

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 misled 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/tldocs/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 of 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 Geoffrey A. Barborika, *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 of 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 equitable 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 disenfranchisement 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.