

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, "intuitive," "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 legitimisation 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.