

Theosophist is who Theosophy does

On Theosophy, true Theosophists, and the Theosophical Society



Roman Charity (1610) Pieter Pauwel Rubens, Hermitage¹

¹ Daughter becoming parent to her starved father who was awaiting execution in a Roman prison, based on the story of Cimon and Pero as told by Valerius Maximus (*Facta et dicta memorabilia*, V.4, 1) — an *exemplum virtutis* in classical antiquity. Also cf. “Shaddai, *El* (Heb.) A name of the Hebrew Deity, usually translated God Almighty, found in *Genesis*, *Exodus*, *Numbers*, *Ruth* and *Job*. Its Greek equivalent is Kurios Pantokrator; but by Hebrew derivation it means rather ‘the pourer forth,’ *shad* meaning a breast, and indeed *shdi* is also used for “a nursing mother.” (*Theosophical Glossary*)

Prefatory notes

This is an anthology from the works of HP Blavatsky, founder and leading exponent of the modern Theosophical Movement, great noetic radiance of our epoch, acclaimed philosopher and mystic, indefatigable servant of humanity.

It has been assembled to help students discriminate between Message, Messenger and Medium, and was first shared with fellow Theosophists and others in 1998. In 2006, it was released to the public at large under the auspices of www.theosophy.gr

Further revised and typographically enhanced, it is now republished as part of our Integrative Theosophical Studies Online Series on Theosophy and Theosophists.

Titles of frequently quoted works are abridged as indicated in: *Compassion: the Spirit of Truth* (2009). Editor's Notes are common to all our publications and can be found in the same place.

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Series Editor



The Theosophical Society was established to save humanity before the hour strikes.

The arid soil upon which the present generation of men is moving, at the close of this age of spiritual dearth and of purely material surfeit, has need of a divine omen above its horizon, a rainbow, as symbol of hope. For of all the past centuries our nineteenth has been the most criminal. It is criminal in its frightful selfishness, in its scepticism which grimaces at the very idea of anything beyond the material; in its idiotic indifference to all that does not pertain to the personal self, more than any of the previous centuries of ignorant barbarism and intellectual darkness. Our century must be saved from itself before its last hour strikes. For all those who see the sterility and folly of an existence blinded by materialism and ferociously indifferent to the fate of their neighbour, this is the moment to act; now is the time for them to devote all their energies, all their courage and all their efforts to a great intellectual reform. This reform can only be accomplished by Theosophy, and, let us add, by Occultism or the wisdom of the Orient.¹

Before the crisis, brought about by necromancy and other infernal arts, is deepened.

A crisis had arrived in which it was absolutely necessary to bring within reach of our generation the Esoteric Doctrine of the Eternal Cycles. Religion, both in the West and East, had long been smothering beneath the dust heaps of Sectarianism and enfranchised Science. For lack of any scientific religious concept, Science was giving Religion the *coup-de-grâce* with the iron bar of Materialism. To crown the disorder, the phantom-world of Hades, or Kama-loka, had burst in a muddy torrent into ten thousand séance-rooms, and created most misleading notions of man's *post-mortem* state.²

The Society stands above human sects, for it has been established in the Spirit of Universal Brotherhood.

For, above all human sects stands Theosophy in its abstract sense; Theosophy which is too wide for any of them to contain but which easily contains them. . . . it has *plus* science its belief in every possibility, and determined will to penetrate into those unknown spiritual regions which exact science pretends that its votaries have no business to explore.³

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE NEW CYCLE) XI p. 134

² *ibid.* (PERTINENT QUERIES) X p. 153; [responding to a correspondent's question as to "how the recent teaching of Occult Science really originated."]

³ *ibid.* (WHAT ARE THE THEOSOPHISTS?) II p. 105

Though an exoteric body, Its fount and source is the White Lodge of Masters which is wholly esoteric.

For a Theosophical Society is an *exoteric* body, the Lodge of Masters wholly *esoteric*. The former is a voluntary group of inquirers and philanthropists, with avowed aims, a printed Constitution, and published officers, and, moreover, expressly disavowing any power, as a Society, to communicate with Masters; the latter is an Occult Lodge, of whose address, members, processes, functions, nothing is known.¹

The Light of Theosophy differs greatly from Its shadows on earth.

It is Theosophy *per se*, not any individual member of the Society or even Theosophist, on whose behalf such a universal omniscience is claimed. The two — Theosophy and the Theosophical Society — as a vessel and the *olla podrida*² it contains, must not be confounded. 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.³

Theosophy is Divine Soul; the Society, Its imperfect body.

Theosophy is the soul of its Society; the latter the gross and imperfect body of the former.⁴ . . . I feel forced to lay such a stress on the difference between true Theosophy and its hard-struggling and well-intentioned, but still unworthy vehicle, the Theosophical Society.⁵

Neither has anything to do with the frailties of individuals. Theosophy is neither national property, nor religion, but only the universal code of science and the most transcendental ethics that was ever known; It lies at the root of every moral philosophy and religion.

. . . neither Theosophy *per se*, nor yet its humble unworthy vehicle, the Theosophical Society, has anything whatever to do with any personality or personalities! To identify it with these is to show oneself sadly defective in logic and even common sense. To reject the teaching and its philosophy under the pretext that its leaders, or rather one of its Founders, lies under various accusations (so far unproven) is silly, illogical and absurd. It is, in truth, as ridiculous as it would have been in the days of the Alexandrian school of Neo-Platonism, which was in its essence *Theosophy*, to reject its teachings, because it came to Plato from Socrates, and because the sage of Athens, besides his pug-nose and bald head, was accused of “blasphemy and of corrupting the youth.”⁶

¹ *Judge Letters*, (TO ASPIRANTS FOR CHELASHIP) I (xiv) p. 52

² [A Spanish mixed stew or hash of meat and vegetables; any incongruous mixture or miscellaneous collection.]

³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (IS THEOSOPHY A RELIGION?) X p. 165

⁴ *ibid.* X p. 166

⁵ *Key to Theosophy*, p. 250

⁶ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (PHILOSOPHERS AND PHILOSOPHICULES) XI pp. 437-38

The raison d'être of the Society is not to gratify individual aspirations but to serve each and every individual on earth and all that lives without any distinction or condition.

“To our minds then, these motives, sincere and worthy of every serious consideration from the worldly standpoint, appear — selfish. . . . They are selfish because you must be aware that the chief object of the T.S. is not so much to gratify individual aspirations as to serve our fellow men: and the real value of this term ‘selfish,’ which may jar upon your ear, has a peculiar significance with us which it cannot have with you; . . . in our view the highest aspirations for the welfare of humanity become tainted with selfishness if, in the mind of the philanthropist there lurks the shadow of desire for self-benefit or a tendency to do injustice, even when these exist unconsciously to himself. Yet, you have ever discussed but to put down the idea of a universal Brotherhood, questioned its usefulness, and advised to remodel the T.S. on the principle of a college for the special study of occultism. This, my respected and esteemed friend and Brother — will never do!”¹

It asserts that only pristine love of humanity in thought and deed can free the masses from the despotism of the personal and ephemeral and help all find the true happiness that lies in the impersonal and eternal.

At present, the main, fundamental object of the Society is to sow germs in the hearts of men, which may in time sprout, and under more propitious circumstances lead to a healthy reform, conducive of more happiness *to the masses* than they have hitherto enjoyed.² . . . the Society is intended to help men to develop the powers latent in them through their own exertions and merit.³

Whilst the Society supports educational initiatives that inculcate independent thinking, self-reliance, and right conduct,

If we had money, we would found schools which would turn out something else than reading and writing candidates for starvation. Children should above all be taught self-reliance, love for all men, altruism, mutual charity, and more than anything else, to think and reason for themselves.⁴

“The Society, as a body, has no creed,”

. . . as creeds are but the shells around spiritual knowledge; and Theosophy in its fruition is spiritual knowledge itself — the very essence of philosophical and theistic enquiry.⁵

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY: ITS MISSION AND ITS FUTURE) X p. 78 *fn.*; [original version of Mahātma Letter 2 (2), pp. 6-7; 3rd Combined ed., placed by Boris de Zirkoff.]

² *Key to Theosophy*, p. 257

³ *ibid.* p. 286

⁴ *ibid.* p. 270

⁵ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (WHAT ARE THE THEOSOPHISTS?) II pp. 100-1; [on “ancient Theosophy.”]

Therefore, orthodoxy in Theosophy is neither possible nor desirable.

**“Theosophy first and organization after.”
Golden words, these.**

The Society can only become a power for good if its members co-operate to do something, no matter how modest, to help their fellow human beings by acting theosophy, rather than philosophising about it.

. . . It is diversity of opinion, within certain limits, that keeps the Theosophical Society a living and a healthy body, its many other ugly features notwithstanding. Were it not, also, for the existence of a large amount of uncertainty in the minds of students of Theosophy, such healthy divergencies would be impossible, and the Society would degenerate into a sect, in which a narrow and stereotyped creed would take the place of the living and breathing spirit of Truth and an ever growing Knowledge.¹

. . . But where would Theosophy be heard of now, had not its Society been organized before its Spirit and a desire for it had permeated the whole world? And would Vedanta and other Hindu philosophies have been ever taught and studied in England outside the walls of Oxford and Cambridge, had it not been for that organization that fished them like forgotten pearls out of the Ocean of Oblivion and Ignorance and brought them forward before the profane world?²

It would be a good thing if the members of each branch would put their heads together and seriously consult as to what tangible steps they can take to further the declared objects of the Society. In too many cases the members of the Theosophical Society content themselves with a somewhat superficial study of its books, without making any real contribution to its active work. If the Society is to be a power for good in this and other lands, it can only bring about this result by the active co-operation of every one of its members, and we would earnestly appeal to each of them to consider carefully what possibilities of work are within his power, and then to *earnestly set about carrying them into effect*. Right thought is a good thing, but thought alone does not count for much unless it is translated into action. There is not a single member in the Society who is not able to do *something* to aid the cause of truth and universal brotherhood; it only depends on his own will, to make that *something* an accomplished fact.³

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (LETTER TO THE SECOND AMERICAN CONVENTION) IX pp. 243-44

² *ibid.* (“ORIGINAL PROGRAMME” MANUSCRIPT) VII p. 168

³ *ibid.* (SPIRITUAL PROGRESS) VI p. 336

Those who, while trying to solve the riddles of life by exploring the Occult forces Nature, do sympathise with the suffering of their brothers and are doing whatever they can to help out their neighbours and brothers, are born mystics or natural Theosophists. They are mankind's true Brothers and Benefactors.

Otherwise, useless are those members of the Society who have neither an inclination nor the courage to "live the life."



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Those who do [occupy themselves with the study of the occult properties of matter and the physical powers of man] are born mystics, and, of course, natural Theosophists; a Theosophist being one who seeks after divine wisdom — *i.e.*, the comprehension of the ultimate causes of force, correlation, and psychic development, the method of solving all life's riddles. Persons of this temperament cannot be bigots; they chafe under the sectarian yoke, and their hearts warm with sympathy for all who suffer, who groan under the social burdens resulting from ignorance, for all of any race, creed, or colour, who aspire after knowledge. These men are true Theosophists, the brothers of humanity, and, in their complete development, the spiritual exemplars, guides, teachers, benefactors, of our race.¹

It is true that the first conditions required to reach it [the "straight gate" and the "thorny path"] are absolute disinterestedness, a boundless devotion to the welfare of others, and a complete indifference to the world and its opinions. In order to make the first step on that ideal path, the motive must be absolutely pure; not an unworthy thought must attract the eyes from the end in view, not a doubt or hesitation shackle the feet. There do exist men and women thoroughly qualified for this, whose only aim is to dwell under the Aegis of their Divine Nature. Let them, at least, take courage to live the life and not conceal it from the eyes of others! No one else's opinion should be considered superior to the voice of one's own conscience. Let that conscience, therefore, [be] developed to its highest degree, guide us in all the ordinary acts of life. As to the conduct of our inner life, let us concentrate our entire attention on the ideal we have set ourselves, and look *beyond*, without paying the slightest attention to the mud upon our feet . . .

Those who are capable of making this effort are the true Theosophists; all others are but members, more or less indifferent, and very often useless.³

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (RECENT PROGRESS IN THEOSOPHY) XII pp. 303-4

² *Charity triumphing over Greed* (1710-15) Giuseppe Mazzuolla, Hermitage

³ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (THE NEW CYCLE) XI pp. 135-36

**“Be Theosophists,
Work for Theosophy!”**

**That was Blavatsky’s message
a month before she passed
away.**

After all, every wish and thought I can utter are summed up in this one sentence, the never-dormant wish of my heart, “Be Theosophists, Work for Theosophy!” — Theosophy first, and Theosophy last; for its *practical* realisation alone can save the Western World from that selfish and unbrotherly feeling that now divides race from race, one nation from the other; and from that hatred of class and social strifes, that are the curse and disgrace of so-called Christian peoples. Theosophy alone can save it from sinking entirely into that mere luxurious materialism in which it will decay and putrefy as older civilizations have done. In your hands, Brothers, is placed in trust the welfare of the coming century; and great as is the trust, so great is also the responsibility. My own span of life may not be long, and if any of you have learned aught from my teachings, or have gained by my help a glimpse of the True Light, I ask you, in return, to strengthen the cause by the triumph of which that True Light, made still brighter and more glorious through your individual and collective efforts, will lighten the World, and thus to let me see, before I part with this worn-out body, the stability of the Society secured.¹



Further reading

- Cranston S. *HPB. The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement*. New York: GP Putnam’s Sons, 1993; p. 146
- *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (E.S. INSTRUCTION No. III) XII p. 597 *et seq.*
- *ibid.* (WHAT ARE THE THEOSOPHISTS?) II pp. 98-106
- *ibid.* (WHAT IS THEOSOPHY?) II pp. 87-97
- *Key to Theosophy*, pp. 20 & 25
- Small WE (Comp. & Ed.). *The Dream That Never Dies: Boris de Zirkoff Speaks on Theosophy*. San Diego: Point Loma Publications Inc., 1983; (IN SEARCH OF THEOSOPHISTS), pp. 38-42
- “Theosophists defined” and other works in the same series
- *Theosophia, Inner Wisdom* in our Major Works

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, (LETTER TO THE FIFTH ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN SECTION OF THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY) XIII pp. 174-75; [published April 1891, a month before Blavatsky passed away.]