

Guenon's Critique of Theosophy

Theosophy is the new religious movement established in America in the late 1800s by the Russian Jew Helena Blavatsky. Theosophy is described to be esoteric Buddhism together with some original ideas thrown in. Esoteric means that it only treats only those aspects of Buddhism that transcend reason such as reincarnation and the chakras. Some of the original ideas popularized by theosophy involve the astral plane, astral projection, and the levels of the ego. The astral plane is the idea that there is a plane of existence that exists coterminous with our plane of existence and in which Ghosts live.

According to Guénon, there is no principle theosophical teaching, but it is presented as the core of all religion and the "absolute truth." In addition to Eastern doctrines, theosophy also includes traces of Western doctrines such as Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and Jewish Kabbalah. It claims to be of Eastern origin but takes on a totally Western character. A lot of the ideas involved are in fact wholly modern. Guénon claims it attempts to displace Christianity from the planet. (THP, 2, 90)

The main goal of theosophy according to Guénon is "progress." The theosophists believe, for example in four-dimensional space and will go even further with higher dimensions such as seven-dimensional space. Theosophists typically regard their doctrine to be "transcendent materialism" in which the only thing that exists is matter. Matter, space and motion constitute the core of the universe. The Theosophists also have a progressive version of reincarnation. (THP, 101-104) Transcendent materialism means that they believe in the metaphysical but under a reductionist lense. For example, the law of attraction could be subscribed to but is interpreted under a reductionist lense. Heaven and hell may exist, but these are real physical places that people go to in embodied form. When it comes to higher dimensional space, this is where the conception of the hypercube originates that we see at times in India.

Blavatsky had a correspondence with a mysterious group of figures called the Mahatmas- which I assume was psychic correspondence, but which was also maintained through the writing of letters. The Mahatmas are the highest-ranking members of the occult hierarchy which according to the theosophists secretly govern the world. There are seven of these Mahatmas and they were initially known as "brothers" but changed to "adepts," (borrowed from the Rosicrucians) to mean those who have achieved the highest rank in their hierarchy. They are also sometimes known as "masters" (THP, 38). The theosophists regard the Mahatmas to be living men located in Tibet, but who have developed superpowers.

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No real Mahatmas

Guénon clearly does not like Theosophy and throughout the text goes at great lengths to critique it and show its pseudo-religious character. For one thing, the historical accounts given by Blavatsky were often fabricated. For example, the trip to Tibet that she supposedly took initially never happened (THP, 21). Guénon maintains that most of Blavatsky's many spirit guides throughout her times at the theosophical society were in fact fabrications based off of people and esoteric societies she had been in contact with. For example, John King, her initial spirit guide was a person not a spirit and she never had contact with HB of L (THP, 11-13, 15-19). Blavatsky's "spiritual guides"- John King and the Mahatmas- only actually reflect various people that Blavatsky had met throughout her life. Some of these guides and esoteric organizations had used Blavatsky as a cover, while others Blavatsky used for her own benefit. Thus, those who believe she made it all up and did everything by herself were just as mistaken as those who believe her claims concerning the spirit guides (THP, 24).

In reality, the word Mahatma cannot designate a person, for it in reality designates a purely metaphysical principle that cannot be applied to human beings. There is evidence that the letters sent from the Mahatmas were in fact taken from other sources. For example, an article appearing in an occult magazine that was supposedly a letter from one of the Mahatmas turned out to be an article written by a professor at New York. This caused Blavatsky to switch to a new Mahatma, who was never referred to accept in appendices. The Mahatmas were not simply invented out of thin air by Blavatsky, but were inspired by others (THP, 39-44). In fact, Guénon says that sometimes she declared that she had made it all up in times of desperation. Blavatsky was in touch with the Rosicrucians, of which she translated some of the ideas about the adepts. For example, the book *L'Etoile Flamboyante* was a book written about several high masonic grades that borrows from the writings of an esteemed Rosicrucian. The idea of adepts who live for ever is also borrowed by some documents of western esotericists. Indeed, the idea that the adepts are located in the middle-East also comes from these same sources in which Western adepts have been regarded to leave for India. Thus, whenever Blavatsky located information about masters in old Rosicrucian texts, she incorrectly interpolated this as about the Mahatmas. (THP, 45-49) Indeed, Guénon said in 1913 he proposed a meeting with one of the figures associated with the Mahatmas who was supposedly located in the Balkans and when the meeting was arranged. a Western theosophist was all that showed up saying the supposed individual was unable to accompany them.

Sources are actually fully Eastern and not Mahatmas

Guénon claims the doctrines involved are in fact taken from Eastern sources and compiled into a "wholly" modern framework- which is full of contradictions. Where do Blavatsky's original ideas come from if not from the revelations of the Mahatmas? She simply acquired her work through her travels. Partly arising from the likes of Jacob Bohme and Eliphas Levi and various kabbalistic and hermetic treatises. There are in fact letters from Olcott to Blavatsky recommending various rare Eastern and

Western texts. (THP, 82, 83) Blavatsky as a librarian, purchased and kept many rare books, the contents of which appeared in her main written books. These books had been manipulated and changed to her own liking- which is thoroughly full of contradictions. These were thrown together in an incoherent manner in which some interesting documents are found in a mass of uncontrolled jargon. (THP, 84) The original ideas obtained by Blavatsky were thus full of contradictions.

Defense against transcendent materialism

This is in contrast to the Easterners who don't even have a conception of matter (THP, 101). Indeed, it is difficult for the Westerner to understand Eastern conceptions with the advent of matter in the West. The Eastern conceptions are attempting to gain access into the fundamental nature of reality through speculation without a notion of matter. Similar to the Schellingian interpretation of mythology, this is very often obtained in the present moment- possibly with the advent of drugs. Indeed, it is difficult for a theosophist to understand the true nature of things when they have not had the drug experience. The drug experience gives first hand acquaintance with the metaphysical. I personally have had experience with drugs and the outcome was an understanding of the metaphysical. Certain mythologies have their own more materialistic notion of mythology that could possibly be interpreted along materialistic lines, but this is certainly not how things have been reached in the East and a lot of times in the West. When it comes to magic, alchemy and astrology, Catholics have for the most part always interpreted these along nonreductionist lines. The Catholics make clear from the beginning that the soul is a Non reductionist entity that departs from the body upon death and enters a metaphysical domain. In addition, according to Guénon, there are clear sources from the Indian document that the different previous yuga periods had no materialistic component to them whatsoever. This is in contrast to Blavatsky's cyclic understanding.