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The truths of occultism constitute, indeed, a body of the highest spiritual importance, at once profound and practical for the world at large. Yet, it is not as a mere addition to the tangled mass of theory or speculation in the world of science that they are being given to you, but for their practical bearing on the interests of mankind. ... And this is why our chiefs have determined to shed upon a few recipient minds more light upon the subject. ... [M.L. no. 6, p. 23]



ARE THE TEACHINGS OF THEOSOPHY OUTDATED?

A new round has been opened in an old and continuing debate. The gauntlet thrown down by John Algeo in the November/December 1990 *American Theosophist* has been challenged by Editor Emmett Small in his January/February 1991 *Eclectic Theosophist*.

At issue are several key questions:

1. Is there a body of fundamental teachings contained in the original source writings of the theosophical movement on which all students of theosophy can agree? Both writers seem to agree that these “original source writings” are to be identified as *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett* and the various writings of H.P. Blavatsky -- of the latter, most particularly *The Secret Doctrine*.

2. There is the question of consistency of the teachings i.e.;

(a) are the teachings, as given in the above sources, internally consistent as a system?

(b) are the teachings of 2nd generation theosophical writers, most particularly those of Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater, consistent with those *original source writings*

referred to above?

3. What are the standards of validity by which the student (and I would argue that we are all students) are to appraise the *truth* inherent in the writings and teachings available to us, both original and 2nd or any other generation?

Algeo, in his *AT* article THE TREE OF THEOSOPHY, claims that:

“The Theosophy taught by Blavatsky is not a uniform, unchanging doctrine. It evolved continually during her lifetime.

Early Blavatsky Theosophy is exemplified most fully by *Isis Unveiled*.

Middle Blavatsky Theosophy is exemplified in its richness by *The Secret Doctrine*.

Late Blavatsky Theosophy is exemplified by *The Key to Theosophy*, *The Voice of the Silence* and her esoteric instructions.”

Small, in his *Eclectic* article THE ENDURING FUNDAMENTALS OF THEOSOPHY, focusses on the assertion that:

“The fundamental teachings of Theosophy do not change. All true students believe in them, for they are a reporting of the facts of being, universal for man, atom and universe.

To label such students as ‘fundamentalists,’ thus imputing to them an unwillingness to recognize ‘advances’ in Theosophy by ‘second generation fig-

ures’ (or third or nth) is sheer nonsense

If to believe in the Three Fundamental Postulates of *The Secret Doctrine* and the wealth of Theosophical Teaching in H.P.B.’s works is to be called a ‘fundamentalist,’ (he) for one would be proudly honored with such a label.

It is the Teaching itself, the fundamental ideas that are important.”

Clearly there is sharp difference of opinion on this question.

Is it safe, perhaps, to say that there is agreement that the Three Fundamental Postulates of Theosophy as set forth by H.P.B. in *The Secret Doctrine* constitute the “bedrock” postulates of Theosophy and are unambiguously set forth?

These are, briefly; Be-ness symbolized under the dual aspects of abstract Space and motion, the Eternity of the Universe, *in toto*, the playground of numberless Universes appearing and disappearing, and the ‘unity’ of all souls with the Universal source of Spirit. [See *S.D. I*, p. 14.]

Beyond this assumed initial consensus, it is not always clear to the average student at which point the differences in viewpoint occur.

To the deep and/or life-long students such as these two authors, the lines of disagreement are more easily identified.

But to the neophyte, the newcomer or casual student of the studies, the sheer mass of the material, its lack of systematic organiza-

tion, coupled with its being mixed in with large quantities of irrelevant or dated commentary on nineteenth century concepts makes its serious study daunting in the extreme and an overwhelming task.

Efforts have been made by latter day writers to systematically organize the essential teachings contained in *The Secret Doctrine* while remaining faithful to the original source.

One such contribution has been made by Geoffery Barborka in *The Divine Plan*. The author sets forth the purpose of the book as providing a guide book and method for studying *The Secret Doctrine*.

Its twelve chapters collect the teachings in the *S.D.* into related categories; i.e., Hierarchies, Races, Rounds, After-Death States, etc. Verbatim source material is faithfully footnoted so that the reader can readily consult the original. Barborka's accompanying commentary reflects an in depth understanding of *The Secret Doctrine*.

A distinction needs to be made between adherence to the fundamental teachings of Theosophy based on a recognition of their indispensability to the total scheme of the philosophy and a slavish dogmatization of everything that was written by H.P. Blavatsky, merely because it bears the *imprimatur* of H.P.B.

For those who advocate the former approach, there remains the problem of how

this distinction is to be made. Clearly, no one can or should be allowed to do it for us, for each member must reserve full freedom to interpret the teachings for themselves or we will have yet another dogma.

Thus, to strive to become a theosophist is to claim the responsibility to do one's own thinking. If we are content to delegate that task to others, we can join any one of a multitude of churches and charismatic movements and be provided with ready-made dogma in 101 different flavors.

Algeo argues that Theosophy, as presented by H.P.B. in *Isis Unveiled*, *The Secret Doctrine* and her latter writings, "was not a uniform, unchanging doctrine. It evolved continually during her lifetime."

I agree that the *presentation* of the teachings clearly underwent evolution from *Isis* to *The S.D.*, but this is not the same as saying that they lack internal consistency.

Isis contained many errors, and there are passages in *The Mahatma Letters* where K.H. acknowledges this, saying that "it really ought to be re-written for the sake of the family honor." [*ML* #9, p. 45; *ML* #20 p. 127]

Furthermore, H.P.B. pointed out repeatedly that in *Isis* she was allowed only to hint at the details of many circumspect topics, while in *The S.D.* she was subsequently allowed more latitude to elaborate.

Her Esoteric Instructions, going yet further, were delivered to her personal students under a solemn pledge of secrecy and have only appeared posthumously in *The Collected Writings*.

Some insight into the reasons that the theosophical teachings evolved from *Isis* to *The S.D.* is given by K.H.:

“Put yourself for a moment in my place, and see whether you would not have had to exercise all the ingenuity you had at your command, in a case like that between C.C.M. and H.P.B. In reality there is no contradiction between that passage in *Isis* and our later teaching; to anyone who never heard of the *seven* principles -- constantly referred to in *Isis* as a trinity, without any more explanation -- there certainly appeared to be as good a contradiction as could be.

‘You will write so and so, give *so far* and no more’ -- she was constantly told by us, when writing her book. It was at the very beginning of a new cycle, in days when neither Christians nor Spiritualists ever thought of, let alone mentioned, more than two principles in man -- *body* and *Soul*, which they called *Spirit*.

If you had time to refer to the spiritualistic literature of the day, you would find that with the phenomenologists as with the Christians, *Soul* and *Spirit* were synonymous.

It was H.P.B., who, acting under orders ... was the first to explain ... the difference ... between Soul and Spirit. ... And, as there happened to be such a war over it, endless polemics and objections to the effect that *there could not be in*

man two souls -- we thought it was premature to give the public more than they could possibly assimilate, and before they had digested the ‘two souls’; and thus the subdivision of the trinity into 7 principles was left unmentioned in *Isis*.” [*Mahatma Letter* no. 52 p. 285].

I am also aware that many of the original teachings were intentionally left obscure or contained blinds devised to mislead the casual reader but which contained a hidden meaning for those possessing the key. The classic case in illustration of this point is A.P. Sinnett’s misinterpretation of the reply of Mahatma K.H. to his question concerning the relationship of Mars and Mercury to the “our system of worlds.”

In his article, Algeo says “ironically [this] is a difference within the first generation (since *The Mahatma Letters* and *The Secret Doctrine* differ on it) rather than between the first and second generation. This charge is simply untrue; on the contrary it is the case of a statement being intentionally left obscure by the Master and consequently being misinterpreted by Sinnett.

The facts of the dispute, as our theosophical history records it, are briefly as follows: In Letter 23A; part II, question 23 (*Mahatma Letters* 3rd ed., p. 145), Sinnett asked:

“What other planets of those known to ordinary science, besides Mercury, belong to our system of worlds?”

The Mahatma's answer in Letter 23B (p. 173) was;

“Mars and four other planets of which astronomy knows yet nothing. Neither A, B, nor Y, Z, are known; nor can they be seen through physical means however perfected.”

Assuming that this reply referred to Earth's septenary chain of globes, Sinnett wrote on p.136 of *Esoteric Buddhism*:

“Besides the earth, which is at the lowest material point, there are only two other worlds of our chain which are visible to physical eyes - the one behind and the one in advance of it. These two worlds, as a matter of fact, are Mars and Mercury - Mars being behind and Mercury in advance of us - Mars in a state entire obscurity now as regards the human life-wave, Mercury just beginning to prepare for its next human period.”

This sentence launched the great Mars-Mercury controversy “which continues to this day.” In the appendix to the 1973 edition of *Esoteric Buddhism*, A. Trevor Barker - editor of *The Mahatma Letters* - says:

“Mr. Sinnett's statement that our humanity has passed through Mars and will continue on to Mercury is very much in need of reevaluation. ... *The Secret Doctrine*, published 5 years later (1888), drew attention to the discrepancy, and laid the blame upon vagueness in correspondence, and the gap between eastern and western terminology, coupled with the obvious fact that the entire

doctrine could not be given out *carte blanche* to an uninitiated westerner.

‘Try to understand that you are putting to me questions pertaining to the highest initiation; that I can give you (only) a general view, but that I dare not nor will I enter upon the details ...’, wrote one of the Teachers to the author of *Esoteric Buddhism*.”

On page 163, vol. I of *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky wrote:

As [Sinnett] was himself, as he says, ‘an untrained mind’ in Occultism, his own inferences, and his better knowledge of modern astronomical speculations than of archaic doctrines led him quite naturally, and as unconsciously to himself, to commit a few mistakes of detail rather than of any ‘broad rule.’ One such will now be noticed. It is a trifling one, still it is calculated to lead the beginner into erroneous conceptions. ... There were several reasons for such mistakes.

(1) They were due to the necessity under which the teachers labored of giving what were considered as ‘evasive answers:’ the questions being too persistently pressed to be left unnoticed, while, on the other hand, they could be only be partially answered.

(2) This position notwithstanding, the confession that ‘half a loaf is better than no bread’ was but too often misunderstood and hardly appreciated as it ought to have been.

As a result thereof, gratuitous speculations were sometimes indulged in

by the European lay chelas. Among such were ... the erroneous statement that two of the superior Globes of the terrestrial chain were two of our well known planets ... Mars and Mercury.

It was asked: 'What other planets of those known to ordinary science, besides Mercury, belong to our system of worlds?'

Now if by 'System of Worlds' our terrestrial chain or 'string' was intended in the mind of the querist, instead of the 'Solar System of Worlds,' as it should have been, then of course the answer was likely to be misunderstood. ...

This is plain:

(a) Astronomy as yet knows nothing in reality of the planets, neither the ancient ones, nor those discovered in modern times.

(b) No companion planets from A to Z, i.e., no upper globes of any chain in the Solar System, can be seen. [With the exception of course of all the planets which come fourth in number, as our Earth, the Moon, etc.]

As to Mars, Mercury, and the 'four other planets,' they bear a relation to Earth of which no master or high Occultist will ever speak, much less explain the nature. ...

Mars and Mercury, Venus and Jupiter, ... are all, per se, the representatives on our plane of such chains. As distinctly stated in [ML 18, p. 116] [by] Mr. Sinnett's 'Teacher': "there are other and innumerable Manvantaric chains of globes bearing intelligent beings both in and out of our solar system."

But neither Mars nor Mercury belong to our chain. They are, along with

other planets, septenary Units in the great host of 'chains' of our system, and all are as visible as their upper globes are invisible." (See *High Country Newsletter*, June 1988 for complete discussion).

With all these qualifications in mind, I can readily accept that in their pristine state, the teachings are correct and consistent. But we must develop the intuition to penetrate the fog.

Another key question is whether the branch of theosophical teaching presented by Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater is consistent with that of the source teachings of H.P.B. and *The M.L.*

My own observation, based on the reading I have done, which is fairly extensive but admittedly not exhaustive, is that their earlier writings, done within a few years after H.P.B.'s death, followed *Secret Doctrine* guidelines in footnoting and were generally consistent.

Their later efforts (from 1900 on), particularly the products of collaborative "clairvoyant investigations" such as *Man - Whence, How and Whither*, are without question at variance and inconsistent with the source teachings.

Whether they are an internally consistent system as John Algeo claims is, to me, irrelevant if they are a departure from the source teachings. The mythology of *The Hobbit* may be internally consistent and yet be

purely a product of fiction. What is crucial is whether a metaphysical model which goes beyond an earlier *accepted* system is consistent with the original.

In contrast, another later generation Theosophist whose writings go beyond the source teachings is G. de Purucker. His teachings, originally given to students of his Esoteric School at Point Loma in the early 1930s, seem to follow the source teachings in what I have observed to be faithful detail, building upon them and extending them in complete harmony. If there are points of inconsistency, I have yet to find them.

As to the question of the standard of validity to be used by the student in evaluating the teachings; this is a crucial issue.

For me, the model must be universal -- that is, it must cover the full range of metaphysical questions with consistency and in addition tie in significantly with other historical traditions which I have accepted as valid.

Again, for me, one additional standard I use in evaluating an ideology is analogous to the principle of *repeatability* in verifying an hypothesis in science. Somewhere in *The Mahatma Letters* there is the statement that a teaching is accepted only after being checked and re-checked by generations of Seers and Adepts.

IN SEARCH OF
THE MASTERS
BEHIND THE OCCULT MYTH

The above titled book, reviewed in the February *High Country Theosophist*, is available for \$11.95 plus \$2.00 shipping from:

Paul Johnson,
1408 Fenton St.
South Boston, Va. 24592

Upcoming

Monday April 8; Nancy Bilms will be out-of-town and thus be unable to make her presentation on the Jain religion.

We will continue our studies in Chapter 5, Macrocosm of *An Introduction to Esoteric Principles*. PLEASE BRING THE FEBRUARY HAND-OUT -- *BIRTH OF THE EARTH CHAIN*.

Monday May 11; Marty Lyman will talk on G. de Purucker -- His life and his work.

Calendar

Friday, March 8th

Barbara Ginsberg's
home -: 696-0794 for
directions.

Al Skrobisch leads an open forum discussion on basic
theosophical concepts.

Meeting begins at 7:00 P.M

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Monday March 11th

Park Hill Public Library
Montview Blvd. at
Dexter St.

Gerald Lee will present a talk on Esoteric Healing.

Take Colo. Blvd to Montview (2000 N.),
7 blocks E. to Dexter.

Meeting begins at 6:00 P.M.