entrenchment of the worldview promoted by someone publicly considered highly scandalous unavoidably meant that there would always remain an enigmatic aura surrounding its evaluation.

Yet notwithstanding this mitigating consideration, many of the esoteric themes deemed disputable during the nineteenth century theosophical movement have endured thanks in large part to the pioneering legitimating efforts undertaken at the time. Most notably, the three defining objectives of the inaugural Theosophical Society have been sustained and become less controversial to Western sensibilities than when initiated. The ideals of universal brotherhood, dissemination and study of esoterically compatible exotic forms of knowledge, and the investigation of the potentialities of human experience and of nature are examples of how the nineteenth century theosophical worldview was able to legitimise what was considered disputable at the time and entrench a consistent

alternative vision of reality that, despite the disreputability that surrounded its inception and history, has retained its integrity.

Bibliography

Ahern, Geoffrey. *Sun At Midnight: The Rudolph Steiner Movement and the Western Esoteric Tradition*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press. 1984.

Altick, Richard D. *Victorian People and Ideas.* New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 1973.

Arber, Agnes. *The Manifold and the One.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1967.

Argyle, Michael. *Psychology and Religion: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 2000.

Arundale, G. S. *Nirvana: An Occult Experience.* Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1978.

_____. *The Lotus Fire: A Study in Symbolic Yoga.* Adyar/London/Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1986.

Ashe, Geoffrey. *The Ancient Wisdom.* London: McMillan Ltd. 1977.

Ashish, Sri Madhava. *Man, Son of Man: In the Stanzas of Dzyan.* London: Rider and Company. 1970.

Avens, Roberts. *Imagination is Reality: Western Nirvana in Jung, Hillman, Barfield and Cassirer*. Dallas Texas: Spring Publications, Inc. 1980.

_____. *Imaginal Body*: *Para-Jungian Reflections on Soul, Imagination and Death.* Lanham, MD./London: University Press of America Inc. 1982.

Bailey, Alice. *Initiation, Solar and Human.* New York: Lucis Publishing Company. 1929.

_____. *The Externalisation of the Heirarchy.* New York: Lucis Press. 1968.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Reverie.* New York: The Orion Press. 1969.

Barker, A. T. ed. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett.* New York/Melbourne/Sydney/Capetown: Rider and Company. 1948.

Barnes, Harry Elmer. *An Intellectual and Cultural History of the Western World.* 3 vols. New York: Dover Publications. 1965.

Barnett, H. G. *Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change*. New York/Toronto/London: McGraw-Hill Books. 1953.

Bauer, Henry H. *Science or Pseudoscience.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2001.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Thinking Sociologically*. Oxford and Cambridge MA: Basic Blackwell Ltd. 1990.

Bierlein, J. F. *Parallel Myths.* New York: Ballantine Wellspring Books. 1994.

Bennett, Gillian. *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today.* London/Harmondsworth/New York/Victoria/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books. 1987.

Bennett, J. G. *The Masters of Wisdom.* New York: Samuel Weiser Inc. 1977.

Berger, Peter. *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1963.

_____. *The Sacred Canopy.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1969.

_____. *A Rumor of Angels.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1970.

_____. *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity.* New York/Toronto/Oxford/Singapore/Sydney: The Free Press. 1992.

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1967.

Berger, Peter, Brigitte Berger, Hansfried Kellner. *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness.* New York: Vintage Books. 1974.

Berra, Tim M. *Evolution and the Myth of Creation.* Stanford CA: Stanford University Press. 1990.

Besant, Annie. *Annie Besant: An Autobiography.* London: The Gresham Press. 1908.

_____. *Some Problems of Life.* Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1919.

_____. *Initiation*. Wheaton: The Theosophical Press. 1923.

_____. *A Study in Consciousness.* Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1959.

_____. *The Ancient Wisdom.* Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1968.

Besant, Annie and C. W. Leadbeater. *Thought Forms.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1969.

_____. *Talks on the Path of Occultism. Volume Two. The Voice of the Silence.* Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1991.

Bharati, Agehananda. *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism.* Santa Barbara CA.: Ross-Erickson. 1976.

Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna. *Collected Writings. Vol 1. 1874 – 1878.* Wheaton /Madras/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1977.

_____. *The Esoteric Writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.* Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1980.

Bochenski, I. M. *Contemporary European Philosophy*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966

Bok, Sissela. *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation.* New York: Vintage Books. 1984.

Bourguignon, Erika. ed. *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change.* Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press. 1973.

Bowra, Maurice. *The Romantic Imagination,* London: Oxford Paperbacks, 1966.

Brandon, Ruth. *The Spiritualists.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1984.

Brann, Eva T. *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance.* Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1991.

Braude, Ann. *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth Century America.* Boston: Beacon Press. 1989.

Brehier, Emile. *The Nineteenth Century: Periods of Systems 1800 – 1850.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1968.

_____. *Contemporary Philosophy Since 1850.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1969

Broad, C. D. *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research*. New York: Humanities Press. 1969.

Broomfield, John. *Other Ways of Knowing.* Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions. 1997.

Brown, Richard Harvey. *Society as Text: Essays on Rhetoric, Reason, and Reality.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1987.

Brown, Slater. *The Heyday of Spiritualism.* Richmond Hill, Ontario: Simon and Schuster of Canada Ltd. 1971.

Bullock, Alan, Oliver Stallybrass, Stephen. Trombley. ed. *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought.* London: Fontana Press. 1988.

Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History.* Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press. 1959.

Burtt, E. A. *In Search of Philosophic Understanding.* New York and Toronto: Mentor Books. 1967.

_____. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science.* Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press. 1980.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology*. New York: Viking Books. 1968.
_____. ed. *Myths, Dreams, and Religion.* New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc. 1970.

Capra, Fritjof. *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture.* Toronto/New York/London/Sydney: Bantam Books. 1983.

Carroll, Bret. *Spiritualism in Antebellum America.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 1997.

Cassirer, Ernst. *The Problem of Knowledge.* New Haven: Yale University Press. 1950.

_____. *The Logic of the Humanities.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1966.

_____. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture.* Toronto/New York/London: Bantam Books. 1970.

Chadwick, Owen. *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century.* Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press. 1975.

Chandler, Russell. *Understanding the New Age*. Dallas/London/Vancouver/Melbourne: Word Publishing. 1991.

Charet, F. X. *Spiritualism and the Foundation of C. G. Jung's Psychology*. Albany, New York: State University of New York. 1993.

Chaudhuri, Nirad C. *Scholar Extraordinary: The Life and Times of Professor the Rt. Hon. Friedrich Max Mueller. P. C.* London: Chatto and Windus. 1974.

Childs, Gilbert. *Rudolph Steiner: His Life and Work.* Edinburg: Floris Books. 1995.

Chryssides, George D. *Exploring New Religions*. London and New York: Cassell. 1999.

Clive, Geoffrey. *The Romantic Enlightenment: Ambiguity and Paradox in the Western Mind (1750 – 1920).* New York: Meridian Books. 1960.

Collins, Randall. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change.* Cambridge, MA. And London: Harvard University Press. 2000.

Corbett, Lionel. *The Religious Function of the Psyche.* London and New York: Routledge. 1996.

Corbin, Henry. *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1969.

Cranston, Sylvia. *H.P.B, The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. 1993.

Crème, Benjamin. *Maitreya's Mission.* Amsterdam/London/Los Angeles: Share International Foundation. 1990.

Crookall, Robert. *The Interpretation of Cosmic and Mystical Experiences.* Cambridge and London: James Clarke and Company. 1969.

Cumont, Franz. *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism.* New York: Dover Publications. 1956.

Curtiss, Hariette Augusta and F. Homer Curtiss. *The Message of Aquaria: The Significance and Mission of the Aquarian Age.* Washington: The Curtiss Philosophic Book Co. 1947.

Davis, Ann. *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting 1920 – 1940.* Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press. 1992.

Dawson, Christopher. *Religion and Culture.* New York: Meridian Books, Inc. 1958.

Dawson, Lorne L. *Comprehending Cults: The New Sociology of Religious Movements.* Toronto/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press. 1998.

Dinnage, Rosemary. *Annie Besant.* Harmondsworth/New York/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books. 1986.

Douglas, Alfred. *Extra Sensory Powers: A Century of Psychical Research.* London: Victor Gollancz. 1976

Douglas, Mary. *Thought Styles.* London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1996.

_____. *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology.* London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Douglas, Mary and Steven N. Tipton. ed. *Religion and America.* Boston: Beacon Press. 1982.

Durr, R. A. *Poetic Vision and the Psychedelic Experience.* New York: Delta Books. 1971.

Dyer, Donald D. *Jung's Thoughts on God: Religious Depths of the Psyche.* York Beach, Maine: Nicolas-Hays. 2000.

Edinger, Edward F. *Transformation of the God Image.* Toronto: Inner City Books. 1992.

Ehrenwald, Jan. *The ESP Experience: A Psychiatric Validation.* New York: Basic Books, Inc. 1978.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane.* New York: Harvest Books. 1959.

_____. *Images and Symbols*. New York: Sheed and Ward. 1961.

_____. *Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religion.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1976.

_____. *Rites and Symbols of Initiation.* Woodstock, CT.: Spring Publications. 1995.

Ellul, Jacques. *The Technological Society*. New York: Vintage Books. 1964.

Ellwood, Robert S. Jr. *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1973.

_____. *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1979.

_____. *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of Wisdom of the Ages.* Wheaton/ Madras/London: Quest Books. 1986.

Enright, D. J. *The Supernatural.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 1995.

Evans, Christopher. *Cults of Unreason.* New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux. 1973.

Evans, Hilary. *Intrusions: Society and the Paranormal*. London/Boston/Henley:

Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1982.

_____. *Visions. Apparitions. Alien Visitors*. Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: The Aquarian Press. 1986.

Faber, M. D. *Objectivity and Human Perception*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. 1985.

_____. *New Age Thinking: A Psychoanalytic Critique.* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press. 1996.

Faivre, Antoine. *Access to Western Esotericism.* Albany, New York: State University of New York. 1994.

Faivre, Antoine and Jacob Needleman. ed. *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*. New York: Crossroad. 1992.

Ferguson, Marilyn. *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher Inc. 1980.

Field, Sydney. *Krishnamurti: The Reluctant Messiah.* New York: Paragon House. 1989.

Fingarette, Herbert. *Self-Deception*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press. 2000.

Flew, Anthony. ed., *Readings in the Philosophical Problems of Parapsychology.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1987.

Forman, Robert K. C. *Mysticism, Mind, Consciousness.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1999.

Franz-von, Marie Louise. *Archetypal Dimensions of the Psyche.* Boston and London: Shambhala. 1997.

Fromm, Erich. *Psychoanalysis and Religion.* New York: Bantam Books. 1967.

Galanter, Marc. ed. *Cults and New Religious Movements*. Washington: Published by the American Psychiatric Association. 1989.

Gardner, Martin. *The New Age: Notes of a Fringe Watcher.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1988.

George, Leonard. *Alternative Realities: The Paranormal, the Mystic, and the Transcendent in Human Experience.* New York: Facts on File Inc. 1995.

Giddens, Anthony. *New Rules of Sociological Method*. London: Hutchinson & Co. 1977.

Giussani, Luigi. *The Religious Sense.* Montreal/Kingston/London/Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press. 1997.

Glock, Charles Y. and Rodney Stark,. *Religion and Society in Tension.* Chicago: Rand McNally and Company. 1965.

Godwin, Joscelyn. *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World.* Cambridge/Hagerstown/New York/Philadelphia/London/Mexico City/Sao Paulo/Sydney: Harper and Row. 1981.

_____. *The Theosophical Enlightenment.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1994.

Gomes, Michael. *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement.* Wheaton/ /Madras/London: Quest Books. 1987.

Goode, Erich. *Paranormal Beliefs: A Sociological Introduction.* Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press. 2000.

Gowan, John Curtis. *Trance, Art, and Creativity.* Buffalo, New York: Printed for the Creative Problem-Solving Institute. 1975.

_____. *Operations of Increasing Order.* Westlake Village, CA: Privately Published by the Author. 1980.

Gray, William B. *Thinking Critically About New Age Ideas.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company. 1991.

Greene, John C. *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought*. New York: Mentor Books. 1961

Griffin, David Ray. *Parapsychology, Philosophy and Spirituality*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1997.

_____. ed. *Archetypal Process: Self and Divine in Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman.* Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press. 1989.

Grim, Patrick. ed. *Philosophy, Science and the Occult.* Albany, New York: State University of New York. 1982.

Grondin, Jean. *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1994.

Grof, Stanislav. *The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1998.

Guenon, Rene. *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*. New York: Noonday Press. 1959.

_____. *East and West*, Ghent, New York: Perennial Wisdom Series. 1995.

Gurvitch, Georges. *The Social Framework of Knowledge.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell. 1971.

Haas, William S. *The Destiny of the Mind: East and West.* New York: The MacMillan Company. 1956.

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. Albany, New York: State University of New York. 1998.

Hanlon, A. C. *Into the Fourth Dimension*. Adyar/London/Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1977.

Hanson, Virginia. ed. *H. P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine.* Wheaton/ Madras/London: Quest Books. 1971.

Harpur, Patrick. *Daimonic Reality: Understanding Otherworld Encounters*. London/New York/Ringwood/Toronto/Auckland: Penguin Arkana Books. 1994.

Hayes, Carlton J. *A Generation of Materialism: 1871 – 1900.* New York: Harper and Row. 1941.

Haynes, Renee. *The Society For Psychical Research 1882 – 1982. A History*. London and Sydney: Macdonald and Company. 1982.

Hearder, H. *Europe in the Nineteenth Century: 1830 – 1880.* London: Longman's Green. 1966.

Heelas, Paul. *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity.* Cambridge, MA. and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. 1996.

Heer, Friedrich. *The Intellectual History of Europe.* 2 vols. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1968.

Hexter, J. H. ed. *The Traditions of the Western World. Volume 2. Early Modern Period and the Recent Period.* Chicago: Rand McNally and Company. 1971.

Hexham, Irving and Karla Poewe,. *Understanding Cults and New Religions.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company. 1987.

_____. *New Religions as Global Cultures.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press. 1997.

Hick, John. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent.* New Haven: Yale University Press. 1989.

Hillman, James. *The Dream and the Underworld.* New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London: Harper and Row, Publishers. 1979.

Hines, Terrance. *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal: A Critical Examination of the Evidence.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1988.

Hocking, William Ernest. *The Meaning of Immortality in Human Experience.* New York:

Harper Brothers. 1957.

Hodgson, Richard. The Defence of the Theosophists. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, Volume 9, 1893 – 1894*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company Ltd. 1894.

Hodson, Geoffrey. *Kingdom of the Gods.* Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1981.

_____. *Clairvoyant Investigations*. Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1984.

Hoyt, Karen and Yamamoto, J. Isamu. *The New Age Rage.* New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company. 1987.

Hughes, Robert A. *A Study Course in Theosophy and Occultism*. n.p., n.d.

Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy.* London: Fontana Books. 1959.

_____. *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell.* Harmondsworth and Ringwood: Penguin Books. 1967.

Inglis, Brian. *Science and Parascience: A History of the Paranormal 1914 – 1939.* London/Sydney/Auckland/Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton. 1984.

Irvine, William. *Apes, Angels, and Victorians: Darwin, Huxley, and Evolution.* Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books. 1962.

Jaffe, Lawrence. *Celebrating Soul: Preparing for the New Religion.* Toronto: Inner City

Books. 1999.

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience.* New York: Mentor Books. 1958.

Jayakar, Pupul. *Krishnamurti: A Biography.* San Francisco: Harper and Row. 1986.

Jenkins, Philip. *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History.* New York: Oxford University Press. 2000.

Johnson, K. Paul. *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Brotherhood.* Albany, New York: State University of New York. 1994

_____. *Initiates of Theosophical Masters.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1995.

Johnson, Raynor C. *Nurslings of Immortality*. New York/Evanston/San Francisco/London: Harper Colophon Books. 1972.

Jones, Richard H. *Mysticism Examined: Philosophical Inquiries Into Mysticism.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1993.

Judge, William Q. *Practical Occultism.* Pasadena: Theosophical University Press. 1980.

Jung, Carl Gustav. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul.* New York: Harvest Books. 1938.

_____. *Psychology and Religion.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1977.

_____. *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1966

_____. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious.* New York: Princeton University Press. 1990.

Kaiser, Christopher. *Creation and the History of Science.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company. 1991.

Kearney, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-Modern.* New York: Fordham University Press. 1998.

Kern, Stephen. *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880 – 1918*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. 1983.

Kingsford, Anna Bonus and Edward Maitland. *The Perfect Way: or, The Finding of the Christ.* London: John M. Watkins. 1923.

Kingsland, William. *Christos: The Religion of the Future*. London: John M. Watkins. 1949.

Kluckholm, Clyde. *Mirror for Man.* New York: Premier Books. 1965.

Koestler, Arthur. *The Roots of Coincidence: An Excursion Into Parapsychology.* New York: Vintage Books. 1972.

_____. *The Sleepwalkers: A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe.* Harmondsworth and Ringwood: Penguin Books. 1968.

Knight, David. *The Age of Science.* Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell Inc. 1988.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1970.

Kurtz, Paul. *The Transcendental Temptation.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1991.

La Fontaine, J. S. *Initiation: Ritual Drama and Secret Knowledge Across the World.* Harmondsworth/New York/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books. 1985.

Langdon-Davies, John. *On the Nature of Man.* New York: Mentor Books. 1961.

Langer, Susan K. *Philosophy in a New Key.* New York: Mentor Books. 1948.

Langer, William L. *Political and Social Upheaval: 1832 – 1852*. New York: Harper and Row. 1969.

Larisey, Peter. *Light for a Cold Land: Lawren Harris's Work and Life – An Interpretation.* Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press. 1993.

Larsen, Stephen. *The Shaman's Doorway: Opening Imagination to Power and Myth.* Barrytown, New York: Station Hill Press. 1988.

Leadbeater, Charles W. *The Hidden Side of Things.* Adyar/Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1977.

_____. *The Inner Life.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1978.

_____. *The Masters and the Path.* Adyar. The Theosophical Publishing House. 1997.

Leff, Gordon. *History and Social Theory.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1971.

Lewis, I. M. *Religion in Context: Cults and Charisma.* Cambridge/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

Lewis, James R. and J. Gordon Melton, ed. *Perspectives on the New Age*. Albany, New York: State University of New York. 1992.

Lind, Mary Ann. *From Nirvana to the New Age.* Terrytown, New York: Fleming H. Revel Company. 1991.

Lowith, Karl. *From Hegel to Nietzche: The Revolution in Nineteenth Century Thought.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1967.

Luckmann, Thomas. ed. *Phenomenology and Sociology*. Harmondsworth/New York/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books. 1978.

Lutyens, Mary. *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 1975.

_____. *Krishnamurti: The Years of Fulfilment.* New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 1983.

_____. *Krishnamurti: His Life and Death*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1990.

Mannheim, Karl. *Essays on the Sociology of Culture.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. 1956.

_____. *Ideology and Utopia.* New York: Harvest Books. 1966.

Marks, David. *The Psychology of the Psychic*. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 2000.

Marwick, Max. ed. *Witchcraft and Sorcery.* Harmondsworth/Baltimore/Ringwood: Penguin Books. 1970.

Maslow, Abraham H. *Towards a Psychology of Being.* New York/Cincinnati/Toronto/London/Melbourne: D. Van Nostrand Company. 1968.

Mastin, Catharine M. *Portrait of a Spiritualist: Franklin Carmichael and the National Gallery of Canada Collection.* Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada. 2001.

Mather, George A. and Larry A Nichols. *A Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions and the Occult.* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House. 1993.

Matson, Floyd W. *The Broken Image: Man, Science and Society.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1966.

McClendon, James. *Deviant Science: The Case of Parapsychology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1984.

_____. *Wondrous Events: Foundations of Religious Belief.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1994.

McCutcheon, Russell T. ed. *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion.* London and New York: Cassell. 1999.

McKenzie, A. E. E. *The Major Achievements of Science.* New York: Touchstone Books. 1973.

Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self, and Society.* Chicago: Phoenix Books. 1969.

Mead, G. R. S. *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*. Wheaton/ Madras: Quest Books. 1967.

Meade, Marion. *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons. 1980.

Meiland, Jack W. *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge.* New York: Random House. 1965.

Melton, J. Gordon *Finding Enlightenment: Ramtha's School of Ancient Wisdom.* Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing Inc. 1998.

Melton, Gordon J., Jerome Clark, Aidan A. Kelly. *New Age Almanac*. New York/Detroit/Chicago/London: Visible Ink Press. 1991.

Merrell-Wolff, Franklin. *Pathways Through to Space: A Personal Record of Transformation in Consciousness.* New York: Warner Books. 1976.

_____. *Transformations in Consciousness. The Metaphysics and Epistemology.* Albany, New York: State University Press of New York. 1995.

Meyerhoff, Hans. ed. *The Philosophy of History in Our Time.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books. 1959.

Mol, Hans. *Identity and the Sacred.* Agincourt: The Book Society of Canada Ltd. 1976.

Miller, Timothy. ed. *America's Alternative Religions.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press. 1995.

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination.* New York: Oxford University Press. 1959.

_____. *Power, Politics, and People*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1963

Montague, William Pepperell. *The Ways of Knowing.* London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1962.

Moore, James R. *The Post-Darwin Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggle to Come to Terms With Darwin in Great Britain and America 1870 – 1900.* Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.1979.

Murphet, Howard. *When Daylight Comes: A Biography of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1975.

_____. *Yankee Beacon of Buddhist Light: Life of Col. Henry S. Olcott.* Wheaton/ Madras/London: Quest Books. 1988.

Murphy, Gardner and Robert O. Ballou. ed. *William James on Psychical Research*. Clifton, New Jersey: A.M. Kelley. 1973.

Muses, Charles and Young, Arthur M. ed. *Consciousness and Reality: The Human Pivot Point. New* York: Avon Books. 1974.

Needham, Joseph. *The New Religions.* Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company. 1970.

Neff, Mary K. ed. *Personal Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky.* Adyar: Quest Books. 1967.

Nelson, Geoffrey K. *Spiritualism and Society.* New York: Schocken Books. 1969.

Nethercott, Arthur. H. *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant.* Chicago/London/Toronto: University of Chicago Press. 1963.

Newell, Norman D. *Creation and Evolution, Myth or Reality?* New York: Columbia University Press. 1982.

Northrup, F.C.S. *The Logic of the Sciences and the Humanities.* New York: Meridian Books. 1959.

_____. *The Meeting of East and West.* New York: Collier Books. 1967.

Ornstein, Robert E. *The Psychology of Consciousness.* New York/Baltimore/Harmondsworth/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books. 1975.

Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy.* New York: Galaxy Books. 1965.

Paden, William E. *Religious Worlds.* Boston: Beacon Press. 1988.

Pareto, Vilfredo. *A Treatise on General Sociology. Vol. 1*. New York: Dover Publications. 1935.

Parsons, Talcott. *The Social System.* New York: The Free Press. 1964.

_____. *The Evolution of Societies.* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall. 1977.

Paton, H. J. *The Modern Predicament: A Study in the Philosophy of Religion.* New York: Collier Books. 1962.

Perkins, James. *A Geometry of Space-Consciousness.* Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House. 1973.

_____. *Adyar, Theosophical Society Centenary, 1875 – 1975*. Adyar: 1975.

Peters, Ted. *The Cosmic Self: A Penetrating Look at Today's New Age Movements*. San Francisco: Harper. 1991.

Piper, Raymond F. and Lila K. Piper. *Cosmic Art.* New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc. 1975.

Poortman, J. J. *Vehicles of Consciousness.* 4 vols. Utrecht/Adyar/London/Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1978

Prajnanda. *The Eternal Movement.* In *The Aryan Path.* Bombay: The Theosophy Company.1930.

Prem, Sri Krishna and Sri Madhava Ashish, *Man, the Measure of All Things: In the Stanzas of Dzyan*. London: Rider and Company. 1969.

Prophet, Elizabeth Clare. *The Great White Brotherhood in the Culture, History and Religion of America.* Livingston MT: Summit University Press. 1987.

Prosch, Harry. *The Genesis of Twentieth Century Philosophy: The Evolution of Thought From Copernicus to the Present*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1966.

Purucker, George, de. *The Esoteric Tradition*. Point Loma, CA: Theosophical University Press. 1940.

_____. *Fountain-Source of Occultism.* Pasadena: Theosophical University Press. 1974.

_____. *Fundamentals of the Esoteric Philosophy.* Pasadena: Theosophical University Press. 1979.

Puttick, Elizabeth. *Women in New Religions: In Search of Community, Sexuality and Spiritual Power.* New York: St. Martin's Press. 1997.

Radhakrishnan, S. *East and West in Religion.* London: George Allen and Unwin. 1967.

Ram, N. Sri. *An Approach to Reality*. Adyar/ Wheaton/London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1968.

Randall, John Herman Jr. *Philosophy After Darwin.* New York: Columbia University Press. 1977.

Ransom, Josephine. *A Short History of the Theosophical Society: 1875 – 1937.* Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1938.

Raschke, Carl A. *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness.* Chicago: Nelson-Hall. 1980.

Reid, Dennis. *Atma Buddhi Manas: The Later Works of Lawren S. Harris.* Toronto: Art Gallery of Toronto. 1985.

Rhine, J. B. *The Reach of the Mind*. Harmondsworth/Baltimore/Montreal/Mitcham/Cape Town: Penguin Books. 1954.

Rich, Norman. *The Age of Nationalism and Reform, 1850 – 1890.* New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company. 1977.

Ricoeur, Paul. *From Text to Action.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1991.

Roberetson, Roland. ed. *Sociology of Religion.* Harmondsworth/New York/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland: Penguin Books. 1972.

Rosenthal, Bernice Glatzer. ed. *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press. 1997.

Roszak, Theodore. *The Making of a Counter Culture.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1969.

_____. *Where the Wasteland Ends.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1973.

_____. *Unfinished Animal*. New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London: Harper Colophon Books. 1977.

Royce, J. R. ed. *Psychology and the Symbol*. New York: Random House. 1965.

Rudhyar, Dane. *The Planetarization of Consciousness: From the Individual to the Whole.* New York/Evanston/San Francisco/London: Harper Colophon Books. 1972.

_____. *Occult Preparations for a New Age.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1975.

_____. *The Fullness of Human Experience.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1986.

Runciman, W. G. *A Treatise on Social Theory. Volume 2*. Cambridge/New York/New Rochelle/Melbourne/Sydney: Cambridge University Press. 1989.

Runes, Dagobert D. ed. *Dictionary of Philosophy.* Ames, Iowa: Littlefield, Adams and Company. 1959.

Russell, Bertrand. *Mysticism and Logic.* Harmondsworth/Baltimore/Montreal/Mitcham/Cape Town: Penguin Books. 1953.

_____. *A History of Western Philosophy.* New York: Simon and Schuster. 1964.

Satin, Mark. *New Age Politics: Healing Self and Society.* New York: Delta Books. 1979.

Schmeidler, Gertrude R. *Parapsychology and Psychology*. Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland and Company Inc. 1988.

Schure, Edouard. *The Great Initiates: Sketch of the Secret History of Religion.* 2 vols. London: William Rider and Son. 1920.

Seager, Richard Hughes. ed. *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices From the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*. La Salle: Open Court. 1993.

Shearman, Hugh. *Charles Webster Leadbeater: A Biography*. London/Ojai/Sydney: The St. Alban Press. 1980.

Simmel, Georg. *Sociology of Religion.* New York: Philosophical Library. 1959.

Simon, W. M. *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century*. Port Washington, New York and London: Kennikat Press. 1963.

Singer, June. *Blake, Jung, and the Collective Unconscious*, York Beach, Maine: Nicolas Hayes Inc. 2000.

Sinnett, A. P. *Esoteric Buddhism.* London: The Theosophical Publishing House. 1969.

Smart, Ninian. *The Religious Experience of Mankind.* London and Glasgow: The Fontana Library. 1973.

_____. *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. 2000.

Smith, E. Lester. *Inner Adventures: Thought, Intuition and Beyond*. Wheaton/ Madras/London: Quest Books. 1988.

Smith, Henry Nash. ed. *Popular Culture and Industrialism 1865 – 1890.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1967.

Smith, Huston. *The Religions of Man.* New York and Toronto: Mentor Books.1959.

_____. *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition.* New York/Hagerstown/San Francisco/London: Harper and Row. 1976.

Smith, Warren Sylvester. *The London Heretics: 1870 – 1914.* London: Constable. 1967.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *The Meaning and End of Religion.* New York/Toronto/London:

Mentor Books.1964.

Smoly, Richard and Jay Kinney. *Hidden Wisdom: A Guide to the Western Inner Traditions*. New York/London/Victoria/Toronto/Auckland: Arkana Penguin Books. 1999.

Sorokin, Pitirim. *The Crisis of Our Age: The Social and Cultural Outlook*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc. 1941.

_____. *Social and Cultural Dynamics: A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Laws and Social Relationships.* Boston: Extending Horizon Books. 1957.

_____. *Social and Cultural Dynamics.* Boston: Extending Horizon Books. 1957.

_____. *Modern Historical and Social Philosophies*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1963.

Spangler, David. *Emergence: The Rebirth of the Sacred*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc. 1984.

Spengler, Oswald. *The Decline of the West.* Abridged edition. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 1961.

Staal, Frits. *Exploring Mysticism.* Harmondsworth/Ringwood/Markham/Auckland:

Penguin Books. 1975.

Stace, W. T. *Religion and the Modern Mind.* New York and Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott. 1960.

_____. ed. *The Teachings of the Mystics.* New York and Toronto: Mentor Books. 1960.

_____. *Mysticism and Philosophy*. London: Macmillan and Company. 1961.

Steiner, Rudolph, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*. Hudson, New York: Anthroposophical Press. 1947.

Stewart, Louis. *Life Forces: A Contemporary Guide to the Cult and the Occult.* Kansas City/New York/Washington: Andrews and McMeel Inc. 1980.

Streiker, Lowell D. *New Age Comes to Main Street: What Worried Christians Must Know.* Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1990.

Stroud, Barry. *Understanding Human Knowledge.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 2000.

Sutcliffe, Steven and Marion Bowman. ed. *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Suzuki, W. T. *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist.* New York: Collier Books. 1957.

Symonds, John. *Madame Blavatsky, Medium and Magician.* London: Odhams Press Ltd. 1959.

Taimni, I. K. *Man, God and the Universe.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1974.

Talbot, Michael. *Mysticism and the New Physics.* New York: Bantam Books. 1981.

Tanner, Amy. *Studies in Spiritism.* Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1994.

Taves, Ann. *Fits, Trances, and Visions.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1999.

Tawney, R. H. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. New York: Mentor Books. 1961.

Taylor, Anne. *Annie Besant: A Biography.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1992.

Taylor, Mark C. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago and London: The

University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Taylor, John. *Science and the Supernatural.* New York: E.P. Dutton. 1980.

Thouless, Robert. *From Anecdote to Experiment in Psychical Research.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1972.

Tillet, Gregory. *The Elder Brother*, New York and London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1982.

Towler, Robert. *Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion*. London: Constable. 1974.

Toynbee, Arnold. *An Historian's Approach to Religion.* London/New York/Toronto: Oxford University Press. 1956.

_____. *A Study in History.* 2 vols. Abridged edition. New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1965.

Trevelyan, George. *A Vision of the Aquarian Age: The Emerging Spiritual World View.* Bath: Gateway Books. 1994.

Tyrrell, G. N. M. *The Personality of Man: New Facts and Their Significance.* Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books. 1946.

Ulanov, Ann Belford. *Religion and the Spiritual in Carl Jung.* New York/Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press. 1999.

_____. *The Wisdom of the Psyche.* Cambridge: Cowley Publications. 1988.

Ulanov, Ann and Barry Ulanov. *Religion and the Unconscious.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. 1975.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Man and the Supernatural.* New York: E. P. Dutton and Co. Inc. 1931.

_____. *The Essentials of Mysticism.* New York: Dutton Books. 1960.

_____. *Practical Mysticism.* Columbus, Ohio. Ariel Press. 1987.

Van der Leeuw , G. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*. New York: Harper Torchbooks. 2 vols. 1963.

Van der Leeuw, J. J. *The Conquest of Illusion.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1968.

Verene, Donald P. ed. *Man and Culture: A Philosophical Anthology*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1970.

Vernon, Roland. *Star in the East: Krishnamurti, the Invention of a Messiah.* New York: Palgrave. 2000.

Wach, Joachim, *Sociology of Religion.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 1962.

_____. *Introduction to the History of Religions.* New York and London: Collier Macmillan Publishers. 1988.

Wachsmuth, Guenther. *The Life and Work of Rudolph Steiner.* New York: Whittier Books. Inc. 1955.

Wager, W. Warren. *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress From Darwin to Marcuse.* Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press. 1972.

Wagner, Helmut R. *Phenomenology of Consciousness and Sociology of the Life-World: An Introductory Study.* Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. 1983.

Washington, Peter. *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon.* New York: Schocken Books. 1995.

Wasserstrom, Steven M. *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1999

Watkin, Mary. *Waking Dreams.* Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications Inc. 1988.

Watts, Alan. *Psychotherapy: East and West.* New York: Mentor Books. 1968.

Webb, James. *The Flight From Reason. Volume 1 of the Age of the Irrational.* London: Macdonald and Co. 1971.

_____. *The Occult Establishment.* La Salle: Open Court. 1991.

Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion.* Boston: Beacon Press. 1963.

Wedberg, Anders. *A History of Philosophy. Volume 3.* Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1984.

Weiner, Philip P. editor-in-chief. *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas.* 5 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1973.

Weisberger, Edward. ed. *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890 – 1985.* New York:

Abbeville Press. 1986.

West, Shearer. *Fin de Siecle*: *Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty.* Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press. 1994.

Westhues, Kenneth. *Society's Shadows: Studies in the Sociology of Countercultures.* Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited. 1972.

White, John. ed. *The Highest State of Consciousness.* Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1972.

_____. *ed. Frontiers of Consciousness*. New York: Avon Books. 1975.

_____. *The Meeting of Science and Spirit: Guidelines for a New Age*. New York: Paragon House. 1990.

White, Victor. *God and the Unconscious.* New York: Meridian Books. 1961.

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. New York: Mentor Books. 1947.

_____. *Adventures of Ideas.* New York: Mentor Books. 1962.

Whiteman, J. H. M. *The Mystical Life.* London: Faber and Faber. 1961.

Whyte, Lancelot Law. *The Next Development in Man.* Mentor Books. New York: 1962.

_____. *The Unconscious Before Freud*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books. 1962.

Wilber, Ken. *The Atman Project: A Transpersonal View of Human Development.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1980.

_____. *Up from Eden: A Transpersonal View of Human Evolution.* Boulder Colorado: Shambhala Publications.1981.

_____. *The Spectrum of Consciousness.* Wheaton/Madras/London: Quest Books. 1985.

_____. *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm.* Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc. 2001.

Williams, Gertrude Marvin. *A Life of Annie Besant.* New York: Coward-McCann. 1931.

_____. *Priestess of the Occult*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1946.

Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society 1780 – 1950.* London: Chatto and Williams. 1959.

Wilson, Bryan. *Contemporary Transformations of Religion.* London/Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press. 1976

_____. *The Social Dimensions of Sectarianism: Sects and New Religious Movements in Contemporary Society*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1990.

Wilson, Colin. *The Occult: A History*. New York: Vintage Books. 1973.

_____. *Religion and the Rebel.* Bath: Ash Grove Press. 1984.

Zusne, Leonard and Warren H Jones. *Anomalistic Psychology*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum Associates, Publishers. 1982.

Bibliography – Internet Resources

Anonymous. *About Spiritualism (An Interview With Madame Blavatsky).* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/aboutspiritualism.htm>. (Accessed March 3, 2002).

Anonymous. *The Theosophical Society. The Lamasary at New York.* The Blavatsky Archives Online.
1999. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hartford.htm>. (Accessed March 2, 2002).

Anonymous. *A Miracle Worker of To-Day.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000.
<http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcottpmg84.htm>. (Accessed March 2, 2002).

Anonymous. *Madame Coulomb at the College Hall.* The Blavatsky Archives Online.
2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/coulombmm1884.htm>. (Accessed March 4, 2002).

Anonymous. *Isis and the S. D.* Wisdom World. n.d.
<http://www.wisdomworld.org/setting/isis.html>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).

Anonymous. *More About the Theosophists. An Interview With Madame Blavatsky.*
The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999.
<http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/moreabout.htm>. (Accessed March 6, 2002).

Anonymous. *Madame Blavatsky's Power. Events in the Career of a Remarkable Woman.*

The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001.
<http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/anonmadblapower.htm>. (Accessed March 8, 2002)

Anonymous. *Madame Blavatsky Resigns.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000.
<http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/nyt1885.htm>. (Accessed March 6, 2002).

Anonymous. *Theosophy in New York. Facts About Mme. Blavatsky, Her Powers and Her Religion.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/nyworld1886.htm>. (Accessed March 9, 2002).

Anonymous. *A Visit to Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/commericialgazettecinnnati.htm>. (Accessed March 7, 2002).

Anonymous. *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/encybrit48.htm>. (Accessed March 16, 2002).

Anonymous. *The 'Complex Character of Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/anoncomplex.htm>. (Accessed March18, 2002).

Anonymous. *Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/anonmmeblav91b.htm>. (Accessed March 16, 2002).

Anonymous. *Madame Blavatsky Dead.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/anonmmeblav91.htm>. (Accessed March 14, 2002).

Anonymous. *Mme. Blavatsky's Disciples.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sinnett95mbd.htm>. (Accessed March 14, 2002).

Arthur, James. *Occult Chronology.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1943. < http://www.theosophical.ca/Occult%20Chronology.htm>. (Accessed July 3, 2002).

Barborka, Geoffrey. *H. P. Blavatsky the Light Bringer.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1970. < http://www.theosophical.ca/HPB%20Light%20Bringer.htm>. (Accessed May 5, 2002).

Barker, A. T. ed. *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1973. <http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/hpb-aps/bl-hp.htm>. (Accessed November 3, 2002).

Besant, Annie. *Among the Adepts: Madame Blavatsky on The "Secret Doctrine."* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/besant1888.htm>. (Accessed October 27, 2002).

_____. *The Great Mare's Nest of the Psychical Research Society*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/besantspr.htm>. (Accessed April 23, 2002).

_____. *Eastern School of Theosophy.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/besantes1894.htm>. (Accessed April 19, 2002).

Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna, *Isis Unveiled.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1877. <http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/isis/iu-hp.htm>. (Accessed July 11, 2002).

_____. *The Drift of Western Spiritualism*. Theosophical Library Online. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/DriftOfWesternSpiritualism.htm>. (Accessed April 14, 2002).

_____. *What are the Theosophists?* Theosophical University Press Online. 1879. <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/theosoph/theos1a.htm#whatarethetheos>. (Accessed March 12, 2002).

_____. *Magic*. Theosophical Library Online. 1879. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/Magic.htm>. (Accessed July 13, 2002).

_____. *Occult Phenomena.* Theosophical Library Online. 1880. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/OccultPhenomena.htm>. (Accessed July 12, 2002).

_____. *A Reply to Our Critics*. Theosophical Library Online. 1881. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/ReplyToOurCritics.htm>. (Accessed May 3, 2002).

_____. *The Claims of Occultism*. Theosophical Library Online. 1881. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/ClaimsOfOccultism.htm>. (Accessed August 9, 2002).

_____. *Madame Blavatsky on the Himalayan Brothers*. Theosophical Library Online. 1881. <http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/MadameBlavatskyOnTheHimalayanBrothers.htm>. (Accessed May 11, 2002).

_____. *Mahatmas and Chelas.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1884. <http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/MahatmasAndChelas.htm>. (Accessed May 3, 2002).

_____. *Are Chelas Mediums?* Theosophy Library Online. 1884. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/AreChelasMediums.htm>. (Accessed May 19, 2002).

_____. *Spiritual Progress*. Theosophical Library Online. 1885. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/SpiritualProgress.htm>. (Accessed June 4, 2002).

_____. *Occult or Exact Science*? Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1886. < http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/OccultOrExactScience.htm>. (Accessed March 25, 2002).

_____. *The Organisation of the Theosophical Society*. Theosophical Library Online. 1886.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/OrganisationOfTheTheosophicalSociety.htm>. (Accessed August 11, 2002).

_____. *Ancient Magic in Modern Science.* Theosophy Library Online. 1886.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/AncientMagicInModernScience.htm>. (Accessed Accessed April 3, 2002).

_____. *The Sign of the Times.* Theosophical Library Online. 1887.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/SignsOfTheTimes.htm>. (Accessed September 17, 2002).

_____. *Is Theosophy a Religion?* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1888.
< http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/IsTheosophyAReligion.htm>. (Accessed March 23, 2002).

_____. *Occultism Versus the Occult Arts.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1888.
< http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/OccultismVersusTheOccultArts.htm>. (Accessed April 8, 2002).

_____. *The Secret Doctrine.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1888.
< http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/sd/sd-hp.htm >. (Accessed July 15, 2002).

_____. *The Theosophical Society: Its Mission and Its Future*. Theosophical Library Online. 1888.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/TheosophicalSocietyItsMissionAndItsFuture.htm>. (Accessed June 9, 2002).

_____. *What Is Truth?* Theosophical Library Online. 1888.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/WhatIsTruth.htm>. (Accessed November 21, 2002).

_____. *The Key to Theosophy.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1889. <http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/key/key-hp.htm>. (Accessed June 7, 2002).

_____. *The Fall of Ideals.* Theosophical Library Online. 1889
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/FallOfIdeals.htm>. (Accessed June 15, 2002).

_____. *The New Cycle*. Theosophical Library Online. 1889.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/NewCycle.htm>. (Accessed September 3, 2002).

_____. *On Pseudo-Theosophy.* Theosophical Library Online. 1889.
< http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/OnPseudoTheosophy.htm>. (Accessed April 13,

2002).

_____. *Our Cycle and the Next*. Theosophical Library Online. 1889. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/OurCycleAndTheNext.htm>. (Accessed September 3, 2002).

_____. *Our Three Objects.* Theosophical Library Online. 1889. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/OurThreeObjects.htm>. (Accessed March 11, 2002).

_____. T*he Voice of the Silence.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1889. <http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/voice/voice.htm>. (Accessed July 17, 2002).

_____*Philosophers and Philosophicules.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1889. < http://www.blavatsky.net/blavatsky/arts/PhilosophersAndPhilosophicules.htm>. (Accessed March 24, 2002).

_____. *Secret Doctrine Commentary: Transactions of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1890 and 1891. < http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/sdcommnt/sdc-hp.htm>. (Accessed July 10, 2002).

_____. *The Cycle Moveth.* Theosophical Library Online. 1890. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/CycleMoveth.htm>. (Accessed September 5, 2002).

_____. *The Dual Aspect of Wisdom*. Theosophical Library Online. 1890. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/DualAspectOfWisdom.htm>. (Accessed June 8, 2002).

_____. *Modern Apostles and Pseudo-Messiahs.* Theosophical Library Online. 1890. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/ModernApostlesAndPseudoMessiahs.htm>. (Accessed May 11, 2002).

_____. *Recent Progress in Theosophy*. Theosophical Library Online. 1890. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/RecentProgressInTheosophy.htm>. (Accessed October 19, 2002).

_____. *Studies in Occultism*. Theosophical University Press Online. 1887 – 1891. <http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/hpb-sio/sio-hp.htm>. (Accessed June 30, 2002).

_____. *My Books*. Theosophical Library Online. 1891. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/MyBooks.htm>. (Accessed July 2, 2002).

_____. *The Mind in Nature.* Theosophical Library Online. 1896. < http://theosophy.org/tlodocs/hpb/MindInNature.htm>. (Accessed June 12, 2002).

_____. *Is Theosophy At Bay?* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/blav89itab.htm>. (Accessed November 8, 2002)

_____. *Letters of H. P. B. to Dr. Hartmann 1885 – 1886.* 2001. The Blavatsky Archives Online. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/blavatskyhartmantabcon.htm>. (Accessed May 22, 2002).

_____. *Letters From H. P. Blavatsky to Her Family in Russia.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001.. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/blavletc.htm>. (Accessed May 22, 2002).

_____. *Letter From H. P. Blavatsky to Henry S. Olcott.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/blavatskyletter83.htm>. (Accessed May 24, 2002).

_____. *Communication With Masters*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/bla85mah.htm> (Accessed May 9, 2002).

_____. *Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to W. Q. Judge and Other Miscellaneous Letters.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hpbwqjtab.html>. (Accessed May 27, 2002).

Brown, William T. *Blavatsky and Her Followers*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/brown1887.htm>. (Accessed May 12, 2002).

_____. *William T. Brown's Last Known Statement Concerning H. P. Blavatsky and the Mahatmas*. 2001. The Blavatsky Archives Online. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/brown1890.htm>. (Accessed May 12, 2002).
.

Burnier, Radha. *Looking at the World*. Canadian Theosophical Association. 1988. < http://www.theosophical.ca/Looking.htm>. (Accessed November 13, 2002).

Caldwell, Daniel H. *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky*. Online Edition. 2001. Theosophical Society in America. <http://www.theosophical.org/theosophy/books/esotericworld/>. (Accessed April 7, 2002).

_____. *"Bear Witness!" Who Was the Real H.P.B.?* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2002. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/whitelotus2000.htm>. (Accessed April 10, 2002).

_____. *A Casebook of Encounters With Theosophical Masters.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2002.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/mastersencounterswith.htm>. (Accessed May 13, 2002).

_____. *A Closer Look at Some of K. Paul Johnson's Arguments Concerning H.S. Olcott's Testimony About the Masters.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2002.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/johnsonparanormal3.htm>. (Accessed May 20, 2002).

Carrithers, Jr. Walter A. *Obituary: The "Hodgson Report" on Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Foundation. 1963.
< http://www.azstarnet.com/~blafoun/obituary.htm>. (Accessed May 23, 2002).

_____. *The Founding of the Theosophical Society.* The Blavatsky Foundation. 2000.
< http://www.azstarnet.com/~blafoun/founding.htm> (Accessed August 19, 2002).

Chatterji, Mohini M. *Mohini Chatterji's Deposition to the Society for Psychical Research, 1884* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/chatterjideposition.htm>. (Accessed May 25, 2002).

Coleman, William Emmette, *Critical Historical Review of the Theosophical Society.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999.
<http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/cole1893.htm>.
(Accessed March 12, 2002).

_____. *Blavatsky Unveiled*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/colebunve.htm>. (Accessed June 27, 2002).

_____. *Henry Kiddle and the Mahatma; or H. K. vs. K. H.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/colekidd9091.htm>. (Accessed May 26, 2002).

_____. *The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/colemansources1895.htm>. (Accessed July 10, 2002).

Conway, Moncure D. *The Theosophists.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/conway02.htm>. (Accessed July 16, 2002).

Coues, Elliott. *Blavatsky Unveiled.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/coues.htm>. (Accessed May 24, 2002).

Coulomb, Emma. *Theosophy. Madame Coulomb v. Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky

Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/coulomb1884b.htm>. (Accessed May 13, 2002).

Corson, Eugene Rollin. ed. *Some Unpublished Letters of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.* Theosophical University Press Online. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/corson/cors-hp.htm>. (Accessed October 8, 2002).

Doubleday, Abner. *General Doubleday in Defense of Madame Blavatsky*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/doubledaygeneralindefense.htm>. (Accessed October 11, 2002).

Dougherty, Sarah Belle. *The Occult Path.* The Theosophical Society. 1996. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sunrise/45-95-6/ot-sbdj.htm>. (Accessed July 9, 2002).

Dunlap, Daniel Nicol. *Interview With Mr. W. B. Yeats.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/yeatsinterview.htm>. (Accessed December 2, 2002).

Edge, Henry T. *The Universal Mystery Language and Its Interpretation.* The Theosophical Society.1997. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/edge-uml/e-uml-hp.htm>. (Accessed July 29, 2002).

_____. *Theosophy and Christianity*. Theosophical University Press Online. 1998. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/th-xity/th-xty1.htm>. (Accessed February 25, 2002)

First Report of the Committee of the Society for Psychical Research. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sprrpcontents.htm>. (Accessed May 4, 2002).

Gower, D. G. *The Impact of Jung and Krishnamurti on Some Theosophical Teachings.* The Canadian Theosophical Society. 1960. < http://www.theosophical.ca/JungKrishnamurti.htm>. (Accessed November 28, 2002).

Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Some Remarks on the Study of Western Esotericism*. Esoterica. 1999. <http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/Hanegraaff.html>. (Accessed February 26, 2002)

Harrison, Vernon. *H. P. Blavatsky and the SPR: An Examination of the Hodgson Report of 1885*. Theosophical University Press Online. 1997. < http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/hpb-spr/hpbspr-h.htm>. (Accessed May 2, 2002).

Hobbes, Terry. *Madame Blavatsky and the Latter-Day Messengers of the Masters.* The Blavatsky Archives on Line, 2002. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/contradictionslatermessengers.htm>. (Accessed May 17, 2002).

Hodson, Geoffrey. *Thus Have I Heard.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1928. < http://www.theosophical.ca/Thus%20Have%20I%20Heard.htm>. (Accessed October 19, 2002).

Hodgson, Richard. *The Theosophical Society. Russian Intrigue or Religious Evolution?* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hodgson11.htm#(3>. (Accessed May 3, 2002).

_____. *Mr. Sinnett's Circular*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hodgmsci.htm>. (Accessed May 3, 2002).

_____. *Col. Olcott and Mr. R. Hodgson.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hodgson2.htm>. (Accessed May 4, 2002).

Holloway, Laura. *Madame Blavatsky: A Pen Picture*. The Blavatsky Archives. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/holloway4.htm>. (Accessed March 30, 2002).

Hume, A. O. *A. O. Hume on Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/hume1884.htm>. (Accessed May 22, 2002).

Jinarajadasa, C. *The Early Teachings of the Masters. 1881 – 1883.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1923. < http://www.theosophical.ca/EarlyTeachings.htm>. (Accessed April 28, 2002).

_____. *The Divine Vision.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1927. < http://www.theosophical.ca/DivineVision.htm>. (Accessed April 30, 2002).

Judge, William Q. *Letters That Have Helped Me*. Theosophical University Press Online. 1891 and 1905. < http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/lthhm/lthhm-hp.htm>. (Accessed October 14, 2002).

_____. *Prophecies by H. P. Blavatsky.* Blavatsky Net. 1892. < http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/prophecies-by-hpblavatsky.htm>. (Accessed October 12, 2002).

_____. *What Our Society Needs Most.* Blavatsky Net. 1892. < http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/what-our-society-needs-most.htm>. (Accessed October 13, 2002).

_____. *The Ocean of Theosophy.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1893. < http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/ocean/oce-hp.htm>. (Accessed July 9,

2002).

_____. *The Mahatmas As Ideals and Facts.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1893. <http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/mahatmas.htm>. (Accessed May17, 2002).

_____. *An Interesting Letter (Written to an Indian Brother).* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1893. < http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/interesting-letter.htm>. (Accessed May 16, 2002).

_____. *Masters, Adepts, Teachers, and Disciples.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1893. < http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/masters-adepts-teachers-disciples.htm>. (Accessed May 16, 2002).

_____. *By Master's Direction.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1894. <http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/judgebmd1894.htm>. (Accessed October 29, 2002).

_____. *H. S. Olcott vs. H.P.B.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1895. < http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/hsolcott-vs-hpb.htm>. (Accessed October 26, 2002).

_____. *H.P.B. Was Not Deserted by the Masters.* Blavatsky Net Foundation. 1896. < http://www.blavatsky.net/theosophy/judge/articles/hpb-not-deserted.htm>. (Accessed May 30, 2002).

_____. *The So-Called Expose of Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/judgeseomb86.htm>. (Accessed May 30, 2002).

Keightly, Archibald. *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/keightle.htm>. (Accessed July 11, 2002).

Keightly, Bertram. *Mr. Bertram Keightly's Account of the Writing of the Secret Doctrine.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/keightleyb1893.htm>. (Accessed July 13, 2002).

Knoche, Grace F. *On the Shores of Darkness There is Light.* Theosophy Northwest. 1993. < http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-gfk3.htm>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).

_____. *Prologue to HPB Special Issue (1997).* Theosophical University Press Online.

<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sunrise/46-96-7/hpb-gfke.htm>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).

Kuhn, Alvin Boyd. *Theosophy: A Modern Revival of Ancient Wisdom*. 1930. Theosophy. < http://downloads.members.tripod.com/~pc93/tsphyraw.htm>. (Accessed May 1,2002).

Leadbeater, C. W. *The Devachanic Plane or the Heaven World: Its Characteristics and Inhabitants.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1902. <http://www.theosophical.ca/DevachanicPlane.htm>. (Accessed January 28, 2003).

_____. *Invisible Helpers*. Canadian Theosophical Association. 1915. < http://www.theosophical.ca/InvisibleHelpers.htm>. (Accessed September 20, 2002).

_____. *A Textbook of Theosophy.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1937. < http://www.theosophical.ca/TextBookTheos.htm>. (Accessed September 18, 2002).

Long, James A. *This Era's Opportunity.* Theosophical University Press Online. 2000. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sunrise/50-00-1/ev-jal.htm>. (Accessed November 19, 2002).

Maitland, Edward. *Anna Kingsford, Madame Blavatsky, and the Theosophists.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/maitland1913.htm>. (Accessed October 22, 2002).

Mead, G. R. S. *Gnosis of the Mind.* The Canadian Theosophical Association. 1906. < http://www.theosophical.ca/GnosisMind.htm>. (Accessed September 18, 2002).

_____. *Concerning H.P.B. (Stray Thoughts on Theosophy*). Canadian Theosophical Association. 1920. < http://www.theosophical.ca/Concerning%20HPB.htm>. (Accessed November 8, 2002).

_____. *Facts About "The Secret Doctrine"* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/mead1.htm>. (Accessed July 19, 2002).

Melton, Gordon, *The Rise of the Study of New Religions*. CESNUR - Center For Studies on New Religions. 1999. < http://www.cesnur.org/testi/bryn/br_melton.htm>. (Accessed December 12, 2002).

Morgan, Ellen H. *A Defense of Madame Blavatsky's Views and Phenomenal Abilities.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/morgan1884.htm>. (Accessed June 30, 2002).

Moses, William Stainton. *The Early Story of the Theosophical Society: A Chapter of History.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999.

< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcottmoses.htm>. (Accessed March 23, 2002).

Mueller, Max. *Esoteric Buddhism*. The Blavatsky Archives. 2001.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/muller1.htm>. (Accessed December 3, 2002).

Oderberg, I. M. *The Dawn of a New Age*. Theosophical University Press Online.1991.
<http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/sunrise/40-90-1/sc-imo6.htm>. (Accessed July 8, 2002).

Olcott, H. S. *Inaugural Address of the President-Founder of the Theosophical Society.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1875.
< http://www.theosophical.ca/Inaugural%20.htm>. (Accessed February 22, 2002).

_____. *Applied Theosophy.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1889.
< http://www.theosophical.ca/AppliedTheosophy.htm>. (Accessed October 26, 2002).

_____. *The Himalayan Brothers*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcott11.html>. (Accessed May 19, 2002).

_____. *Theosophy and Its Opponents.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcotthodgson.htm>. (Accessed September 18, 2002).

_____. *The First Leave of T. S. History.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcott1890.htm>. (Accessed March 7, 2002).

_____. *Henry S. Olcott's Deposition to the Society for Psychical Research, 1884.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001.
< http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcottdeposition.htm>. (Accessed May 21, 2002).

_____. *Letter From Col. Olcott to Mr.H - - - - - X - - - - -* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/olcott1881a.htm>. (Accessed April 13, 2002).

Pelt, Gertrude W. van. *Archaic History of the Human Race: As Recorded in "The Secret Doctrine" by H. P. Blavatsky*. 1934. Theosophical University Press Online.
< http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/books/archaic/archaic1.htm>. (Accessed July 20, 2002).

_____. *Hierarchies: The Ladder of Life.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1998.

< http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/hierarch/herarc-1.htm>. (Accessed July 20, 2002).

_____. *Rounds and Races: Our Divine Parentage and Destiny.* Theosophical

University Press Online. 1998.
< http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/hierarch/herarc-1.htm>. (Accessed July 21, 2002).

Podmore, Frank. *Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/podmoremme.htm>. (Accessed October 16, 2002).

Pratt, David. *The Book of Dzyan.* Exploring Theosophy. 1998.
< http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dp5/dzyan.htm>. (Accessed July 15, 2002).

Purucker, George de. *Man in Evolution*. Theosophical University Press Online. 1977.
< http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/man-evol/mie-hp.htm>. (Accessed August 12, 2002).

_____. *Occult Glossary.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1996. < http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/ocglos/og-hp.htm>. (Accessed May 2, 2002).

_____. *The Masters and the Path of Occultism*. Theosophical University Press. 1998. < http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/books/mas-oc/mapo-gdp.htm>. (Accessed May 25, 2002).

Reigle, David. *The Book of Dzyan Research Reports.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 1999. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/reiglecon.htm>. (Accessed August 3, 2002).

Robb, Richard. *Access to Great Ideas*. Theosophical University Press Online. 1975.
< http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-sdref.htm>. (Accessed July 14, 2002).

Ross, Lydia. *The Doctrine of Cycles.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1998.
< http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/cycle-lr/cycle-1.htm>. (Accessed July 21, 2002).

Row, T. Subba. *What is Occultism.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1905.
< http://www.theosophical.ca/WhatIsOccultism.htm>. (Accessed April 19, 2002).

Ryan, Charles J. *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1975. <http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/hpb-tm/hpbtm- hp.htm>. (Accessed April 8, 2002).

_____. *What is Theosophy?* Theosophical University Press Online. 1998.
< http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/ryan-wh/wit-hp.htm>. (Accessed February 26, 2002).

Santucci, James. *Women in the Theosophical Movement*. Theosophical History. 1990. < http://www.theohistory.org/womenints.html>. (November 12, 2002).

Sinnett, A. P. *The Occult World.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1888. < http://www.theosophical.ca/OccultWorld.htm#first>. (Accessed September 26, 2002).

_____. *What is Theosophy. A General View for Enquirers.* The Theosophical Society. 1998. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/ryan-wh/wit-hp.htm>. (retrieved February 25, 2002)

_____. *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/ryanmlhare.htm>. (Accessed May 29, 2002).

_____. *The Society for Psychical Research and Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sinnett1886.htm>. (Accessed May 28, 2002).

_____. *A. P. Sinnett's Deposition to the Society for Psychical Research.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sinnettdeposition.htm>. (Accessed May 30, 2002).

_____. *Do the Mahatmas Exist?* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/sinnettmah.htm>. (Accessed May 30, 2002).

Society for Psychical Research Committee. *Report of the General Meeting of the SPR on May 29, 1885: Hodgson's Report on Madame Blavatsky (Meeting 1)* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/spr52985.htm>. (Accessed May 12, 2002).

_____. *Report of the General Meeting of the SPR on June 26, 1885: Hodgson's Report on Madame Blavatsky (Meeting 2)* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/spr62685.htm>. (Accessed May 12, 2002).

Studd, Samuel. *Concerning H. P. B.: An Examination of the So-Called Proofs of Fraud on the Part of Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2000. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/studd.htm>. (Accessed April 29, 2002).

The Theosophical Movement 1875 – 1925: A History and a Survey. Online edition. Wisdom World. 1925 <http://www.wisdomworld.org/additional/TheTheosophicalMovement-Series/index.html>. (Accessed February 21, 2002).

Tingley, Katherine. *Theosophy: The Path of the Mystic.* Theosophical University Press

Online. 1977. < http://www.theosociety.org./pasadena/pathmyst/path-hp.htm>. (Accessed October 14, 2002).

Van Mater, John P.. *Unveiling Isis: HPB's First Book.* Theosophical University Press Online.1997. <http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-isisj.htm>. (Accessed July 10, 2002).

_____. *The Writing of the Secret Doctrine.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1998. < http://www.theosophy-nw.org/theosnw/theos/th-kvms.htm>. (Accessed July 11, 2002).

Versluis, Arthur. *What is Esoteric? Methods in the Study of Western Esotericism.* Esoterica. 2002. < http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIV/Methods.htm>. (Accessed February 26, 2002).

Wachtmeister, Constance. *Statement by Constance Wachtmeister.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/wacht1886.htm>. (Accessed November 17, 2002).

Westbrook, R. B. *Reminiscences of Original American Theosophists*. The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2002. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/westbrook.htm>. (Accessed November 26, 2002).

Witte, Count W.S. *Count Witte on Madame Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/witte.htm>. (Accessed November 18, 2002).

Woods, Ernest. *The Seven Rays.* Canadian Theosophical Association. 1925. < http://www.theosophical.ca/SevenRays.htm>. (Accessed September 12, 2002).

Wyld, George. *Madame Blavatsky and Her "Theosophical" Society.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/wyldmbahts.htm>. (Accessed November 9, 2002).

Wright, Leoline L. *Mahatmas and Chelas.* Theosophical University Press Online. 1997. < http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/gdpmanu/mahat_ch/m_c-hp.htm>. (Accessed April 29, 2002).

Zhelihovsky, Vera Petrovna de. *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky.* The Blavatsky Archives Online. 2001. < http://www.blavatskyarchives.com/zhelhpbl.htm>. (Accessed August 13, 2002).