

## Chapter 4

### Blavatsky's Theosophical Legitimation of the Three Categories of Knowledge

#### 4.1 Introduction to Chapter Four

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

... for it heals the wounds inflicted by the gross asperities of the Church "isms" on the sensitive soul of every naturally religious man.<sup>6</sup>

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

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



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

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

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

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



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

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

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

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

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

demonstrate the validity of its religious premises.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Theosophy is certainly not a philosophy, simply because it includes every philosophy as every science and religion.<sup>18</sup>

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

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

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

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

qualifications.<sup>19</sup>

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

Theosophy is "divine" or "god-wisdom."<sup>20</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

called "the science of things possible, inasmuch as they are possible." <sup>22</sup>

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

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

The office of Philosophy is the systematisation of the conceptions furnished by Science. . . . Science furnishes the knowledge, and Philosophy the doctrine. <sup>23</sup>

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

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

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

Another definition of philosophy as "the Science of Principles." is suggested.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Blavatsky interprets this by saying that it

... is the claim of Theosophy in its branch-sciences of Alchemy, Astrology, and the occult sciences generally.<sup>25</sup>

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

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

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

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

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

Blavatsky is confident that she has shown how theosophy  
... falls under, and answers fully, every description of philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

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

... he who studies Theosophy, studies the highest transcendental philosophy.<sup>29</sup>

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

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

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

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

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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

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

... none of our present Darwinians and materialists and their admirers, our critics, could have studied philosophy otherwise than very “superficially.” ... Theosophists have a legitimate right to the title of philosophers—true “lovers of Wisdom.”<sup>31</sup>

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

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

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

the necessary foundation for proper investigation. By not factoring in the principles enunciated by occult science, only a partial and very limited understanding of the causes and conditions of paranormal phenomena could be adduced. Scientists themselves were basically helpless under such conditions through no fault of their own. They simply were not equipped with the proper set of conceptual tools to approach the phenomena correctly. Without a prior familiarity with occult principles and acceptance of a working hypothesis about the subtle realms of nature, science inevitably fails to reveal the true depth and scope of the universal laws that are in operation throughout the cosmos. Orthodox materialist scientists are constrained by the presuppositions of their disciplines and require a new orientation based on inclusion of occult knowledge. However, even by just acknowledging the legitimacy of an occult hypothesis, scientists could, in good faith, admit that they have conducted their investigations as far as they could take them and then let more qualified metaphysicians deal with the implications.

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

So science as familiarly known and practiced could still function within prescribed limits, but would be considered a prefatory or preliminary exercise. The more authoritative expertise would be entrusted to “transcendentalists and philosophers” who share the esoteric orientation. Therefore, making sense of, and supplying meaning to empirical knowledge itself would not be a responsibility of the scientist (unless properly enlightened and initiated) but require the sanctification of elite esoteric specialists. The fundamental principle is that intellectual/conceptual cognition is incomplete and untrustworthy without the guidance of intuitional/spiritual illumination. And to provide properly trained scientists, these initial conditions would have to be met.

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

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



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

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

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

Turning specifically to the conflicting opinions about paranormal experience, Blavatsky states that scientific acceptance of the hypothesis of psychic phenomena is not necessarily impossible, but that the dispute is based on different perspectives about their cause. She claims too that the theosophical position is more difficult to defend than that of the spiritualists, because it is more extreme, rejecting both materialistic theory as well as belief in spirits as presented in conventional spiritualist thought. Blavatsky categorises spiritualists as “Idealists” and scientists as “Materialists” who equally share the same belief that known science could prove or disprove the authenticity of the spiritual realm. But those who believe in the possibility of science vindicating occult beliefs will be disappointed as well, because its current methodology simply will not allow a proper treatment.

Science, unless remodelled entirely, can have no hand in occult teachings. Whenever investigated on the plan of the modern scientific methods, occult phenomena will prove ten times more difficult to explain than those of the spiritualists pure and simple.<sup>38</sup>

The modern scientific method must be rethought and reconstructed to allow the admittance of phenomena that cannot be adequately explained through either spiritualist

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

or materialist frameworks of knowledge. Blavatsky, clearly showing her frustration at this entrenched state of affairs, is doubtful that sufficient progress is on the horizon. After ten years of attentively following the debate, she is doubtful of even the hope for an objective and impartial inquiry into paranormal phenomena, let alone help in effectively breaking down established scientific views and adopting more amicable theories from the occult system. Even those individual scientists who may have come to believe in the authenticity of such phenomena are not receptive to hypotheses extending beyond spiritualist boundaries. Though perhaps able to doubt the credibility of the materialistic worldview, they yet remain unable to make the leap from spiritualist to occult theory. And if a choice has to be made, she feels that the esteem and prestige of traditional scientific orthodoxy would prevail even over private speculative belief. Even if open-minded at the outset, the cumulative conditioning affected by habitual deference to the authority of science simply takes precedent over more tenuous and subjective beliefs. Only the “right spirit of inquiry” precludes the imposition of the entrenched habitual ways when dealing with the unfamiliar and the mysterious side of nature. A new sense of reverence and non-judgmental objectivity is requisite.

As well, there is even a line of demarcation drawn between theosophists who are interested in occult investigation and those who do not consider it a high priority.

Those Theosophists who are not Occultists cannot help the investigators, let alone the men of science. Those who are Occultists work on certain lines that they dare not trespass. Their mouth is closed; their explanations and demonstrations are limited. What can they do? Science will never be satisfied with a half-explanation.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, “those who are Occultists” are privy to more esoteric knowledge than those who are not interested. They also proceed with constraints, not daring to trespass boundaries. These boundaries may be implicit or self-imposed, but non-the-less regulate the field of inquiry. As well, the impression is given that a far vaster quantity of knowledge is potentially attainable, but not yet accessible. Secretive caution must be applied. “Their mouth is closed,” so only a limited amount of information is transmittable. “Their explanations and demonstrations are limited,” so only partial and

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

selective information is conveyed or alluded to. Yet, by definition of the process and its cautionary restraints, there are no other options. So only hints and ambiguous suggestions are possible to indicate more extensive knowledge. But inevitably, this procedure can only be ineffective when measured by traditional scientific standards and expectations. So a certain sense of helplessness, frustration, and futility is unavoidable from the perspective of the experienced occultist trying to gain scientific legitimation.

The methodology of science is examined with the realisation that the inductive method, based on sense experience, cannot adequately provide a trustworthy method for investigation of abnormal phenomena.

Science I mean Western Science—has to proceed on strictly defined lines. She glories in her powers of observation, induction, analysis and inference. Whenever a phenomenon of an abnormal nature comes before her for investigation, she has to sift it to its very bottom, or let it go. And this she has to do, and she cannot, as we have shown, proceed on any other than the inductive methods based entirely on the evidence of physical senses.<sup>40</sup>

By acknowledging the method of scientific investigation and the difficulties of applying it to abnormal phenomena, Blavatsky notes that in certain notorious public investigations scientists were unable to independently deal with phenomena beyond their scope. In Loudon, Salem, Morzine, and elsewhere, respective police agencies were called in to deal with situations arising from inadequate understanding of psychic phenomena. Also, she states that only small samplings of baffling cases have ever been designated for scientific investigation. And in many of those cases, evidence was grossly mismanaged. Hearsay statements would be accepted as factual while eyewitness accounts would be dismissed, according to how they conformed to established scientific principles. And even honourable people may react subconsciously and in their own self-interest.

As well, the repercussions of the materialistic scientific worldview extend from theoretical to practical interests and bring up ethical concerns. Blavatsky sees a direct logical connection between belief in a soulless mechanistic universe and what she feels is essentially a self-interested hedonistic outlook on life.

The theoretical materialistic science recognizes nought but SUBSTANCE. Substance is its deity, its only God. We are told that practical materialism, on the other hand, concerns itself with nothing that does not lead directly or indirectly to

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

personal benefit. "Gold is its idol," justly observes Professor Butler of (a spiritualist, yet one who could never accept even the elementary truths of occultism, for he "cannot understand them."—"A lump of matter," he adds, the beloved substance of the theoretical materialists, is transformed into a lump of mud in the unclean hands of ethical materialism. And if the former gives but little importance to inner (psychic) states that are not perfectly demonstrated by their exterior states, the latter disregards entirely the inner states of life.... The spiritual aspect of life has no meaning for the practical materialism, everything being summed up for it in the external. The adoration of this external finds its principal and basic justification in the dogmas of materialism, which has legalized it.<sup>41</sup>

The contempt and disgust for the attitudes and practices of "practical materialists" as she characterises them is plain to see. She blames the ideational foundation of theoretical materialism and its lack of a spiritual component for allowing a purely secular attitude to prevail. Apparently, preoccupation with "the external" would not proliferate if a worldview with clearly defined boundaries between sacred and profane were to be dominant. This distaste for anything to do with non-spiritual values reflects her implicit gnostic ethical stance. The realm of matter and the interests of the body and personal ego are starkly contrasted with the idealised world of the spirit and the transcendental objective of mystical enlightenment. The practical materialist, even professing to abide by a moral code termed "ethical materialism" is thus denounced for conducting his life with "unclean hands." Blavatsky's radical gnostic dualism is an "either/or" affair, allowing no room for compromise or alternative options. She even damns with faint praise Professor Butlerof, who though not a materialist, is considered too timid to commit to the theosophical orientation because he "could never accept even the elementary truths of occultism."

The abhorrence felt by Blavatsky for any and all forms of materialism then clearly is not simply based on differing opinions about the ultimate nature of the universe. It is primarily a strongly felt emotional reaction to what she perceived to be the legitimising of potentially chaotic and self-interested ethical conduct. And from this perspective, it seems fair to conclude that Blavatsky feared a dominantly secularised world because it would reflect the successful influence of conventional science without acknowledging the primacy of spirit. Yet she detested orthodox Christianity and its worldview, so the only viable alternative was to embrace the esoteric vision. And her advice to theosophists

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

therefore was to simply try and ignore the distractions of the secular world, maintain faith in the theosophical approach, and concentrate on making personal progress with one's inner life.

The scientific perspective endorsed by Blavatsky would substitute the occult vision of a dynamic and multi-dimensional view of nature for the mechanistic model based on Newtonian physics. To occultists, the belief is that all beings pass through increasingly complex cycles of transformation, growth and maturation. However, Blavatsky is disappointed at what she feels is

...the spiritual stagnation in the world of the intellect and of the higher esoteric knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

That "the higher esoteric knowledge" had not yet infiltrated adequately to effectively change the dominant worldviews appears to be taken as indication of failure to achieve a major objective. She ends her article with a little more optimism, trusting in the assurance that time will prove her right.

However, no one can impede or precipitate the progress of the smallest cycle. But perhaps old Tacitus was right: "Truth is established by investigation and delay; falsehood prospers by precipitancy." We live in an age of steam and mad activity, and truth can hardly expect recognition in this century. The Occultist waits and bides his time.<sup>43</sup>

While disappointment in people, groups, and institutions was inevitable, confidence in the inexorable workings of the cosmic plan sustained faith in the overall program. She seems to be suggesting that the evolutionary cycles proceed with an almost grim and autonomous inevitability. Not even the "smallest cycle" will be avoided or compromised, reaffirming the belief that long-term vindication of the theosophical position will ultimately prevail and justify the current enterprise. The frantic, active, technologically burgeoning age was also used as an excuse for lack of widespread public repudiation of the status quo worldviews. Preoccupation with "this worldly" interests precluded mass attraction to alternative systems. The seemingly self-evident superiority of the theosophical brand of truth thus could "hardly expect recognition in this century." However, belief, confidence, self-assurance that the alternative worldview is

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the better option allows the occultist to wait till others see what they feel is the same self-evident truth. He “bides his time” while the ephemeral and transitory come and go, certain that vindication and validation eventually will prevail.

Science, as the dominant category of knowledge in the West, is therefore considered both an enemy and a potential ally. The reality of a strongly materialistic strain of thought was considered a major impediment and obstacle, responsible for legitimating a worldview felt to be bereft of the kinds of beliefs and perceptions embedded in the esoteric way of envisioning reality. Thus, at every opportunity Madame Blavatsky tried to debunk what she felt were extravagant and erroneous claims, and the seemingly unassailable authority that the scientific establishment wielded. This meant challenging many of the fundamental tenets that supported the materialistic outlook. Yet, the broad scientific methodology and validation of a neutral and objective approach to the field of data also was respected. Therefore, the effort to emulate the scientific attitude in the promotion and defence of paranormal and mystical phenomena was a strategic tact used by Blavatsky in the effort to gain public credibility and legitimacy. However, because the theosophical animus was more aligned to spiritual and religious priorities, adoption of a quasi-scientific stance could not fully demonstrate the principles most esteemed. Every attempt to posture as a purely independent and objective investigative body was compromised by reference to the prerequisite set of beliefs considered critical to any potential exploratory undertaking. So regardless of the merit of any theory or hypothesis, only those sharing those criteria could adjudge the results to be independently and impartially arrived at. Blavatsky assumed that the position she espoused was a necessary corrective to the flawed materialistic approach, but it too reflected a vested and prejudicial viewpoint.

The critical stance taken by Blavatsky towards materialistic science was motivated by indignation about its dismissal of a spiritual dimension. The theosophical constructivist efforts were directed towards the legitimation of all forms of what were purported to be supersensory and mystical experience. Using a semi-scientific framework to incorporate materials pertaining to psychic or occult phenomena had a defensible logic, since those forms of experience were said to be based on extended or expanded sensory capacities. However, when venturing away from discussion of psychic

experience towards spiritual and mystical states of consciousness, Blavatsky's use of scientific analogies or creation of hybrid terms blurred distinctions. A constant theme in her writings is that spiritual truth can be "proven scientifically." In fact, the examples mostly used pertain to psychic phenomena, or promote disciplines, techniques, and changes of lifestyle that may eventually produce profound spiritual enlightenment. Combating scientific materialism by claiming to be able to use the very same methodology to prove the opposite conclusion and legitimate a spiritual worldview perhaps was an understandable but overly ambitious expectation.

#### **4.5 Summation of Chapter Four: The Dual Interpretations of Each Category**

Madame Blavatsky's approach to the three categories of knowledge often revealed a double set of objectives. On the one hand, it was important to debunk and critique what was felt to be wrong with the dominant orientations. Thus, she attacked the category of religion for being dogmatic, obscurantist, exoteric, intent on worldly and self-serving ends. More concerned with the letter rather than the spirit of authentic religion. And she likewise was dismissive of philosophy practiced for mere intellectual purposes, without a nobler objective in mind. Science was scorned when seen as a legitimator of mechanistic and materialistic worldviews and not as a technique for justifying occult knowledge. In her writings, Madame Blavatsky had a natural inclination to challenge what she disputed, because implementing her own vision required opportunity to prove that the majority consensual stances were fallacious or misleading.

As well, while attempting to prove that the status quo beliefs were wrong, it was imperative that a more appealing and more plausible option was presented. So when explicating her writings it is not unusual to see that the tenor of her style shifts constantly between deconstruction and reconstruction. Religious knowledge, when understood from an esoteric context, took on an entirely different worth than when considered purely as a by-product of a stagnant formalistic institution. Through the valuation of mystical experience and belief in an unbroken wisdom tradition, religious knowledge acquired a different meaning than commonly held in mainstream Western society. As well, by prioritising philosophy as a lifelong quest for wisdom (which was assumed to be a form of transcendentalism or Idealism), rather than as a mere intellectual exercise, a more

theosophically empathetic image was inculcated. The intellect was now believed to be informed or supplemented by spiritual intuition. And by idealising the role of the scientist as an impartial objective investigator of all facets of nature, it was presumed that the materialistic premises would naturally be proven unsubstantiated and repudiated, ultimately replaced by insights derived from scientists with more spiritually attuned and sympathetic outlooks. And this would invariably lead to a vision of nature that legitimises more subtle, occult, and spiritual dimensions.

To construct a minority worldview that challenged conventional thinking required that the main categories of knowledge be addressed and dealt with in a way that brought up doubts about the status quo positions, and also provided attractive alternatives that could be reasonably accepted as credible. The main thrust of Madame Blavatsky's writings attempts to do just that. As well as confronting the categories of knowledge, the type of esoteric, occult, mystical contents of the theosophical worldview depended upon a dramatically revised representation of the parameters of human experience. Proclaiming the benefits of an esoteric, spiritual worldview immediately suggested that the confirmatory means of legitimation would have to come from testimony or evidence that verified that such potential in fact was authentic. We shall now explore this issue.