

Saving Time:
Time, Sources, and Implications of Temporality in the Writings of H. P.
Blavatsky

Submitted by Jeffrey Lavoie for
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Abstract

The subject of time has long been a subject of fascination by philosophers and researchers alike: What is it? How can it be measured? Is it connected to the larger metaphysical meaning of life (e. g. eternal life, absorption, reincarnation, etc.)? Having some standard measurement of time became a pressing contemporary issue in the Victorian Era as international traveling and communications became more typical. Also, the prominent role of evolution as propagated by Charles Darwin's 'Theory of Natural Selection' questioned the long accepted Christian beliefs in the biblical 'Creation'. This forced Victorians to seriously consider the subjects of origin and chronology.

It was into this shifting and modernist environment that the Theosophical Society was established emerging out of Spiritualism. H. P. Blavatsky, along with Henry S. Olcott and several other founding members, formed this organization as a means of discovering hidden truths and learning practical occult methods and exercises. Indisputably, Blavatsky was one of the leading forces of this Society and her natural intellect combined with her vast, occult writings brought about one of the most distinctive and philosophical doctrines in the Theosophical belief system — a soteriological view of time. Using her philosophy of time, Blavatsky was able to create the ultimate Victorian *mythos* that could combine science and world religions into one unified and religious modernist system.

This thesis will diachronically study Blavatsky's writings on time, soteriology and chronology. It will begin in the early days when her philosophy was largely borrowed from comparative mythographers, and trace her writings up until the late 1880s when it became mixed with Hindu and Buddhist notions of time and salvation. While studying the evolution of time and its role in Blavatsky's teachings is the focal point of this study, the secondary purpose is to examine this system as a Victorian mythology that typified the time period along with its hopes, fears and social anxieties.

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Definitions

H. P. Blavatsky's Time Terminology

Avitchi: a place of suffering in H. P. Blavatsky's afterlife and spiritual evolution that is similar to the Western notion of 'hell'.

Bardo: the period of time between death and rebirth.

Circle of Necessity: Blavatsky used 'the circle of necessity' with two different meanings: first, to define the period of time after death when the astral soul lingered around the body for a duration of 1,000- 3,000 years.¹ Second, this term was connected to reincarnation—if a person had died a premature death (abortion or infant death) or had lived in a state of idiocy, their soul would be expelled from this circle and reincarnated on the same sphere.² It was a post-death 'wandering of the spirit' for purification.³ This 'circle of necessity' was a time of purification when the soul was atoning for its earthly infractions.

Day of Brahma: (see 'round')

Devachan: described as a type of heavenly afterlife experience/locality. It was commented that in this realm 'all unrealized hopes, aspirations, dreams, become fully realized, and the dreams of the objective become the realities of the subjective

¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), p. 85. This Western definition of the 'circle of necessity' was also not unique to Blavatsky having been published in John Wilson's, *The Lost Solar System of the Ancients Discovered* (London: Spottiswood & Co, 1856), p. 248. Also see H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877), I, pp. 226, 296-297.

² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* I, p. 351.

³ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* II, p. 284.

existence.⁴ It was divided into separate 'lokas' such as Rupa-Loka, Arupa-Loka, and Kama-Loka.⁵

Dhyan chohan: God-like beings in Blavatsky's writing; humanity evolves into these beings by its seventh round.

Eighth-Sphere: 'the eighth sphere' that she equated to 'the allegorical Hades, and the Gehenna of the Bible' where 'through vice, fearful crimes and animal passions' certain souls were annihilated. This sphere was a place of judgment for exceptionally wicked souls.⁶

Fohat: the link between matter and spirit that was the electric ever-propelling life-force of the universe

Globes: A series of planetary spheres that the soul travelled upon and transmigrated across. In 1881, it was revealed that the total number of globes was seven.⁷ There were seven levels of evolution all occurring at the same time on the same sphere. There seemed to be no consistent order to this evolutionary system, though one universal tenet was that in this evolutionary process each soul ended their round at the same time. The results remained the same: when the soul travelled through all seven spheres/globes it had completed one round/manvantara, and after seven rounds/cycles on the seven spheres the soul had completed a mahamanvantara/great round.

Kalpa: a period of 4,320,000,000 years and is divided into four lesser yugas known as the Satya-yug (1,728,000 years), Tretya Yug (1,296,000), Dvapa yug (864,000) and the Kali yug (432,000).⁸ All of these yugas added together equal one Maha-yug or 4,320,000 years. A Manwantara equals 308,448,000 years (71.4 Maha-yugs).

⁴ *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. by A. Trevor Barker (Theosophical University Press, 1975), p. 197.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 198–99.

⁶ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 352.

⁷ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 348.

⁸ Blavatsky's view of time was comparative in nature, as such, she had to prove that this chronology could be found in other cultures other than Eastern: 'The Chaldeans, in their turn, give precisely the

Kama Loka: the place where Blavatsky's elementals lived. It was also the point where the spirit was refined.⁹ The geography of 'Kama Loka' was later divided into seven lokas (place or abode), the seventh of which was called the 'Territory of Doubt'.

Karma: this force or law of 'retribution' was the vehicle that propelled the soul from matter to spirit and served as the guiding principle that was based on moral aptitudes, characteristics and deeds of a previous birth.¹⁰ It was the 'mechanism for progress — the soul, like everything else in nature, only moves forward toward perfection,' a process that continues evolving through this huge cosmological process; however, 'this progressive view of karma and rebirth are at odds with the traditional Hindu view which allows for regression from the human to animal stages.'¹¹

Kingdoms: individual stages of evolution where the monad incarnates into four different identities: mineral, vegetable, animal, and human.¹² The monad had to evolve through each of these kingdoms and the seven rounds and seven kingdoms.'¹³

Manvantara/manwantara: (see rounds definition)

Monad: The word monad is derived from the Greek word *μονάς* meaning one and was borrowed from the German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm *Leibniz* (1646–1716), especially obvious in his work *La Monadologie* (1714). It is defined as 'the immortal part of man which reincarnates in the lower kingdoms, and gradually

same figures, minus one cipher, to wit: they make their 120 saros a total of 432,000 years.'

Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 467.

⁹ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹¹ Meera Nanda, 'Madame Blavatsky's Children: Modern Hindu Encounters with Darwinism', *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 279–344 (p. 308).

¹² This septenary nature of 'kingdoms' is found in A. P. Sinnett (unspecified), 'Fragments of Occult Truth: No V. The Evolution of Man', *The Theosophist*, 4.2 (1882), 46–48 (p. 47).

¹³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 75.

progresses through them to Man and then to the final goal Nirvana.¹⁴ It is the one core unit of a soul.

Night of Brahma: (see obscuration)

Nirvana: 'is a word which none of our Orientalists have as yet rendered with any degree of accuracy... [it] means the ultimate, the complete destruction of the human individuals.'¹⁵ Later it referred to a place 'in which there is no more any trace of human thinking, but everything is divine and pure: it is without beginning, as without end, it always was. This is Nirvana...'¹⁶

Obscuration: (See 'pralaya')

Parabrahm: is that One Reality and the Absolute; Blavatsky also defined it as the field of Absolute Consciousness.¹⁷

Planet of Death: Another locality introduced in the Mahatma letters was the 'Planet of Death' which was a 'whirlpool whither disappear the lives doomed to destruction.'¹⁸ It was located between Kama-Loka and Rupa-Loka and it is at this point that a struggle between the principles of the soul takes place. Joy Mills in her commentary on the Mahatma Letters equated the two terms 'Planet of Death' and the 'eighth sphere', echoing G. de Purucker's explanation in his *Occult Glossary*.¹⁹ Though these two terms (eighth sphere and planet of death) were synonymous, it remains unknown if they were originally meant to become identical terms further complicating this cosmological system.

¹⁴ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), p. 216.

¹⁵ Letter 100 (written on 11 December 1877), *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky: 1861 – 1879* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 2003), p. 380.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 198.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. vii, 107.

¹⁹ Joy Mills, *Reflections: on an Ageless Wisdom* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2010), p. 265.

Pralaya(s): A 'pralaya' is a period of rest which follows a manvantara/round (seemingly synonymous with 'obscuration'). This term was used synonymously in *Isis Unveiled* with a 'Night of Brahma'²⁰

Prisca Theologia: a consistent and heavenly tradition that has been preserved, protected and handed down through the ages. This is different than the *philosophia perennis* which believed that this one pure truth has been corrupted over time.

Race(s): Blavatsky's philosophy of time was divided into intervals of rounds which were further broken down into groups of incarnations called 'races'. A 'race' defined the various incarnations of the soul upon the seven globes/spheres. In Blavatsky's final philosophy, there were seven races that lived on each of the seven spheres/planets as these time divisions were made to fit into Blavatsky's time scheme that utilized multiples of seven.²¹

Rounds: The first term that was a key component in Blavatsky's philosophy of time was a period of time known as a 'round'. A 'round' was Blavatsky's method of connecting spiritual evolution (phenomenal/historical time) with the ebbs and flow of the vast periods of the universe (cosmological/mythological time). A 'round' became one of the most foundational elements of her later cosmology. Blavatsky's conceptualization of the 'round' seemed to have been first introduced in a *Theosophist* article titled 'The Pralaya of Modern Science' in 1880.²² The term round was defined as the passage of a monad from globe A to globe Z (or later determined to be globe 'G') through each of the four kingdoms (mineral, vegetable,

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 133–139.

²¹ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 47.

²² H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Pralaya of Modern Science', *The Theosophist*, 2.1 (1880), 11–12. Blavatsky's desire to 'Orientalize' her philosophy of time was evidenced in her equating of this term 'round' with an Eastern division of time known as a 'manvantara' (which means the age or period of a Manu) in Mahatma Letter XIV (9 July 1882), though this association would become unclear in later letters. Blavatsky switched between these two terms throughout these letters making it confusing to the general reader. Though the term 'manvantara' was used throughout the Mahatma letters and in the *Theosophist* this term was not clearly defined by the Masters as relating to a period of Manu as found in Eastern religious traditions (actually the word 'manu' is never used in the Mahatma letters) until 1883; thus, Blavatsky initially divorced an Eastern term from its context in order to give her philosophy an Oriental flavor. This will be a continuous theme found throughout these letters- redefining Eastern terms (and scientific concepts) to fit into her cosmology.

animal, man). A completed round was defined as a complete run through the globes.²³ Then another larger division of time was a Mahamanvantaras ('maha' meaning great) which referred to a completion of seven rounds.

Septenary constitution: Blavatsky belief that the monad (soul) could be divided into seven individual parts.

Soteriology: the study of salvation.

Spheres: (see globes)

Sub-races: The seven races were divided into sub-groups that Blavatsky calls sub-races. Each globe contained seven parent races with numerous offshoots of sub-races, and after completing these seven races/rings the soul would be transferred on to the next globe or placed into the subjective world. There were seven divisions of races on each globe. There were seven root races, but within these seven root races were 7 sub races, and within the seven sub races there were 7 branch races.

Summerland: The heavenly, 'afterlife' locale of Spiritualism as popularized by Andrew Jackson Davis; however, Blavatsky believed this term was synonymous with her Kama Loka.

Yug/yuga(s): Blavatsky divided time into segments of smaller periods that could be expressed in terms of years. These yugs occurred seven times on each globe — once for each race.²⁴ The yug is an Eastern time division that in its proper context refers to a period of time based on the quality of life or dharma (natural law); Blavatsky's use of this term seemingly divorced it from its original association with the quality of dharma.²⁵

²³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 78.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is contrary to most modern studies on the life and writings of H. P. Blavatsky (1832 – 1891): it recognizes the intellect that she possessed (her fluency in three known languages attests to this fact). Blavatsky was creating a universal religion that incorporated many world religions and scientific notions into one system. It was her unique interpretation of scientific and religious theories that produced some truly original views of the cosmos, spiritual evolution and her philosophy of time which is the focal point of this study. The underlying goal of this project is to recognize the intellect of Blavatsky and prove the value of a concentrated chronological study of individual subjects within her writings. Owing to this intellect, the life of H. P. Blavatsky is a fascinating topic as it overlaps many different fields of research: science, philosophy, religion, and sociology. Blavatsky's adventurous life remains intriguing in its own right for she was the daughter of a high-ranking military leader, an international traveller, an adept story-teller, a philosopher and even claimed to be a medium for spiritually advanced Masters. Thus, in order to understanding her teachings an examination of her rich life is essential. The main goal in recounting this biographical information is to establish the various strong female personalities that influenced Blavatsky during her formative years that will have some bearing on her later association with Spiritualism. Following this explanation a high-level review of literature relating to this topic will be engaged

I. Biography

Raised by Women: 1831-1948

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 – 1891) was born in Ekaterinoslav, Ukraine on 12 August 1831. Born the daughter of Colonel Pyotr Alexeyevitch and Helena Andreyevna von Hahn neé de Fadayevev (1814-1842) better known by her pen name Zenaida R-va. Blavatsky benefited from the influence of a strong independent mother figure even though she passed away when Blavatsky was only eleven years of age. Despite this early death, Blavatsky's mother was an exceptional writer who published at least twelve works, the first of which was

released in 1837 when she was only 23 years old. Hahn's short stories were widely read and eventually earned her the reputation as 'Russia's most famous female author' as described by both Ivan Turgenev and the Russian critic Vissarion Belinski which evidenced her apparent skill as a writer.¹

Hahn's stories exerted an enormous influence upon her impressionable young daughter during her privileged upbringing. However, Blavatsky lived under the shadows of two extraordinary women her mother and also her grandmother, Helena Pavlovna Dolgorukov [Fadeyev] (1789-1860). Following the untimely demise of her mother, Blavatsky was raised by Dolgorukov, who in her own right was a striking example of an early 'feminist' voice as an independent woman living in a male-dominated era. This male-centred society was evident in the severe lack of job opportunities available for women in the late Victorian era and the legal reforms which seemed to strip women of their legal identities and did not allow them to incur debts or enter into contracts.² Not only did Dolgorukov speak five languages, and was knowledgeable of history, geology, and botany, but supposedly the Scottish geologist Sir Roderick Murchison even named a fossil after her- the Venus Fadeef.³

The Influence of Christianity through Eastern Orthodoxy

Another important influence during this early stage in Blavatsky's life was her connection with the Russian Orthodox Church, which, in order to find one must turn to the embellished testimonies recorded in Blavatsky's own biography written by A. P. Sinnett. In Sinnett's book *Incidents in the Life of Blavatsky*, he recorded some of Blavatsky's and her sister Vera Petrovna Zhelikhovskaia's (1835-1896) reminiscence of their youth spent together in Russia, though these writings must

¹A *History of Women's Writing in Russia*, eds. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 323. As the modern scholar of nineteenth century, Russian literature Joe Andrew noted:

[Hahn] in virtually all she wrote over her brief career (1837-42)...sought to give women a voice, as well as to dramatize the invidious position in which a woman of talent found herself in the Russia of the 1830s...she was certainly amongst the first to dramatize what was soon to be called 'the Woman question'...Gan [Hahn] is perhaps the most important Russian woman writer of the first half of the nineteenth century. *Russian Women's Shorter Fiction: An Anthology 1835-1860*, trans. Joe Andrew (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. xi.

² Lydia Murdoch, *Daily Life of Victorian Women* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014), p. 11.

³ 'Character Sketches: Serge JulichVitte, The Russian Minister of Finance' in *The Review of Reviews: An International Magazine*, 8 (July-December 1893), 655-59.

be read critically to separate the hagiography from biography. These tales reveal a young Blavatsky who was evidently gifted in story-telling, especially in her tales of prehistoric beasts and their supernatural adventures. These *Incidents* also included anecdotes from Blavatsky's experience with the Russian Orthodox Church (which she continuously refers to as the 'Greek' Church or 'Orthodox Church'- the ethnic designation in front being a secondary consideration as all 'Orthodox' follow the same belief systems), an organization, which at one point in her life, she referred to as her 'own dear mother.' In her later writings Blavatsky went so far as to suggest that Roman Catholicism was a derivation of the 'Greek Oriental Church' which she called the 'Mother and Mistress of all other Christian churches.'⁴ Given this influence, there has been a renewed interest by historians to analyze this connection suggesting that the role of the Orthodox Church was immeasurably influential on Blavatsky throughout her lifetime.⁵

In one of these earlier tales recorded by Blavatsky's sister, Zhelikhovskaia recounted a particular visit from the Exarch of Georgia- Metropolitan Isidore. It was said that during this visit some peculiar spiritualist phenomena occurred involving Blavatsky that alerted this cleric to Blavatsky's clairvoyant abilities.⁶ Another story in this work recounted the paedobaptism of Blavatsky within the Orthodox Church which allegedly ended in a disaster involving a candle that left several individuals 'severely burnt' including the chief priest.⁷ A different connection implied by Sinnett was that in 1848 Helena Blavatsky's marriage to Nicholas was officiated through the Russian Orthodox Church.⁸

In her later years, when Blavatsky was homesick, her sister suggested asking the Rev. E. Smirnoff, the minister of the Russian Embassy Church in

⁴ *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings, 1888*, ed. Boris De Zirkoff, 16 vols (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962), IX, p. 340.

⁵ Brendan French has performed the most thorough investigation on the connection between Blavatsky and the Russian Orthodox Church. As French noted: 'That Blavatsky was well aware of Orthodox theology is evident from her repeated references to Eastern Patristic literature.' See Brendan French, 'H. P. Blavatsky and Orthodox Theology', *Theosophical History*, 8:7 (July 2001), 199–204 (p. 202). Also see Brendan French 'Blavatsky, Dostoevskii, and Occult Starchestvo', *Aries*, 7 (2007), 161-184. and for an older article on this topic see Richard Hutch, 'Helena Blavatsky Unveiled', *Journal of Religious History*, 11:2 (December 1980), 320–341.

⁶ Blavatsky's cousin Sergei Iulevich Witte confirmed that 'the exarch of Georgia was Isidor, a fine old man, later metropolitan of Petersburg...he often dined at our house.' *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, trans. Sidney Harcave (London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc. 1990), p. 25.

⁷ A. P. Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky: Compiled from Information Supplied by Her Relatives and Friends* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1913), pp. 18–9.

⁸ At least this seems implied in Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, pp. 53–55.

London, to call on her. To this suggestion Blavatsky responded positively noting the nationalistic sentiment that: 'Is it not astonishing that I, a heathen, hating Protestantism and Catholicism alike, should feel all my soul drawn towards the Russian Church. I am a renegade, a cosmopolitan unbeliever - everyone thinks so, and I also think so, and yet I would give the last drop of my blood for the triumph of the Russian Church and everything Russian.'⁹ And elsewhere in this same letter she noted her preference of Buddhism over Christianity which she saw as 'a pure moral teaching, in perfect harmony with the teachings of Christ, than modern Catholicism or Protestantism. But with the faith of the Russian Church I will not even compare Buddhism. I can't help it. Such is my silly, inconsistent nature.'¹⁰ Blavatsky's reliability will be dealt with throughout this thesis, yet it is undeniable that these various statements and encounters with the Orthodox Church provide a clear connection that shaped Blavatsky's early world-view.

The Imaginative Travels of Blavatsky: 1849-1873

On 7 July 1849, at the age of seventeen Blavatsky married Nicholas Blavatsky who was around fifty years of age at the time; however, Blavatsky soon liberated herself from this marriage abandoning her husband in pursuit of world travels. Her life following this time period remains the subject of much dispute. It is believed that at some point she met up with the world traveler and talented artist Albert Leighton Rawson (1829-1902); however, the dates and nature of this relationship seem exaggerated by both Rawson and Blavatsky making any definitive historical analysis difficult to assess. This ambiguity reveals what John Patrick Deveney asserted in his informative article about this relationship: 'very clearly, there is something going on here that neither H. P. B. nor Rawson wanted revealed' though what this was Deveney does not suggest.¹¹ While Blavatsky claimed during this time period to have visited a number of various exotic places including entering

⁹ 'Letters of H. P. Blavatsky', *The Path*, 10:8 (November 1895), 235–240 (p. 236).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹¹ John Patrick Deveney, 'The Travels of H. P. Blavatsky and the Chronology of Albert Leighton Rawson: An Unsatisfying Investigation into H. P. B.'s Whereabouts in the Early 1850s', *Theosophical History*, 10:4 (October 2004), 8–31.

Tibet this seems doubtful; given her penchant for embellishments and outright lies any corroboration of these travel destinations remain unverifiable.¹²

In 1858, Blavatsky's cousin Sergei Yulyevich Witte (1849-1915) noted that she returned to her family in Russia and for a short while moved back in with her husband in Tiflis, but this would only turn out to be a brief visit as Blavatsky soon met up with a former intimate friend Agardi Metrovich the opera singer. Throughout the 1860s, her and Metrovich moved around Southern Russia to Kiev and then to Odessa.¹³ It was during this time that some historians believe that Blavatsky had conceived a love child with Metrovich- a son named Yuri; however, what actually happened during these years remains unknown as there is very little evidence from this interval.¹⁴ Blavatsky herself confirmed the lack of sources for this stage in her life in a letter to Sinnett:

Between H. P. Blavatsky from 1875 and H. P. B. from 1830 to that date is a veil drawn and you are in no way concerned with what took place behind it, before I appeared as a public character. It was my PRIVATE LIFE holy and sacred...¹⁵

The United States, Spiritualism, and the Theosophical Society: 1874-1879

The details of Blavatsky's life become more verifiable beginning with her arrival in New York on 7 July 1873. It was while living at a women's boarding house that Blavatsky continued her study of practical Spiritualism (and a French form called Spiritism that believed in reincarnation). As Alex Owen implied in her book *The Darkened Room*, the Spiritualist movement held direct implications on the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century as it provided female mediums with paying job opportunities and opened the door for female employment. While Owen might have inadvertently exaggerated the influence of Spiritualism on the employment rate (and neglected to mention the growing literacy rate and the rise of formal education), none can deny that Spiritualism played an important role in

¹² Blavatsky's alleged travels to Tibet are documented in *Personal Memoirs of H. P. Blavatsky*, comp. Mary Neff, (London: Rider & Co. 1937), pp. 136–168.

¹³ *The Memoirs of Count Witte*, pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ *Personal Memoirs of H. P. Blavatsky*, pp. 170–188.

¹⁵ Letter No. LX in *Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. A. Trevor Barker (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1925), p. 145.

Victorian culture.¹⁶ It was Blavatsky's pursuit of the Spiritual movement that led her to a séance at the farm of William and Horatio Eddy in October 1874. It was here that she would make the acquaintance of the credulous Spiritualist reporter, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907); eventually both she and Olcott assisted in establishing the Theosophical Society in 1875 as a reformed 'Spiritualist-type' of organization that sought 'to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe.'¹⁷ In all practicality, the early Theosophical Society served as an organization that taught a philosophically-advanced, Western Esoteric style of Spiritualism that focused on teaching practical occult training such as astral projection, the capture of elementals, and 'various phenomena of clairvoyance, and psychic action between distant points.'¹⁸

Blavatsky eventually emerged out Spiritualism, a movement which she had been a part of since the 1860s. She accomplished this by maintaining claims that many of the communicating spirits were not actually spirits of the recently deceased, but were in reality deceiving elementals which were simply the shells of former human beings who had passed beyond the ability to communicate. It became evident that Blavatsky came to a point where she disagreed and distrusted the Spiritualists of her day. She wrote on 10 September 1875 in a letter to A. N. Aksakoff that 'The spiritualists are furious because we do not share many of their opinions and do not regard all their mediums' lies as Gospel truth.'¹⁹

¹⁶Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 31.

¹⁷ This goal was listed in the original By-Laws of the Society of 1875. W. J. Heyting, 'Is the T. S. True to Its Objects?' *The Theosophist*, 51:3 (December 1929) 265-276 (p. 267). Many of the early members of the Theosophical Society were Spiritualists including William Stainton Moses (1839-1892) who took over editorship of the Spiritualist Magazine *Light* for a short while, Emma Hardinge Britten the 'author' of the influential Spiritualist work *Art Magic*, and Charles Carleton Massey (1838-1905) a frequent contributor in various Spiritualist publications. For an overall view of the relationship that existed between Spiritualism and the Theosophical Society see Jeffrey D. Lavoie, 'The Spiritualism of Madame Blavatsky: An Introduction to Western Esotericism and Writings of a Victorian Occultist', *Ex Historia* (University of Exeter), 4 (2012), 214-246.

¹⁸ C. C. Massey, 'For Private Circulation Only: The British Theosophical Society and Resignation of G. Wyld' (n. p.: n. l., 1882), p. 8. This Western Esoteric flavor is apparent in the articles of the scientific Spiritualist especially HIRAF, Henry Olcott's first presidential address, and in Henry Felt's promise to teach about the nature of elementals. For a fuller discussion see John Patrick Deveney, 'Astral Projection or Liberation of the Double and the Work of the Early Theosophical Society', *Theosophical History Occasional Papers*, 6 (Fullerton, CA: James Santucci, 1997).

¹⁹ Solovyoff, Vsevolod, *Modern Priestess of Isis* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1895), p. 254.

From 1876-1878, Blavatsky moved in to an apartment on Eighth Avenue and Forty-Seventh Street in New York, affectionately known within her circle as the Lamasery. It was here that Blavatsky wrote *Isis Unveiled*. Additionally, while staying at the Lamasery, Blavatsky networked with an eclectic group of people ranging from eccentric spiritualists to Jewish rabbis all of whose influences would become evident in her philosophy.²⁰ After the founding of this society, Blavatsky began pouring most of her time into writing her first major work, *Isis Unveiled* which was a two-volume work published in 1877. *Isis Unveiled* was a 1,300 page 'master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and modern Science and Theology' a title that evidenced the main goal of this writing- to prove beyond doubt the existence of the one true *prisca theologia* (or the ancient wisdom tradition as she designated it), the original religion of the world, and 'unveil' it. Blavatsky maintained that undergirding every religious tradition was the one true 'archetypal' religion of pure truth. The belief in such an ancient tradition that has been handed down from generation to generation has historically been categorized under the term *prisca theologia* though Blavatsky herself never used this term.

While proving the existence of this ancient tradition was the main thesis of *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky also dealt with a number of other subjects such as the introduction of some basic Eastern terms and philosophies (though these ideas were taken from the writings of Western Orientalists), the validation of Spiritualist phenomena, advocating for the superiority of Eastern religions over Christianity (an idea largely derived from the French magistrate Louis Jacolliot), and most of the second volume was Blavatsky's comparative mythography which she explicated a unique revisionist history of the biblical text ascribing its stories and doctrine to pagan origins. Despite these other objectives the main thesis remained 'unveiling' the doctrines of her reconceptualized form of the *prisca theologia*- the true religion of humanity. Blavatsky's belief that this one true religious system was the source for all world religions was especially connected to her philosophy of time as will be shown throughout this study.

²⁰ Sylvia Cranston, *HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* (Santa Barbara, CA: Path Publishing House, 1993), p. 169.

The 'Oriental Shift' of the Theosophical Society: 1879-1885

Following the subsequent decline of the Theosophical Society in the United States, in 1879 Blavatsky relocated the Theosophical Society to India. It would be this move to India that would place Blavatsky (and her Theosophical Society) in constant friction with the Protestant Christian missionaries as exemplified in the debate between Olcott and the missionaries at the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Missional School (Anglican), and the Madras Christian College for their influence in publishing incriminating letters supposedly written by Blavatsky in their *Madras Christian College Magazine*.²¹

It was also during this same period (1879) that the monthly periodical known as the *Theosophist* was established with Blavatsky as the editor of to update to the larger Theosophical community of key events and ideas. This magazine coincided with an influx of communications called 'Mahatma letters' which were being circulated within the Theosophical Society. These letters were supposedly hand-written, 'precipitated' messages from Blavatsky's invisible yet highly evolved spiritual masters (the majority of these letters being signed by 'Koot Hoomi' and 'Morya') to certain key people connected to the Theosophical Society in an attempt to guide them in their decisions. These letters were 'delivered' through a variety of unusual methods which only added to their mystique; some of these methods included falling miraculously from a ceiling or tree, being discovered between random book pages in certain individual's homes, and some were simply mailed through the postal system. These mysterious letters laid out a complex cosmology of evolution that included ideas for both the creation and function of the universe, combining Eastern terms with Western concepts. These Mahatma letters were powerful tools used by Blavatsky to validate her own view of religion which was primarily a combination of anti-Christian Spiritualism and Western Esoteric currents

²¹ 'Welcome to Madras Christian College', <[http://www.mcc.edu.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article &id=162&Itemid=569](http://www.mcc.edu.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=162&Itemid=569)> [accessed on 20 July 2012]; Henry S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: 1878-1883*, 6 vols (London: The Theosophical Society, 1900), II, pp. 192-194. For more information on these letters see J. D. B. Gribble, *A Report of An Examination Into The Blavatsky Correspondence Published in the 'Christian College Magazine'* (Madras: Higginbotham and Co., 1884)

which she assimilated into Eastern terms and concepts, the whole time moving the Theosophical Society towards a focus on universal brotherhood.²²

Moving On: 1885-1891

In 1885, Blavatsky moved from Madras, India to Würzburg, Germany and in 1886 continued on to settle in Ostend, Belgium leaving in 1887 to a more permanent location- London. It was also during this time period (in 1886) that the periodical called *The Path* was founded as an independent Theosophical publication edited by William Quan Judge and shortly thereafter a general occult publication titled *Lucifer* was founded in September 1887 which was edited by Blavatsky and Mabel Collins (later Annie Besant took on Collins' role).²³ Blavatsky's personal role in these publications varied and shifted as she was devoting herself to publishing her greatest work.

It was the information put forth in the Mahatma letters that provided the basis for a philosophy that Blavatsky would expand upon in her greatest assimilation of world religions- *The Secret Doctrine* published in 1888. This two-volume work was based on the Stanzas of Dzyan a mysterious ancient religious text written in the unknown 'Senzar' language and unknown to scholarship.²⁴ The scope of Blavatsky's teachings in this work was divided into three principles: 1) the existence in an eternal, all-powerful, and unchanging-One absolute reality which is the infinite cause of everything, 2) the cyclical period of 'ebb and flow' (rest and unrest) of the universe, 3) the identity of 'All Souls with the Universal Over-Soul: the pilgrimage of every Soul or spark through the cycle of incarnation'; thus, the importance of time was evident even in these three principles.²⁵ The goal of this work was similar to *Isis Unveiled*; Blavatsky was presenting to the world for the first time ever *The Secret Doctrine* which had been hidden in the world's languages,

²² For a concise study of the Western Esoteric currents that Blavatsky utilized in her writings reference Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1994).

²³ 'Introduction', *The Path*, 1:1 (April 1886), 1-3 (p. 2). 'What's in a Name?', *Lucifer*, 1:1 (15 September 1887), 1-7.

²⁴ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 223.

²⁵ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), I, p. 17.

histories, and religions; however, this work was superior to *Isis* as it incorporated the 'Eastern' garbed metaphysics found in the Mahatma letters. This work was syncretic in nature and the fact that it was originally meant to be a sequel to *Isis Unveiled* showed that Blavatsky believed she was continuing to 'unveil' the 'secret doctrine' of humanity.²⁶

In 1889, Blavatsky followed up this writing by publishing two accessible works on Theosophy- the *Key to Theosophy* and the *Voice of Silence* both of which attempted to apply the complex and often contradictory teachings fully explained in *The Secret Doctrine* in practical terms. *The Key to Theosophy* was written in a question-and-answer style format and *The Voice of Silence* was pragmatic and applied these Theosophical teachings. On 8 May 1891, shortly after the publication of these two books Blavatsky succumbed to a case of influenza that took her life. This section has provided a general overview for the biographical events that would shape and mold Blavatsky throughout her lifetime and would influence her understanding of time and chronology.

II. Start at the Beginning: A Brief Literature Survey

Research into the life of Blavatsky, her teachings and the Theosophical society has remained largely stagnant from the mid-twentieth century until now. Few researchers have focused on her life while even fewer held any interest in understanding her teachings and philosophy. *Theosophical History* edited by James Santucci remains the only scholarly journal dedicated exclusively to Theosophical research, yet its circulation is limited. Of even less interest are her teachings on time which appear confusing and contradictory, having kept researchers at bay since their inception. However, just because something is confusing does not mean there is no value in it. This thesis will argue that the subjects of time and chronology were not just a confusing by-product of Blavatsky's attempt to combine different religions together; rather, time and chronology were the very elements that gave her vast and complex teachings true meaning and purpose.

²⁶ 'Advertisements', Supplement to the *Theosophist*, 5:7 (April 1884), 68.

There are no scholarly chronological studies relating to Blavatsky's teachings, which reveal a serious lack of appreciation for their value. However, her writings are rich and worthy of serious study. Blavatsky's teachings engaged such respected individuals as the philologist Max Müller (1823 – 1900) and the scientist Alfred R. Wallace (1823 – 1913). Not only that, her first book *Isis Unveiled* (1877) sold out 1,000 copies within a ten-day period and within that same year two more editions were also printed and sold out. As a point of comparison, the popular journalist Charles Dickens' first novel *Pickwick Papers* (1836) had an initial print run of 1,000 (due to its disappointing sales the next three printings were much smaller runs), Charles Dodgson's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) was intended to be released in a print run of 2,000, and Charles Darwin's epic *Origin of Species* (1859) was printed in 1859 at a print run of 1,250 copies (though only 1,170 were available for sale). These figures reveal Blavatsky's widespread popularity and the worth of such a study even if many people in modernity have never heard of her or the Theosophical Society.

It is a popular assumption among Blavatsky researchers that her belief in spiritually-evolved Masters remains one of her most distinctive teachings. This was implied in K. Paul Johnson's book *The Masters Revealed* (1994) and *Initiates of Theosophical Masters* (1995) in which he suggests that 'a genuine and unprecedented spiritual transmission occurred between East and West through the efforts of Blavatsky and her Masters.'²⁷ He suggested that Blavatsky's Masters were a composite of various human historical figures that were connected to key events in Blavatsky's life. While Johnson's analysis is praiseworthy he fails to identify any connection between the Masters and the subject of time. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke makes a noble attempt to connect Blavatsky's teachings to Northern Buddhism and different Eastern currents in his article 'The Coming of the Masters' (2010). While he claims that much of Blavatsky's philosophy is a 'controversial commentary on Thomas Rhys Davids' study *Buddhism* (1877)', his focus on trying to locate a precursor leads him away from any serious discussion of

²⁷ K. Paul Johnson, *Initiates of Theosophical Masters* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1994), p. 5.

time or the Masters.²⁸ He also fails to reference the long chain of previous proponents of his Eastern theory, including Charles Carleton Massey (1831 – 1907), Anna Kingsford (1846 – 1888) and the supposedly ‘neutral’ Hare Brothers. Regardless of this, however each of these individuals have failed to appreciate Blavatsky’s own unique theories that placed time at the forefront of her philosophy.²⁹

This intellectual barrier was breached by Brendan French who in his unpublished thesis titled ‘The Theosophical Masters’ (2000) connects these Masters to Blavatsky’s view of time. He argued that they linked time with metaphysical purpose:

The Master instantiates, indeed *incarnates*, the nexus between evolutionism undergone through aeonic time and ultimate reintegration into the Divine; he provides the mesocosmic link between mundane existence and ultimate human destiny, *for he is the closest to both*. His centrality to Theosophy is guaranteed precisely because he provides the inspirational impetus which otherwise is lacking in an evolutionary timescale of such enormity. It should be noted that the vast scale of cosmic time, marked by innumerable incarnations of the human Monad ever evolving toward perfection - necessary though it is in order to counter Darwinism and a literalistic Biblical hermeneutic - may not inspire the individual to adopt positive measures aimed at conscious evolution, the central tenet and *raison d’être* of Theosophy. In fact, the lineaments of the evolution of the human Monad are so long and attenuated that a Theosophy bereft of the Masters-exemplar could certainly be accused of fostering *at least* the same degree of passivity

²⁸ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, ‘The Coming of the Masters: The Evolutionary Reformulation of Spiritual Intermediaries in Modern Theosophy’, *Constructing Tradition: Means and Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism*, ed. Andreas B. Kilcher (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 161–178 (p. 141).

²⁹ C. C. Massey, *The Metaphysical Basis of Esoteric Buddhism* (n. l.: n. p., 1883), pp. 3-5. In this booklet Massey believed that he had traced the Theosophical teachings to an obscure ‘Eastern’ sect explaining that ‘there can hardly, I think, be a doubt that Mr. Sinnett’s teachers belong to the sect of the Swabhavikas, the oldest of the four great schools into which Nepaulese and Tibetan Buddhism is divided.’ Thus, Massey believed these new teachings reflected an Eastern philosophy validating the new Oriental shift of the Theosophical Society. A similar sentiment was first expressed by Kingsford in her ‘Letter’ though she had merely identified it with a Northern sect and a form of unorthodox Buddhism. *A Letter Addressed to the Fellows of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society by the President and a Vice-President of the Lodge* (privately circulated: n. p.), p. 21. The Hare brothers who were quick to point out that Blavatsky’s system was not consistent with any Buddhist or Hindu notions that they could discover failed to come to the conclusion that it was therefore something unique and worthy of study, Harold Edward Hare and William Loftus Hare, *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1936), p. 105.

which some commentators have found in certain Oriental religious paradigms.³⁰

French observed that spiritual evolution (through time) was the most important focus for followers of Theosophy, and that without the existence of Masters there would be little motivation for its practice. French believed that these intermediaries provided life (time on earth) with value and meaning; however, he stopped short of identifying their role in Blavatsky's time scheme. It is not surprising that he would seek to make these Masters the central point of Blavatsky's teachings as this was the focal point of his thesis; however, these Masters only had value *because of* Blavatsky's philosophy of time instead of the other way around. Without these vast cycles of time, the Masters would be of little value to humanity. The Masters were those who had experienced time and evolution, thereby obtaining an advanced evolutionary stage: the Masters knowledge of time and their experience through it made them superior to the average person i. e., time gave them value.

Garry Trompf, who served as French's doctoral advisor at the University of Sydney, remains the only other researcher to have seriously engaged Blavatsky's view of time through his research on macrohistory. As such, his writings will be engaged throughout this work. Trompf claimed that the 'Masters could help humanity in their journey and potential escape to nirvana'; thereby, confirming the premise of this thesis that time provided the Masters with a source of value rather than the other way around (e. g. because they could control it and cycles).³¹ The unique approach of this study is in its claim that time provided each Theosophist (and Master!) with a tangible purpose and value; therefore, time became both a soteriological and teleological explanation within Blavatsky's philosophy. Throughout her writings, Blavatsky closely associated her chronology with these evasive Masters which became the driving force in her philosophy as it was necessary for the soul to evolve into the next round/race in order to reach a place called nirvana. The subject of nirvana leads to the introduction of the term soteriology. Soteriology is the doctrine of salvation, from *soteria* a Greek word

³⁰ Brendan James French, 'The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2000), I, 169.

³¹ Garry W. Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from *Isis Unveiled* (1877) to *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)', *Literature & Aesthetics*, 21.1 (2011), 43–71 (p. 63).

referring to a 'saviour'. Blavatsky's soteriology concerned a vast spiritual evolution through an descent/ascent of the soul which developed throughout her writings.

While both Trompf and French have presumed that Blavatsky's cyclical view of time were her way of protesting against scientific materialism and philosophical positivism; it seemed more correctly that Blavatsky's direct reference to biblical chronology proved that her argument was much larger — she was attempting to refute the entire linear chronology of Western Christianity which she believed dominated nineteenth-century Western culture.³² The roots of this purpose were deep-seated and were exhibited as early as *Isis Unveiled*, for, as one critic remarked, a more appropriate title would have been *The Horrors of Christianity Unveiled and the Excellencies of Hinduism Praised*.³³ It was during the early 1880s that the stance of the Theosophical Society and its relationship to Christianity was being questioned by such early Christian Theosophists as Kingsford, Edward Maitland (1824 – 1897) , 'H. X.' (A. O. Hume [1829 – 1912]), Massey and even George Wyld (1821 – 1906), who resigned as president of the British Branch of the Theosophical Society on 2 July 1882. Wyld's resignation was due to his belief that the ideals of the Society had changed considerably and thereby denigrated Christianity.³⁴ The stance Blavatsky took on Christianity became an important topic from this time period forward that had implications which would affect the membership of the early Theosophical Society.

Trompf observed the importance of Blavatsky's macro-historical framework and periods such as a kalpa and manvantara. These periods of time became the 'vehicle' that instilled her ancient wisdom tradition with purpose and meaning thereby connecting history and religion:

Blavatsky appropriated the Indian epical visualization of great cycles (of *kalpa* and *manvantara*) as the conceptual vehicle by which to view cosmo-history undergoing periodicity and constant renewal through time, yet

³² Trompf noted that Blavatsky's cyclical time revealed the progression of mankind 'not the unilineal evolutionism of such "blind leaders of the blind" as Huxley, Comte or the London materialists.' Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky', p. 279; French, 'The Theosophical Masters', I, pp. 116–17.

³³ Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations* (Westport, C Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 160.

³⁴ Massey, *For Private Circulation Only: The British Theosophical Society*, p. 1.

presented her total vision- her neo-Gnostic *mythos* included- in the guise of a synthetic teaching deriving from a far-distant Source in time.³⁵

Trompf's designation of Blavatsky's writings as a neo-Gnostic *mythos* will be a constant term employed throughout this study; by developing her Theosophy she was assembling the ultimate, modernist Victorian mythology that incorporated both 'Science' and 'Theology' into one unified system. Despite Trompf's study in this direction, the larger implications of Blavatsky's chronology remain underemphasized, as well as the main purpose for creating these various root races- to connect all of the religions and their chronologies together!³⁶

It is my argument that this *mythos* was intimately connected to the subjects of time and salvation in Blavatsky's writings. Not only were her teachings on time intentional, but they gave meaning to everything in her Theosophical system and ensured the superiority of her own place in this organization because 1) she was the only person who was able to properly interpret these cycles of time and 2) she was one of only a few select people who could communicate with these spiritually advanced Masters.

While both Trompf and French's attempts are admirable as they begin engaging Blavatsky's notion of time, what I suggest is different in scope and approach. First, I will include the primary publications of the early Theosophical Society including the *Theosophist*, the *Path*, and *Lucifer* which were not widely available when French and Trompf were writing. Second, I have discovered unpublished letters that afford a wider understanding of the time period in which Blavatsky wrote. Finally, I suggest that Blavatsky's teachings and beliefs were not static since they evolved as they interacted with some of the key events in her life. Due to this evolution, I have conducted a chronological survey with an overlapping biography that examines her life and her evolving notion of time within this Victorian *mythos*.

³⁵ G. W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner, and Guénon', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), pp. 269–96 (p. 281).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

CHAPTER 1

The Beginning of Blavatsky: The Victorian Spiritualist, 1831-1876

It is unfortunate that the average Westerner living in the twenty-first century has probably never heard of H. P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) or the Theosophical Society. The few who would recognize the name ‘Blavatsky’ probably know of her through the historically inaccurate reference in the novel *Wicked* or even more rarely through her role in the first cremation ‘funeral’ celebrated in the United States.¹ Even though Blavatsky has been dubbed ‘the mother of the New Age movement’ it seems that her life has been nearly forgotten by the public at large even among many New Age groups and organizations who maintain her philosophies oftentimes without even realizing it.² Of even less interest are her writings, which have been primarily disregarded as a ‘holy horror’, ‘rambling tirade(s)’, ‘woefully confusing’ and even a ‘philosophy communicated to the Nephilim’ (fallen angels).³ None can deny that Blavatsky was a product of her times who established a nineteenth-century religious movement rooted in Modern Spiritualism that reconceptualized a unique ontological belief: the existence and communication with invisible Masters. This idea was further popularized by the transcendent secret chiefs of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and more recently through the esoteric organization known as the Church Universal and Triumphant whose leaders claimed to have been messengers of ‘Ascended Masters’.

Despite a large neglect from mainstream culture, several elements of the ‘Theosophical Society’ have piqued the interest of a select group of academics who have established a quarterly publication titled *Theosophical History* (est. 1985). This periodical has explored certain aspects of Blavatsky’s writings including her teachings on these Masters, Atlantis, the history of the Theosophical

¹ Gregory Maguire, *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 451.

² See Gary Lachman, *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality* (London: Penguin Book, 2012).

³ Michael Gomes, *Dawning of the Theosophical Society* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), p. 142; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004) p. 18.; Harold Edward Hare and William Loftus Hare, *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1936), p. 102; and G. H. Pember, *Earth’s Earliest Ages: And Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1884), pp. 395–96.

Society, feminism, and her belief in the Brotherhood of Humanity. However, Blavatsky's philosophy of time as a whole has been largely ignored by modern researchers, which is curious since it happens to be one of her (if not *the* most) defining aspects.⁴ The few academics who have taken the time to organize and piece together Blavatsky's philosophy of time have categorized it as 'easy to get lost in', 'flummoxing' and as a 'recreation reserved for the few', implying that her chronology was a system of confused, disjointed, and contradictory ideas that serve no real metaphysical purpose.⁵ Yet, it is the thesis of this research that not only was Blavatsky's philosophy of time important, but it also served as the connecting-rod for all of her other teachings.

Blavatsky's view of time became the metaphysical link that would allow all of her eclectic notions of salvation, history and cosmology to fit into one unified system. It is the premise of this study that Blavatsky's teachings cannot fully be understood apart from this philosophy. Arguing for the primacy of 'time' in the teachings of Blavatsky comprises the central argument of this thesis and in order to prove this premise a journey must be made back into the mid-nineteenth century through Nazi Germany and into modernity.

This present chapter seeks to provide a valuable contextual background that will place Blavatsky within the backdrop of the nineteenth century and survey some biographical information which will be referenced throughout this thesis. This chapter also provides a unique categorization of Blavatsky's literary approach that reconceptualizes George Mosse's (1918–1999) 'scavenger ideology' as well as identifying her 'occult hermeneutic'. This section will define key elements that are essential for embarking on a chronological study of Blavatsky's writings. This thesis

⁴ Focusing on the Masters is a long established tradition, as noted in Annie Besant's 1918 work *H. P. Blavatsky and the Masters of Wisdom*. Even in modernity this trend continued, K. Paul Johnson wrote a widely circulated book that focused on identifying the historical Masters in Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), Brendan French in 2000 wrote his dissertation titled Brendan James French, *The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater*, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2000). In fact, these elements described above are all in some way connected her Blavatsky's grand view of time: the Masters are important for their advanced evolutionary nature through time, Atlantis was a subject of prehistory, Blavatsky remains important of an example of feminism for the time period in which she lived, etc.

⁵ Adam Warcup, *Cyclical Evolution: A Theosophical View* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1986), p. 1.; Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 71; Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (Kempston, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1996).

will argue that it was Blavatsky's philosophy of time and spiritual evolution that set the Theosophical Society apart from Spiritualism and other nineteenth-century religious movements and remains as one of the most captivating and misunderstood aspects of her teachings. This study is original and unique in its chronological approach, as the importance of time in Blavatsky's writings and the early history of the Theosophical Society has never been fully explored.

The overall goal of this thesis is three-fold: 1) to analyze Blavatsky's intellectual progression regarding time and chronology including both popular and obscure sources; 2) to argue that this complicated view of time and its implications were appealing philosophical elements drawing new members and interested parties to the Theosophical Society, and 3) to examine how this chronology influenced later Western views of historical development. In order to accomplish this goal, the subject of time itself warrants further contextualization.

I. Breaking it Down: Blavatsky and the Philosophy of Time

1. Philosophy

'What is time?' This question has been the subject of philosophical debate ever since man became conscious of the movement of stars, the changing of the seasons and the menstruation cycles associated with child birth among other signifiers of change. This debate can be traced back to the early classical Greek philosophers Plato (427–347 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and it continued up to the discoveries of the twentieth-century physicist, Albert Einstein who developed the 'theory of relativity' (which connected space and time relationally, changing the classical Newtonian approach to mechanics).⁶

Blavatsky herself utilized an Aristotelian philosophy for the continuity of time believing that it derived from a continuity of motion and change; thus, by postulating a universe where motion was eternal, Blavatsky was implying that time was eternal as well.⁷ Blavatsky would also subscribe to a Kantian approach to time as being based on the human intuition or sensibility of the mind, and not a thing existent by itself, i. e., 'time is not an empirical concept' (this theory has long been

⁶ Richard M. Gale, 'What, Then, is Time?', in *The Philosophy of Time: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Richard M. Gale (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 1–8 (p. 3).

⁷ *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. by A. Trevor Barker (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1975), pp. 138–39.

debated).⁸ Blavatsky viewed motion and matter as being outside of time (and in eternity) rather than measuring it; thus, time could not be determined by motion or material measurement.

In Blavatsky's cosmology, every object was continually moving, by which she generally meant evolving/changing into a higher form. Blavatsky, in defining her view of divinity, explained that an immutable (unchanging) divine being was a philosophical impossibility as everything in the universe was evolving and subject to her cosmological view of time.⁹ Blavatsky's philosophy of time and metaphysics consisted of an eternal evolution as everything in the universe continually moved up this complex, eternal evolutionary ladder.

As observed above, in Blavatsky's philosophy of time the only impossibility was the existence of an immutable being (such as the nineteenth-century Christian conceptualization of the immutability of God).¹⁰ This philosophical view of eternal motion and its connection to divinity would become an important concept throughout her later writings. However, her belief that no deity could be immutable would change in *The Secret Doctrine* where Parabrahm was transformed into the 'ONE *immutable*-Parabrahm.'¹¹ This changing relationship between motion and time has been an association found throughout the historical debate on time handed down through the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus.

Another concept shared by Blavatsky and classical philosophy included the Platonic philosophy of 'correspondences'. This characteristic was identified by Antoine Faivre as one of the six elements found among Western Esoteric currents, therefore serving as further proof that Blavatsky was moving her modified view of Spiritualism into a Western Esoteric philosophy.¹² In fact, Blavatsky mentioned Plato in relation to her philosophy of time and spiritual evolution at several points, later referring to him as a spiritually advanced individual or what she designated as a fifth rounder (someone who had already evolved through five 'rounds').¹³ Yet,

⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by F. Max Müller (New York: Macmillan & CO., 1896), pp. 24–33. Consider it in comparison to *The Mahatma Letters: to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 194.

⁹ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 60.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), I, 340.

¹² Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 10–11.

¹³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 84. For mention of Plato see Mahatma letters XVIII, XXV, LII, CXXVII.

despite any indirect connections between Blavatsky and the history and philosophy of time, her views seemed largely based on a practical and soteriological approach rather than any dogmatic historical basis in the history of philosophy.

2. Myth

Mircea Eliade wrote about myths and sacred time, stating that myths typically take place in a special 'sacred time' before history or the *in illo tempore*, a time before time itself existed. What makes any myth relevant to its specific culture is when history becomes connected to this mythic *in illo tempore*. It has been commonly maintained that 'myth' represents a 'primitive' stage in human development, whereas, 'history' has become a higher form of it. Each culture has their own way of connecting mythology and history. For example, as Paul Ricoeur noted in his work on ancient Israel, they had their own methods: '...in Israel the quasi myths of myth fragments borrowed from neighboring cultures were incorporated into the great narrative ensembles...in the form of historicized myths, as is the case in *Genesis* 1-11. This reinterpretation of myth on the basis of history appears quite specific to the literary sphere of ancient Israel.'¹⁴ According to Ricoeur, Israel did not reject myth — they just reinvented it.

Blavatsky would attempt a similar feat for her own culture albeit in a very different time period — the nineteenth century. She brought together the history and mythology of her culture, fusing mythology with modern scientific theories. This made her a product of her times and her beliefs typified the unsettled climate of the Victorian Era. After all, this time period marked the beginning of religious modernism, which the historian William Hutchinson defined as the 'adaption of religious ideas to modern culture' as modernists attempted 'to minimize the distinctions between the sacred and secular, this world and the next, the ideal and the real, and religion and science.'¹⁵ One such scientific theory that Blavatsky engaged was a time period in geology now called 'deep time' which will now be discussed.

¹⁴ Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of Human the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1994), p. 18.

¹⁵ John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), p. 38.

3. Geology

Blavatsky's construction of time began a noticeable transformation following her relocation to the East in 1879 as she began to create her own detailed cosmology, rooting it in nineteenth-century science and engaging geological theories of something that has been recently called 'deep time' (only conceptually as she never seemed to engage this term in her writings). The definition of 'deep time' can best be understood through an analogy suggested by John Mc Phee in the *Basin and Range*: 'consider the earth's history as the old measure of the English yard, the distance from the king's nose to the tip of an outstretched hand. One stroke of a nail file on his middle finger erases human history'; thus, 'deep time' is a term used by geologists to explain the vast period of billions of years preceding the emergence of human life with the universe.¹⁶ It is best described as a '1' with at least ten zeros before it. The noted naturalist Charles Darwin expressed a similar concept in his *Origin of Species*:

I look at the natural geological record, as a history of the world imperfectly kept, and written in a changing dialect; of this history we possess the last volume alone, relating only to two or three countries. Of this volume, only here and there a short chapter has been preserved and of each page, only here and there a few lines.¹⁷

The so-called father of geology James Hutton (1726–1797) was first credited with discovering the notion of 'deep time', explaining that it included both 'infinite space and endless time'.¹⁸ It was the existence of this 'deep time' that provided Blavatsky with a 'scientific' basis to defend her belief in vast time periods of rounds, pralayas, and races. It was also this explanation of enormous periods of pre-historical time that Blavatsky continuously engaged in her philosophy to prove her occult knowledge of the ancient wisdom tradition: she believed that she had access to the innermost details of physical and spiritual evolution beginning with the primordial *in illo tempore* and down through this 'deep time', thereby making her teachings metaphysically invaluable.

¹⁶ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 3.

¹⁷ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1861), p. 272.

¹⁸ James Hutton, *An Investigation of the Principle of Knowledge and the Progress of Reason, From Sense to Science and Philosophy*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Straham & Cadell, 1794), III, 645.

Infinite Time Equals Infinite Possibilities

Blavatsky's later connection to Eastern views of time also allowed for similar intervals of millions of years which could make any pre-Adamite theory possible, no matter how bizarre. No one could prove what the climate of the earth had been like or what the composition of humanity had been 100,000,000 years ago (at least until the development of the scientific principle of uniformitarianism by Charles Lyell in 1830). Blavatsky adopted this Eastern cyclical view of time to develop her own theories of races and rounds that were largely based upon her interpretations of science and ancient texts. Maria Carlson noted the philosophical appeal of this pre-historical 'deep time' by Blavatsky in her work which focuses upon Blavatsky's influence in her homeland of Russia. In relation to Blavatsky's use of Buddhist cycles, Carlson noted that:

Madame Blavatsky's use of 'cosmic mathematics'...is a good example of the way in which Theosophy unites science and metaphysics. The Buddhist calculation of time creates the illusion of 'scientific facts'; actually it is scientific methodology applied to an unprovable premise without scientific bases.¹⁹

Blavatsky recognized both a linear and cyclical view of time in the development of her cosmology. While philosophically the dual existence of both cycles and linear time can be found as far back in the writings of Aristotle, Plotinus, and in the *Hermeticum*, Blavatsky attempted to assimilate both of these ideas into her cosmology; this belief seemed validated through her later discovery of Hindu and Buddhist texts which she came across in India post-1879. Thus, she combined philosophy, mythology and science together to create her super religion-Theosophy.

What gave Blavatsky's view of 'deep time' respectability to the general public was that it coincided with many contemporaneous geological and evolutionary theories for the origin of the world, i.e. scientific cosmology. It is important to recognize that there was some overlap between the theories of scientists like Charles Lyell (1797–1875) and James Hutton (1726–1797), who

¹⁹ Maria Carlson, *No Religion Higher than Truth: A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 231. I have omitted the phrase 'in this passage' using ellipses because Carlson equated this realization to a specific passage in *The Secret Doctrine*. It appears obvious that Carlson's conclusion pertains to Blavatsky's conceptualization of time in a much more general sense.

studied geological cycles of time, and Blavatsky, who promoted a similar cyclical view of time through her writings on religion. In fact, Blavatsky herself in *The Secret Doctrine* defended her belief in cycles using the scientific research of Alfred Wallace (1823–1913) and occasionally quoted Lyell.

Blavatsky's view of time contained points of validity because she continually employed the evolutionary theories of prominent scientists albeit on very different grounds and for different reasons. Also, Blavatsky only adhered to modern scientific theories when they validated her own ideas, and she never incorporated Charles Lyell's theory of uniformitarianism into her eternal evolutionary scheme. Uniformitarianism maintained that the present was the key to the past: all past events could be understood by examining the scientific laws of the present. This theory required a belief that similar scientific laws have been in effect throughout history; it alleviated the need for elaborate mythologies of pre-Adamite races which had become a common belief among many nineteenth-century esotericists, occultists and even so-called 'orthodox' theologians.²⁰

Blavatsky defended her belief in cyclical history on entirely different terms; her belief for the superiority of cyclical time seemed to derive from her enormous respect for Eastern religions and philosophy. Blavatsky presented her Theosophy as being 'scientifically-generated, historically verifiable, and empirically-testable: in short, *as fact*.'²¹ Theosophy would intentionally assimilate comparative mythography with nineteenth-century theories of philosophy, science and anthropology, all of which added to its general appeal to an under-educated culture emerging out of illiteracy during the *fin de siècle*.²²

²⁰ One such supposedly orthodox theologian who held to a Pre-Adamite race was G.H. Pember's 'gap theory'. Pember was mentioned by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 229 (1888) as he spent roughly forty pages in his book *Earth's Earliest Ages* (1884) attacking Theosophy. At any rate Pember's theory espoused that there was a longer interval between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, and that the amount of time between these two verses could have coincided with the modern theory of evolution. Additionally, this view asserted that there was a race before Adam with a history of its own showing that 'the fossil remains are those of creatures anterior to Adam...they must have belonged to another world, and have a sin-stained history of their own, a history which ended in the ruin of themselves and their habitation.' G. H. Pember, *Earth's Earliest Ages: And Their Connection with Modern Spiritualism and Theosophy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1884), pp. 18, 55.

²¹ Brendan French, 'The Mercurian Master: Hermes' Gift to the Theosophical Society', *Aries*, 1.2 (2001), 168–205 (p. 169).

²² Following the Education Act of 1870 a standardized system of schooling was established. Michael Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society in England, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 62–63.

4. Popular Culture

Many recent books have been written on the nature of time and its philosophy ranging from a survey of its history to a detailed engagement of definitions and elements. The purpose of this study is not to survey the history of this fascinating philosophy or to define the meaning of time. Rather, this study will focus on one Victorian mystic and observe how she utilized her own philosophy of time to produce a pseudo-scientific, esoteric mythology that reflected the unsettled climate of the Victorian era. Despite this concentrated focus, it is worth mentioning that the entire study of time was about to change following the close of the Victorian era (in 1905) when a desk-clerk named Albert Einstein developed his own revolutionary *special theory of relativity*. This theory defined time in relation to space, observing that time flows differently for bodies moving relatively to each other.²³

In order to grasp the intricacies of Blavatsky's philosophy of time, some contextual information must be explained. First, the question must be asked: what role did time play in the larger Victorian culture? The subject of time and time travel in literature became a subject of great interest in the late Victorian era through such novels as *The Time Machine* (1895) by H. G. Wells, *Tourmalin's Time Cheques* (1891) by Thomas Anstey Guthrie, *A Connecticut Yankee King Arthur's Court* (1889) by Mark Twain and even in Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol* (1843) where Ebenezer Scrooge encounters the ghosts of Christmas past, present and future and through their assistance travels through time.

Despite this newly invigorated fascination with time, it was not until 1918 that the Standard Time Act was passed in the United States, which implemented a standard of time and daylight savings time that authorized the interstate commerce commission to define each time zone. There were many elements that pushed Western society to become more aware of time and its management, though most notably was the industrial revolution, the postal service, and railroad companies. Yet, for many years there was no universal standard for keeping time and each region maintained a different time zone. As of 1870, there were roughly 80 different time zones in the United States alone. As Stephen Kern observed, during the late nineteenth century 'if a traveler from Washington to San Francisco set his watch in

²³ See John Bernard Kennedy, *Space, Time and Einstein: An Introduction* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2003).

every town he passed through, he would set it over two hundred times.'²⁴ It remains curious that this desire for a standardized time schedule was facilitated not by science or military necessity, but largely through the spread and growth of railroad companies. Regardless of the reasons, the subject of time and its measurement was a relevant cultural issue that overlapped with the life of Blavatsky. Her own frequent and extensive travels would have ensured her familiarity with this 'time-zone' issue which lacked any uniformity or measurement; thus, this issue of time became an important part in developing her own cosmology reflecting the larger Victorian culture.

A General History of Spiritualism

The term spiritualism was (and has been) a catch-all term for many different beliefs during the Victorian era; however, what has been designated the Modern Spiritualist movement (designated throughout with a capital 'S') began in 1848 at the Fox household in the city of Hydesville, New York. Strange and eerie noises ricocheted throughout the house on 31 March awaking the slumbering Fox family. Katy, one of the Fox daughters, then attempted to communicate with this spirit allegedly addressing the ghost 'Mr. Split-foot, do as I do.'²⁵ This was followed by a series of knocks which were believed to have been a communication from a spirit that employed a code system to answer the questions it had been asked. Though other events prefigured this movement, this initial communication with the Fox sisters birthed a new religious belief system which was subsequently labelled Modern Spiritualism. At its very origination, Spiritualism was directly connected to these psychical disturbances known as 'phenomena'. This term 'phenomena' (plural of phenomenon) is an important word that will be employed throughout this work to describe the unexplainable events that became associated with Spiritualist and occultist beliefs i. e., any 'paranormal' or 'supernatural' occurrence such as spirit-writing, full body materialization of spirits, ectoplasm, etc.²⁶

²⁴ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 12.

²⁵ Nancy Rubin Stuart, *The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 2005), pp. 5-6. Recently, researches have suggested that this address to 'Mr. Splitfoot' was a later interpolation.

²⁶ Even though Spiritualist William Henry Harrison sought to abolish the words 'miracle' and 'supernatural' in their association with Spiritualism as it made the movement seem less scientific,

Spiritualism supposed the post-mortem survival of the soul and was later merged with Swedenborgianism and other pre-existent ideologies including Mesmerism, comparative mythography, phrenology, the historical critique of Christianity, and the works of Andrew Jackson Davis.²⁷ These belief structures provided established philosophical foundations on which the modern Spiritualist religious movement would build and assimilate.

Time in Victorian Spiritualism

While setting a standard of time measurement became a new pressing topic in the Victorian Era, very little discussion of time could be found in the writings of most Modern Spiritualists. This is likely due to the fact that the spiritual world seemed to exist outside of time and space. It remains outside the scope of this project to examine fully the philosophy of time in Spiritualism. Indeed, an entire research project could be focused on this one topic as there are as many diverse opinions on Spiritualist philosophy as there were Spiritualists to think of them.

This work will prove that Blavatsky's early philosophy was deeply rooted in Spiritualism. By her own admission, Blavatsky was converted in 1858 by Daniel Dungas Home (1833–1886) even if the details of this conversion remain the subject of dispute. Blavatsky mentioned her affiliation with Spiritualism in various interviews and letters written between the years 1874-1875. Even as late as 1878 she designated herself as a Spiritualist; therefore, Blavatsky's Spiritualist background remains incontestable even if she later downplayed her involvement in this movement.²⁸

To suggest any sweeping generalizations of Spiritualism or Spiritualist views or beliefs would be intellectually unfair as most did not attempt to engage a coherent philosophy of time and eternity. The only primary (and generally agreed upon) tenet of Spiritualism as suggested in the *Spiritual Magazine* of 1869 was

this term is appropriate in this thesis because it has been written for a modern audience. Richard Noakes, 'Natural Causes? Spiritualism, Science, and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain,' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Nicola Brown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23–43 (p. 30).

²⁷ A general survey of some of these earlier currents can be found in Joscelyn Godwin's *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994).

²⁸ For the philosophical connections between Spiritualism and the Theosophical Society see Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement* (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2012).

‘that disembodied human spirits sometimes manifest themselves or make known their presence and power, to persons in the earthly body, and hold realized communications with them. Whoever believes this one fact, whatever else he may believe or disbelieve in Theology, Philosophy, or Morals, is a Spiritualist, according to the modern use of the term.’²⁹ This inclusivity notwithstanding there were several key figures in Spiritualism who were influential on the movement as a whole, several of whom became especially important to Blavatsky — one such Spiritualist was Andrew Jackson Davis.

In 1850, Davis wrote an article titled ‘What is the Philosophy of Time’? In this article he dealt primarily with defining phenomenal time, comparing it to space i. e., eternity compared to infinity. He did not develop a theory of time for the afterlife as Blavatsky later did and suggested that nothing and eternity were synonymous.³⁰ ‘Time’ did not appear to have been an issue in mainstream Spiritualism at least until the publishing of Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism* which prompted a series of articles on this subject matter. Still, in the 1850s Davis was more concerned with clarifying the nature of eternity, claiming that it was totally inconceivable to the ‘human soul’. He described eternity as an ‘...infinite ocean, and this life is but a single drop of its everlasting waters, and if that drop be used a million of time by millions of individuals, it nevertheless remains a part of the universal ocean, indestructible.’³¹ Despite this abstract engagement of time and eternity, it was decidedly an eternal process.³²

It is also widely maintained that Blavatsky started the Société Spirite in Cairo in 1871, a society which was concerned with ascertaining the teachings of Allan Kardec. Kardec defined his view of time in *Genesis: Miracles and Predictions according to Spiritism* (1868) and its relation to the concept of eternity. In Kardec’s view, both time and space were eternal in scope and duration.³³ Kardec’s

²⁹ A. E. Newton, ‘Modern Spiritualism’, *The Spiritual Magazine*, 4.10 (1869), 385–90 (p. 386).

³⁰ Andrew Jackson Davis, ‘What is the Philosophy of Time?’, *The Spirit Messenger*, 1.17 (1850), 132–133 (p. 132).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² The spiritual world was seen as existing outside of time and sense, as noted in Thomas Brevior, ‘Notes on Healing by the Laying on of Hands’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 5.11 (1870), 433–39 (p. 433). Also see R. F. A., ‘Spiritual Progress’, *Spirit Messenger*, 1.35 (1851), 278.; William Howitt, ‘What Spiritualism Has Taught’, *Spiritual Magazine*, 6.4 (1885), 145–162; ‘Spiritual Phenomena at Bridgeport’, *The Spirit Messenger*, 1.6 (1850) 44–45 (p. 44).

³³ Allan Kardec, *Genesis Miracles and Predictions According to Spiritism* (Brazil: International Spiritist Council, 2009), p. 150.

systemization of Spiritism and his infinite view of time and space bore a striking similarity to Blavatsky's views of time in *Isis Unveiled*.³⁴ Therefore, Blavatsky's philosophy of time must be contextualized into the larger history of Spiritualism (and Spiritism, this French version of Spiritualism that includes a belief in reincarnation) and the figures that influenced her and her eventual philosophy of time and chronology; thus, Davis' and Kardec's eternal view of time would serve as the foundation for Blavatsky's own cosmology.

It was a lack of any clear philosophical sophistication in mainstream Spiritualism that pushed Blavatsky (and Olcott) to develop the Theosophical Society; this seemed especially true in relation to time. Blavatsky equated the Theosophical Society to what Allan Kardec's Spiritism had become — a Spiritualist organization that maintained an advanced form of philosophy, and therefore, the Theosophical Society went on to promote a complex and developed philosophy. This was in contrast to many contemporary Spiritualist movements that were philosophically simplistic and in the 1870-1880s became subject to frequent exposures and debunking.³⁵ One such philosophy that Blavatsky developed was an advanced, religious-modernist view of time that assimilated both science and religion.

One final article deserves mention for it presents a typical Spiritualist view of time which appeared infinite — an idea that Blavatsky maintained throughout her writings. However, a generally accepted approach can be seen in the following writing taken from Alonzo Eliot Newton (1821–1889). Newton wrote two tracts

³⁴ Kardec expounded upon his view of eternity, noting his indirect assimilation of Catholicism: 'Before the creation of humanity there was simply eternity. Beyond earth eternity remains impassive and unmoving although time has been marching steadily forward on other worlds. On the earth, however, time replaces eternity, and over a given series of generations one will count the years and centuries...Now let us transport ourselves to the final day of that earth, to the hour in which, bowed under the weight of old age, it will be erased from the book of life never to appear again. Here, the chain of events stops, the terrestrial movements that measure time cease and time ends with them...There are as many worlds in the vast expanse as there are different and incongruent times. Outside these worlds, only eternity replaces such ephemeral sequences...Immensity without boundaries and eternity without bounds: such are the two great properties of the nature of the universe'. Kardec, *Genesis*, pp. 140–41.

This belief appears similar to Blavatsky's view of eternity in *Isis Unveiled*, her first major work published in 1877 which will be described in a later chapter. H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877), I, pp. 184, 348.; H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Teachings of Allan Kardec', *The Theosophist*, 4.11 (1883), 281.

³⁵ See Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement* (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2012), pp. 130–44.

illustrating this ambiguous though infinite approach to time, the afterlife and the soul's future progression:

That, since growth through successive stages is the law of the human being in the present life, it may be inferred that unfoldment, expansion, or progression through endless successive stages, is the destiny of the human spirit... That progression may be, and in many cases is, from bad to worse (at least, through an indefinite cycle or *aeon* of existence), is affirmed by some; while others assert only a progression in good or in happiness for all. The mere opinions of Spirits cannot decide the question. It must be settled by the laws of our mental and moral constitution.³⁶

It is curious that Newton noted the disagreement among Spiritualists concerning a 'progressive' view on future stages of existence. Blavatsky would build on these two general tenets of time in Spiritualism: 1) the belief in an eternal, never-ending time and 2) a belief in a progression of the soul. These two points would become the foundation for Blavatsky's complex philosophy of time. Furthermore, it should be remembered that Blavatsky was a well-read Victorian possessing a proficient knowledge of Russian, French and English, and would, therefore, have been exposed to numerous sources and teachings throughout her lifetime. Even by her own admission these two figures (Davies and Kardec) were especially influential, particularly during this 'earlier' time period.

Now that this historical background has been examined and analyzed, there are three fundamental traits/doctrines that are crucial to understanding Blavatsky and her teachings, especially on time. These three points include the following: 1) her conceptualization of the Theosophical 'Masters', 2) her Scavenger ideology and approach to sources, and 3) the existence of her reconceptualized *prisca theologia* and the formation of her occult hermeneutic.

II. BASIC TENETS OF BLAVATSKY'S PHILOSOPHY

1. The Invisible Masters

Blavatsky's associations and philosophical ideologies were not the only elements shared with Spiritualism. Blavatsky's very conceptualization of her Tibetan Masters had its early roots in Spiritualism. Many Spiritualist mediums employed different 'spirit guides' to lead them through the spirit world. Oftentimes, mediums would

³⁶ A. E. Newton, *Two Tracts: Tract No. 1: Spiritualism Defined; Tract No. 2: What Does Spiritualism Teach?*, (Boston: Bela Marsh, [n. d.]).

adopt alternate personalities in their séances based upon the individual spirit guides that they were channelling. Many of these spirits were allegedly historical personages; thus, when channelling a historical figure such as William Shakespeare, the medium would take on the personality, speech, and behaviour that was common for William Shakespeare. ‘The bard’ was actually a common figure making spectral appearances from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, revealing himself through a variety of phenomena, including the most famous situation of his communication with Victor Hugo through a series of raps.³⁷ Spirit guides could be famous figures from the past or unknown figures whose identifications were too vague to verify.

Wouter Hanegraaff noted a further connection between the Victorian process of channeling spirit guides and the eighteenth-century process of communicating with ‘elevated beings’ in such illumines orders as ‘Martinez de Pasqually’s *Elus-Cohens*, Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety’s *Illumines d’Avignon*, Jean-Baptiste Willermoz’s *Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cite Sainte*, and similar religious orders closely connected to or derived from them.’³⁸ The belief in spiritual masters that could communicate with mortals has a rich history that Blavatsky would utilize through her conceptualization of the Tibetan Masters. These Tibetan Masters had a humble origination and first began influencing Blavatsky through her conceptualization of the famous spirit guide — John King.

‘John King’ was an unidentifiable spirit guide who seemingly first appeared to the Spiritualist sensation the Davenport Brothers in 1850. John King would become a popular figure in the Spiritualist world, as did his supposed ‘daughter’ Katie King. For years, this pair had become one of the most popular male and female spirit guides channeled on either side of the Atlantic.³⁹ The concepts of Spirit guides and controls were a common theme in Victorian Spiritualism, employed by a number of famous mediums including William Stainton Moses, Leonora Piper and Emma Hardinge Britten, to name only a few. Emma Hardinge

³⁷ Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 51.

³⁸ Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press), p. 436.

³⁹ Brendan James French, ‘The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater’, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2000), I, pp. 86–87.

Britten actually noted in her autobiography that Spirit guides were a fundamental aspect of nineteenth-century Spiritualism:

In my subsequent experiences with thousands of mediums, in different countries, I can scarcely remember one who was not controlled, or at least assisted, by some special Spirit friend, whom the mediums regarded as 'Guides' or 'Controls'... The functions of these attendant, 'Guides' were still further explained to me by my own Spirit teachers as the fact that there were Medium Spirits in the higher world, just as there were medium mortals here on earth. In other words, certain Spirits only could effect a magnetic rapport with certain mortals called mediums.⁴⁰

The very fact that Blavatsky associated with the spirit guide John King evidenced her intimate connection to American Spiritualism. Allegedly, the spirit John King had formed an unusual relationship with Blavatsky that has been predominantly ignored in modern Theosophical scholarship. One writer noted that John King was best defined as an 'undigested lump in Theosophical Literature', suggesting the lack of research that has been performed on ascertaining the role of this mysterious spirit guide.⁴¹

Also, of importance were Blavatsky's claims that she had been acquainted with and communicated with John King well before he began frequenting séance circles, thereby illustrating the superiority of her connection and psychic abilities. One of Blavatsky's early critics, Vsevolod Solovyoff (1849–1903), noted the eventual evolution of John King as a servant to the Brotherhood of Luxor who later transformed into the Tibetan Masters Morya and Koot Hoomi:⁴² 'here are the first traces of the gradual transformation of John King into Mahatma Morya. The "master" is not invented yet as it will only grow clear in the course of a couple of years in India, into whom the "familiar spirit" is to be turned... However, what she says is quite enough for every reader of my narrative to recognise at once in this

⁴⁰ Emma Hardinge Britten, *Autobiographical Sketch of the Life and Spiritual Experiences of Emma Hardinge Britten, Trance Clairvoyant and Inspirational Spirit Medium* (Manchester and London: John Heywood, 1900), p. 42.

⁴¹ H. J. Spierenburg, 'Dr. Rudolf Steiner on Helen Petrovna Blavatsky', *Theosophical History*, trans. by J. H. Molijn, 1.7 (1986), 159–74 (p. 168).

⁴² The *St. James Gazette* noted that the name Koot Hoomi was made up of syllables from the names of two prominent Theosophical Society members probably Henry Olcott and A.O. Hume-(ol)Cott Hume. Arthur Lillie, *Koot Hoomi Unveiled; or, Tibetan 'Buddhists' versus the Buddhists of Tibet* (London: The Psychological Press Association, 1884), p. 14.

John King the first appearance on the stage of our old acquaintance, the famous Thibetan Mahatma Morya.⁴³

John King began to evolve into his new role described previously by Solovyoff — he had become a messenger for a group of higher beings known simply as the Brotherhood of Luxor. The further reconceptualization of John King as a messenger of the mysterious and elusive Masters was further exhibited in several letters written around mid-1875. Incidentally, one early researcher, Bruce Campbell, has remarked that these letters serve as evidence of Blavatsky's decisive turn away from Spiritualism, yet in reality they also prove that a deeper connection had existed at one time.⁴⁴ Once the Masters made their debut, there was little need for John King to continue in his role, yet this spirit figure remains as a permanent link between Spiritualism and Theosophy, forever connecting Blavatsky to this Victorian religious movement.

Time and the Masters

The existence of these supernatural Masters and their connection to humanity will be shown to be intimately connected to Blavatsky's philosophy of time and cosmology; although not everyone accepted outright this belief in the existence of Theosophical Masters. The American Spiritualist critic William Emmette Coleman had his own opinions which reflected his overall suspicion of Theosophy and its leader — Blavatsky. In the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, Coleman claimed that 'the theosophical mahatmas, asserted to possess such marvelous wisdom and power, do not exist, but are the coinage of Madame B.'s brain.'⁴⁵ Coleman went on to admit that these 'Mahatmas', or the belief in advanced Masters, had been a key doctrine in India long before Blavatsky's visit. He asserted that Blavatsky had merely borrowed their ideas 'as a means of advancing her cause among the marvellous natives and almost equally as wonder-loving, credulous Europeans and

⁴³ Vsevolod Solovyoff, *Modern Priestess of Isis* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1895), pp. 247, 244.

⁴⁴ Bruce Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revealed: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 24; Curuppumullagē Jinarājadāsa, *The Golden Book of the Theosophical Society: A Brief History of the Society's Growth from 1875—1955* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925), pp. 13—14; Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of The Theosophical Society* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), I p. 25.

⁴⁵ Wm. Emmette Coleman, 'The Theosophical Mahatmas', *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 41.14 (1886), 1.

Americans. She was prudent enough to locate her mahatmas in an inaccessible retreat, where it would be excessively difficult for any one to disprove their existence.⁴⁶ Coleman was one of Blavatsky's most influential critics; however, not everyone was as combative in their disagreements. A more rational approach to the existence of the Masters was propagated by the English Christian mystic Charles Carleton Massey (1831–1905). Though Massey would resign from the Theosophical Society in 1884 due to his shaking confidence in Blavatsky, he continued to maintain a belief in these Masters long afterwards. Massey believed that the Masters should be judged by their philosophy rather than their phenomena; 'time' was one such philosophy that proved there was a 'method' behind all of Blavatsky's 'madness' (regardless as to whether these Masters were real physical beings as she claimed them to be or just anthropomorphisms of her psyche). These two opinions reveal the differing attitudes towards Blavatsky and her insistence on the reality of these evolutionary advanced beings.

2. Scavenger Ideology: Blavatsky's Approach to Sources

George Mosse coined the term 'scavenger ideology' used in reference to racism which 'annexed the virtues, morals, and respectability of the age to its stereotypes and attributed them to the inherent qualities of a superior race.'⁴⁷ While Blavatsky's racism appeared more subtle than others of her time period, her cosmology could be seen as a spiritualized form of a scavenger ideology. She maintained the belief in a spiritually superior race (the Masters) and added to them traits which she believed were the 'virtues, morals, and respectability' of Western nineteenth century culture, including sexual and moral standards.⁴⁸ In making these traits optimal she oftentimes discriminated not necessarily against the Jews (as did her later 'follower' Guido von List), but against 'primitive' races such as the Australian aborigines who she claimed were part of an earlier, less-evolved root-race.⁴⁹ The claim was made by James Santucci that Blavatsky's racism 'must be considered from a different perspective, one that is cosmic and ultimately divine in scope' and

⁴⁶ Coleman, 'The Theosophical Mahatmas', p. 1.

⁴⁷ George Mosse, *Towards the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 199.

⁴⁸ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 57.

⁴⁹ *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 199, 280, 328.

this remains true to a point. However, his conclusion that Blavatsky's major writings reveal 'the absence of racist attitudes' remains partially incorrect.⁵⁰ Blavatsky did use her teachings to discriminate, though not on the basis of physical, but of spiritual, evolution. This scavenger ideology placed a spiritual superiority on the present and future races as opposed to the past ones which were more physical/material. Yet, these teachings of spiritual superiority were not disseminated until after the Oriental shift in 1879. At the same time, Blavatsky believed in the transmission of an ancient, universal wisdom tradition (*prisca theologia*) which maintained that the older traditions were more reliable than current ones. This presented a philosophical paradigm in reconciling two conflicting beliefs: How could this past tradition be purer than the present if they were written by less evolved intelligences? The answer was simple: her Masters provided the soteriological solution.

These Masters served as a constant connecting-rod linking the past, present, and future together; therefore, even though the past had a purer revelation which over time has been corrupted, Blavatsky could access these Masters and reintroduce this religious tradition. A clear connection between time and Blavatsky's racial theories exists — the more advanced a race, the more spiritual it became. It would seem only natural that Blavatsky placed these ideal spiritual traits (advanced race status) on her Masters, making Mosse's definition of scavenger ideology relevant to her own teachings.

On another level, labeling Blavatsky's approach as a 'scavenger' ideology seems to fit as she took a very scavenger-like approach to her sources. If defining the word 'scavenged' to mean 'to search through for salvageable material,' then it seems an appropriate title for Blavatsky and her approach to the various sources she engaged. Blavatsky was on a mission to salvage materials that would prove the existence of her ancient wisdom tradition. This 'scavenger' approach was evidenced through her citations in *Isis Unveiled*, in which she consulted roughly one hundred sources even though she cited over a thousand; much of her knowledge was based on secondary sources which she had 'scavenged' through (as she seemed to admit in her article 'My Books'). Brendan French noted a similar

⁵⁰ James A. Santucci, 'The Notion of Race in Theosophy', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 11.3 (2008), 37–63 (pp. 39, 51–52).

approach to Blavatsky's sources (curiously equating her with a specific type of scavenger — a magpie): 'It is true that Blavatsky possessed a magpie-like talent for incorporating seemingly disparate themes and images into her programme, and that on a number of occasions her syncretising can seem forced or arbitrary.'⁵¹

This approach becomes understandable when it is realized that Blavatsky believed her mission was 'divinely' assigned to her by this group of highly evolved Masters; therefore, she did not have the time to sit down and read the primary sources, and she had to content herself with using secondary sources. Michael Gomes confirms this eclectic scavenger type of approach in his annotated bibliography titled *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century*: 'She seems to have drawn on anything that would support her thesis, not only books, pamphlets, journals, unpublished material, but even correspondence.'⁵² Thus, the scholarly aptitude of the writer mattered little to Blavatsky who was merely attempting to piece together the ancient wisdom tradition that had been scattered throughout these various sources. Blavatsky herself quoted Montaigne in regard to any claim of originality: 'Gentlemen, "I have here made only a nosegay of culled flowers, and have brought nothing of my own but the string that ties them."⁵³

This scavenger approach seems understandable when one ascertains that Blavatsky only possessed a limited English education and in her later years kept up a busy schedule which included public speaking and other time-consuming activities. Put simply, she did not have time to devote towards the study of ancient languages and texts. She did, however, possess a proficient knowledge of French, Russian, and English which made her intellectually acute even if she never obtained any formal education or degree.⁵⁴ This raw intellect, combined with her charismatic personality, explains how she could gather together a group of admirers and followers including such notable intellectuals as a professor at Cornell University, Hiram Corson, the Cambridge educated Bertram and Archibald Keightley, and Dr. Franz Hartmann, M.D, to name only a few.

⁵¹ French, 'The Theosophical Masters', I, p. 169.

⁵² Michael Gomes, *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1994), p. 144.

⁵³ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 29.

⁵⁴ An interesting article is 'My Books' (referenced above) which was written shortly before Blavatsky's demise in 1891. H. P. Blavatsky, 'My Books', *Lucifer*, 8.45 (1891), 241—47.

3. Blavatsky's 'Occult Hermeneutic' and Her Reconceptualization of the *Prisca Theologia*

Blavatsky created her own Western Esoteric form of Spiritualism that drew from earlier traditions; she consistently refers to an 'ancient wisdom tradition,' which appears to have been her reconceptualization of a tradition known as the *prisca theologia*. In order to understand the influence of Western esotericism on Blavatsky, two terms deserve explanation — *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis*. The term *prisca theologia* is a Latin term that means literally ancient theology/tradition. This term was first employed by the Greek historian Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (ca. 45-120 CE) in his *De Animae Procreatione in Timaeo* in reference to pre-Platonic philosophers as teachers of religious wisdom. The Latin term *theologia* is a transliteration and combination of the Greek terms θεός (God) and λόγος (word, discourse, or reasoning). The Latin word *prisca* means ancient. Therefore, the term *prisca theologia* refers to an ancient wisdom that contains the idea of a 'continuity' of tradition accessible throughout history, though it also connotes a 'degeneration' of this universal religion that continues to occur as time progresses.⁵⁵ There is another similar term *philosophia perennis* which is a Latin phrase that contains the two words 'philosophy' (*philosophia*) and 'through the ages' (*perennis*). The word *philosophia* is a transliteration of the Greek terms φιλέω (love) and σοφία (wisdom) and means 'love (of) wisdom.' The term *philosophia perennis* contains the concept that there is in existence an ancient religion or tradition that transcends time and has been available to all initiates throughout history.

Wouter Hanegraaff observes that the *prisca theologia* was 'reconceptualized in the 16th century as *philosophia perennis*, this theme of an ancient genealogy of divinely inspired philosopher sages became centrally important to the esoteric tradition; reconstructed by nineteenth-century occultists under the influence of the "oriental renaissance" and comparative religion, it was finally adopted in the New Age movement.'⁵⁶ The concept of an ancient theology that degenerates through

⁵⁵ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, 'Tradition', in *Dictionary of Western Esotericism and Gnosis*, ed. by Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), pp. 1125–1135 (p. 1126).

⁵⁶ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 390. This idea is further expounded by Antoine Faivre who notes that *prisca theologia* in the Middle Ages 'was transformed into *philosophia occulta* and *philosophia perennis*, terms that were not interchangeable, but that

time mutated into a philosophy that had merely been hidden or kept secret seems a fitting definition for Blavatsky's conceptualization of the oriental kabala or ancient wisdom tradition. While from a comparative view the terms *prisca theologia* and *philosophia perennis* might appear similar, there is one major difference between their definitions. The term *prisca theologia* is connected to the idea that only a degenerative form of the universal religion exists, whereas *philosophia perennis* claims that the one true religion is still accessible in its pristine state.

Blavatsky herself hinted at the importance of time as being vital towards reconnecting with the true *prisca theologia*, which she continuously referred to as the ancient wisdom or universal tradition. In her final book, Blavatsky noted that '*The Secret Doctrine* is the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages, and its cosmogony alone is the most stupendous and elaborate system: e.g. even in the exotericism of the Puranas.'⁵⁷ Blavatsky's view of her own 'supernatural' abilities in relation to history was further exhibited in another quote: 'Occult teachings are pre-eminently panspermic, and the early history of humanity is hidden only from "ordinary mortals"; nor is the history of the primitive Races buried from the Initiates in the tomb of time, as it is for the profane science.'⁵⁸ The true occult teachings were accessible to Blavatsky along with true history (i.e. rounds, root races, and sub-races) through her Masters and their knowledge of time. In her earlier writings, Blavatsky continued to engage a typical chain of transmission or genealogy reflecting earlier Western esoteric writers such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and George Gemistos Plethon (ca. 1355–1452) who included Moses, Plato, and Zoroaster, which shows a clear tradition that will now be examined.

Blavatsky's and Her Ancient Wisdom Tradition

Early Writings

From her earliest publications, Blavatsky had adopted a belief in an uninterrupted chain of intellectual tradition that had passed down 'secret doctrines' from one generation to the next; this ancient wisdom tradition appeared as her own version

were applied to a nebula endowed with relative autonomy in the mental universe of the epoch, and detached from theology properly speaking.' Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 7.

⁵⁷ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 272.

⁵⁸ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 133.

of the *prisca theologia*. In July of 1875, Blavatsky maintained that the original teachings came from the East only they had been ‘altered.’ In one of her earliest articles titled ‘A Few Questions to HIRAF’ she noted that:

all the mysterious doctrines had come down in an oral tradition as far back as man could trace himself on earth. They were scrupulously and jealously guarded by the Wise Men of Chaldaea, India, Persia and Egypt, and passed from one initiate to another, in the same purity of form as when handed down to the first man by the angels, students of God’s great Theosophic Seminary. For the first time since the world’s creation, the secret doctrines, passing through Moses who was initiated in Egypt, underwent some slight alterations.⁵⁹

This quote illustrated Blavatsky’s own acceptance of the *prisca theologia* and how it degenerated beginning with Moses.

Another early letter written to Professor Hiram Corson of Cornell University referred expressly to a ‘theosophy taught by the Angels’ tracing it through a historical lineage as Blavatsky herself noted:⁶⁰

My belief is based, on something older than the Rochester Knockings, and spring out from the same source of information, that was used by Raymond Lully (ca. 1232-ca.1316), Picus of Mirandola (1463-1494),⁶¹ Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535), Robert Fludd (1574-1637), Henry More (1614-1687) etc etc (sic) all of whom have ever been searching for a system, that should disclose to them the ‘deepest depths’ of the Divine nature and show them the *real tie which binds all things together*.⁶²

According to Blavatsky, all of these historical personages were searching for a system that would allow them to comprehend the universal religion or this *prisca theologia*. It is notable that while Blavatsky identified with the above figures in this letter and in her earlier writings, in *The Secret Doctrine* these historical characters are rarely mentioned.⁶³

⁵⁹ H. P. Blavatsky, ‘A Few Questions to HIRAF: Author of the Article “Rosicrucianism”’, *Spiritual Scientist*, 2.19 (1875), 217–218, 224 (p. 224).

⁶⁰ Letter 21 XXI, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky 1861-1879*, ed. by John Algeo and others (Wheaton IL: Quest Books, The Theosophical Publishing House, 2003), p. 86.

⁶¹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola was well acquainted with both Marsilio Ficino and Lorenzo de’ Medici.

⁶² *The Letters of HP Blavatsky 1861-1879*, p. 86.

⁶³ Though all of these figures were at one time influential to Blavatsky and they appear quite frequently in *Isis Unveiled* and earlier writings, they rarely appear in Blavatsky’s later writing *The Secret Doctrine*. Raymond Lully, Picus (Pico) della Mirandola, and Henry More are not even mentioned in passing. Robert Fludd is mentioned one time in relation to his view of light and darkness (Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* I, 70), and Agrippa is mentioned three times – once in passing [I, 611] and another time in relation to John Trimethius [II, 487] and once in the footnotes [I, 453].

Isis Unveiled

In her *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky claimed an Eastern origin for her ancient wisdom tradition which she saw as a pre-Vedic form of Buddhism that ultimately minimized the influence of Hermes on this universal religion.⁶⁴ This was contrary to the Renaissance philosophers who saw the emergence of the *prisca theologia* originating in Egypt through the mysterious figure Hermes Trismegistus.⁶⁵ Elements of this ‘universal religion’ were also mixed within the teachings of Plato, according to Alexander Wilder (1823–1908), the noted American Platonist who was instrumental in helping Blavatsky edit and compile her first major work *Isis Unveiled* (1877).⁶⁶

Blavatsky later noted that the ‘best philosophical doctrines’ of Plato have been derived from Pythagoras, the first person to organize the doctrines from the descendant of Mochus and later from the Brahmins of India.⁶⁷ Though this wisdom tradition finds common ground in Plato, the teachings have been scattered throughout the various world religions; thus, the *philosophia perennis* had transformed into the *prisca theologia*. The concept of the wisdom tradition played a vital part in the early writings of Blavatsky as exemplified in *Isis Unveiled*. Though lacking a consistent genealogy in *Isis*, Blavatsky maintained that this tradition originated in the East. Blavatsky’s genealogy changed depending on her context; however, despite this oriental origin, Moses, Orpheus, and Pythagoras are used with some regularity.

⁶⁴ Blavatsky refers to Hermes over twenty times throughout *Isis Unveiled*, and his influence is certainly notable in the development of Blavatsky’s chronology. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 33–34. Despite Blavatsky’s shift away from Egypt as the originator of the *philosophia perennis*, she still continues to refer to Hermes quite often and with much respect even in *The Secret Doctrine*.

⁶⁵ This Oriental origin is exemplified in the following quotes from *Isis Unveiled* (1877): ‘We can assert, with entire plausibility, that there is not one of all these sects—Kabalism, Judaism, and our present Christianity included—but sprang from the two main branches of that one mother-trunk, the once universal religion, which antedated the Vedic ages—we speak of that prehistoric Buddhism which merged later into Brahmanism; Pre-Vedic Brahmanism and Buddhism are the double source from which all religions sprang.’ *Isis Unveiled*, II, 123, 639. This oriental origin for the ancient wisdom tradition was exhibited in Blavatsky’s earlier works specifically her letter to HIRAF: ‘by telling a little of the little I picked up in my long travels throughout the length and breadth of the East—that cradle of Occultism—in the hope of correcting certain erroneous notions he seems to be labouring under, and which are calculated to confuse uninitiated sincere enquirers, who might desire to drink at his own source of knowledge.’ H. P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings, 1874–1878*, ed. by Boris de Zirkoff, 15 vols (Pasadena: CA: Theosophical Publishing House, 1950), I, 103.

⁶⁶ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, xi.

⁶⁷ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled* II, 338. Also see Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 39. Mochus is often identified with the personage of Moses of the Hebrew Bible.

The Secret Doctrine

In *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), Blavatsky moved away from defining the various aspects of occult wisdom as she had done in *Isis Unveiled* and began to develop her own 'universal doctrine.' Since the concept of this universal tradition had already been connected to the above historical figures in *Isis*, Blavatsky proceeded to assimilate this universal religion with mythological root races and her vast cosmology.⁶⁸

In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky seemed less concerned with describing the ancient wisdom tradition than she was with revealing it, but she was still attempting to combine Western science and esotericism with Eastern religions to reveal the one ancient universal religious tradition.⁶⁹ In Blavatsky's view, all of the major world religions had the same founders only in different reincarnations of the 'seven' primordial sages; thus, Blavatsky's teachings as they were taught through the Masters were part of this ancient tradition or *prisca theologia* — this advanced status made them intrinsically valuable.

Occult Hermeneutic

It was Blavatsky's relationship with her unseen brotherhood of adepts (Masters) and her access to this reconceptualized *prisca theologia* that led to the development of what will be termed the 'occult hermeneutic.' Blavatsky continuously claimed throughout her writings that people had misunderstood the true meaning of ancient writings, philosophies, symbols, etc. She believed the lot fell to her, as a properly initiated adept, to read and correctly interpret the ancient writings truthfully.⁷⁰ This implied that Blavatsky was the only person capable of rightfully divining the true meaning of the universe based upon her occult

⁶⁸ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 267.

⁶⁹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Theosophical Society, Orientalism, and the "Mystic East": Western Esotericism and Eastern Religion in Theosophy', *Theosophical History: A Quarterly Journal of Research*, 13.3 (2007), 3–28 (p. 24).

⁷⁰ John P. Van Mater recognized these 'occult hermeneutics' in his following statement: 'Any who have looked into these references realizes repeatedly that although we may have read and reread certain passages, say in Genesis, it is only when H.P.B. sheds her penetrating light upon them that we can see, for the first time perhaps, the true intent of the Christian version of the birth of worlds and men.' John P. Van Mater, 'A Secret Doctrine Bibliography', in *Symposium on H. P. Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine Held at San Diego, California: Sat. and Sun., July 21-22, 1984* (San Diego: Wizards Bookshelf, 1984), pp. 7–10 (p. 7).

understanding and her 'intimate acquaintance' with adept Masters as described in her Preface to *Isis Unveiled*:

The work now submitted to public judgment is the fruit of a somewhat intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science. It is an attempt to aid the student to detect the vital principles which underlie the philosophical systems of old...⁷¹ It was while most anxious to solve these perplexing problems (metaphysical questions) that we came into contact with certain men, endowed with such mysterious powers and such profound knowledge that we may truly designate them as the sages of the Orient...⁷² in our modern days those who have been initiated by the adepts of mystic lore into the mysterious knowledge, which, notwithstanding the lapse of ages, has yet a few real votaries on earth.⁷³

Blavatsky was one of these 'votaries' and held a unique monopoly on the truth. Throughout her construction of time in *Isis Unveiled* (that will be explored in the next chapter) she relied heavily upon ancient works to substantiate her philosophical views. Intrinsic to Blavatsky's claim of proper interpretation was the idea that any interpretation that contradicted her own must be incorrect or misunderstood.⁷⁴

Blavatsky's occult hermeneutic was part of a hierarchical effort connected to the Masters who entrusted her with this privileged information and it was her job to diffuse it to the culture.⁷⁵ Blavatsky's elite position as the only trustworthy initiate placed her in a unique position which Olav Hammer called a 'prophetic status'. This position, as Hammer correctly identifies, opened up the 'prophet' to certain 'accusations of presenting incoherent messages' which would 'undermine the claims of authority. If and when inconsistencies are detected, there are several

⁷¹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, v.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. vi.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii. See also p. xi.

⁷⁴ This same identification was made in relation to Blavatsky's later interpretation of Eastern texts which evidences this 'occult hermeneutic' or the 'true esoteric meaning': Blavatsky justified her selective use of contemporary occultism by using...interconnected distinctions. If anyone claimed that Indian religions were not as she said, she simply replied that this person had focused on either modern Hinduism or the exoteric meaning of the Vedic works, not on the true esoteric meaning of ancient Brahmanism. She argued that scholars often fell into the trap of taking modern Hinduism or the Vedas at face value when the true religion of India remained hidden in the esoteric, Brahmanical teachings of the Vedas. Indeed, whilst orientalists rightly had dated the Vedas as pre-Christian, we should not trust their interpretations of Vedic works since they could not perceive the inner meanings of these works: 'our scientists do not-nay, can-not-understand correctly the old Hindu literature.' Mark Bevir, 'The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 62.3 (1994), 747–67 (p. 758).

⁷⁵ Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 417–18.

ways to deal with them.⁷⁶ Hammer then proceeded to quote Mahatma Letter No. 24a where the Master admitted to certain incoherencies in the doctrine of evolution of races, but dismissed them as ‘not much worth worrying about.’ They are simply due to the less than optimal circumstance in which the letters were written.

Hammer also correctly identified that Blavatsky had more sophisticated strategies to explain her ‘inconsistencies,’ giving the three main excuses employed by her to justify these ‘discrepancies’. It should be observed that the first two appear to differ in semantics, so only two will be mentioned: 1) The existence of a higher (inconceivable) synthesis that may seem contradictory merely because finite beings do not have the intellect to understand said doctrine. This will be seen in the evolution of the doctrine of reincarnation which Blavatsky denied in *Isis Unveiled* though she accepted it in the Mahatma Letters and in her later writings. She explained this by creating the septenary constitution of the soul which, she argued, had not been ‘revealed’ to her at the time *Isis* had been written. 2) The second defence is to claim that the recipient of the message could only receive these transmissions at certain times and in certain circumstances i. e., ‘a person is sometimes able to fulfill the role of prophet, but is an ordinary person on other occasions.’⁷⁷ This would explain how an overweight, cigarette and (occasional) hashish-smoking Russian immigrant could become a mouthpiece for these great ascetic Masters. These excuses litter the pages of the Mahatma letters and remain a constant point of aggravation for their recipients (most notably A. O. Hume the founder of the Indian National Conference).

Blavatsky’s claim that her interpretation was superior based upon her understanding and experience with the hidden Masters will be termed throughout this study as the ‘occult hermeneutic.’ Again, the prevailing belief of Theosophy claimed that Blavatsky was not assembling her own philosophy, but that she was revealing an age-old truth that had been hidden in the histories and religions of the world for millions of years. What Hammer did not specify or recognize (along with most previous scholars) was that Blavatsky continuously utilized this ‘occult hermeneutic’ in her understanding of time as found in the following interpretation of Genesis. In this quote, Blavatsky revealed her unique interpretation of a Day and

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 414.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 414–15.

Night of Brahma (Hindu and Buddhist/Eastern) which she connected to the Genesis biblical cosmology (Judaism and Christianity/Western):

...the 'day' and 'night' of Brahma. The former represents a certain period of cosmical activity, the latter an equal one of cosmical repose. In the one, worlds are being evolved, and are passing through their allotted four ages of existence; in the latter the 'inbreathing' of Brahma reverses the tendency of the natural forces, everything visible becomes gradually dispersed; chaos comes; and a long night of repose reinvigorates the cosmos for its next term of evolution. In the morning of one of these 'days' the formative processes are gradually reaching their climax of activity, and in the evening imperceptibility diminishing the same until the pralaya arrives, and with it 'night.' One such morning and evening do, in fact, constitute a cosmic day; and it was a 'day of Brahma' that the kabbalistic author of Genesis had in mind.⁷⁸

Blavatsky's syncretic construction of time in the above quote was based upon her re-interpretation of the biblical book of Genesis in light of Hindu chronology and her own mythology. This statement that 'it was a "day of Brahma" that the kabbalistic author of Genesis had in mind' is a valid example of Blavatsky's 'occult hermeneutic' at work. She offers no corroborative evidence for the authority of this statement; rather, this was her own interpretation revealing this 'occult hermeneutic' of ancient texts.

Throughout her writings, Blavatsky interpreted various historical events through an occult hermeneutic which oftentimes instilled history with a new meaning.⁷⁹ For example, as noted above, Blavatsky viewed the biblical flood as a historical fact of history, but this flood had to be understood from her occult understanding of cosmological chronology that included rounds and root races.⁸⁰ An example of this interpretation is found in the following excerpt: '...there were several Deluges mixed up in the memories and traditions of the sub-races of the Fifth Race. The first great "Flood" was astronomical and cosmical, while several

⁷⁸ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 422.

⁷⁹ The word hermeneutic means 'interpretation' and implies attributing the correct thought to a series of words. What is interesting for this study is that the etymology for the word 'hermeneutic' could be connected to the Greek messenger-god 'Hermes' who was said to have been the creator of speech. This term was first used in connection with sacred concepts. See Jean Grondid, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Hew Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 22.

⁸⁰ The very concept of the flood contains its own intrinsic soteriological implications. The flood is an important symbol to Blavatsky which she connects to her view of root races in the following passages: Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 444–45, 563.; II, 138–41, 144, 146, 222, 270, 309, 313, 331, 353, 356, 519, 774.

others were terrestrial.⁸¹ The historical event of the flood is thus understood in light of Blavatsky's views of races and sub-races and is therewith assimilated into her complex cosmology.

Blavatsky applied the same occult hermeneutic towards reinterpreting the sacred scriptures of the world. In *The Secret Doctrine*, she quotes a passage from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* claiming: '... let us pause and see what may be the hidden meaning of this, the most ancient as it is the most suggestive of traditional allegories. As it relates directly to the early races, this will be no real digression.'⁸² This English poem was interpreted in light of Blavatsky's racial anthropology and cosmological chronology which is validated using her occult hermeneutic. It is intriguing that without the insight of Blavatsky this true 'hidden meaning' of this ancient parable would have been lost on society at large. This interpretation combined with her scavenger approach to sources evidences that she used these Eastern sources to build and promote her own philosophical system which she justified through this occult hermeneutic. It is no wonder that she especially employed this 'occult hermeneutic' for her understanding of time and chronology, validating the main point of this study that her philosophy of time provides a new framework for understanding her writings and a fascinating study for followers and researchers alike.

III. Conclusion

Even in this brief introductory section one can see glimpses of how important the subject of time was in Blavatsky's own cosmology and how it also mirrored a Victorian cultural issue — time and its measurement. It was Blavatsky's desire to create a philosophically advanced Spiritualist-type of organization that prompted her to form the Theosophical Society. This Society focused on 'unveiling' the 'secret doctrines' of the one universal tradition ('time' seemed to be one of these main philosophical tenets). It only makes sense that any universal religion would also include a universal system of time and measurement; thus, if Blavatsky could develop one universal theory of time and chronology that could connect all of the world religions together then her movement could boast something that no other

⁸¹ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 353.

⁸² Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 423–14.

could — a truly modernist, scientific and religious belief system (i. e., a modern Victorian *mythos*).

This appeared to be her goal in formulating her complex view of time. There were two key points that Blavatsky borrowed from Victorian Spiritualism which she would continue to teach throughout her lifetime: 1) an infinite view of time and 2) a possibility of ‘endless stages’ for the soul to experience. Aside from this contextualization, there were three main traits/points that remain vital towards ascertaining Blavatsky’s philosophy of time. These include: 1) a belief in the superiority of ‘The Masters’, 2) her scavenger ideology, and her understanding of the *prisca theologia* which led her to develop an 3) occult hermeneutic. These Masters were Blavatsky’s invisible trump cards, which seemed to develop out of her Spiritualist view of spirit guides i. e., John King. These Masters would continue to evolve, spending more ‘time’ going through this vast cyclical cosmology; they would even ‘write notes’ to various Theosophists. These notes explicated a complex cosmology of the world and its creation that resembled a Western view of Eastern ideologies with a Spiritualist evolutionary scheme and framework. The Masters also had the ability to lead certain human beings outside of time into temporary periods of nirvana; thus, Blavatsky’s philosophy of time gave these Masters ontological value and not the other way around as historians have presumed.

The second main point of consideration when studying Blavatsky’s philosophy is her scavenger ideology. This classification works on two levels: first, it engages Mosse’s classical definition that Blavatsky had placed the stereotypes of her age on the qualities of a superior race, in this case the Masters and the final seventh root race. This definition fits Mosse’s classification although Blavatsky’s eclectic approach to sources validates this categorization on a different level. Her tendency to scavenge through and cite any source that proved her point (i. e., her ancient wisdom tradition) regardless of its respectability validates this definition. This point will be continuously proven throughout this thesis.

And finally, Blavatsky’s search for the ancient wisdom tradition (her reconceptualized *prisca theologia*) and her connecting this with some of the main recipients of this tradition (Moses, Plato and Zoroaster) associated her own teachings with a long line of Western Esoteric writers. Her belief in the existence of

a tradition that had been continued and passed down from the fourth race to the fifth was what gave life (and time) its meaning. Not only that, but it was possible to learn the deeper metaphysical truths about the nature of humanity and its true purpose from these hidden Masters who occasionally imparted this knowledge on to an initiate. It was Blavatsky's position as an initiate that she believed made her teachings more authoritative than those of her contemporaries (such as Emma Hardinge Britten, Anna Kingsford, A. P. Sinnett, etc.). This initiation led to the 'occult hermeneutic' which Blavatsky believed gave her the superior position in any situation. And if in any of her writings she seemed to contradict herself it was not the Master's fault, but merely the inability for finite beings to understand infinite ideas.

The remainder of this study will explain why this philosophy matters in the larger context of history while deconstructing Blavatsky's major teachings and categorizing them appropriately. For now, the three points evidenced in this section being considered provide a solid foundation that will be built upon by considering Blavatsky's first major writing published in 1877 — *Isis Unveiled*. It will be shown that in many ways Blavatsky's writing typified the nineteenth century attitude — a desire to assimilate the old and new together into a logical coherent philosophy. This assimilation was clearly articulated in the title of the individual volumes for *Isis Unveiled* — 'Science' and 'Theology'.

CHAPTER 2

***Isis Unveiled* (1877): Time for a Source Analysis and Comparative Mythography**

'Time' is an abstract concept that is difficult to define, to comprehend and even more complicated to engage in a historical thesis such as this. Adding to this ambiguity is the very obscure nature of H. P. Blavatsky and her circular and often self-contradictory writing; thus, tracing any one of Blavatsky's philosophies is a challenge, as they were constantly evolving. She also engaged in an obscure writing style primarily because English was not her first language. This indirect and circular style remains most evident in her first major work *Isis Unveiled*, which was published in 1877.

Despite these problems, this chapter will show that 'time' became one of the defining features in Blavatsky's earlier works, hereon evidencing a powerful philosophical stance against materialism and a declaration of separatism from other Victorian religious movements. Blavatsky's early view of time combined elements of comparative religions, contemporary science, and anthropology, along with her own unique ideologies. It is curious that Blavatsky's conceptualization of time has been ignored by most previous researchers even though it is directly connected to her soteriology and remains one of if not the most defining philosophical elements of her teachings.

Though she emerged out of Victorian Spiritualism (and Spiritism), Blavatsky focused instead on philosophically advanced subjects which set her Theosophical Society apart, giving her movement a flavour of intellectual superiority especially in her later writings. While other chapters in this study will be more analytical in engaging the later distinctive 'Oriental' writings of Blavatsky's philosophy (that emerged following her relocation to India in 1879), this chapter seeks to untangle and trace her philosophies to their original sources as closely as possible. To accomplish this feat, the source analysis of a contemporary Spiritualist critic William Emmette Coleman will be utilized throughout this work. Coleman identified one particular author who became influential on Blavatsky's early writings and notions of time — the comparative mythographer Godfrey Higgins whose writings will be examined closely. This earlier stage in Blavatsky's writing has been divided

into two chapters, the first dealing with essential source and contextual information of *Isis Unveiled* and the second section identifying and clarifying Blavatsky's principles of time.

Philosophy in *Isis Unveiled*

The first aim of this chapter is to identify and ascertain the main elements in Blavatsky's chronological and soteriological structure up until the publication of her major work *Isis Unveiled* (in 1877). This book, which totaled 1,300 pages, represented Blavatsky's first major literary production even though it was not published until later in her career, following her forty-sixth birthday.¹ The subtitle of this book clearly stated its overall aim: 'a master-key to the Mysteries of Ancient and modern Science and Theology'. This subtitle communicated Blavatsky's desire to reveal the 'ancient wisdom tradition' which she believed was the underlying current of all world religions.²

Isis Unveiled was released as a two-volume set that appeared to be a manual for all things occult. The first volume was titled 'Science' and it attempted to validate the numerous accounts of Spiritualist phenomena while engaging Victorian scientific theories. The second volume was called 'Theology' and it suggested that all the various world religions could be traced back to one universal religious tradition thereby validating her desire to 'unveil' this tradition.

Numerous subjects were explored throughout this work, including psychometry, a process by which a medium holds an object and can tell its past based on its vibrations; an emanationist cosmology that each world emanates from

¹ It is curious that no previous articles, essays or letters are known prior to October 1874. See Boris de Zirkoff, 'H. P. Blavatsky's Literary Career: The Earliest Known Writings', in *H. P. Blavatsky's Collected Writings: 1874–1878*, ed. by..., 15 vols (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), pp. 1–2 (p. 1). There is a slight possibility that Blavatsky may have contributed to the periodical *Revue des Deux Mondes* of Paris and could have been a correspondent with *Indépendance Belge* or several other Parisian Journals under either a pseudonym or anonymously, but no records of this type have been discovered.

² See H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877), I, 33–34; II, 123. Blavatsky viewed the ancient wisdom as providing the hermeneutical key to interpret scientific data: 'our work, then, is a plea for the recognition of the Hermetic philosophy, that anciently universal Wisdom Religion, as the only possible key to the Absolute in science and theology.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, vii, xi, 131, 162, 436; II, 99, 142.

the one original version; an exoteric interpretation of Genesis and many others.³ In order to fully understand Blavatsky's philosophy of time, certain key beliefs deserve examination. Two such doctrines would bring criticism for their inconsistency, yet they remain important for their eventual influence on her soteriology.

Reincarnation and Spiritual Evolution

One of the key doctrines that later shifted was Blavatsky's teaching on reincarnation (which was directly connected to the spiritual journey of the soul and its evolution). In *Isis Unveiled*, reincarnation only occurred in rare circumstances though this opinion would soon change. Blavatsky's original view of spiritual evolution was confirmed by Colonel Henry Olcott (1831–1905), the co-founder of the Theosophical Society. In his autobiography, Olcott summarized the Theosophical beliefs and soteriology/spiritual evolution which combined Spiritualism with the theory of elementals showing how far 'away from believing in Re-incarnation H.P.B., and I were then.'⁴ Olcott clearly presented their view of spiritual evolution and confirmed Blavatsky's own view, but also noted that when *Isis Unveiled* was written, Blavatsky had not yet adopted the concept of reincarnation. Later critics of Blavatsky would charge that her philosophy in *Isis Unveiled* was inconsistent with her later 'Eastern' belief structure that incorporated both reincarnation on the same sphere and a septenary constitution of the soul. It is true that in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky spoke against the concept of reincarnation on the same sphere (the same world) except in the most severe cases of idiocy, an early violent death or ' . . . in cases of abortion, of infants dying before a certain age, and of congenital and incurable idiocy, natures original design to produce a perfect human being, has been interrupted.'⁵

³ Bruce Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revealed: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), p. 38.

⁴ Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of The Theosophical Society* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), I, 281.

⁵ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 351. The theorization that in *Isis Unveiled* Blavatsky seemed opposed to reincarnation on the same sphere is further exemplified in the following quotation: 'But this doctrine of permutation, or *revolutio*, must not be understood as a belief in reincarnation. That Moses was considered the transmigrating of Abel and Seth, does not imply that the kabbalists—those who were *initiated* at least—believed that the identical spirit of either of Adam's sons reappeared under the corporeal form of Moses. It only shows what was the mode of expression they used when hinting at one of the profoundest mysteries of the Oriental Gnosis, one of the most majestic articles of faith of the Secret Wisdom.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 152–53, 280.

It becomes evident that Blavatsky did not accept the doctrine of reincarnation during her writing of *Isis Unveiled*, and that it only appeared in her philosophy after her travels to India. Olcott wrote to rectify this discrepancy, noting that Blavatsky *had not* been aware of reincarnation before writing of *Isis Unveiled*. This validates Blavatsky's self-fashioned 'prophet' status identified in the previous chapter as well as the supposition that Blavatsky possessed little first-hand knowledge of Tibet or other Eastern countries.⁶ Olcott further wrote that Blavatsky 'was not taught the doctrine of re-incarnation until 1879 — when we were in India. I willingly accept that statement, both because it tallies with our beliefs and writings in New York, and, because if she knew it when we were writing *Isis*, there was no earthly reason why she should have misled me or others, even if she has so desired, which I do not believe.'⁷ Blavatsky's soteriology depended upon a series of incarnations that occurred in the spiritual spheres (as commonly taught in Spiritualism), though reincarnation on the same sphere would become a doctrine that Blavatsky would adopt as her cosmological structure developed and progressed.

The Trichotomy of the Soul

Another later evolution in Blavatsky's philosophy concerned the constitution of the soul. In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky favoured a triune division of the soul (an idea advocated in Plotinian philosophy), whereas in the Mahatma letters (as reprinted in the *Theosophist* article 'Fragments of Occult Truth') and in *The Secret Doctrine* she accepted a seven-fold division (septenary). Blavatsky defended her belief in the septenary constitution of the soul in a later article published in *The Theosophist* in August 1882. Few researchers have explored the early issues of *The Theosophist* given their inaccessibility, so this thesis will be one of the first to engage these texts in order to properly understand Blavatsky's mental process.

⁶ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 280.

⁷ Ibid. After noting that Blavatsky was unaware of reincarnation until 1879, Olcott continued on to cite specific sources where Blavatsky had clearly stated this opinion evidencing the 8 February 1878 issue of the *Spiritualist*: 'A dead child is a failure of nature—he must live again; and the same *psuche* re-enters, together with those of congenital idiots are, as stated in "Isis Unveiled," the only instances of human re-incarnation.' Can anything be plainer? Olcott concluded that '...the doctrine of Re-incarnation was not publically taught so early as 1879.' Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 284.

In this article, Blavatsky was responding to an earlier article written by Charles Carleton Massey accusing her of changing her doctrine on reincarnation. Blavatsky explained that this apparent discrepancy was related to a simple misunderstanding concerning the constitution of the soul.⁸ She articulated that in *Isis Unveiled* she divided the monad (Blavatsky's word for a complete soul that literally means 'unit') into three parts: body, soul, and spirit, and that these three attributes as a whole could not reincarnate; however, she argued that these three divisions could be divided into even more divisions, thereby advocating for the septenary constitution of the monad. This new constitution was divided as followed: the Body was composed of the Sthula-sarira, jiva, and the lina-sarira; the Soul was composed of the kama-rupa and the manas; and the Spirit was composed of the atma and buddhi (these divisions were expressed in Sanskrit/Eastern terms). Blavatsky then asked:

where is the 'discrepancy' or contradiction?...Shall we say then with the Spiritists that C. C. M., the man we know, will be reborn again? No, but that his divine Monad will be clothed thousands of times yet before the end of the Grand Cycle, in various human forms, every one of them a new personality.⁹

Blavatsky's defense of this reincarnation inconsistency was explained by her further septenary division of the soul and her cyclical chronology. Her argument was that in *Isis Unveiled* she was simply discussing the division of the soul and reincarnation at a higher level. The soul was capable of being divided into more segments, though it seemed that even Blavatsky herself was unaware of this concept when writing her first work.¹⁰ Based on the above information, it seems fair

⁸ 'Koot Hoomi' explained this discrepancy in Mahatma Letter no. 52 received in Simla in the autumn of 1882: 'we thought it was premature to give the public more than they could possibly assimilate, and before they had digested the "two souls"; – and thus the further subdivision of the trinity into 7 principles was left unmentioned in *Isis*.' *The Mahatma Letters: to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. by A. Trevor Barker (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1975), p. 290.

⁹ Helena Blavatsky, '*Isis Unveiled* and *The Theosophist* on Reincarnation,' *Collected Writings: 1882-1883*, comp. by Boris De Zirkoff, 15 vols (Pasadena: CA: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), IV, 183–86.

¹⁰ See Mahatma Letters XXIVb and LII in Barker. *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 182–83, 290. Concerning the trichotomy of the soul, even Colonel Olcott noted a connection with a Greek term *psuche* (thus this 'Greek term' had been further divided into Sanskrit terms): 'She and I believed...that man is a trinity of physical body, astral body (soul- the Greek psuche), and divine spirits. This will be found set forth in the first official communication made by us to the European reading public...our party left for New York for India on Dec. 17, 1878, and a few days previously H.P.B wrote in the *Revue Spirite*, of Paris, an article which appeared in that magazine, Jan. 1, 1879; it was in answer to sundry critics. She now describes man as a four principle...or quaternary...'

to conclude that reincarnation and the septenary constitution of the soul were later conceptualizations by Blavatsky in her attempt to assimilate ‘Eastern’ ideologies into her Theosophy.

Wouter Hanegraaff, after studying the concept of reincarnation in *Isis Unveiled*, concluded that: ‘As far as Blavatsky is concerned, it is significant that when reincarnation (or its cognates, transmigration and metempsychosis) is discussed in *Isis Unveiled*, this is done as frequently with reference to occidental as to oriental traditions’ though he stops short of explaining what affect this insight made on her individual teachings. This work will prove Hanegraaff’s theory was correct as it explores Blavatsky’s early concept of time and spiritual evolution. It will also be proven that *Isis* was largely Western in focus and that it included her view of time, though it would evolve to become one of her most unique and distinctive doctrines.¹¹

I. Background

Since *Isis Unveiled* first put forth some of Blavatsky’s teachings, the events leading up to its publication deserve further notice. There are certain elements in this early writing process that would become standard elements in most Theosophical writings, yet it all began in New York City.

The Writing of *Isis Unveiled*

Blavatsky wrote this work primarily while residing at the Lamasery located in downtown New York at 302 West 47th Street between the years 1876–1878.¹² According to Olcott, Blavatsky had written *Isis Unveiled* by using her psychic senses to peer into the astral light guided by her Masters:

...her pen would be flying over the page, when she would suddenly stop, look out into space with the vacant eye of the clairvoyant seer, shorten her

Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 283. Olcott continued to translate a portion of this letter: ‘Yes, for the Theosophists of New York, man is a trinity, and not a duality. He is however more than that: for, by adding the physical body, man is a tetraktis, or quaternary.’ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 283.

¹¹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religions and Western Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1998), p. 472.

¹² For more information concerning the Lamasery see Anonymous, ‘The Theosophical Society: The Lamasery at New York. Interviews with Madame Blavatsky. The Wonderful Author of the Book of Wonders, “Isis Unveiled” etc.’, *Hartford Daily Times*, 2 December 1878, p. 1; and Michael Gomes, *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987), p. 199.

vision as though to look at something held invisibly in the air before her, and begin copying on her paper what she saw.¹³

In addition to her location in New York, in the early fall of 1875 Blavatsky worked on *Isis Unveiled* at Ithaca (NY) during her three week visit to Hiram Corson, a professor of Rhetoric, Oratory, and English at Cornell University.¹⁴ Blavatsky made quite an impression on Corson and his family during her stay. Corson was able to recollect the events of her visit in a much later interview with Charles Lazenby, observing that she used an unusual method of (allegedly) peering into ‘another plane of objective existence,’ translating what she viewed into English.¹⁵ Because of this strange method, Corson believed Blavatsky exhibited some inexplicable mystical powers of erudition (or ‘definite knowledge’). Another explanation for these mysterious ‘powers of erudition’ was suggested in a recently discovered letter of Blavatsky dated from 17 November 1877. This communication was sent by Blavatsky to the Spiritualist William Stainton Moses implying that she utilized the Cornell University library throughout the writing process.¹⁶

It is notable that Blavatsky never claimed that every word in *Isis* was channelled by her own abilities, and acknowledged the contributions of Alexander Wilder (1823–1908), the Neo-Platonist who helped edit *Isis Unveiled* and allegedly wrote the preface, Charles Sotheran (1847–1902), who suggested the title ‘Isis Unveiled’, and Colonel Olcott, who served as the greatest aid to Blavatsky during the publishing stage of *Isis Unveiled* by helping her with editing, copying, and translating words and phrases into English. It was Olcott who ultimately postulated the idea of dividing the book into two sections: ‘Science’ and ‘Theology.’¹⁷

1. Blavatsky and Her Connection to Modern Spiritualism

¹³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 208–09.

¹⁴ Boris de Zirkoff noted that Blavatsky ‘seems to have left New York, September 15, 1875, going by the evening boat to Albany, N. Y. Either the next day or the 17th, she arrived at Ithaca. By the second week in October, she was back in New York.’ Boris de Zirkoff, ‘Introductory: How Isis Unveiled Was Written’, in *Isis Unveiled: Collected Writings 1877*, 1st Quest Edition, 2 vols (The Theosophical Publishing House, 1972), I, pp. 1–61 (p. 5).

¹⁵ Charles Lazenby, ‘Isis Unveiled: Anecdotes about HP Blavatsky’, *The Path*, 1.1 (1910), 9.

¹⁶ Joscelyn Godwin, ‘From the Archives: H.P.B. to M.A., Oxon’, *Theosophical History*, 4.6–7 (1993), 172–77 (p. 173).

¹⁷ J. W. Bouton, ‘Cuttings and Comments’, *The Theosophist*, 22.5 (1901), 314–20 (p. 318). See also H. P. Blavatsky, ‘My Books’, *Lucifer*, 8.45 (1891), 241–47.

According to Blavatsky, she became aware of the French form of Spiritualism (known as Spiritism) and started her own French Société Spirit in 1871 ‘for the investigation of mediums and phenomena according to Allan Kardec’s theories and philosophy.’¹⁸ According to Olcott, it was from France that Blavatsky travelled to the United States ‘for the sake of Spiritualism...knowing this country to be the cradle of Modern Spiritualism...’ according to a personal letter sent on 13 December 1874 (not long after the founding of this Société Spirit).¹⁹ Shortly after this move Blavatsky became involved with the *Spiritual Scientist* published in Boston and its editor Gerry Brown, who printed an introductory interview with Blavatsky on 3 December 1874. The pages of the *Spiritual Scientist* continued to publish articles from Blavatsky until sometime around the end of 1876 when Blavatsky had a falling out with the editor that resulted in a parting of ways.²⁰ Also, many of the original Theosophical Society charter members were prominent Spiritualists such as William Stainton Moses (1839–1892), who became an editor for the Spiritualist periodical *Light* (for a short while), Charles Carleton Massey (1838–1905), a well-known contributor to various Spiritualist publications, and Emma Hardinge Britten, the editor of *The Two Worlds* and author of *Art Magic* among others. This provides an undeniable link between Blavatsky and the Spiritualist movement which would become especially obvious in her philosophy of time and cosmology as put forth in the next chapter.

2. Modifying Spiritualism

Many of Blavatsky’s letters from this time period presented her general opinion towards Spiritualism and its ideology. The relationship between Spiritualism and the Theosophical has never been fully explored, yet it is in this Victorian religious movement that the foundational elements of Theosophical teaching and soteriology

¹⁸ Michael Gomes, ‘From the Archives’, *Theosophical History*, 9.4 (2003), 21–26 (p. 26); A. P. Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky* (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1886), pp. 158, 154–68.; *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky 1861-1879*, ed. by John Algeo and others (Wheaton IL: Quest Books, The Theosophical Publishing House, 2003), p. 113. For more information about the connection between Kardec and Blavatsky see Joscelyn Godwin, *The Beginnings of Theosophy in France* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1989); and Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement* (Boca Raton, FL: 2012), pp. 130–48.

¹⁹ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, I, 13.

²⁰ See Joscelyn Godwin, ‘The Haunting of E. Gerry Brown: A Contemporary Document’, *Theosophical History*, 4.4–5 (1992), 115–20.

can first be discovered. In a letter written to F. J. Lippitt on 30 January 1875, Blavatsky wrote: 'The time is close, my dear General, when Spiritualism must be cleansed of its erroneous misinterpretations, superstitions, and ignorant notions, all of which only make skeptics and unbelievers laugh at us.'²¹ This letter illustrates Blavatsky's desire to reform the Spiritualist movement.

A similar sentiment was conveyed in a letter written nearly a month later to Hiram Corson in which Blavatsky expressed the following thought: 'I came to this Country only on account of the Truth in Spiritualism, but I am afraid I will have to give it up. We shall never be able to draw the line of demarcation between the true and the false, as long as the so-called pillars of Spiritualism will, notwithstanding their half rotten and unreliable condition, be supported and helped out to the last, by the too lenient backs of the cowardly Spiritualists.'²² Blavatsky was frustrated with Spiritualism, an emotion that would push her to develop her own modified view that included her 'theory of elementals,' a belief that defended the supernatural aspect of Spiritualism by ascribing its phenomena to deceitful spirits. In another letter written later that same month to A. N. Aksakoff, the Russian Spiritualist, Blavatsky wrote:

...I have already sacrificed myself for Spiritualism, and am ready at any moment to lay my head on the block, in defense of my faith and the truth; and in the court, before the Grand Jury, I would have shown who is innocent and who is guilty in this unparalleled swindle of Spiritualism, in this rascality, where no one sees what is truth and what is lies, and which is bringing despondency and confusion to the whole Spiritualistic world of America and Europe, and giving the skeptics the right to laugh at us.²³

Here Blavatsky's enthusiasm to promote the cause of Spiritualism was exhibited despite the fact that numerous Spiritualist mediums were being exposed as frauds across the Western world.²⁴ The widespread criticism of the 'swindle of

²¹ Letter XIV, in *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky: 1861 – 1879* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 2003), p. 59.

²² Letter XV, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 68.

²³ Letter XVII, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, pp. 70–71.

²⁴ In a different letter addressed to Aksakoff in February 1875, Blavatsky again defended the cause of Spiritualism: 'For Spiritualism I am ready to work night and day as long as I have morsel of bread, and that only because it is hard to work when one is hungry...' See Letter XVIII, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 73. In a letter written around this same time period (13 February 1875) Blavatsky again identified herself as a Spiritualist to Lippitt: 'Spiritualism will never be able to crawl out from the clutches of suspicion and ostracism unless we Spiritualists help ourselves to extricate the genuine facts from under weeds of falsehood and lies that suffocate the former...' See Letter XX, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 75.

Spiritualism' in 1875 was confirmed through an article published by *The New York Times* on 23 February 1875 titled 'A Decline in Spiritualism' which told of an impending conundrum; however, whether this article influenced Blavatsky remains unknown (though this article was published during the same month and year that Blavatsky wrote these above letters during her stay in New York).²⁵

This article suggested that Spiritualism had suffered a drastic decline during the 1870s, though it seems more accurate to define this 'decline' as a 'reconceptualization'. This supposed 'decline' seemingly reflected Blavatsky's own personal frustration with Spiritualism. In 1875, an article was written pseudonymously by Olcott which explained that the purpose of the fledgling Theosophical Society and its newly-acquired periodical titled the *Spiritual Scientist* was to establish a philosophically advanced Spiritualist publication similar to what Allan Kardec had achieved in France with his *Revue Spirite*. Thus, Blavatsky's main goal seemed to be as a reformer of Spiritualism, though in doing this she ignited an occult revival; this connection will now be examined.²⁶

3. 'Western Esoteric' Spiritualism

In a letter written on 16 February 1875, Blavatsky first employed the term 'theosophy' as defining a Western Esoteric teaching that was purer than Spiritualism and which originated in the philosophies of astrology, Hermeticism, alchemy, kabbalah, and Neo-Platonism, thereby connecting Spiritualism to her comparative view of time.²⁷

For the first time recorded in her writings, Blavatsky revealed a new changing attitude towards Spiritualism, choosing to focus upon the 'older' esoteric universal tradition that she claimed undergirded Spiritualism (and that figured so prominently in her 1877 *Isis Unveiled*). This connection between Blavatsky's Spiritualism and her ancient esoteric tradition is nothing new; however, what remains under appreciated is how these ideologies affected her view of time and spiritual evolution. As noted in the previous chapter, the whole subject of time itself

²⁵ 'A Decline in Spiritualism', *New York Times*, 23 February 1875, 4.

²⁶ Brotherhood of Luxor, 'Important to Spiritualists', *Spiritual Scientist*, 2.8 (1875), 85.

²⁷ Letter XXI, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 86.

was a contemporary cultural issue following the discovery of vast geological stages ('deep time') within a culture that predated Einstein's 'theory of relativity'.

Throughout this section it will be shown that Blavatsky's association with Spiritualism heavily infiltrated her early philosophy of time, spiritual evolution, and cosmology as put forth in *Isis Unveiled*. Despite this reliance, Blavatsky would begin setting her Theosophical Society apart from Spiritualism. While it seemed initially that Blavatsky's most incompatible doctrine with Spiritualism was her belief in the 'theory of elementals' (an idea that held that the spirits being channelled by mediums at séances were primarily lying, deceitful spirits), it seemed that it was merely her *focus* on this doctrine that set her apart from this movement.²⁸ Despite this altered view of Spiritualism, in *Isis Unveiled* Blavatsky was still concerned with proving that there was a genuine 'supernatural' aspect to Spiritualist phenomena as her 'theory of elementals' depended upon this same supposition.²⁹

As one can imagine, Blavatsky's adamant belief that Spiritualist phenomena was the result of lying and deceiving spirits known as elementals instead of the souls of the recently deceased irked many contemporary Spiritualists.³⁰ Given this strong assertion, it is not surprising that several of

²⁸ At one point Blavatsky wrote that 'they [Spiritualists] would kill Colonel Olcott if he dared call them 'Elementaries' in the lectures he was about delivering!' H. P. Blavatsky, 'A Society without a Dogma', *The Spiritualist*, 12.6 (1878), 62–63 (p. 62). A similar idea was first suggested by the Spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis though he called these lying spirits 'diakkas'. See Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Diakka, and their Earthly Victims, being an Explanation of Much that is False and Repulsive in Spiritualism* (Boston: Colby and Rich, 1880). Blavatsky noted the nature of these creatures: '...nevertheless, these figures were *not* the forms of the persons they appeared to be. They were simply their portrait statues, constructed, animated and operated by the elementaries. If we have not previously elucidated this point, it was because the spiritualistic public was not then ready to even listen to the fundamental proposition that there are elemental and elementary spirits. Since that time this subject has been broached and more or less widely discussed. There is less hazard now in attempting to launch upon the restless sea of criticism the hoary philosophy of the ancient sages, for there has been some preparation of the public mind to consider it with impartiality and deliberation. Two years of agitation have effected a marked change for the better.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 70.

²⁹ In the introduction to *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky defined elementals as 'the creatures evolved in four kingdoms earth, air, fire and water and are called by the kabalists gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and undines...such beings never become men. These elementals are the principal agents of disembodied but never visible spirits at séances, and the producers of all the phenomena except the subjective.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, xxx. It seems likely that Blavatsky had derived her belief in elementals from Eliphas Lévi's *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1855), the French mage who remained heavily influential on the life and philosophy of Blavatsky (as noted in the famous source analysis performed by William Coleman which is examined elsewhere).

³⁰ Elementary spirits are equated with demons and evil spirits and Blavatsky admitted the influence of Andrew Jackson Davis' diakkas on this conceptualization. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, xix, 220, 325–26. This 'theory of elementals' set her teachings apart from mainstream Spiritualism (even though a similar theory had been taught by Andrew Jackson Davis, though he believed it was rare,

Blavatsky's earliest critics came from Spiritualist circles. One such Spiritualist critic was a desk-clerk named William Emmete Coleman, who conducted a detailed source analysis that contained some important implications that previous scholarship has overlooked—this analysis will now be examined.

II. SOURCE ANALYSIS

Blavatsky Unveiled: A Source Analysis of *Isis Unveiled*

Coleman's source analysis remains one of the most valuable keys to unlocking the secrets of Blavatsky's early view of time. Coleman's article was published as an appendix to Vsevolod Solyovyoff's book *A Modern Priestess of Isis* (1895) and was entitled 'The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings' which implied that Blavatsky had plagiarised (or at least derived) most of her information from primarily secondary sources. In this article, Coleman mentioned his intention to publish a full-length work exposing 'theosophy as a whole'; however, this book never saw publication as it seemed to have been burned along with his other papers in the great fire of San Francisco in 1906.³¹ It should be noted that Coleman published many articles that were hostile to the Theosophical Society, and Blavatsky particularly, within the pages of the Chicago-based Spiritualist periodical the *Religio-Philosophical Journal* (1865–1905), several of which have been referenced throughout this study.

Those who remain sympathetic to Theosophy have attempted to disprove Coleman's above critiques by attacking his personal character.³² Yet, in his source

whereas Blavatsky taught the opposite; thus it was her reconceptualization of this theory that made her teaching distinct).

³¹ J. N. Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1915), p. 246. William Emmette Coleman, 'The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings', in *Modern Priestess of Isis*, ed. by Vsevolod Solovyoff (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1895), pp. 353–66 (p. 353).

³² It has been noted that Coleman held a humble position as a clerk in the Quartermaster Department of the U.S. Army. Michael Gomes noted that out of the long list of credentials that Coleman boasted in his article 'The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings' (the American Oriental Society, the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Pali Text Society) none of his contributions in these fields are known. In fact, an accusation was made by a stenographer named William Henry Burr in 1881 who accused Coleman of plagiarizing one of his pamphlets. Coleman responded to this allegation by suggesting a very different standard of plagiarism than he had applied to his analysis of Blavatsky's writings, explaining that 'it is ridiculously absurd to call it plagiarism to use quotations from other writers, taken second-hand. All writers do it more or less, Mr. Burr very largely, and no one ever called it plagiarism before'; thus, it is curious to ponder what Coleman's list would have looked like if he had applied this same

analysis, Coleman noted a long list of sources from which Blavatsky had borrowed, along with the number of quotations that she had utilized; however, he rarely cited specific examples of this plagiarism, which makes many of his assertions too vague to verify. This is not to conclude that Coleman was incorrect in his claims, only that many of his accusations were never specified. His main analysis has stirred much controversy since its initial publication. Several scholars have suggested that Blavatsky had merely engaged in typical ambiguous Victorian citation practices and that no code of conduct for plagiarism existed in the nineteenth century, but is this true? In his article 'Plagiarism and the Secret Doctrine', Darrell Erixson disputes the validity of Coleman's claims on the grounds that no plagiarism laws existed during the time in which Blavatsky wrote. Erixson claims that 'establishing the charge of plagiarism...is very difficult' as he argued that there is 'no legal precedent for the era.' He goes on to ask 'are the borrowings from Blavatsky reasonable in quality, number and length in relation to the nature and objects of the selections made and the subjects to which relate? I fear these questions could be argued for decades without a likely conclusion.'³³

Erixson suggests that no official standard for plagiarism had been established in the nineteenth century; however, he seems to overlook the long history of copyright laws which became a subject of growing interest through such judicial cases as *Mawman v. Tegg* (1826), *Folsom v. Marsh* (1841), and *Jeffreys v. Boosey* (1854) to name only a few. Also, several major works on copyright law were published in the nineteenth century. The most defining of these works seemed to have been *A Treatise on the Law of Copyright in Books, Dramatic and Musical Compositions, Letters and Other Manuscripts, Engravings and Sculpture as Enacted and Administered in England and America* (1847) by George Ticknor Curtis (1812–1894) and one in 1870 by W. A. Copinger (1847–1910) titled *The Law of Copyright*. Copinger's *The Law of Copyright* 'quickly became and has remained one of the key points of reference as to the law of copyright within the

standard to his own analysis of Blavatsky's writings. Sylvia Cranston, *HPB: The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky, Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement* (Santa Barbara, CA: Path Publishing House, 1993), p. 379.; Gomes, *Dawning of the Theosophical Movement*, p. 147; Reprinted by John Patrick Deveney, 'Sauce for the Goose: William Emmette Coleman's Defense to a Charge of Plagiarism', *Theosophical History*, 8.10 (2002), 272–73 (p. 273).
³³ Darrell Erixson, 'Plagiarism and the Secret Doctrine', *Theosophical History*, 12.3 (2006), 19–28 (pp. 19, 28).

United Kingdom (and is certainly the text exhibiting the greatest weight of authority by dint of longevity). It was the text to which counsel and judges alike would most readily refer in cases of alleged copyright infringement.²² In 1870, Copinger published his influential copyright treatise in Britain, and one American reviewer described it as ‘an indispensable supplement’ to Curtis’ work.²³ In a peculiar move for a British legal writer, Copinger referenced American cases and borrowed heavily from Curtis in major parts throughout his text. This work remains an important treatise on the law of copyright, establishing a standard that remains relevant even for modern professionals and academics. It seems undeniable that Copinger borrowed from Curtis reiterating the same categories for literary copyright though adding another category:

Copyright may be invaded in several ways: - 1st. By reprinting the whole work verbatim. 2nd. By reprinting verbatim a part of it. 3rd. By imitating the whole or a part, or by reproducing the whole of a part with colourable alterations. 4th. By reproducing the whole or a part under an abridged Copinger borrowed from It can no longer be denied that some writing standard and ethic did exist throughout the Victorian Era.³⁴

Coleman’s claims, though extensive, remain vital for ascertaining the origins of the philosophy put forth in *Isis Unveiled*. Coleman maintained that *Isis Unveiled* was largely borrowed from a number of various nineteenth-century sources.³⁵ These key sources give the reader an understanding of what books and authors Blavatsky read and borrowed from during this earlier time period. Some of the more important works that Coleman identified included Kenneth R. H. Mackenzie’s *Masonic Cyclopaedia* (1877), Charles William King’s *Gnostics and Their Remains* (1864), the works of S. F. Dunlap, L. Jacolliot, and Eliphas Lévi, Isaac Cory’s *Ancient Fragments* (1826), Louis Jacolliot’s *Christna et le Christ* (1874), *Bible in India* (English translation, 1875), *Le Spiritisme dans le Monde* (1875), Eliphas Lévi’s *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie* (1854-56), *La Science des Esprits* (1865), *La Clef des Grands Mysteres* (1861), and *Histoire de la Magie* (1860), Godfrey Higgins’s *Anacalypsis* (1833), Charles Bunsen’s *Egypt* (1848), Edward

³⁴ W.A. Copinger, *The Law of Copyright in Works of Literature and Art* (London: Stevens & Haynes, 1870), p. 95.

³⁵ For a fuller discussion of Coleman’s life and his claims of plagiarism see Jeffrey D. Lavoie, ‘Analyzing Coleman: A Brief Analysis of William Emmette Coleman’s Life, Claims, and Credentials’, *Psypioneer*, 9.2 (2013), 42–51.

Pococke's *India in Greece* (1852), Emma Hardinge's *Modern American Spiritualism* (1870), John William Draper's *Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), Paschal Beverly Randolph's *Pre-Adamite Man* (1863),³⁶ James Martin Peebles's *Jesus: Myth, Man, or God, Around the World, Principles of the Jesuits* (1893), *Septenary Institutions* (1850), Thomas Taylor's *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries* (1875 ed.) and Alfred Wallace's *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1874) (notice a fair percentage of these sources identified above were written by Spiritualists evidencing its early influence). Coleman concluded that:

Two years ago I published the statement that the whole of *Isis* was compiled from a little over 100 books and periodicals. In the *Theosophist*, April, 1893, pp. 387, 388, Colonel Olcott states that when *Isis* was written the library of the author comprised about 100 books, and that during its composition various friends lent her a few books, - the latter with her own library thus making up a little over 100, in precise accordance with the well-established results of my critical analysis of every quotation and plagiarism in *Isis*.³⁷

Blavatsky herself admitted in her final article 'My Books' that when writing *Isis Unveiled* proper citation was not a main priority. She also admitted to engaging several unscrupulous literary habits supposedly out of ignorance. This included taking material from secondary sources and citing them as primary, neglecting to use quotation marks when using direct quotes, and her failure to cite many of her indirect quotations. At the same time, contrary to some of Coleman's allegations, Blavatsky does appear to use her sources correctly, and clearly does not plagiarise them.³⁸ The final word on Coleman's analysis was that Blavatsky did plagiarise

³⁶ The claim that Blavatsky had plagiarised from Randolph's *Pre-Adamite Man* has recently been disputed by John Deveney. Deveney noted that 'Madame Blavatsky does cover much of the same ground as Randolph has and she discusses "Pre-Adamite" spirits and the likes and cites ("for what it's worth") a statement from Randolph's book (*Isis Unveiled*, I, p. 127), but it is difficult to discern any extensive pattern of plagiarism of Randolph's work generally...Randolph, who had been dead for more than two years when *Isis* was published, can scarcely have been considered useful to her.' John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), p. 544. Also, in a letter written to J. Ralston Skinner in 1877 Blavatsky referenced the Arabic source *Nabatean Agriculture* (ca. 1,000 CE) which held that Adam had come out of India and was the father of an agricultural civilization. Also, Blavatsky utilized the papers of Swiss naturalist and Harvard professor Louis Agassiz and may have even read some of the Jewish Midrash literature and Kabbalistic writings which implied the existence of prior worlds. See David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. 7, 95–97.

³⁷ Coleman, 'The Sources of Madame Blavatsky's Writings', pp. 354–57.

³⁸ For example, the final paragraph on page 353 in *Isis Unveiled*, I was derived from J. S. *Demonologia, or Natural Knowledge Revealed* (London: John Bumpus, 1827), pp. 209, 210, 224,

often, though not in every case that he has suggested (and several he did not). This does not mean that Blavatsky did not contribute anything original in her writings, and this study will identify several of these unique doctrines. The purpose of this study is not to shame and blame Blavatsky, but rather to identify the sources that she employed in order to ascertain the early influences on her philosophy of time, a doctrine that would become one of her most defining teachings.

Blavatsky's Syncretism: Eastern Oriental or Western Orientalist?

In continuing to examine Blavatsky's philosophy, it is important to observe the type of sources that she utilized at this stage and determine whether they were primarily Eastern or Western. The term 'East' or 'Eastern' will be used throughout this writing to define any culture or religious tradition deriving from Asia, whereas the word 'Oriental' will be used specifically to describe a Western perception of the 'East' (Asia). Most times, 'Orientalist' writings reveal more about Western culture and popular opinion than they do about the Asiatic cultures that they are claiming to describe. Also, during the late Victorian Era, the East was indirectly defined and connected to Max Müller's *The Sacred Books of the East*, which provided translations of many Oriental texts for the first time in English, thus attempting to bridge the gap between the 'East' and the 'West'.

The term Western will be loosely defined using Antoine Faivre's definition, which connects the term 'Western' to any current developing out of the three Abrahamic religions.³⁹ While these two definitions have their own set of complications, they provide some general geographical understanding of the terms 'Eastern' and 'Western'. Yet the question remains, 'which did Blavatsky favor or was it Eastern, Western, or something entirely different'?

A clue was revealed by Coleman's analysis that lends some insight into Blavatsky's influences in 1877. Out of the list of a hundred books that Coleman alleged Blavatsky had plagiarised from in her writing of *Isis Unveiled*, most of them (if not all) were Western. Despite this important insight, it could still be argued that

226. Though still a questionable example, Blavatsky appeared to have altered Forsyth's work sufficiently.

³⁹ Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion', *Numen*, 42 (1995), 48–77 (p. 50).

Blavatsky might have obtained firsthand knowledge of Eastern religions through her travells during her younger years.⁴⁰

One problematic issue for determining whether Blavatsky's influences were primarily Eastern or Western was her claims to have visited Tibet in her earlier travels. These travels would have enabled her to study Buddhism and Hinduism under the direct guidance of a master or rishi, allowing Theosophy a possible untraceable Eastern origin. Recently, the factuality of Blavatsky's travels has been disputed. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke notes that Blavatsky appeared knowledgeable about the geography and ethnography of Tibet, though it is very possible that this knowledge could have been drawn from the following nineteenth-century sources: Abbe Evariste Regis Huc's, *Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China during the Year 1844-5-6* (1852), Emil Schlagintweit's, *Buddhism in Tibet* (1863), and Clements R. Markham's, *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa* (1876).⁴¹

Goodrick-Clarke went on to note that Blavatsky's knowledge of Buddhism could easily have been found in the contemporaneous Western publications such as Edward Upham's *The History and Doctrine of Buddhism* (1829), Robert Spence Hardy's *Eastern Monachism* (1850), and *A Manual of Buddhism* (1860), Samuel Beal's *Catena of the Buddhism Scriptures from the Chinese* (1871), and Thomas William Rhys Davids' *Buddhism* (1877).⁴² This argument is suggested by Joscelyn Godwin who noted that 'there is nothing in the many passages on Buddhism in *Isis Unveiled* that could not have been drawn from Western publications, except the skill with which Blavatsky negotiated the pitfalls inherent in the subject.'⁴³

While both Godwin and Goodrick-Clarke identified a primarily Western connection, neither offered any specific corroborating proof to validate such general statements. While the idea that Blavatsky borrowed many of her ideas

⁴⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Helena Blavatsky* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2004), p. 52.

⁴¹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Theosophical Society, Orientalism, and the "Mystic East": Western Esotericism and Eastern Religion in Theosophy', *Theosophical History: A Quarterly Journal of Research*, 13.3 (2007), 3-28 (p. 21).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Joscelyn Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 326. Also, Wouter Hanegraaff noted that 'up to the publication of her first major work, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), it was not an Indian but an "Egyptian" atmosphere which prevailed in the Theosophical Society.' Hanegraaff went on to quote Carl T. Jackson as evidence for this supposition. See Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), pp. 452–53.

from Western Orientalists has previously been suggested, this thesis will give further evidence to this connection, thereby validating the value of a tedious, chronological study of her teachings.

This study will show that the sources related to time and chronology in Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* were primarily Western during this early time period. India was important to Blavatsky in 1877 while writing *Isis Unveiled*; however, it seems that much of her knowledge of India was derived from secondary sources, including the 21 volume complete works of Louis Jacolliot (1837–1890), which had been sent to Blavatsky from John L. O'Sullivan out of Paris, France.⁴⁴ Thus, Theosophy had an origin in Western esotericism, yet this influence would soon become mixed with Eastern philosophy after Blavatsky's 1879 relocation to India (a transition that will be referred to throughout this study as the Oriental shift). For now, the main sources Blavatsky utilized in developing her view of time will be explored to determine what has previously been suggested— that her main influences were initially Western.

1. The Concept of Time in *Isis Unveiled* as Derived from Western Sources

The sources that Blavatsky utilized in *Isis Unveiled* remain crucial for understanding the evolution of this philosophy from an inessential doctrine lurking in the background of her teachings to the driving force of her entire vast cosmology and spiritual evolution. Wouter Hanegraaff observed that in *Isis Unveiled*, karma was only mentioned in passing, though it later took centre stage in *The Secret Doctrine*. Still, it seems that Hanegraaff failed to see the larger picture: that karma was important only because it was directly linked to Blavatsky's eternal view of time and soteriology. *Isis Unveiled* presented the starting point for this time-ideology. Like many Spiritualists of her day, at first Blavatsky seemed unconcerned with defining any specific notions of time evidenced in the sources she utilized; however, she did reference the following Western sources related to chronology and history within the pages of *Isis Unveiled*:

⁴⁴ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 594. For a detailed biographical account of Jacolliot see Daniel Caracostea, 'Louis François Jacolliot (1837-1890)', *Theosophical History*, 9.1 (2003), 12–39.

Christian C. J. Bunsen, *Egypt's Place in Universal History* (1867): Blavatsky primarily used Bunsen for her references to chronology and ancient history.⁴⁵

Charles Coleman, *The Mythology of the Hindus With Notices of Various Mountain and Island Tribes* (1832): Blavatsky used this source to develop her use of Eastern terms and time divisions. Though this work is important for the fact that Blavatsky borrowed some of her Eastern terms and time divisions from this work, it is not used consistently in relation to the overall development of her chronology and evidences her scavenger ideology.⁴⁶

Isaac Preston Cory, *Ancient Fragments* (2nd ed. 1832): Blavatsky utilized this source for her understanding of Greek and Near Eastern mythologies and she quoted Isaac Cory throughout *Isis Unveiled* especially in relation to metaphysics and evolution.⁴⁷

William and Elizabeth Denton, *The Soul of Things: Psychometric Researches and Discoveries* (1863): This source was not cited with the same frequency as the other works in this section; however, Blavatsky occasionally used this book to substantiate her belief in the existence of an antediluvian race which she believed could be proven using psychometric archaeology — the process of receiving psychic vibrations from objects. Blavatsky used the various visions recorded by Elizabeth Denton to prove that a primeval race existed which coincided with her own views of evolutionary theory.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Isis Unveiled*, I, 32, 33, 240, 241, 513, 518–19, 529, 542, 589, 605, 607; II, 92–93, 159, 217, 248, 327, 361, 366–68, 415, 424, 426, 431–33, 435, 448, 487, 548, 558, 565.

⁴⁶ *Isis Unveiled*, I, 32; II, 79, 278, 301, 598.

⁴⁷ For a more in-depth examination on how Blavatsky utilized Isaac Cory and his writings in her conceptualization of time see Jeffrey D. Lavoie, 'Isaac Preston Cory, *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and Cosmology', *H.E.R.M.E.S.* (2012), 3–9. See also *Isis Unveiled*, I, 56, 150, 154, 178, 188, 287–88, 328, 341–42, 349, 353, 413, 577–78; II, 48, 239, 261, 271.

⁴⁸ *Isis Unveiled*, I, 184. For more references to Denton see *Isis Unveiled*, I, 183–84, 295, 331–32.

John William Draper, *History of Conflict between Religion and Science* (1875): Blavatsky consistently referenced Draper's theories on geological periods and evolution and assimilated them into her constructions of time.⁴⁹

Louis Jacolliot, *Les Fils de Dieu* (1875): Blavatsky developed many of her comparative remarks between Hinduism and Christianity directly from Jacolliot's works and utilized his French translations of Eastern texts which served as a primary source for her Oriental understanding of Eastern religious traditions. She further noted that 'no traveler has shown himself fairer in the main or more impartial to India than Jacolliot,' though she later referred to him as a 'humbug' in an 1887 letter.⁵⁰

Alfred R. Wallace, *The Action of Natural Selection on Man* (1871) and *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* (1876): Alfred Wallace was a prominent naturalist whose claim to fame was becoming an independent co-founder for the theory of natural selection alongside Charles Darwin. Wallace was also a popular Spiritualist and Blavatsky continuously used him as her champion against Darwin's 'materialist' evolution. Blavatsky relied heavily upon Wallace's anthropology in her views of racial theories, spiritual evolution, and cyclical time and consistently manipulated his theories, using her occult hermeneutic to validate her own philosophical arguments.⁵¹

Blavatsky also indirectly engaged the teachings of the French mage Eliphas Lévi (1810 – 1875) in her conceptualization of spiritual evolution.⁵²

⁴⁹ *Isis Unveiled*, I, 6–7, 16, 19, 21, 27, 85, 94, 97–98, 179, 186, 208, 233, 238, 240–41, 253, 267–94, 331–32, 404, 429–31, 511–12, 520–21, 582; II, 9, 32, 41, 49, 62, 88–89, 478, 509, 546.

⁵⁰ *Isis Unveiled*, I, 584. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky to J. Ralston Skinner, 17 February 1887, Cambridge (MA), Andover-Harvard Library, bMS 516/1 (12). For an academic biography of Jacolliot see Daniel Caracostea, 'Louis-Francois Jacolliot (1837–1890): A Biographical Essay', *Theosophical History*, 9.1 (2003), 12–39; *Isis Unveiled*, I, 139–41, 222, 225, 291, 458, 288, 579, 583–87, 589–90, 594–95, 610, 617, 621; II, 30–31, 38–39, 46–48, 70, 103–107, 158, 242, 257, 259–62, 278, 308, 321–22, 324, 427, 584–85.

⁵¹ For several examples of how Blavatsky utilized Wallace and his works within *Isis Unveiled* see Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *The Theosophical Society: The History of a Spiritualist Movement* (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2012), pp. 315–34; *Isis Unveiled*, I, 38, 42, 46, 54–55, 118, 155, 177, 194–95, 222–24, 245, 293–96, 326, 331, 334, 407, 421, 428.

⁵² Blavatsky had read Lévi's *Dogme el rituel de la haute magie* quite extensively, having made use of this source throughout her writings as noted in Coleman's analysis and in Blavatsky's own

This is a list of the primary sources that Blavatsky employed in constructing her view of time and chronology at this stage. She would also periodically refer to the writings of the noted Orientalists William Jones and Max Müller, but it seemed likely that many of the quotes could have been derived directly from the work of one source in relation to time and history — the writings of a Freemason and comparative mythographer Godfrey Higgins (1772–1833).⁵³ While all of these above sources exerted a considerable influence upon Blavatsky in *Isis Unveiled* and throughout her lifetime, Higgins was undeniably the most influential on her philosophy of time in this early stage and deserves further attention. An analysis of his work will be performed with the aim of understanding what elements Blavatsky derived from this fascinating figure in history.

2. Godfrey Higgins and Madame Blavatsky: The Englishman's Influence

The influence of Godfrey Higgins on Blavatsky has been observed by several individuals; however, the breadth of his influence has never fully been explored. It seemed that Blavatsky's view of time and chronology was in no small part based upon the writings of Higgins, which will be evidenced in this section. This influence in relation to time and eschatology was noted by one contemporaneous reviewer of *Isis Unveiled* for the *New York Herald* who suggested that: '*Isis* will supplement the *Anacalypsis*. Whoever loves to read Godfrey Higgins will be delighted with Mme.

Collected Writings. For a fuller discussion of Blavatsky's debt to Lévi, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Helena Blavatsky* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2004), pp. 91–102, 148–159. This reliance on Lévi should not imply a total submission, as Blavatsky's view of the after-death state of the soul in *Isis Unveiled* had much more in common with Spiritualism than Lévi's notion of after-life states: 'Bodies are only temporary shells, whence souls have to be liberated; but those which in this life obey the body compose for themselves an interior body or fluidic shell, which, after death, becomes their prison-house and torment, until the time arrives when they succeed in dissolving it in the warmth of the divine light, towards which, however, the burden of their grossness hinders them from ascending. Indeed, they can do so only after infinite struggles, and by the mediation of the just, who stretch forth their hands towards them. During the whole period of the process they are devoured by the interior activity of the captive spirit, as in a burning furnace.' See Eliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic: Its Doctrine and Ritual*, trans. by A. E. Waite (London: George Redway, 1896), p. 48. Though similar elements are noted in the quote above, Blavatsky (in her later writings) would incorporate more of Lévi's view of the afterlife.

⁵³ Most of these works are listed in Michael Gomes' source analysis recorded in *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century*. Gomes only excluded two of these authors in his preliminary list: Charles Coleman and Alfred R. Wallace. See Michael Gomes, *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), pp. 150–59.

Blavatsky. There is a great resemblance between their works. Both have tried hard to tell everything apocryphal and apocalyptic.⁵⁴

Since Blavatsky clearly owed so much to Higgins, only information which directly pertains to Blavatsky's concept of time will be examined. Higgins' major work was his *Anacalypsis* (1833), which was released in an initial print run limited to only 200 copies; thus, Blavatsky was one of a small group of key individuals who popularized his writings in the nineteenth century (along with the Theosophist and Spiritualist, Emma Hardinge Britten, a close personal associate of Blavatsky during this time period).⁵⁵ While educated at Cambridge, Higgins' time there was brief as he could not afford to pay the tuition fees and as a result he never 'took a degree or was called to the bar.'⁵⁶ He went on to join the army, earning the rank of a major and served from the years 1802 to 1813.⁵⁷

Following his discharge from the service, Higgins obtained a position as a magistrate of York County allowing him the title of esquire. After overcoming a serious illness, he became intrigued with religious studies which led him to a critical consideration of the origin of religion and a study of languages and their etymology.⁵⁸ By his own account, Higgins considered himself a social reformer, setting his sights upon exposing the shocking abuses prevalent in the York Lunatic Asylum and working to repeal some of the infamous lunacy laws that remain a subject of considerable interest among modern Victorian scholars.⁵⁹ He went on to

⁵⁴ For *New York Herald* article and a more detailed discussion of Higgins' influence on Blavatsky see Leslie Shepard 'The *Anacalypsis* of Godfrey Higgins—Precursor of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*', *Theosophical History*, 1.3 (1985), 46–52. See also Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 76–91 ; Garry W. Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from *Isis Unveiled* (1877) to *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)', *Literature & Aesthetics*, 21.1 (2011), 43–71 (p. 52). H. P. Blavatsky, 'My Books', *Lucifer*, 8.45 (1891), 241–47.

⁵⁵ Shepard 'The *Anacalypsis* of Godfrey Higgins', p. 46.

⁵⁶ Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis: An Attempt To Draw Aside the Veil of The Saitic Isis*, 2 vols (London: Longman Press, 1846), I, v.

⁵⁷ J.M. Robertson, *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Rationalist Press Association 1929), p. 89.

⁵⁸ Higgins, *Anacalypsis* I, p. x.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. viii. For Higgins' tract against the lunacy laws see Godfrey Higgins, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Earl Fitzwilliam Respecting the Investigation Which has Lately Taken Place into the Abuses at the York Lunatic Asylum* (Doncaster: W. Sheardown, 1814), pp. 6–9. For more information regarding the abuse of nineteenth-century lunacy laws and their relation to modern religious movements, see Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 344.

produce some important pamphlets on matters concerning money payments (1819) and the Corn Laws (1826).⁶⁰

Following the publication of these pamphlets, Higgins published his first major work entitled *Horae Sabbaticae* (1826), followed by *An Apology for the Life and Character of the Celebrated Prophet of Arabia called Mohamed, or the Illustrious* in 1829 which was written to promote religious tolerance through an acceptance of universalism.⁶¹ After this time, Higgins became interested in travel and longed to conduct a journey to the Eastern oriental lands. Based upon his later reflection noted in the 'Preface' of *Anacalypsis* (1833), this trip never occurred: 'I am now turned sixty...yet I have not entirely given up the hope of going as far as Egypt: but what I have finished of my work must first be printed.'⁶² This preface was written on 1 May 1833, but Higgins' health quickly deteriorated and on 9 August 1833 he died; thus, Blavatsky's main source for her philosophy of time had little direct knowledge of Eastern religious traditions and customs.⁶³

Higgins' Definition of Time

Given the giant 1,436-page span of *Anacalypsis*, only a few key concepts will be mentioned in relation to time and their influence on Blavatsky. Noting the pages that Blavatsky quoted from *Anacalypsis* in relation to the subject of time, it becomes apparent that she relied heavily upon the fifth volume in particular. Higgins' fifth volume was divided into thirteen chapter headings, and in the interest of being concise, only the titles that are relevant to this study are listed:

- 1) Chapter Two: Cycles, astronomy, and Hindu and Mosaic systems along with Berossus
- 2) Chapter Three: Two Cycles and Plutarch and other Western authors on the 600-year cycle
- 3) Chapter Four: The concept of Indian circles
- 4) Chapter Five: William Jones' view on Manu

⁶⁰ Robertson, *History of Freethought in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 89.

⁶¹ Higgins belief in universalism was shown in the following quotation: 'Be assured that God will never damn you for an opinion—a point of faith...no person, whose mind has not been corrupted by education, can doubt the truth of the Hindoo (sic) doctrine, that God is equally present with the pious Jew in the synagogue, the Christian in the church, the Mohamedan in the mosque, and the Brahmin in the temple.' Godfrey Higgins, *An Apology for the life and character of the celebrated Prophet of Arabia called Mohamed, or the Illustrious* (London: Rowland Hunter, 1829), p. 107.

⁶² Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, viii.

⁶³ Ibid., p. xxiv; Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 78.

- 5) Chapter Eleven: the idea of wisdom and a secret doctrine along with a chronological system
- 6) Chapter Twelve: Genesis and its allegorical interpretation and Faber's concept of the trinity in Indian and Hebrew belief structures

Some of the key elements associated with Blavatsky's philosophy of time in *Isis Unveiled* appear in these chapter headings:

- 1, 3-4) Blavatsky's tendency to use Orientalists to define her Eastern view of time was paralleled in Higgins' chapters two, four, and five.
- 2) Her insistent use of Cory's *Ancient Fragments* (specifically Berosus) to validate her position including her use of the term 'neros' (which she borrowed from Higgins as a means of dividing time into 600 year segments) was the content of chapter three.
- 5) Blavatsky's connecting of her chronology with a universal wisdom tradition corresponded with Higgins' 'secret doctrine' in chapter eleven including its connection to chronology.
- 6) Blavatsky's use of an allegorical interpretation of Genesis and the trinity/avatars correlated with that of Higgins' chapter twelve.

It is therefore evident that most of the characteristics that appear typical in Blavatsky's early view of time were first employed by Higgins.

In defining his own structure of time, Higgins relied heavily upon the 'cycles of the Neros' which he had defined in his earlier work *Celtic Druids* (1827):

The cycle of the Neros is worthy of much observation: it is formed by 7,421 lunar revolutions of 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes, 3 seconds, which make 219,146 days and a half; and this same number of 219,146 and a half, give six hundred solar years of 365 days, 5 hours, 51 minutes, 36 seconds each which differ less than 3 minutes from what its length is observed to be at this day. Now Ptolemy and Hipparchus made the year to be 365 days, 5 hours, 55 minutes, 12 seconds. Supposing this cycle were correct to a second, if on the first of January at noon a new moon took place, it would take place again in exactly six hundred years, at the same moment of the day, and under all the same circumstances.⁶⁴

Higgins went on to note in *Anacalypsis* that this system of dividing time into 600-year divisions was a 'very respectable record' that was invented by an antediluvian race, though it had been forgotten after the cataclysmic flood.⁶⁵ In Higgins' view, the whole chronology of the world could be divided into 600-year segments known as neros. This was an idea that Blavatsky would both engage with and subsequently discredit within the pages of *Isis Unveiled*.

⁶⁴ Godfrey Higgins, *The Celtic Druids* (London: Rowland Hunter, 1829), p. 48.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49; Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 29–30.

The *Anacalypsis* and *Isis Unveiled*

Anacalypsis suggested that the earliest antediluvian races were the first to comprehend the divine cycle of neros and possessed a real understanding of true religion. This religion consisted of several attributes related to time and origin. Some of these included: 1) an emanationist origin of the world; 2) the immortality of the soul; 3) a belief in the trinity; 4) the androgynous character of God; 5) metempsychosis; 6) reabsorption into the one deity; and 7) the periodical renewal of the world.⁶⁶ According to Higgins, these concepts had been reconceptualized by various religions over time and had become ‘clothed with bodies and converted into living creatures’, yet these tenets comprised the doctrine of the one original universal religion.⁶⁷

Higgins and Neros

Higgins continuously referenced his ‘cycle of neros’ and connected this theory to the myth of the avatar.⁶⁸ He maintained that every 600 years new avatars (or saviors) were born on the earth — one for every nation, although he tended to focus on the Eastern and Near Eastern world.⁶⁹ Cyrus was the eighth avatar being born around the year 600 BCE.⁷⁰ Jesus was the ninth avatar and at his birth ‘the eighth Neros cycle since counting had begun was coming to an end, and messianic expectations were running high both among the esotericists who understood astronomy, and among the people who were led on to expect great events.’⁷¹ In the year 600 CE, another cycle had passed and the tenth avatar Mohammed was born and ended a larger 6,000 year cycle (10 neros = 6,000 years).⁷² Higgins noted that ‘Jesus Christ was believed, by the followers of Mohamed, to be a divine incarnation...and to have foretold the next and last Avatar

⁶⁶ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 35–37, 223, 803, 815.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶⁸ ‘The myth of the avatar’ was Joscelyn Godwin’s description for Higgins’ belief that a new avatar appeared on this world every 600 years. See Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 84.

⁶⁹ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 662–63.

⁷⁰ Higgins, *An Apology for Mohamed* (London: Rowland Hunter, 1829), pp. 102–03; Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 201.

⁷¹ Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 83.

⁷² Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 683–84. Though elsewhere Higgins placed Hakem Bemrillah (the founder of the Assassin group) as his tenth avatar. Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 699.

Mohamed, to complete the ten periods, and the six millenaries, previous to the grand Millenium or the reign of the Χρησος, or Christ, on earth for...one thousand years'.⁷³ A similar assimilation of historical religious leaders was later purported by Blavatsky in *Isis Unveiled* and expounded upon in *The Secret Doctrine*.⁷⁴ Also, in this work Higgins suggested that all of the Indian, Chaldean, Christian and Ophite Trinitarian conceptualizations served as evidence that proved the existence of this universal tradition. This was another defensive argument that Blavatsky engaged within the pages of her *Isis Unveiled*.⁷⁵

Higgins' belief in never-ending cycles of time was further connected to his soteriology, an idea mirrored in the teachings of Blavatsky. Higgins wrote that:

As it was believed to be with worlds, so it was with man. He was supposed to pass from cycle to cycle, from world to world, till his period was complete, the temporary evil of one cycle remedied by the abundance of good in another, till the universal absorption was to take place. This is the reason why we have no hell in the Pentateuch...Thus through millions of ages and worlds existences were [sic] supposed to keep arising and passing away, and being renewed, until the final absorption into the Divine Essence. And the Divine Essence itself was supposed to keep on its endless course, creating new existences for ultimate happiness.⁷⁶

This quote evidenced Higgins' overview of cyclical time and soteriology (i. e. absorption into the Divine Essence), along with its apparently infinite duration/scope. Higgins claimed that his reason for adapting this cyclical view of life and soteriology was because they seemed to reconcile the various world religions together.⁷⁷

Higgins' also postulated a world that was always shifting from cycle to cycle, activity to inactivity, and destruction to creation; even once the soul found its final resting place it would still continue within this cyclical time pattern. Despite all of Higgins' unusual theories and confusing calculations, the concluding paragraph in this section remains intriguing as it pertained to both the avatar mythology and the concept of neros:

...the great mythic-cyclic-microsmic system...was the foundation of the systems of all nations...the system of Cycles, an effect arising out of almost

⁷³ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 687–79.

⁷⁴ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 358–59.

⁷⁵ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 169–71. See also Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 172, 450

⁷⁶ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 826.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the first and most pressing wants of man, was in itself of a nature peculiarly proper to perpetuate this mythic system, and may be considered as the great cause which prevented for a certain time, the divergence of the system, and of its present actual dispersion and disappearance. It lasted one period of ten ages, or 6,000 years; it is now nearly dissipated and gone. It arose out of the wants of man; it was continued by those wants: it aided greatly in supplying or remedying those wants. Those wants now supplied by the diffusion of great scientific knowledge...the law which forbids man to look too far either behind or before him.⁷⁸

It appeared that the division and cycle of the neros, the myth of the avatar, and his detailed pseudo-history were all, according to Higgins, based on the psychological desires and wants of humanity. Though Higgins viewed the neros as the key to understanding history, this above statement appeared to negate the importance of any attempt to divide and ascertain the chronology of the world. It will seem undeniable after studying Blavatsky's philosophy of time in *Isis Unveiled* that her philosophy was based largely upon Higgins' work even though she attempted to alter these ideas slightly, giving the impression that she possessed a superior knowledge according to her 'occult hermeneutic'. These alterations will now be explored.

3. Blavatsky's Critiques of Higgins in *Isis Unveiled*

Though critical of Higgins, Blavatsky adopted the term 'neros' in connection to her concept of time and even indirectly credited Higgins for this term while engaging his time-scheme, though altering it slightly.⁷⁹ She noted that Higgins, in his calculations of time and in defense of his Neros time division, took into account the cyclical movements of the earth's axis and concluded that the earth's movements had significantly changed from the past ages.

Despite Blavatsky's reliance on Higgins, she continuously criticized his theories in relation to cyclical time. Blavatsky noted that the 'method of calculating by the neroses, without allowing any consideration for the secrecy in which the ancient philosophers, who were exclusively of the sacerdotal order, held their

⁷⁸ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, II, 445.

⁷⁹ Higgins noted that the term 'neros' was not original to his writings and appeared to attribute this theory to Marco Cassini who allegedly borrowed it from Simon de la Louberes's *Du Royaume de Siam* (1691). Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 168–69. See Blavatsky referencing Higgins in *Isis Unveiled*, I, 33–34. taken from *Anacalypsis*, I, 209.

knowledge, gave rise to the greatest errors.’⁸⁰ As previously noted, Higgins’ explanation of time depended largely on the concept of *neros* which he based upon Ptolemy, Hipparchus, and antediluvian sources; however, Blavatsky disagreed with his ‘*neros*’ division of time. She claimed that Higgins’ fatal mistake was in his inability to discern the ancient philosophies (‘the secrecy by which they held their knowledge’). It was only by using her occult knowledge along with a proper interpretation of these ancient texts that the world and its origins could truly be understood. After noting this criticism, Blavatsky continued to paraphrase Higgins:

This method of calculating by the *neroses*, without allowing any consideration for the secrecy in which the ancient philosophers, who were exclusively of the sacerdotal order, held their knowledge, gave rise to the greatest errors. It led the Jews, as well as some of the Christian Platonists, to maintain that the world would be destroyed at the end of six thousand years. Gale shows how firmly this belief was rooted in the Jews. It has also led modern scientists to discredit entirely the hypothesis of the ancients. It has given rise to the formation of different religious sects, which, like the Adventists of our century, are always living in the expectation of the approaching destruction of the world.⁸¹

This statement was in direct response to a comment made by Higgins in *Anacalypsis* in which he quoted Theophilus Gale (1629–1678), the English non-conformist theologian.⁸²

The main difference between Blavatsky and Higgins was that he used Gale to show that both the Jews and Plato believed in the destruction of the world at the end of a 6,000 year cycle, whereas Blavatsky attributed this to a mistake which had given ‘rise to the greatest errors.’⁸³ Thus, Blavatsky was attempting to improve upon Higgins’ chronology and understanding of time, thereby presenting herself as superior to Higgins.

⁸⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 34.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² ‘The alternate destruction of the world by fire and water was taught by Plato. In his *Timaeus* he says, that the story of Phaeton’s burning the world has reference to a great dissolution of all things on the earth, by fire. Gale shews that the Jews, as well as Plato, maintained that the world would be destroyed at the end of 6000 years; that then the day of judgment would come: manifestly the Jewish and Christian Millenium...something very like the alternations from heat to cold, and cold to heat, in certain long periods, must happen : and paradoxical as many of my readers may think me, yet I very much suspect that if the angle do (sic) increase and decrease as just mentioned, and the race of man should so long continue, evils very like those above described must be experienced.’ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 202–03.

⁸³ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 34.

As for Higgins' view of Eastern time, while he did employ Eastern terms, he did not seem to use them within their Eastern context, believing that these divisions were misunderstandings. Higgins acknowledged that the Hindu system adopted 'such very long periods' which he attributed to their misunderstanding of the Neros cycle and by multiplying the neros by ten, though he explained that they were merely trying to embrace 'every periodical movement or apparent aberration' in their chronology.⁸⁴ Blavatsky's philosophy of time in *Isis Unveiled* seemed to have been based largely upon Higgins' cyclical time which she connected to these Eastern yugs and the vast periods of time that accompanied these cycles. In *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), she would fully assimilate her philosophy of time with one Eastern text in particular the *Vishnu Purana*; however, at this stage she was content to merely prove that Higgins was wrong without suggesting any better time divisions or numerical explanations. Understanding this difference of opinion, it seemed that Blavatsky dismissed Higgins' philosophy of neros not his philosophy of cycles which was exhibited in the following quote:

These ciphers are not fanciful, but founded upon actual astronomical calculations, as has been demonstrated by S. Davis. Many a scientist, *Higgins among others, notwithstanding their researches, has been utterly perplexed as to which of these was the secret cycle.*⁸⁵ Bunsen has demonstrated that the Egyptian priests, who made the cyclic notations, kept them always in the profoundest mystery. Perhaps their difficulty arose from the fact that the calculations of the ancients applied equally to the spiritual progress of humanity as to the physical. It will not be difficult to understand the close correspondence drawn by the ancients between the cycles of nature and of mankind, if we keep in mind their belief in the constant and all potent influences of the planets upon the fortunes of humanity. *Higgins justly believed that the cycle of the Indian system, of 432,000, is the true key of the secret cycle.*⁸⁶ *But his failure in trying to decipher it was made apparent; for as it pertained to the mystery of the creation, this cycle was the most inviolable of all* (emphasis added).⁸⁷

Blavatsky seemingly claimed in this work that the Indian system contained the truth of all chronologies even if she had not figured out the specifics. It should also be noted that Higgins continually considered the neros to be the true key towards

⁸⁴ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 176–77.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 32.

understanding time, not the 432,000 year period as implied by Blavatsky (he divided 432,000 into increments of 600 years); contrastingly, Blavatsky noted the importance of understanding the 'secret cycle'.⁸⁸ She later attempted to divide time in her own way, validating her cosmology and metaphysics using the yuga system.

At this point (in 1877), it was enough merely to criticize Higgins, as she had not yet figured out how to reconcile the world chronologies into one system. She maintained that Higgins' interpretation of the Indian system and this mysterious cycle was incorrect. His 'failure in trying to decipher it was made apparent; for as it pertained to the mystery of the creation, this cycle was the most inviolable of all.'⁸⁹ The issue here appeared to concern a prevailing belief that there was a way of dividing time into cycles that would allow an individual to unlock a hidden meaning behind their history. Higgins developed his own solution to this issue in the cycle of Neros, validating this belief by noting that all of the eastern Yugas were divisible by the cycle of Neros (600).⁹⁰

Blavatsky disagreed with Higgins and suggested that his erroneous claim resulted 'from the fact that the calculations of the ancients applied equally to the spiritual progress of humanity as to the physical.'⁹¹ According to Blavatsky, there was a clear distinction between spiritual evolution and physical evolution, an idea seemingly derived from her background in Spiritualism. Thus, Higgins' misunderstanding stemmed from his inability to ascertain the differences between cosmological and earthly time (i.e., his inconsideration of the descent/ascent of the soul from spirit).

Another example of Blavatsky's criticism of Higgins was exemplified in the following quote:

In the first book of Manu we read: 'Know that the sum of 1,000 divine ages, composes the totality of one day of Brahma; and that one night is equal to that day.' One thousand divine ages is equal to 4,320,000,000 of human years, in the Brahmanical calculations... Throughout the whole immense period of progressive creation, covering 4,320,000,000 years, ether, air, water, and fire (heat), are constantly forming matter under the never-ceasing impulse of the Spirit... this computation, which was secret and which is hardly hinted at even now, led Higgins into the error of dividing every ten

⁸⁸ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 176–77, 206, 558.

⁸⁹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 32.

⁹⁰ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 176.

⁹¹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 32.

ages into 6,000 years. Had he added a few more ciphers to his sums he might have come nearer to a correct explanation of the neroses, or secret cycles.⁹²

Again, Higgins' 'nero' calculations are mentioned and dismantled in this case because he did not add enough ciphers (i. e. he missed the mark). Otherwise, he would have come to understand the secret cycle which Blavatsky herself claimed to know, but failed to reveal in *Isis Unveiled*. It seemed that Blavatsky not only criticized Higgins' theories in order to show that she was aware of his writings, but to insist on her own originality and superior understanding of the ancient wisdom tradition. Still, Blavatsky relied on Higgins' work using it as a blueprint to construct her own theories on time and chronology.

Despite the vast amount of time and preparation that went into writing the *Anacalypsis*, Higgins himself noted the impossibility of connecting the various world chronologies – in his conclusion to book five:

The above is quite enough to show the utter hopelessness of making out a system of chronology...can anything be devised which shall raise a stronger presumption, that a system of chronology never was the leading object of the books? The whole tends to support the doctrine of nearly all the learned men of antiquity, that, like the Mythological histories of the Gentile nations, a secret doctrine was concealed under the garb of history. It may be considered certain from the above, that no dependence can be placed on any system of Chronology, and that there is no hope whatever of ascertaining the truth, unless some person shall be able to devise a plan of proceeding different in principle from any thing which has hitherto been adopted.⁹³

It appears obvious that the main justification for Higgins' (and Blavatsky's) attempt to connect the various chronologies and events of history was his belief that 'a secret doctrine was concealed under the garb of history.'⁹⁴ This above passage provides a clue towards understanding Blavatsky's teachings; this 'secret doctrine' was the very subject Blavatsky would later reveal in her 1888 work that took the

⁹² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 272.

⁹³ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 186.

⁹⁴ 'What we desire to prove is that underlying every ancient popular religion was the same ancient wisdom-doctrine, one and identical, professed and practiced by the initiate of every country, who alone were aware of its existence and importance. To ascertain its origin, and the precise age in which it was matured, is now beyond human possibility. A single glance, however, is enough to assure one that it could not have attained marvelous perfection in which we find it pictured to us in the relics of the various esoteric systems, except after a succession of ages.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 99.

phrase as its title. Higgins' remark indicated that this 'secret doctrine' included the key towards understanding the chronology of the world; this connection would reconcile not only the world religions and their *mythos* but their chronologies as well. This was a feat that Higgins did not think would ever be achieved, but Blavatsky would solve this problem by 1888 with the creation of her own system. Thus, a philosophy of time seemed to undergird Blavatsky's ancient wisdom tradition and its teachings from the very beginning which can be traced back to Higgins and this specific challenge — Higgins implied that no one could unlock the secret ('devise a plan') to the world's religious chronology.⁹⁵ It seems possible that the above quote by Higgins could have served as the inspiration for Blavatsky's title *The Secret Doctrine*. It remains curious that most previous researchers have neglected Godfrey Higgins as a key source on Blavatsky even though he heavily influenced not just *Isis Unveiled*, but her entire view of comparative philosophy and mythography.

Blavatsky maintained that the one true universal religion must contain one universal historical chronology and she made it her mission to discover it. Blavatsky would later harmonize the various world chronologies (mirroring Higgins), but in *Isis Unveiled* it seemed enough for her to simply note the different theories of time division. It was in the Mahatma letters where Blavatsky began (whether directly or indirectly) to build her own cosmological structure of time and evolution that would be completed in her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky criticised Godfrey Higgins' time-cycles in order to prove that her view of time was distinct and therefore no one could accuse her of just rehashing what Higgins had said before, though in reality her alterations were minimal.

To summarize, Blavatsky used Higgins in creating her concept of time, though she disagreed with his division of time into 'neros'. Blavatsky's main disagreement was due to Higgins' misinterpretations of ancient philosophies and his lack of understanding spiritual evolution. Blavatsky argued that the chronologies of the world could be harmonized through a proper understanding of the cycles. It seemed obvious that Blavatsky's structure of time was strongly

⁹⁵ Higgins concluded after his long, complex attempt to connect all of the various chronologies of Ussher, Eusebius, Colonel Wilford, Sir William Jones, Marco Cassini, and William Drummond by noting the impracticability of deriving such a connection.

influenced by Higgins.⁹⁶ This reliance is evidenced in the fact that Blavatsky continuously referenced his calculations even though she may have disapproved with his conclusions. Higgins himself noted that ‘I cannot help suspecting there is still a *secret doctrine*, known only in the deep recesses, the crypts, of Thibet, St. Peters, and the Cremlin’ — Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* published by a Russian no less could be seen as a direct response to this statement, evidencing again the enormous influence that Higgins maintained on Blavatsky as well as the importance of time in her writings.⁹⁷ Higgins provided two main elements of a *prisca theologia* and cyclical time — ideas that would figure prominently into Blavatsky’s philosophy of time.⁹⁸ Having noted and examined some of Blavatsky’s key sources and identified them as Western, now attention must be focused upon the elements of time which were based largely on Western philosophy (Platonic and Plotinian) and Blavatsky’s use of them in developing her philosophy of time and salvation within the pages of *Isis Unveiled*.

III. Conclusion

This chapter has traced Blavatsky’s early view of time to contemporary comparative mythographers and Spiritualism, proving that during this stage, time was not a central theme in Blavatsky’s teachings (though it would soon become one through the direct influence of Higgins). Blavatsky’s philosophy of time from 1877 was deeply rooted in her religious identification — Spiritualism which she identified with as early as 1860. As previously noted, practitioners of Spiritualism were not interested in defining periods and divisions of time in their writings; it was this lack of a clearly developed philosophical sophistication within Spiritualism that

⁹⁶ This descent/ascent theory could be found in various Spiritualist writings, including Gerald Massey, *Concerning Spiritualism* (London: J. Burns, 1872), p. 55; Andrew Jackson David, *A Stellar Key to the Summer-Land* (Boston: William White and Company, 1867), pp. 55–56, 62, 89, 140, 181; Emma Hardinge Britten, *Art Magic, or Mundane, Sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism* (Chicago, IL: Progressive Thinker Publishing House, 1909), pp. 25, 216.

⁹⁷ Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, I, 204. A similarity between Blavatsky’s view of time and Higgins was observed even in the nineteenth century, as noted in an article published in an 1894 edition of the Theosophical Society’s periodical *Lucifer* in an article titled ‘Occult Indications in Ancient Astronomy’ written by S. Stuart. S. Stuart, ‘Occult Indications in Ancient Astronomy’, *Lucifer*, 15.80 (1894), 101–09.

⁹⁸ Marc Demarest traced the influences of Britten’s *Art Magic* and noted Higgin’s influence on Emma Britten whose texts heavily influenced Blavatsky. See Marc Demarest, Introduction to *Art Magic* ([n. p.] Createspace Independent Publishing, 2011), pp. iii-iv (pp. xxx, xxxii).

seemed to push Blavatsky to establish a more advanced philosophical organization that provided safeguards for its members and practitioners. This society could withstand the rise of fraudulent accusations that plagued Spiritualism during this era — this organization was known as the Theosophical Society (established in 1875) which interjected the idea of elementals into Blavatsky's Western Esoteric flavor of Spiritualism, which she associated with her ancient wisdom tradition — her own reconceptualized *prisca theologia*.

Reforming Spiritualism provided Blavatsky with the opportunity to create her own modified view of spiritual evolution which she combined with the history of earlier comparative mythographers. After all, Blavatsky claimed that all religions maintained some form of the true ancient wisdom religion, so this universal connection seemed logical to her. The key elements of Blavatsky's philosophy of time were based primarily on Western sources, including Charles Bunsen, Charles Coleman, Isaac Cory, William Denton, John Draper, Godfrey Higgins, Louis Jacolliot, and Alfred Wallace, to name some of her more influential sources, all of whom were identified in William's Coleman famous source analysis. These writings provided Blavatsky with a basic outline for her philosophy of time, though she would add her own unique interpretation of them as she had with Higgins, thereby defining her own unique view and teachings. Now that Higgins has been identified and explored, a definition of Blavatsky's view of time must be clarified in order to appreciate the history and evolution of this philosophy.

CHAPTER 3

***Isis Unveiled* (1877): Blavatsky and Her Time Terminology**

In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky laid the foundation for what would become a key doctrine throughout her teachings — time and chronology. In keeping with the purpose of the previous chapter, understanding Blavatsky’s view of time at this stage remains crucial towards ascertaining its later importance. Her chronology constituted a response to the perceived Victorian materialist influence as well as recognized the religious movements that this time period birthed.

This chapter lays out a descriptive philosophical foundation on which later chapters will build, critique and analyze. In order to understand Blavatsky’s view of time, one must first wade through her dense writings to identify key technical terms and systems put forth as they will evolve into core doctrines later on (as such, this chapter is more descriptive than analytical). This chapter will show that Blavatsky’s view of time in *Isis Unveiled* was based on comparative mythography and a Western Neo-Platonic soteriology, yet it would become a very defining doctrine. The connection between Blavatsky’s writings and comparative mythography is not a novel idea (Joscelyn Godwin suggested this current in *The Theosophical Enlightenment* [1994]), but viewing it in light of Blavatsky’s philosophy of time is a new consideration. This chapter will seek to clearly identify the structure and order of Blavatsky’s cosmology, revealing a distinct purpose to all of this jargon.

I. Blavatsky’s Two Key Principles of Time

In *Isis Unveiled*, there were two main themes that serve as the basic structure for understanding Blavatsky’s philosophy of time. These two concepts further evidence a Western influence as they were derived from Neo-Platonic philosophy and were based largely on Blavatsky’s belief in the existence of an ancient, universal wisdom tradition which she was attempting to ‘unveil’ for humanity. Furthermore, these two principles remain directly inter-connected: 1) a belief in an

emanationist origin of the world and 2) a belief in the descent/ascent of spirit that goes through a system of spiritual evolution and soteriology.¹

1. Emanationist Origin

In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky believed strongly in an emanationist origin for the world.² The word ‘emanation’ was derived from the Latin term *emanare* which means to flow out, arise, or proceed. Emanation refers to the belief that the creation of the world occurred by a series of creations flowing out from the one supreme God. As this creative flow proceeded onward, it gradually descended further away from the divine source; therefore, the early emanations are closer to the divine than the later emanations.

This idea had its roots in the theory of forms and universals which was derived from the Platonic separation of spirit (ideal form) from matter (imperfect form). Plato (429–347 BCE) promoted a philosophy which was later known as the theory of forms. His teachings implied that the earthly world was merely an imperfect form of an ideal heavenly world.³ This heavenly world was known as the world of forms. Each object in the earthly world corresponded to a heavenly object or form.⁴ Plato described this world of forms as a pristine region of the physical

¹ These two ‘motifs’ were recognized by Brendan French in his thesis which analyzed Blavatsky’s view of time and her belief in the Masters. He noted the following three trends: an emanationist cosmogony, heavenly ascent figurations, and the ‘Age theory.’ Brendan James French, ‘The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater’, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2000), I, 190–91.

² H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1877), I, 154, 285, 295.

³ The concept of an imperfect copy and its connection to Platonic forms is what Faivre classifies under his idea of ‘Living Nature’. This concept is the second characteristic for defining Western esotericism. See Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), pp. 11–2.

⁴ *Plato’s Phaedo*, trans. by E.M. Cope (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1875), p. 43. In *Phaedo*, Socrates describes these ideas (forms) by looking at the idea of universal beauty: ‘here is nothing else that makes (something) beautiful but that ideal beauty, but only to the extent that it is by the absolute beauty that all beautiful things are made beautiful.’ See *Plato’s Phaedo*, p. 79. In other words, there exists a universal idea (form) of what constitutes beauty by which to say something is beautiful (a general/universal agreement as to what constitutes beauty). Then, in the *Republic*, Socrates attempts to prove his ‘theory of forms’ to the young Glaucon. Here Socrates uses an analogy of God creating the idea of a bed. Though there are many beds, God created the perfect idea (form) of a bed. This is because God ‘desired to be the real maker of a real bed, not a particular maker of a particular bed, and therefore He created a bed which by nature is one only.’ See *The Republic of Plato: With an Analysis and Introduction*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Carendon Press, 1881), p. 300 and John Gregory, *The Neoplatonists* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1991).

universe located above the surface of the Earth.⁵ This suggested the existence of a heavenly world where everything existed in its perfect form. Plato further speculated that the human soul had the ability to identify these forms and that their composition was eternal and belonged to the heavenly world, whereas the body was earthly and material.⁶

Plato's teachings on forms and ideas were expounded upon by Plotinus (ca. 205–270 CE), who added his own interpretation and ideas maintaining that 'everything here below derives from above there, and is more beautiful in the superior world; for forms here below are mingled with matter; on high, they are pure.'⁷ Plotinus' focus on the doctrine of emanation established a hierarchical structure of the universe.⁸ He explained the process of emanation in the following excerpt:

The only hypothesis left is that all things were within some one other thing. ('Being') was next to this other thing (matter), and as no interval separated them, He suddenly begot an image or representation of Himself, either by Himself, or by the intermediation of the Universal Soul, or of some particular soul...⁹

All beings were the result of divine emanations from the supreme divinity. As the process of emanation continued onwards, each subsequent emanation was being mixed with more and more matter and was therefore less spiritual. An important aspect of this philosophy was the belief that matter was 'impure.'

Plotinus explained that this philosophy of emanation consisted of a definitive three-tiered hierarchical system based upon Intellect which contained the perfect archetypes of all forms and individuals, the world soul, and the lower soul which created the material world.¹⁰ A similar emanationist explanation for the creation of the universe was employed by Blavatsky and became the cornerstone in her philosophy of time.

⁵ 'But those that are found to have passed a preeminently holy life—these are they that are delivered and *set* free from these our earthly regions...and attain to that pure dwelling-place above, and make their abode upon the surface of the earth.' *Plato's Phaedo*, p. 102.

⁶ *Plato's Phaedo*, pp. 78–81.

⁷ *Plotinus Complete Works: In Chronological Order Grouped in Four Periods*, trans. by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie, 4 vols (Apline, NJ: Platonist Press, 1918), II, 562.

⁸ This is referred to as the concept of 'Imagination and Mediations' and it is the third attribute of Western Esotericism as classified by Faivre in Faivre, *Accessing Western Esotericism*, p. 12.

⁹ *Plotinus Complete Works*, II, 562–63.

¹⁰ *Plotinus: The Enneads*, trans. by Stephen Mackenna (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 350, 401, 481–82, 502.

Blavatsky's Conceptualization

The view that each subsequent emanation was less pure because it contained less spirituality (and more materiality) seemed to have influenced Blavatsky's views on the composition of the soul/monad as it evolved through its spiritual evolution (later defined as various rounds and root races).¹¹ As implied above, and especially in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky loosely followed Plotinus' and Plato's distinction between the heavenly, spirit world and the earthly, material world. In Blavatsky's philosophy, spirit was higher up the evolutionary scale than matter. It seemed that Platonic philosophy laid the foundation for this type of thought, yet this separation of matter and spirit was indirect as this theory could also be found throughout the early Spiritualist movement, most notably in the teachings of the early Spiritualist leader Andrew Jackson Davis. It would be a futile task to trace Blavatsky's conceptualization of this idea to any one precursor as this doctrine is found in many differing Western philosophies, including Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Spiritualism.¹² Despite the sources of this anti-materialistic belief, it seems fair to deduce that Blavatsky's concept of emanation was based upon the philosophy of Plotinus, which was connected to Plato's theory of forms whether directly or indirectly.¹³

Evolution and Emanation

For Blavatsky, the process of emanation seemed to be a historical process and a cause of creation (life-forms) that became connected to her notion of evolution. This connection was noted in the introduction of *Isis Unveiled*: 'Evolution began

¹¹ See the section on time in the Mahatma Letters. Blavatsky is adamantly opposed to 'materialism'. See Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 479–81.

¹² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 285, 309, 429; II, 112, 275, 320. See Andrew Jackson Davis, *A Stellar Key to the Summer-land* (Boston: William White & Company, 1867), pp. 64–65.

¹³ It is possible that Blavatsky's view of emanation was derived from her understanding of the kabbalah, though even many kabbalists would trace their belief in emanation from Plotinus (except for the kabbalists of Gerona who held a slightly different view of emanation and believed that the emanation remained with God and did not move away from him—though it seems plausible that even this altered view of emanation may have been derived from Plotinus' theory of emanation). See Gershom Scholem, *Origins of The Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. Allan Arkush (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 448. Most of Blavatsky's understanding of Plato's philosophies came from Alexander Wilder (1823–1908). Wilder was a noted American Platonist and was instrumental in helping Blavatsky write *Isis Unveiled*. Given Wilder's heavy influence upon the writing of *Isis* it is difficult to say how much Blavatsky actually knew of Plato and Plotinus independent from Wilder's corrections.

with them (the Unknowable Being and the Creative Being) from spirit, which descending lower and lower down, assumed at last a visible and comprehensible form, and became matter. Arrived at this point they speculated in the Darwinian method, but on a far more large scale.¹⁴ The difference between emanation and evolution was that “the evolutionist stops all inquiry at the borders of “the Unknowable” the Emanationist believes that nothing can be evolved...except it has first been involved, thus indicating that life is from a spiritual potency above the whole’; thus, emanation explained the spiritual evolution (a descent from spirit followed by an ascent back) of the soul.¹⁵ This connection reveals Blavatsky’s combination of mythology (emanation) with history (evolution).

In the first volume of *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky continually attempted to critique Darwin’s major work *On The Origin of Species*.¹⁶ It remains apparent that, while arguing against the materialist conclusions that could be derived from Darwin’s work, Blavatsky assimilated Darwin’s concept of evolution into her own *mythos*, which included a detailed cosmological construction of the universe.¹⁷ Darwinian evolution only explained life in the physical phase of evolution (i.e. the descent into matter), but this was only a tiny piece of a much larger picture in Blavatsky’s spiritual evolution (ascent back into spirit) and her cyclical view of time. Furthermore, in Blavatsky’s philosophy of evolution in *Isis Unveiled* (and her subsequent writings) there was the concept of a descent away from pure spirit into physical evolution, which Blavatsky acknowledged conformed in some way to Darwin’s theory of evolution. This descent into matter would be followed by an ascent back to spirit which was based heavily on her conceptions of emanations and forms (this concept will be referred to throughout this paper as ‘descent/ascent’). The combination of emanation and a cyclical view of time and its importance on Blavatsky’s time scheme has been observed by Garry Trompf, who noted that its originality was in ‘the *combination* of the leitmotifs of cosmic ascent-

¹⁴ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, pp. xxx—xxxI.

¹⁵ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, pp. xxxII.

¹⁶ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 216.

¹⁷ Blavatsky clearly favored Alfred Wallace over Darwin in *Isis Unveiled* (having mentioned Darwin fifteen times and Wallace twenty-five times); however, in *The Secret Doctrine*, Darwin (fifty-two times) was mentioned many more times than Wallace (seventeen times). For her view of evolution see Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions*, p. 216.

descent' and that 'macro-cyclism is the key to Blavatsky's thought';¹⁸ Trompf identified this connection to Eliphas Lévi but never mentioned any connection to a Neo-platonic soteriology. The descent/ascent of the soul within cycles of time served as the basic foundational premise in Blavatsky's philosophy of time and will serve as the basic tenet for her later complex views of time, evolution, and cosmology throughout her later writings.

2. The Spiritual Descent/Ascent

The concept of emanation in *Isis Unveiled* occurred within cyclical time and within Blavatsky's soteriological framework (reabsorption into eternity).¹⁹ Blavatsky's soteriology was linked with her belief in the descent/ascent of spirit. This idea maintained that spirit had become tainted with matter through this process of emanation. A connection between the concepts of emanation, descent/ascent, and time are seen throughout *Isis Unveiled*; one such example is noted below and contextualized into pre-history:

The 'coats of skin,' mentioned in the third chapter of *Genesis* as given to Adam and Eve, are explained by certain ancient philosophers to mean the fleshy bodies with which, in the progress of the cycles, the progenitors of the race became clothed. They maintained that the godlike physical form became grosser and grosser, until the bottom of what may be termed the last spiritual cycle was reached, and mankind entered upon the ascending arc of the first human cycle. *Then began an uninterrupted series of cycles or yugas [sic]; the precise number of years of which each of them consisted remaining an inviolable mystery within the precincts of the sanctuaries and disclosed only to the initiates.* As soon as humanity entered upon a new one, the stone age, with which the preceding cycle had closed, began to gradually merge into the following and next higher age. With each successive age, or epoch, men grew more refined, until the acme of perfection possible in that particular cycle had been reached (emphasis added).²⁰

Notice the mystery of cycles that Blavatsky associated with time in this passage as well as her progressive view of evolution. This above excerpt demonstrated Blavatsky's cyclical view of the descent of the soul into matter (and away from spirit). It is also noteworthy that all of humanity was involved in this cyclical

¹⁸ Garry W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner, and Guenon', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), pp. 269–96 (pp. 278–79).

¹⁹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 7.

²⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 293–94. See also Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 51.

process; this idea would take centre stage in Blavatsky's later conceptualizations of progressive root races and rounds that fit into this same descent/ascent framework.

Both the philosophy of emanation and the theory of forms appear prominent in Blavatsky's development of time in *Isis Unveiled*. It is curious that, unlike her chief source on time Godfrey Higgins, Blavatsky did not suggest any numerical figures for these time periods at this particular point, only the initiates knew and they had not yet divulged any numerical figures to the world.²¹ Drawing upon these Neo-Platonic elements, Blavatsky postulated a view of time that started with the soul originating through the process of emanation from the One Universal Being in its original composition — spirit (positive) which would eventually descended into matter (negative). This descent/ascent from spirit influenced the composition of each subsequent human race that followed this guiding principle. What occurred after the soul had exited this period of objective time (i. e. Blavatsky's view of soteriology) will be explained in a later section, but first it is important to explain how Blavatsky connected Platonism to Eastern religions and to identify which sources Blavatsky utilised in constructing her semi-Neo-Platonic philosophy of time.

Neo-Platonic Sources

Blavatsky's knowledge of Platonic and Plotinian philosophy seemed to have been derived largely from three sources that were identified by William E. Coleman: Eduard Zeller (1814–1908), Benjamin Franklin Cocker (1869–1883), and the noted Neo-Platonist, Thomas Taylor (1758–1835). Taylor seems to have been the most influential of these sources, having written extensively on Plotinus and having translated many of his works into English, including *On the Descent of the Soul* in 1794.²² Blavatsky wrote admiringly of Taylor throughout *Isis Unveiled*, maintaining

²¹ 'The precise number of years of which each of them consisted remaining an inviolable mystery within the precincts of the sanctuaries and disclosed only to the initiates.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 293.

²² A complete annotated bibliography of Taylor's work has been compiled noting the following translations: Thomas Taylor, *Concerning the Beautiful: Or a Paraphrase translation from the Greek of Plotinus, Ennead I, Book VI* (London, 1787); *An Essay on the Beautiful: From the Greek of Plotinus* (London, 1792); *Five Books of Plotinus: viz. On Felicity; on the Nature and Origin of Evil; On Providence; on the Nature; Contemplation and the One; on the Descent of the Soul* (London, 1794); Porphyrius' *Life of Plotinus: Select Works* (1817), *On Suicide* (London, 1834), Three

another indirect connection — Taylor was a ‘learned and excellent friend’ of Godfrey Higgins.²³ Despite this connection, Taylor would have conceivably been known to Blavatsky through the influence of her editor, the Platonist Alexander Wilder.

It has already been observed that according to Blavatsky, Wilder exerted an enormous influence on her during the writing of *Isis Unveiled* and assisted in editing and organizing this work. Blavatsky even claimed that he had written the introduction ‘Before the Veil,’ though Wilder himself seemed to deny this role.²⁴ One fact remains undeniable: Wilder was connected to the early Theosophical Society, having served as one of its early Vice-Presidents and firmly defended its teachings, as he argued in an article in the *Spiritualist*, claiming Theosophy was a ‘doctrine for the learned rather than dogmas for the unlearned...’ and expressing that ‘there is no antagonism to modern science where it has any real exactness.’²⁵ Wilder’s remarks confirm that Theosophy claimed to have been an empirical movement connected to science and evolution and served as a complex Victorian mythology.

This connection notwithstanding, Wilder retained a tremendous amount of respect and appreciation for Taylor, exhibited in his introduction to Taylor’s dissertation *The Eleusianian and Bacchich Mysteries*. In this work, Wilder wrote that while Taylor’s interpretations were not generally accepted by classical scholars, Taylor ‘was endowed with a superior qualification’ and that while ‘others

Treatises of Plotinus ‘and one on the descent of the soul’ (Osceola, MO, 1880). See *Thomas Taylor The Platonist 1758–1835: List of Original Works and Translations*, comp. by Ruth Balch (Chicago: [n. pub.], 1917).

²³ Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis: An Attempt To Draw Aside the Veil of The Saitic Isis*, 2 vols (London: Longman Press, 1846), I, 816.

²⁴ Blavatsky claimed that: ‘it is Professor Wilder who did the most for me. It is he who made the excellent *Index*, who corrected the Greek, Latin and Hebrew words, suggested quotations and wrote the greater part of the *Introduction* “Before the Veil”...it was Dr. Wilder’s express wish that his name should not appear except in footnotes.’ Helena Blavatsky, ‘My Books,’ in *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings: 1890–1891*, comp. by Boris De Zirkoff, 15 vols (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), XIII, 191–93 (p. 198). Alexander Wilder noted a different opinion: ‘I would hesitate, likewise, to be considered in any noteworthy sense as an editor of the work. It is true that...I was asked to read the proof sheets and make sure that the Hebrew words and terms belonging to other languages were correctly given by the printer, but I added nothing, and do not remember that I ventured to control anything that was contributed to the work. Without her knowledge and approval, such action would have been reprehensible.’ Alexander Wilder, ‘How “Isis Unveiled” Was Written’, *The Word*, 7.2 (1908), 77–87 (p. 83).

²⁵ Alexander Wilder, ‘The Soul and the Spirit’, *The Spiritualist*, 12.8 (1878), 89–90 (p. 89).

may have known more Greek...he knew more Plato.'²⁶ Wilder viewed the 'later Platonists' as primarily universalists in nature bringing 'to it [principle of truth] in their proper order and relations all the sublimest studies and precepts existing in the various religious and philosophic system of the different regions of the earth.'²⁷ This same description could also be applied to Blavatsky and her own attempts at comparative mythography; thus, Wilder serves as an indirect bridge between Blavatsky and Platonism.²⁸

This study is not the first attempt to suggest the connection between Wilder's Neo-Platonism (through Taylor) and Blavatsky's outlook of time and chronology. In his *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time*, Joscelyn Godwin noted the heavy influence that Wilder (and therefore Taylor's 'Platonic chronology') had on Blavatsky, though he overlooks the specific significance of the philosophy of time on Blavatsky's view of evolution.²⁹ Even the nineteenth-century comparative mythographers noted the similarities between Greek philosophy (Neo-Platonism) and Eastern religious traditions, yet Blavatsky took this as validation for the superiority of Eastern philosophy. She maintained her belief in the superiority of the East, a theme promoted throughout *Isis Unveiled* and seemingly based on the writings of Louis Jacoliot, as noted in the previous chapter.

In his doctoral thesis, Brendan French suggested several other possible sources from whom Blavatsky may have derived this descent/ascent principle (combined with progressive evolution) which became a major concept in her philosophy of time. These included: Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), and Eliphas Lévi. French's conclusions were based upon the work of Garry Trompf, who noted that the influence of Lévi and Boehme remain critical to understanding Blavatsky's view of descent/ascent and even suggested the influence of the Freemason and co-founder of the Golden Dawn William Wynn Westcott (1848–1925), noting that 'these three sources...convey both a vision of cosmic-descent/ascent, whereby the Divine becomes expressed within matter until

²⁶ Thomas Taylor, *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries: A Dissertation*, 3rd edition (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1875), pp. xix–xx.

²⁷ Alexander Wilder, 'The Later Platonist', *Bibliotheca Platonica: An Exponent of the Platonic Philosophy*, 1.3 (1890), 162–85 (pp. 162–63).

²⁸ Thomas Taylor, *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries: A Dissertation*, ed. by Alexander Wilder (New York: J. W. Bouton, 1891), pp. 89–90, 104–06.

²⁹ Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 66.

respiritualization takes place, and sense of great ages or aeonic pulsation through time.³⁰ As noted above, this framework was normative of Western esoteric writings and there are numerous sources from which Blavatsky could have derived her ideology of cosmic descent/ascent. While no one precursor can be identified in Blavatsky's writing, Trompf's focus on discovering Blavatsky's sources is admirable. This idea can be more fully explored in a thesis of this nature rather than an article where space and scope are severely limited.

Despite a similarity in all of these various individual philosophies of the descent/ascent of the soul and progressive spiritual evolution, it seemed that the majority of the figures mentioned by French were merely reconceptualizing the teachings of esoteric philosophy which seemed to have been the very project of his thesis (i. e. Blavatsky and her Masters presented a reconceptualized Hermetic mythology).³¹ French concluded that: 'Blavatsky embraced within her macrohistorical imaging a conceptual framework adopted from the core traditions of Western esotericism- traditions with which she was more than familiar...'³² Certainly, Blavatsky's use of these two concepts in her view of time confirmed the enormous debt Blavatsky owed to Western intellectual history; however, French's familiarity with Western texts has pushed him to hastily associate Blavatsky's macrocyclicist history (one aspect of her philosophy of time) with the 'most predictable place of all — the *Hermetica*.'³³ And that the 'evident cyclicisim of the Asclepian prophecies (from pristine purity to corruption, to annihilation, to rebirth) is the obvious contender for the provenance of such foundational *leitmotif* of esotericism.'³⁴ Though the influence of Hermes and the *Hermetica* on Western esotericism was imperative, French's statement that Blavatsky's view of cyclical time was derived largely from *Asclepius* appears too simplistic a solution for such a

³⁰ Garry W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner, and Guenon' in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, eds. Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), 269-296 (pp. 276–77).

³¹ French, 'The Theosophical Masters', I, pp. 225–26. Hanegraaff noted that: 'The so-called Neoplatonism of the romantics turned out to be something else: it constituted a religious philosophy with some resemblances to Neoplatonism, but was basically rooted in a completely different worldview, i.e. Hermeticism.' Wouter Hanegraaff, 'Romanticism and the Esoteric Tradition', in *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. by Roelof can den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 237–68 (p. 254).

³² Brendan French, 'The Mercurian Master: Hermes' Gift to the Theosophical Society', *Aries*, 1.2 (2001), 168-205 (p. 189).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

complex ideology. Certainly she borrowed the principles of emanation and ascent/descent, but these ideologies only provided a framework for her spiritual evolution. In response to French's conclusion on the Hermetic influence, this study has identified multiple sources that influenced Blavatsky's philosophy of time, most of them appearing more influential than the *Hermetica*. Indeed, at this stage Blavatsky's chronology and spiritual evolution appear to possess a stronger correlation to Victorian Spiritualism and comparative mythography than anything else.³⁵

At this juncture it is enough to note that evolution, emanation, and the wisdom tradition were all intricately connected to Blavatsky's philosophy of time, beginning in this early writing. Blavatsky's view of an emanationist origin for the world was connected to her belief in the ancient wisdom tradition (*prisca theologia*) and its ability to be recovered and 'unveiled'; her view of time appeared as a mixture of comparative mythography, Spiritualism and Neo-Platonism. Also, it has been suggested that Blavatsky associated the monad's descent into matter with her own interpretation of evolution, evidencing her own empirical explanations which assimilate modern scientific theories. Now that these main themes have been examined, Blavatsky's understanding of the universe must now be explained.

II. Blavatsky's Cosmological Construction of the Universe

1. Modified Spiritualism

As Blavatsky herself later noted, her view of time at this early point was largely indistinct (typical of Spiritualism) and was a syncretism of other writers. She clearly articulated the cosmological structure of the universe in the first volume of *Isis Unveiled* stating the following:

imagine a point in space as the primordial one; then with compasses draw a circle around this point; where the beginning and the end unite together, emanation and re-absorption meet. The circle itself is composed of innumerable smaller circles...each of these minor rings forms the belt of the goddess which represents that sphere. As the curve of the arc approaches the ultimate point of the semi circle- the nadir...the face of each successive goddess becomes more dark and hideous...every belt is covered with representations of plants, animals, and human beings...belonging to...the anthropology of that particular sphere. There is

³⁵ French, 'The Theosophical Masters', I, 218–21, 190–91.

a certain distance between each of the spheres, purposely marked; for after the accomplishment of the circles through various transmigrations, the soul is allowed a time of temporary nirvana during which space of time the atma loses all remembrance of past sorrows. The intermediate ethereal space is filled with strange beings.³⁶

This cosmology bears a striking resemblance to *Art Magic* written by Emma Hardinge Britten, who was able to release her works in a more expeditious manner through self-publishing. Britten noted a similar cosmology which illustrated her connection to Blavatsky (especially during this time period):

As it is above, so it is below-on earth as in the skies. The universe is an endless chain of worlds in which spiritual spheres above, and semi-spiritual spheres below, stretch away from the lowest tones of being to the highest, in which embryonic life is swarming upwards to manhood, as man himself aspires to spiritual existence beyond.³⁷

Blavatsky's cosmology and her belief in endless spheres seemed to have been typical of Spiritualism. Blavatsky elaborated upon this idea of spiritual evolution focusing on the individual (soul) as a form of Theosophical soteriology, and noting that after death the soul must undergo a temporal period of judgment and refinement.³⁸

Blavatsky's cosmological structure was defined as a 'circle composed of innumerable smaller circles.' The monad's mission was to traverse these innumerable spheres, occasionally stopping for a temporary period in Nirvana.³⁹ After death, the monad would wander through the region lying between the earth and moon in order to purify itself to be reborn on another sphere in the cycle known as the 'circle of necessity.'

The overall purpose of this process of spiritual evolution was the progression of the soul/monad and its eventual absorption into Eternal Rest,

³⁶ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 348. elipses added

³⁷ Britten, *Art Magic*, p. 256.

³⁸ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 284.

³⁹ Nirvana implies an absorption into God's own essence and being. See Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 310. The word monad is derived from the Greek word μονάς meaning one and was borrowed from the German mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), especially obvious in his work *La Monadologie* (1714). It is defined as 'the immortal part of man which reincarnates in the lower kingdoms, and gradually progresses through them to Man and then to the final goal Nirvana.' H. P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), p. 216.

though Blavatsky linked this belief to 'Plato, Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, the Eleatic schools of Greece, as well as the old Chaldean sacerdotal colleges' who

all taught the doctrine of the dual evolution; the doctrine of transmigration of souls referring only to the progress of man from world to world, after death here. Every philosophy worthy of the name taught that the spirit of man, if not the soul, was preexistent...nothing is eternal and unchangeable, save the Concealed Deity. Nothing that is finite—whether because it had a beginning, or must have an end can remain stationary. It must either progress or recede; and a soul which thirsts after a reunion with its spirit, which alone confers upon it immortality, must purify itself through cyclic transmigrations, onward toward the only Land of Bliss and Eternal Rest, called in the Sohar, 'The Palace of Love,'...in the Hindu religion, 'Moksha'; among the Gnostics, the 'Pleroma of eternal Light.'; and by the Buddhists, Nirvana. The Christian calls it the kingdom of heaven...⁴⁰ The soul cannot reach the abode of bliss, unless she has...the re-union of the soul with the substance from which she emanated-spirit. ⁴¹

Again Blavatsky's Spiritualist belief in endless worlds/spheres is exhibited. It also appears based upon this above quote that it was possible for the soul to obtain an eternal rest by being absorbed into the One Being (from which it had emanated) through the reuniting of the soul and the spirit. Yet this could only occur after continuing upon its descent/ascent. The soul, therefore, continued on in spiritualized worlds until it had achieved the necessary balance of spirit and could finally be absorbed into its divine source. Another aspect of this spiritual evolution is found in *Isis Unveiled* which confirmed that souls typically go to other more spiritualized planes after death rather than returning to earth.⁴²

2. Cyclical Time—Minor and Grand Cycles

In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky further described two types of cycles: minor and grand, both of which contained periods of activity/inactivity, along with partial and global cataclysms (pralayas), following the overriding, Neo-Platonic principle of the descent/ascent from spirit. A grand cycle was said to be composed of seven minor cycles. Blavatsky herself set up five systematic rules associated with her cyclical view of the universe including an descent/ascent within an eternal backdrop:

⁴⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 279—80.

⁴¹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 281.

⁴² Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived*, p. 39. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 351; II, 152, 280.

1. The universe was formed through evolution from pre-existent matter, 2. This universe is only one of an endless series of universes, 3. Eternity is pointed off into grand cycles, in each of which twelve transformations of our world occur (this would change to a series of seven in the Mahatma letters), following its partial destruction by fire and water, alternately. So that when a new minor period sets in, the earth is so changed, even geologically, as to be practically a new world. 4. These twelve transformations follow her view of descent/ascent of the soul; in other words, the first six transformations become gradually more material (descent), while the last six become gradually more spiritual (ascent), corresponding with the nature of man, 5. When the apex of the cycles is reached a gradual dissolution occurs [pralaya] and every living and objective form is destroyed; however, by this stage, humanity, animals, plants, and every atom is sent to an subjective realm.⁴³ One such subjective realm mentioned above was Blavatsky's belief in a place of judgment known as a 'circle of necessity,' which will be examined in the next section.

Blavatsky connected these cycles to Eastern religion and her own ideas of evolution: 'After a time of rest, say the Buddhists, when a new world becomes self-formed, the astral souls of animals, and of all beings, except such as have reached the highest Nirvana, will return on earth again to end their cycles of transformations, and become men in their turn.'⁴⁴ Blavatsky would later expand this evolutionary process of the monad into a longer process that went from mineral to animal to human evolution. She would also assimilate these periods into various 'rounds' and 'root-races'; however, at this stage Blavatsky seemingly utilized Eastern terms in conjunction with her own unique interpretations.

Using Neo-Platonic elements, Blavatsky postulated a view of time that divided humanity into races which followed this principle for the descent/ascent of the soul, though it had originated through the process of emanation from the One Universal Being which meant that humanity originated as spirit (positive) and descended into matter (negative). One day it would return to spirit and become re-

⁴³ Mostly paraphrased from Blavatsky. *Isis Unveiled*, II, 455–56.

⁴⁴ Blavatsky. *Isis Unveiled*, II, 455–56.

absorbed into the One, following a series of spiritual incarnations which Blavatsky began expressing in 'Eastern' terms.

III. Blavatsky, Time and Her Use of Eastern Terminology

1. Yugs: Time in *Isis Unveiled*: Eastern Terminology with a Western Twist

Blavatsky defined 'time' by employing multiple terms, several of which were Eastern in origin. Most of these terms could have been derived from either Higgins or Jaccoliot, while it seemed that Blavatsky's understanding of the yugs were (based upon her citation) taken directly from Charles Coleman's *The Mythology of the Hindus With Notices of Various Mountain and Island Tribes* (1832).⁴⁵ These terms included a kalpa, yug, and manwantara, all of which are expressed in yearly increments. One Kalpa is equal to 4,320,000,000 years and is divided into four lesser yugas known as the Satya-yug (1,728,000 years), Tretya Yug (1,296,000), Dvapa yug (864,000) and the Kali yug (432,000).⁴⁶ All of these yugs added together equal one Maha-yug or 4,320,000 years. A Manwantara equals 308,448,000 years (71.4 Maha-yugs). One 'day of Brahma' is equal to one 'night of Brahma' and each of these is equivalent to 4,320,000,000 years.⁴⁷ One term that Blavatsky borrowed from Higgins was a 'nero,' which signified a period of 600 years; then there was a 'saros' which was the equivalent of 3,600 years.⁴⁸ Blavatsky also seemingly coined a new technical term for time division, decimillennium, though this term was derived from the Greek prefix δέκα meaning ten; thus, a decimillennium was equal to one-hundred thousand (100,000) years.⁴⁹ These are the basic terms that she utilized in her explanation of time.

⁴⁵ Compare Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 32. to Charles Coleman, *The Mythology of the Hindus with Notices of Various Mountain and Island Tribes Inhabiting the Two Peninsulas of India and the Neighbouring Islands* (London: Parburry and Co., 1832), p. xiii.

⁴⁶ Again, Blavatsky's view of time was comparative in nature, as such, she had to prove that this chronology could be found in other cultures other than Eastern: 'The Chaldeans, in their turn, give precisely the same figures, minus one cipher, to wit: they make their 120 saros a total of 432,000 years.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 467.

⁴⁷ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 272.

⁴⁸ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31. Since the inception of this term by Blavatsky, it appears to have remained a strictly Theosophical word which could only be found in one work written by a known Russian esoteric philosopher, Peter D. Ouspensky (1878–1947). See P. D. Ouspensky, *Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World*, trans. by Nicholas Bessaraboff and Claude Bragdon (Rochester, NY: Manas Press, 1920), p. 113.

One of the appealing elements of these Eastern time divisions for Blavatsky seemed to be that they could explain a materialist and individualistic shift in Victorian culture (i. e. the Kali Yug explained the reason why humanity was focused on the physical/material instead of the spiritual). In Blavatsky's philosophy, humanity's spiritual and physical evolution were directly connected to each other e. g. religion and history. This belief illustrated Blavatsky's critique of nineteenth century culture: she regarded it as heavily materialistic and dismal. Blavatsky referred to it as 'the age of doubt'; this belief also brought hope as it showed that this age of darkness, misery, and sorrow was only temporary and would be followed by a golden age; thus, time was the instrument that would provide deliverance/salvation.⁵⁰ Blavatsky admitted that her interpretation of 'the four ages of the Hindu chronology' was a 'more philosophical idea than appears on the surface,' evidencing her scavenger approach to these sources.⁵¹ Eastern time divisions could also explain the degeneration of the human life-span, which corresponded with an Indian view of yugs and Blavatsky's cyclical and progressive view of evolution.⁵²

In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky considered an Eastern view of time and apologetically defined and defended the Hindu chronology in light of the accepted literal Genesis chronology; she compared the Hindu view of time to the Greek, Roman, and Jewish chronologies, noting her disdain of Christianity and its chronology, which was a recurring theme throughout this work. The following passage proves that *Isis* primarily presented a comparative mythography in the spirit of Godfrey Higgins, utilizing Eastern terms to validate her own agenda:

The 'ages' of the Hindus differ but little from those of the Greeks, Romans, and even the Jews. We include the Mosaic computation advisedly, and with intent to prove our position. The chronology which separates Moses from the creation of the world by *only four generations* seems ridiculous, merely because the Christian clergy would enforce it upon the world literally. The kabalists know that these generations stand for ages of the world. The allegories which, in the Hindu calculations, embrace the whole stupendous sweep of the four ages, are cunningly made in the Mosaic books, through the obliging help of the *Masorah*, to cram into the small period of two millenniums and a half (2513)!

⁵⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 275.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 469.

The exoteric plan of the *Bible* was made to answer also to four ages. Thus, they reckon the Golden Age from Adam to Abraham; the silver, forward, the iron. But the secret computation is quite different, and does not vary at all from the zodiacal calculations of the Brahmans. We are in the Iron Age, or Kali-Yug, but it began with Noah, the mythical ancestor of our race.⁵³

Blavatsky believed that the Hindu system of chronology held a more accurate division of time (which aligned more closely with nineteenth-century scientific theories of origins since the age of the earth was older than a literal reading of the Bible suggests) despite her seeming reluctance to fully adopt it at this early stage. It could be argued that *Isis Unveiled* presented Blavatsky's comparative mythography. She did not fully assimilate Eastern time divisions at this point and it was not until the Oriental shift that she would integrate this tradition more fully into her philosophy.⁵⁴ While Blavatsky utilized some Eastern terms within this passage, her view of Eastern time was rudimentary and her ideologies seemed better connected to Western sources at this stage. Brendan French noted this fact:

...In reality, the Indic materials at this point add little other than a vocabulary to conceptual figurations whose grammar was already available from classical models of time and history, such as those of Hesiod (c. 750 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (384–355 B.C.E.), or from the expansive visions of such luminaries of esotericism as Boehme and Swedenborg.⁵⁵

French went on to note that Blavatsky's employment of Eastern terminology was not merely to evidence that India was the cradle of civilization, but also to show that Blavatsky's wisdom tradition was universal in scope and transcended religious boundaries. French implied that Blavatsky connected her philosophy of time to the ancient wisdom tradition. This conclusion summarized the main goal of *Isis Unveiled*: to prove that an ancient wisdom tradition existed that undergirded Spiritualism through a comparative view of religion. Blavatsky even knew where it could be rediscovered- in India.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 443. Blavatsky's pattern of using Genesis to explain her view of time is evidenced in this above quote.

⁵⁴ Though the *Vishnu Purana* was known to Blavatsky before 1886 (see H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Puranas On The Dynasties of the Moryas and the Koothoomi', *Collected Writings: 1883-1884-1885*, ed. by Boris de Zirkoff, 15 vols (Pasadena: CA: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), VI, 40–42), according to a letter sent to A. P. Sinnett she received her own copy of this Purana around March of 1886. See *The Letters of HP Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. by A. T. Barker (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1973), p. 197.

⁵⁵ French, *The Theosophical Masters*, I, 116–17.

Despite the universal scope of this ancient wisdom tradition, it appeared that Blavatsky's philosophy of time was almost wholly influenced by Western sources and ideologies and Eastern terms were merely added to give an Oriental flavor; thus, her philosophy (of time particularly) reflected a Western influence. Now that Blavatsky's time divisions have been explored, some main 'Eastern' terms that Blavatsky reconceptualized and connected with time will now be analyzed.

2. Day and Night of Brahma

In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky promoted an infinite spiritual evolution through various cycles.⁵⁶ Outside of this infinite realm there existed an ultimate cause and sustainer of the universe. This Divine Being was thought to be infinite, unknowable, and eternal. This Being was the one Cause and the original form out of which everything emanated; this divinity was outside of time, space, and any other conceivable human method of measurement. Though this One unknowable 'deity' is the only constant and unchanging being within Blavatsky's continuously evolving view of time, its eternal creative force was subjected to cyclical periods of rest and activity that affected the timing of the universe.⁵⁷ Two of the key elements associated with Blavatsky's philosophy of time are exhibited, including a descent (followed by an ascent) and a belief in emanation which she connected to an Eastern deity — Brahma.⁵⁸

A cyclical view of time was further illustrated through the Eastern concept of a Day and Night of Brahma. There are two periods associated with cyclical time in *Isis Unveiled*: activity (Day of Brahma/evolution on spheres) and inactivity (Night of Brahma/ no evolution on sphere). However, Blavatsky continuously harmonized the night of Brahma with the biblical Genesis cosmology. Periods of activity were separated from periods of inactivity which followed the cosmic rest (pralaya).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 206–07; II, 219.

⁵⁷ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 94, 407; II, 219, (First Cause) 266–67, 273, 311.

⁵⁸ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 272–73.

⁵⁹ There are two distinct pralayas: a maha (great) pralaya and a minor pralaya. See Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, p. 24. The concept of cyclical rest and activity are not unique to Eastern philosophy and are notable in Robert Fludd and also Jewish (Lurianic) Kabbalah (Tzim Tzum). Also, note the writings of the evolutionist Alfred Wallace: 'all nature is full of rhythmic movements of infinitely varied kinds, degrees and durations. All the motions and function of living things are periodic; growth and repair, assimilation and waste, go on alternately....All kinds of stimulus must be of short duration or injurious results follow...the advantage of darkness (gives) rest to all the senses and faculties of body and mind, and endowing us with renewed vigour for another period of activity and

Blavatsky used her allegorical interpretation of Genesis in order to defend her conceptualization of the Day and Night of Brahma and her view of time throughout *Isis Unveiled*, again evidencing her comparative approach to mythography and the influence of Godfrey Higgins. It is enough to merely show that Blavatsky linked the concept of activity and inactivity to both Western (days and nights in creation as told in Genesis) and the Eastern concepts (days and nights of Brahma) revealing that this concept of periodic destructions held precedence in comparative mythography.⁶⁰

3. Pralaya

A pralaya was a partial cataclysm that occurred after each minor cycle of the globe as exemplified in the flood of Noah, but a Maha-Pralaya (global cataclysm) occurred after a completed day of Brahma.⁶¹ Following this pralaya, 'new races of men and animals and a new flora evolve from the dissolution of the precedent ones,' mirroring a Darwinian form of evolution.⁶² Time was infinite and eternal, consisting of expanding worlds and cyclical cataclysms that included cyclical periods of rest and unrest. These periods were separated by the 'pralaya' — a period of dissolution when the pralaya acted as the catalyst for the night of Brahma. This is the polar, cosmological structure of the entire universe as a whole. The concept of activity and inactivity were also seen in the individual journey of the soul's evolution in the concept known as the 'circle of necessity'. One important point to remember was Blavatsky's view of cycles ended in a similar manner as Higgins had suggested — absorption back into the One; however, Blavatsky's limited knowledge of Eastern traditions led her to develop her own unique ideas which she connected to these Eastern terms/concepts. Blavatsky also believed in

enjoyment of life.' Wallace, *Man's Place in the Universe*, p. 214. See Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 263–64, 421–22.

⁶⁰ This is evidenced in *Isis Unveiled*, I, 150, 293–94, 303; II, 422–24, 461. 'When we realize that the majority of those who are so skeptical as to the magical powers possessed by the ancient philosophers, who laugh at the old theogonies and the fallacies of mythology, nevertheless have an implicit faith in the records and inspiration of their Bible, hardly daring to doubt even that monstrous absurdity that Joshua arrested the source of the sun, we may well say Amen to Godfrey Higgins' just rebuke: 'When I find,' he says, 'learned men believing Genesis literally, which the ancients, with all their failings, had too much sense to receive except allegorically, I am tempted to doubt the reality of the improvement of the human mind.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 283–84.

⁶¹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 424.

⁶² *Ibid.*

lesser deities and avatars, suggesting a complicated hierarchal system that will now be examined.

4. Evolution, 'Avatars' and Cyclical Time

Blavatsky's concept of spiritual evolution presented a doctrine of cosmological salvation in the absence of a personal God or Redeemer. In this system she employed a range of differing divinities. While both Trompf and French argued that there was no discussion of 'the Masters' in *Isis Unveiled*, their role was prefigured in Blavatsky's teachings of emanations and lesser divinities which would later evolve into her concept of the Masters.⁶³ These lesser gods were higher emanations from the One unknowable Being, and, as Blavatsky herself noted, that 'without a God, the cosmos would seem to it but like a soulless corpse.'⁶⁴

Much of Blavatsky's philosophy was borrowed from comparative mythography in *Isis Unveiled* where she deduced that the ancient wisdom tradition consisted of a three gods in one (trinity) as exhibited in the Hindu, Greek, Chaldaean, and Christian religious traditions. She claimed that all of these traditions were corruptions of the one true wisdom tradition that she was 'unveiling' in this text. This original trinity was convertible with all of these traditions and 'by describing the avatars of one, all others are included in the allegory, with a change of form but not of substance' further validating the comparative categorization.⁶⁵ This trinity revealed itself through incarnations as avatars which were involved in their own spiritual evolution that aligned with physical evolution of humanity. It is worth mentioning that in both of these avatar references below Blavatsky referenced Jacolliot who was an important source throughout *Isis Unveiled*.⁶⁶ Blavatsky held that Vishnu's many incarnations were symbols for spiritual evolution as followed:

⁶³ Garry W. Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from *Isis Unveiled* (1877) to *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)', *Literature & Aesthetics*, 21.1 (June 2011), 43-71 (p. 56).; Brendan James French, 'The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, August 2000), II, 472.

⁶⁴ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 36; II, 35–36.

⁶⁵ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 278. In order to clarify her view of the avatars Blavatsky referenced Charles Coleman and Jacolliot.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 259. In this passage Blavatsky referenced William Jones and Jacolliot.

1. Matsya avatar, Vishnu as a fish, 2. Kurm-avatar, as a tortoise, 3. Varaha, as a boar, 4. Nara-Sing (sic): as a man-lion, last animal stage, 5. Vamuna (sic) as a dwarf, first step toward the human form, 6. Parasu-Rama, as a hero, but yet an imperfect man, 7. Rama-Chandra, Physically a perfected man, 8. Christna-Avatar, who is identical with Adam Kadmon, 9. Guatama Buddha, 10. An unknown avatar '...when Vishnu appears for the last time he will come as a Saviour'.⁶⁷

Blavatsky believed these avatars corresponded with different stages of human evolution, which she connected with the Western mythological figure Berosus and Charles Lyell's time divisions. Again, the connection between history (Lyell) and myth (Berosus) is apparent. What remains striking about Blavatsky's view of this Eastern avatar ideology was that she applied this system to a progressive form of evolution, yet in most Eastern traditions the belief in reincarnation was largely anti-evolutionary. Karma could lead to a human soul being reincarnated as a cockroach. As one modern Indian researcher Meera Nanada noted: 'the avatars of Vishnu, likewise, originally represented different forms [sic] God Vishnu...takes on to save the world from destruction: there wasn't even a hint of evolutionary progression of living forms in representations of Vishnu the fish to the man avatars.'⁶⁸ Despite Blavatsky's insistence that this was truly an allegory for spiritual evolution 'there is no evidence that the devotees of Vishnu have read the myth as an allegory of evolution.'⁶⁹ This serves as another example of Blavatsky's scavenger approach and occult hermeneutic at work, further revealing her superficial comprehension of Eastern customs at this early stage.

As hinted above, Blavatsky's whole conceptualization of the avatar at this stage was that they were early emanations to carry 'mankind personified by one god-like man to the apex of physical and spiritual perfection — a god on earth. In Christna and other Saviours of the world we see the philosophical idea of the progressive development understood....'⁷⁰ Christna was part of a Hindu trinity as explained in *Isis Unveiled*, yet even these divinities were subjected to Blavatsky's

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 274.

⁶⁸ Meera Nanda, 'Madame Blavatsky's Children: Modern Hindu Encounters with Darwinism', *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 279–344 (p. 310).

⁶⁹ Nanda, 'Madame Blavatsky's Children', p. 310.

⁷⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 276.

philosophy of time. The life of these avatars, were called a 'day of parabrahma'. Speaking of the One Cause, Blavatsky noted that the emanations of the trinity (the 'inferior deities') would one day be made extinct; thus, even the gods were subject to Blavatsky's laws of cycles, emanations, and dissolution.⁷¹

The nature of these mediators was explained in a letter published in the *Spiritualist* periodical on 8 February 1878. This quotation combined (Higgins') comparative mythography and Neo-Platonism with Eastern terms, thereby noting the role of these mediators:

In days of old the 'mediators' of humanity were men like Christna, Gautama Buddha, Jesus, Paul, Apollonius of Tyana, Plotinus, Porphyry, and the like of them. They were Adepts, Philosophers- men who, by struggling their whole lives in purity, study, and self-sacrifice, through trials, privations, and self-discipline, attained divine illumination and seemingly superhuman powers. They could not only produce all the phenomena seen in our times, but regarded it as a sacred duty to cast out 'evil spirits' or demons from the unfortunates who were obsessed- in other words, to rid the medium of their days of the 'Elementaries'.⁷²

These men 'obtained' their place as 'adepts' though this view would change and become a result of their spiritual evolution and racial standing in future writings. Aside from using these 'reconceptualized' Eastern terms, Blavatsky incorporated her own ideas in *Isis Unveiled* that appear to have been original to her interpretations of time. These original concepts will now be identified.

IV. 'Blavatskyism' Original Time Divisions

Blavatsky's early critic, William Emmette Coleman suggested that since many of her main teachings could not be categorized into any known (Eastern or Western) framework that instead her teachings should be labelled 'Blavatskyisms'. Several elements are employed in *Isis Unveiled* that can only be categorized as 'Blavatskyisms' which show the originality of her philosophy of time.⁷³ These original concepts will now be explored.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 273.

⁷² 'Madame Blavatsky on the Views of the Theosophists', *The Spiritualist*, 12.6 (1878), 68–70 (p. 69).

⁷³ William Emmette Coleman, 'Madame Blavatsky and Theosophy: A Reply to My Critics. Part Two', *The Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 2.

<<http://blavatskyarchives.com/colemanmadameblavatskypart2.htm>>.

1. Elementals and the Eighth Sphere: Blavatsky's Form of Justice

Included in Blavatsky's cosmological structure in *Isis Unveiled* was the concept of 'the eighth sphere' that she equated to 'the allegorical Hades, and the Gehenna of the Bible' where 'through vice, fearful crimes and animal passions' certain souls were annihilated. This sphere was a place of judgment for exceptionally wicked souls.⁷⁴ The eighth sphere was not always a permanent judgment and in some cases monads could even leave this sphere after repenting or, as Blavatsky noted, 'by exercising the remnants of his will-power, strive upward, and...struggle once more to the surface.'⁷⁵ The eighth sphere was separate from Nirvana and it was an important part of Blavatsky's cosmological structure of time, spiritual evolution, and justice/punishment.

The eighth sphere was an actual cosmological place in Blavatsky's structure of the universe where monads went to be annihilated, though another belief was also connected to this sphere. In Blavatsky's philosophy, this sphere was the home of the elementals (in the Mahatma Letters this locale would change to Kama Loka).⁷⁶ These were the lying and deceitful spirits that were contacted by Spiritualists during their séances. In *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky placed her theory of elementals into the ancient history of necromancy, going as far back as the séances that occurred in ancient Israel and Greece to provide ancient precedent to her conceptualization of these deceiving and trickster spirits.⁷⁷

Given the existence of elementals, any spirit communications were subject to fallibility and were therefore unreliable. It was only through communication with Blavatsky's hidden masters (who were themselves an evolving concept in Blavatsky's philosophy) that true infallible metaphysical knowledge could be known. Blavatsky was distancing herself from the accepted tenet of Spiritualism while at the same time using their phenomena to validate her own version of the one, true ancient wisdom tradition. Her belief in the eighth sphere as a place of annihilation remains a prime example of a true 'Blavatskyism' which was a result of her comparative approach.

⁷⁴ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 352.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 352–53. The rule that monads could escape the eighth sphere would change in *Esoteric Buddhism*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 355–56, 490.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

2. The Circle of Necessity: A Spiritualist Ideology for an ‘Eastern’ Philosophy

The term ‘circle of necessity’ did not originate with Blavatsky as it was found in early translations of the ancient writings of Diogenes Laertius in his *Life of Pythagoras*: ‘they say, too, that [Pythagoras] he was the first person who asserted that the soul went a necessary circle, being changed about and confined at different times in different bodies.’⁷⁸ Though Blavatsky also connected this term to Pythagoras’ philosophy, she related it to an Egyptian view of the afterlife as well.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Blavatsky equated the ‘circle of necessity’ to the Greek term κύκλο ς ἀνάγκη (wheel/circle of destiny/necessity).⁸⁰

Based upon its historical usage, the ‘circle of necessity’ described the entire journey of an individual soul. Blavatsky used ‘the circle of necessity’ with two different meanings. The first definition is found in *The Theosophical Glossary*: ‘the duration of the cycle between rebirths or reincarnations being from 1,000 to 3,000 years on the average’ (i. e. Blavatsky used this term to define the period of time after death when the astral soul lingered around the body for a duration of 1,000-3,000 years).⁸¹ This term was later related to reincarnation — if a person had died a premature death (abortion or infant death) or had lived in a state of idiocy, their soul would be expelled from this circle and reincarnated on the same sphere.⁸² These were the only two circumstances under which reincarnation on the same sphere was permissible in Blavatsky’s soteriology (in *Isis Unveiled*).

The circle of necessity was used ambiguously by Blavatsky, though it appeared to be assimilated into her cosmological construction of the universe and

⁷⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. by C. D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), pp. 343–44. The ‘circle of necessity’ was also mentioned by Plutarch in relation to Pythagoras: ‘refers to the Pythagorean circle of necessity; where by Necessity they mean restraint or death. Which they suppose to be the condition of al Human Souls, while under the Power of Matter.’ Plutarch, *Morals*, 2 vols (London: Thomas Braddyll, 1704), II, 338.

⁷⁹ Blavatsky associated the term circle of necessity with Pythagoras in Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 347. This term was intimately connected with Egyptian soteriology as it is nearly always mentioned in relation to the occidental mysteries. See Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 226, 296, 347, 553.

⁸⁰ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 553.

⁸¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892), p. 85. This Western definition of the ‘circle of necessity’ was also not unique to Blavatsky having been published in John Wilson, *The Lost Solar System of the Ancients Discovered* (London: Spottiswood & Co, 1856), p. 248. See also Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 226, 296–97.

⁸² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 351.

soteriology, and in her post-death ‘wandering of the spirit’ for purification.⁸³

Blavatsky noted it was a ‘pure Buddhistical doctrine’, but she also associated it with Egyptian mythology.⁸⁴ She called it ‘the inexorable doom imposed upon every soul

after the bodily death, and when it had been judged in the Amenthian region.’⁸⁵

This ‘circle of necessity’ was a time of purification when the soul was ‘atoning’ for its earthly infractions.

Additionally, the second definition for the ‘circle of necessity’ was related to the overall cyclical journey of the soul, a synonym of a human ‘grand cycle’. The purpose of this was identical to another of the widely accepted teachings of Spiritualism, the perfection of the soul:

physically, intellectually, and spiritually...No human being completes its grand cycle, or the ‘circle of necessity,’ until all these are accomplished. As the laggards in a race struggle and plod in their first quarter while the victor darts past the goal, so in the race of immortality, some souls outspeed all the rest and reach the end...This is what the Hindu dreads above all things—transmigration and reincarnation; only on other and inferior planets, never on this one.⁸⁶

Here the ‘circle of necessity’ was connected to Blavatsky’s soteriological view in *Isis Unveiled* — that reincarnation did not occur on the same sphere, echoing the teachings of Spiritualism (incarnation in other worlds was a generally accepted belief among many Spiritualists).⁸⁷ All of the soteriological elements that Blavatsky employed (e. g. the circle of necessity, reincarnation, a Day and Night of Brahma, etc.) were subjected to her philosophy of cyclical time. It is curious that throughout

⁸³ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 284.

⁸⁴ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 346–47.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 553.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 345–46.

⁸⁷ In Blavatsky’s reconsideration of *Isis Unveiled* (as noted in an article written for *The Path* in October 1886) she argued that this paragraph was not actually inconsistent with her later views of reincarnation. Instead, Blavatsky noted that this was an editorial mishap: ‘The “last sentence” is a fatal mistake, and one to which the writer pleads “not guilty.” It is evidently the blunder of some “reader” who had no idea of Hindu philosophy and who was led into a subsequent mistake on the next page, wherein the unfortunate word “planet” is put for cycle. *Isis* was hardly, if ever, looked into after its publication by its writer, who had other work to do; otherwise there would be an apology and a page pointing to the errata, and the sentence made to run ‘the Hindu dreads transmigration in other inferior forms, on this planet...Human incarnation is a cyclic necessity and law; and no Hindu dreads it- however much he may deplore the necessity.’ H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Theories About Reincarnation and Spirits’, *The Path: A Magazine Devoted to the Brotherhood of Humanity, Theosophy in America, and the Study of Occult Science, Philosophy, and Aryan Literature*, 1 (1886–1887), 232–45 (p. 237). Thus, Blavatsky’s interpretation that ‘human incarnation was a cyclical necessity’ clearly articulated Blavatsky’s second definition for the ‘circle of necessity’—the overall journey of a monad through various incarnations.

Blavatsky's later writings and philosophies the 'circle of necessity' seemed to evolve into a non-essential doctrine and was used only in its second definition. In fact, a case could be made that the circle of necessity was replaced by Avitchi as Blavatsky's view of reincarnation and karma started to evolve and take center stage especially following the Oriental shift in 1879. With karma, there would be no need for a place of punishment (avitchi) or a time of judgment (circle of necessity). The next life would provide the 'necessary' punishment for the previous life. No longer did the soul have to wander the earth after its demise. In Blavatsky's later philosophy, the soul was placed directly into an alternative universe of reward which was outside of earthly time (as opposed to wandering in the earthly sphere). This philosophical shift in Blavatsky's philosophy was seen through her later neglect of the term 'circle of necessity.' This was likely related to Blavatsky's desire to distance her philosophy from nineteenth-century Spiritualism, which held a general belief that the souls of human beings lingered on the earth and were capable of communicating and being channeled by a medium.⁸⁸

In the Mahatma letters, the concept of this circle would be expanded — a piece of the soul was capable of being cast off an individual monad and could start its own circle. In *The Secret Doctrine*, this circle was replaced by karma and became the explanation for good and evil. In *Isis Unveiled*, the circle of necessity explained the terrible and apparent injustices of life. This term provides another apparent example of a 'Blavatskyism.' Now that these original terms have been identified, it should be noted that Blavatsky also developed some primitive ideas that laid the foundation of her future cosmology and soteriology. Here in *Isis Unveiled* they are mentioned in passing, but by examining them in this early state some clues as to how her philosophy of time developed can be understood.

⁸⁸ According to Kardec, after death the soul 'does not become lost in the immensity of the infinite, as is generally believed. It is in the errant state in the spirit world... Since the visible world lives in the midst of the invisible world and is in constant contact with it, it follows that these two react incessantly upon each other... Allen Kardec, *What is Spiritism?: Introduction to Knowing the Invisible World, that is, The World of Spirits*, trans. by Darrel Kimble, Marcia Saiz, and Illy Reis (Brasilia, DF : International Spiritist Council, 2010), pp. 160, 212.

3. 'Blavatskyism': Original Elements of Time and Spirit Evolution

Root Race Prototype

Blavatsky evolved a complex chronology through infinite rounds, root races, and globes and these teachings were prefigured in *Isis Unveiled*. In *Isis*, races were connected to cycles though there were no details and the teaching remained subtle and indirect. One of the primitive doctrines that *Isis Unveiled* introduced was Blavatsky's view of races, which even at this stage had its place in her larger evolutionary framework. Her conceptualization of races was directly connected to the two main principles of time identified earlier — her understanding of emanation and the descent/ascent of the soul.⁸⁹

Although several excerpts in *Isis Unveiled* prefigure the concept of root races, this term did not yet explicitly feature in Blavatsky's cosmology. The origin of this concept is anticipated which connected Blavatsky's view of races with her view of cycles:

The grand cycle as we have heretofore remarked, includes the progress of mankind from its germ in the primordial man of spiritual form to the deepest depth of degradation he can reach — each successive step in the descent being accompanied by a greater strength and grossness of the physical form than its precursor — and ends with the Flood. But while the grand cycle, or age, is running its course, seven minor cycles are passed, each marking the evolution of a new race out of the preceding one, on a new world. And each of these races, or grand types of humanity, breaks up into subdivision of families, and they again into nations and tribes, as we see the earth's inhabitants subdivided to-day into Mongols, Caucasian, Indians, etc.⁹⁰

This quote remains important because it described the evolution of new races and even connected the early prototype of root races with the number seven.⁹¹ The hierarchy of 'races' with their subdivisions would be greatly expanded in future

⁸⁹ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 276.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁹¹ Blavatsky further believed in six previous and distinct races as noted in *Isis Unveiled*—again totaling seven: 'We have already seen that it is one of the universal traditions accepted by all the ancient peoples that there were many races of men anterior to our present races. Each of these was distinct from the one which preceded it; and each disappeared as the following appeared. In *Manu*, Six such races are plainly mentioned as having succeeded each other.' Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 590. The above quotes provided the foundation for the later sub-divisions based on nineteenth-century racial divisions, a characteristic of root races that Blavatsky would elaborate upon in the Mahatma Letters and in *The Secret Doctrine*. Also noted in this above quote from *Isis*, the conceptualization of root races was deeply connected to Blavatsky's view of descent/ascent an idea which will also be directly connected to her view of 'rounds' (as defined in the next section).

writings; however, at this stage Blavatsky connected these teachings to one of the few main Eastern texts that she was aware of at this point in time (likely through Jacolliot's works) — the *Laws of Manu*.⁹²

The concept of previous races was connected to the period of seven Manus which created the world. The Manus will be closely associated with root races and time in *The Secret Doctrine* and serve as Blavatsky's intermediaries in her cosmological system of the universe. A term for time-divisions directly related to the Manus is a *manwantara*, which literally meant (time) periods of Manu.⁹³ It is important to comprehend that Blavatsky would use this term *manwantara* (also spelled *manvantara*) continually (over 100 times) in setting up her cosmology in *The Secret Doctrine*, though in *Isis Unveiled* it was only mentioned in a few instances.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, there are two Manus for each age, one at the beginning and one at the ending of each round. Also, the septenary constitution maintains that there must be seven Manus in total or fourteen for every seven rounds or 4,294,080,000 years.⁹⁴ It is important to note Blavatsky's early conceptualization of root races and Manus in *Isis Unveiled* and follow its evolution through her writings into *The Secret Doctrine*. Trompf hinted at this connection noting that 'not only is root race theory absent in *Isis*, but the Hyperboreans and Lemurians who later feature in this theory are also not yet placed beyond the Atlanteans.'⁹⁵ While her complex system of root races and spiritual evolution had not yet been set up in *Isis Unveiled*, the primitive concept was noted, as evidenced in the quotes above. Another idea that could have been a major piece of Blavatsky's philosophy of time in her later doctrine was a 'round' — a period of time that reflected a spiritual evolution that aligned with her two principles of time (i. e. descent/ascent of the soul along with an emanation origin of the universe).

⁹² Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 590.

⁹³ According to Vettam Mani, 'Manvantara' in *Puranic Encyclopedia* (Delhi: Shri Jainendra Press, 1975), p. 482.

⁹⁴ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 69.

⁹⁵ Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory?', p. 55.

‘Round’ Prototype

A round was a soul’s completed journey through each globe, an idea that was not formulated at this stage as worlds were innumerable in this earlier cosmology; however, during each round the composition of the soul would change from material to spiritual. A similar teaching could be found in *Isis Unveiled*, though it is only in the background and remains unimportant at this stage (though the term ‘round’ was never actually employed). The concept of ‘rounds’ was prefigured in *Isis Unveiled* as descending towards material (i. e. moving towards a more physical composition):

The first races of men were spiritual, and their protoplasmic bodies were not composed of the gross and material substances of which we see them composed now-a-day. The first men were created with all the faculties of the Deity, and powers far transcending those of the angelic host, for they were the direct emanations of Adam Kadmon...Hence, man was intended from the first to be a being of both a progressive and retrogressive nature. Beginning at the apex of the divine cycle, he gradually began receding from the centre of Light, acquiring at every new and lower sphere of being (world each inhabited by a different race of human beings) a more solid physical form and losing a portion of his divine faculties.⁹⁶

This theory mentioned briefly in *Isis Unveiled* would evolve into Blavatsky’s complicated conceptualization of ‘rounds’ where the monad acquired ‘at every new and lower sphere of being...a more solid physical form and losing a portion of his divine faculties’ would continue through seven rounds during which duration the monad’s physical constitution would descend into matter and then ascend back into spirit. Thus, the term known as a ‘round’ was Blavatsky’s way of dividing the temporal process of the descent/ascent of the soul through its different compositions (again mythology and history are brought together).

Blavatsky believed that this spiritual descent/ascent which occurred during each ‘round’ could be proven through archaeology, which she engaged using modern geological terminology:

Our science shows that the globe has passed through five distinct geological phases, each characterized by a different stratum, and these are in reverse order, beginning with the last: 1. The Quaternary period, in which man appears as a certainty; 2. The Tertiary period, in which he *may have* appeared; 3. Secondary period, that of gigantic saurians, the megalosaurus, ichtyosaurus, and plesiosaurus—*no vestige of man*; 4. The Palaeozoic

⁹⁶ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 276–77.

period, that of gigantic Crustacea; 5 (or first). The Azoic period, during which science asserts organic life had not yet appeared. And is there no possibility that there was a period, and several periods, when man *existed*, and yet was not an organic being—therefore could not have left any vestige of himself for exact science? *Spirit* leaves no skeletons or fossils behind, and yet few are the men on earth who doubt that man can live both objectively and subjectively.⁹⁷

Here again, as with the ‘avataric evolution,’ Blavatsky used these periods of time to defend her unique views of spiritual evolution; she believed science (history) would vindicate her ancient wisdom tradition (myth). Also, the idea of a pre-existent spiritual race was suggested as early as *Isis Unveiled*, yet this has to do with a pre-Adamite race, as Alexander Winchell and Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825–1875) suggested. This idea of descent/ascent would continue to evolve in the Mahatma Letters and in *The Secret Doctrine* where it would become fully assimilated into Blavatsky’s cosmological structure of time and the universe.

V. Conclusion: Western Time in Eastern Terms

It has been determined that *Isis Unveiled* was largely a reconceptualization of early nineteenth-century mythography as put forth by such writers as Thomas Inman, Godfrey Higgins and the writings of Max Müller. This chapter has traced Blavatsky’s view of time to two main Neo-Platonic principles — the descent/ascent of the soul and an emanationist origin for the universe. These two principles serve as the philosophical structure for Blavatsky’s view of time in 1877 and continued even into her later writings. It was also typical for Blavatsky to employ Eastern terms, though she would redefine their meanings. While she implied that her own view of time was based upon Eastern concepts, in *Isis Unveiled* she continuously employed Western sources to defend her philosophy. It has also been proven that her knowledge of Eastern concepts was secondary and her view of time was more ‘Blavatskyism’ than anything else.

Despite this originality, Blavatsky’s cosmological structure of the universe did resemble a Spiritualist position and posited an eternal view of time and evolution over innumerable spheres whose ultimate soteriological goal was an absorption back into the deity. This ‘absorption’ was shared by both Neoplatonism

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 464.

and Eastern philosophy; however, as in Spiritualism, the soul needed time to progress, for which case it would incarnate on other spheres and also spend time in different localities. Two of these localities were mentioned in *Isis Unveiled*: the ‘circle of necessity,’ which was a temporary period of correction, or else it would be sent to the eighth sphere for annihilation.⁹⁸ Blavatsky’s philosophy of time also applied to the One universal Being and its creative force in periods of activity and inactivity. It also applied to the lesser divinities, such as the avatars of Vishnu, who were sent to assist humanity in its evolution and to help them achieve their ultimate soteriological end; thus, everything in the universe was subjected to her large view of time and evolution.

Several terms are introduced in *Isis Unveiled*, and though not central in this early stage, they would become key in Blavatsky’s later philosophy of time. These elements included races, rounds and the eighth sphere, yet even these will be subjected to Blavatsky’s mythic principles of time — 1) descent/ascent and 2) emanation. All of these observations paved the way for Blavatsky’s complicated philosophy of time that validates the thesis of this study—that time was a key teaching in her philosophy. Yet there was a very practical purpose for this philosophy that has never been fully explored before now. Garry Trompf implied that:

Such was the thesis of Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* (1877) which in constituting Theosophy as a system simultaneously involved differentiating its origins and content from other unorthodox para-psychological and healing movements which she saw as lacking cohesive intellectual defence.⁹⁹

In 1877, Blavatsky’s comparative approach to time and her belief in the ancient wisdom traditions set the Theosophical Society apart from other Spiritualist organizations. In the pages of *Isis Unveiled*, ‘Theology’ was combined with ‘Science’ in order to validate this mega-religion. Brendan French noted that Blavatsky’s unique contribution in *Isis* was that ‘cosmo-historical synthetic universalism’ was now ‘conceptualised by esotericism’; thus, by combining

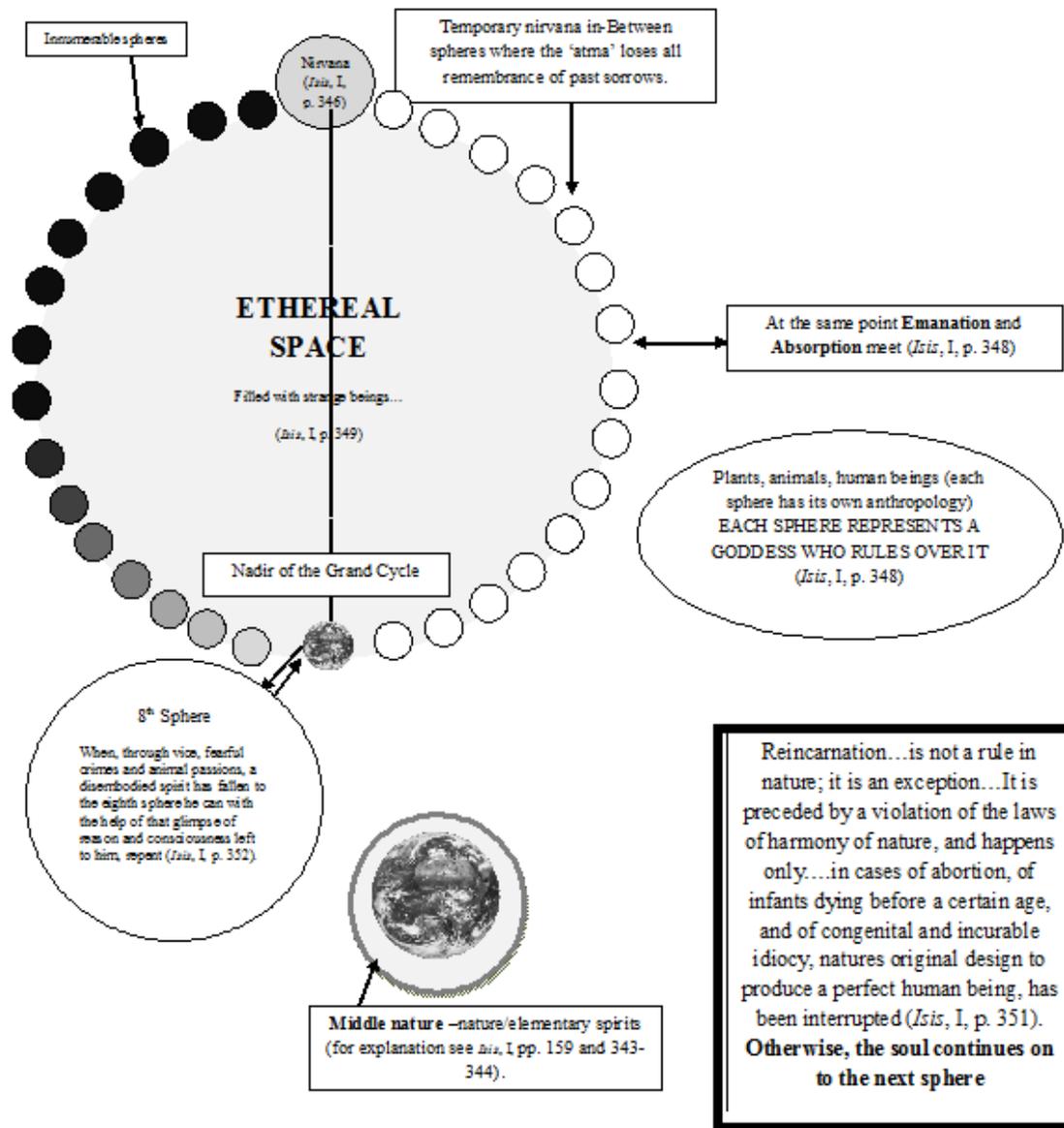
⁹⁸ Annihilation was a concept not found in most Spiritualist ideologies. Allan Kardec the systematizer of the French Spiritism called the doctrine of annihilation ‘repugnant’. Allan Kardec, *The Spirit’s Book* (Brasilia, Brazil: International Spiritist Council, 2010), pp. 521–22; Kardec, *Heaven and Hell: Divine Judgment Vindicated in the Plurality of Existences*, trans. by Anna Blackwell (New York: Spiritist Alliance Books, 2003), pp. 15–18.

⁹⁹ Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner, and Guenon’, p. 279.

Western Esotericism and comparative mythography Blavatsky was creating a 'new esotericism parry with "scientism"...'¹⁰⁰ By combining religion and science together Blavatsky was building an empirical, Victorian *mythos* which furtherer distinguished her Theosophical Society from other contemporaneous organizations. *Isis Unveiled* represented Blavatsky's attempt at unveiling the true version of religion that was based on combining all of the major 'doctrines' into one main system.

¹⁰⁰ French, 'The Theosophical Masters', I, 20–121.

Figure 1: The Cosmological Chronology of Isis Unveiled



CHAPTER 4

A Western View of Eastern Time: A Background of the Mahatma Letters and their Teachings, 1878-1882

The time period between 1878 and 1883 witnessed a drastic shift in Blavatsky's philosophy of time. Her view of time emerged out of its Western format and was transformed into an infinite and incalculable chronology mixed together with Eastern terms and concepts, Western ideologies, along with her own concepts. This period would advance one of the most distinctive doctrines in Blavatsky's teaching- her philosophy of time which refers to an infinite universe that goes through a complex evolutionary process.

During these years, Blavatsky had two purposes for her view of time that have previously been neglected by modern scholarship: 1) Blavatsky *intentionally* employed a confusing chronology using Eastern terms with her own changing definitions and 2) Blavatsky made her interpretation of 'Eastern' teachings (known as the ancient wisdom tradition) superior to all previous religious revelations. The confusing chronology would serve to elevate her Theosophical Society, further distinguishing it from Spiritualism and placing her Masters in a superior metaphysical position within her cosmological structure of the universe. This and the second purpose are vital for understanding the evolution of Blavatsky's philosophy of time that will be explored throughout this chapter.

In order to ascertain Blavatsky's time-philosophy and its rising importance in her teachings, a basic contextualization must be made within the larger discussion on the history of the Theosophical Society at this time. In December of 1878, Blavatsky and Henry Olcott travelled from the United States to India, relocating the Theosophical Society there in 1879. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke observes that, 'What Blavatsky sought in a romanticized mystical East was the opposite pole to the rationalist and materialist science of the West,' that it aimed to 'search for an ancestral-wisdom-tradition that could unite religion, philosophy and science in a universalist vision.'¹ He held that Blavatsky's reaction was an 'occultist response to the perceived conceit and limitations of Western science in rejecting "supernatural"

¹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Theosophical Society, Orientalism, and the "Mystic East": Western Esotericism and Eastern Religion in Theosophy', *Theosophical History*, 13.3 (2007), 3–28 (p. 14).

events as impossible, illusions or deceptions.’ While Goodrick-Clarke summarized Blavatsky’s mystical motivations, I suggest that India was also a refuge from the Western media, allowing her to fall off the radar of Western culture. Regardless of her reasoning, during this time she began assimilating Eastern tenets of philosophy into a Western framework. I want to argue that a similar assimilation occurred in her engagement of cyclical and linear time.

I. The Mahatma Letters: Background

Mysterious Mahatma letters were delivered to A. P. Sinnett (and A. O. Hume) from the Tibetan Masters during the course of six years between 1881 and 1887. Many of these letters were delivered by Blavatsky in person; however, some came through the mail, others reportedly fell randomly from the ceiling, and still others were sent in even more peculiar ways.² The Mahatma letters represent an important piece of the cosmological puzzle that Blavatsky was constructing between the years 1879–1883 following her relocation to India. It should be noted that these letters were not intended for general circulation and were not made public until Boris De Zirkoff transcribed and published them in 1923, many years after their composition. While the *Theosophist*, a monthly publication started by Blavatsky in 1879, attempted to disseminate the doctrines found in these letters to a larger audience, it was in these early Mahatma letters that the earliest doctrines of cosmology were first developed. It was also in these letters that Blavatsky subjected her theories, especially those relating to time and spiritual evolution, to two individuals — Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921), the Anglo-editor for the *Pioneer*, one of the leading English dailies in India, and Allan Octavio Hume (1829–1912), one of the founders of the Indian National Congress. Both of these men possessed an obvious familiarity with Eastern culture and philosophy having lived in India for some time. The period 1878–1882 clearly marked the beginning of an Oriental shift in the Theosophical Society and Blavatsky’s philosophy. Also, adding to this shift was the Theosophical Society’s affiliation with the fundamental

² *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett*, p. 23. A similar concept was used by Frederick Hockley (1808–1885) to communicate with spirits using a mirror and a seer. As Joscelyn Godwin observes in the Mahatma’s case, the process entailed a further stage of ‘precipitation’ on to paper by the ‘seer’, who was not a medium but an initiate in training.’ Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 172.

Hindu group, the Arya Samaj. This was an alliance that ended in 1882 due largely to the official conversion of both Olcott and Blavatsky to Buddhism on 25 May 1880 which followed a recitation, in their imperfect knowledge in Pali, of the Three Refuges and the five Precepts of Theravadan Buddhism.³

This Oriental shift was observed by Theosophical historian Garry Trompf, who observes that ‘the so-called Mahatma Letters to Sinnett accept an Indic approach to cosmohistory,’ whereas in her previous writings (and most especially in *Isis Unveiled*) ‘Indian *kalpa* theory stands as a mere preface.’⁴ While Trompf is correct in this observation, this cosmological history is more ‘Blavatskyism’ than anything else, though she does employ elements derived from the Western Orientalists, giving it an ‘Indic’ shell. A seemingly Oriental shift was occurring in these letters, though to what degree will continue to be a subject of debate among researchers.

One suggestion (which was argued previously) was that up until 1877, Blavatsky’s ‘Eastern influence’ came largely from Western Orientalists (scholars who studied Eastern cultures and religions) rather than from a direct experience of the East itself; a similar argument could be made for the philosophical influence on the earliest Mahatma letters to Sinnett and Hume. This lack of an immediate early Eastern influence on Blavatsky could have been due to her limited comprehension of Sanskrit and Tamil. Still, there is no denying that Eastern philosophy eventually crept into Blavatsky’s writings.

The lack of a clear Eastern understanding was also suggested by Wouter Hanegraaff, who observes that ‘in spite of widespread interest in the Orient, it remained difficult for westerners living in the late nineteenth century to achieve an adequate and balanced perspective on Hinduism or Buddhism as they actually functioned in their own cultural context. Oriental religions were consistently idealized and adapted to Western conditions.’⁵ The Mahatma letters serve as a prime example of Hanegraaff’s statement as they idealized ‘Oriental’ religious

³ H. P. Blavatsky, ‘The Arya Samaj: Alliance of Theosophy with a Vedic Society in the Far Orient’, *New York Echo* (1878) reprinted in *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings: 1874–1878*, comp. by Boris De Zirkoff, 15 vols (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1966), I, 383.

⁴ Garry W. Trompf, ‘Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from *Isis Unveiled* (1877) to *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)’, *Literature & Aesthetics*, 21.1 (2011), 43–71 (pp. 58, 52).

⁵ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), p. 462.

concepts which were adapted to a Western audience. Yet, through this idealizing, Blavatsky developed her own creative teachings which were anything but simple.

This collection of letters has been labelled the ‘Mahatma letters’ because they were allegedly hand-written communications sent from invisible Eastern Masters or mahatmas, a term that was first applied to them in September 1882. These letters primarily bear the signatures of two hidden Tibetan masters ‘Koot Hoomi’ and ‘Morya,’ both of whom might have been fictional representations of Blavatsky. There exists a long-standing debate among Theosophists as to whether these letters were what they actually claimed to be: some hold that the letters were written from highly evolved men and others argue that they were clever forgeries contrived by Blavatsky. It seems plausible that, given Blavatsky’s familiarity with both invisible ‘spirit guides’ and the ‘automatic writings’ of mainstream Spiritualism, these letters may have been written by sub-personalities of her psyche.⁶ The question concerning the authorship of these letters is not the main focus of this study and I will assume that Blavatsky was the main force behind the writing of these letters even if she herself did not physically write each individual one.

What remains intriguing were the personalities that Blavatsky engaged in writing these letters: they were written from an Indian male perspective. This observation contains certain gender implications that modern researcher Joy Dixon has commented upon:

If the author of the letter was Blavatsky herself, ventriloquizing Mahatmas who lived in Tibet...[then] in this reading, Blavatsky’s fictional personas—Morya, the gruff Punjabi, and the scholarly Kashmiri, Koot Hoomi Lal Singh—allowed her access to both an authoritatively masculine and an exotically eastern voice. Morya and Koot Hoomi could thus be invoked to authenticate

⁶ There has been a long-standing debate on the authorship of the Mahatma letters which suggests that the answer to this problem is not as clear cut as it may initially appear. This debate began with the Society of Psychical Research report issued by Richard Hodgson in 1883/4 accusing Blavatsky of being the primary author of these letters. A more recent article in the 1990s by the handwriting expert Vernon Harrison concluded differently suggesting that Blavatsky was not the author, or if she was, that she would have written these letters through a sub-personality. In 2006, Kerri Barry published an article on Blavatsky’s role in the writing of these Mahatma letters in *Theosophical History*, suggesting that Blavatsky may have had a ‘psychopathological condition such as dissociative syndrome.’ Theosophical historian Michael Gomes wrote a follow-up article challenging Barry’s sources, scholarship, and her conclusions; however, while Gomes was correct in his analysis of Barry’s writings, this does not infer that his own conclusions are correct. See Kerri Barry, ‘Genius, Fraud, or Phenomenon? The Unsolved Case of H. P. Blavatsky’, *Theosophical History: A Quarterly Journal of Research*, 12 (2006), 23–35 (p. 29); Michael Gomes, ‘Response to Kerri Barry’s Genius, Fraud, or Phenomenon?’, *Theosophical History: A Quarterly Journal of Research*, 13 (2007), 3–9.

Blavatsky's own pronouncements. If Blavatsky did write the letters, they become not (as Sinnett believed) the tangible proof of ancient eastern wisdom, but a complex appropriation of the ambiguous authority of the East in the orientalist imagination.⁷

This analysis verifies the truth of Hanegraaff's statement quoted above — both the 'idealizing' of Oriental religions and their 'adaption' to Western conditions. The nineteenth century witnessed the rise of a phenomenon called the 'Romanticized East', when Asia became both a mysterious and intriguing source for spirituality. Blavatsky's use of this male Eastern voice exemplifies a Western adaption of Eastern elements which also provided her with credibility on two levels: 1) a male voice in a patriarchal culture and 2) an Eastern voice from the 'Romanticized East'. These letters provided Blavatsky with authority, serving as a powerful statement that allowed her to step outside of her marginalized categorization as a woman living in Victorian times and to validate her ancient wisdom tradition (i. e., the second purpose of her philosophy of time). It is not surprising that Blavatsky used this platform to campaign for not only social issues but to extend the very bounds of eternity, cosmology and spiritual evolution.

1. Philosophy in the Mahatma Letters

The correspondence detailed in these letters enabled Blavatsky to develop her cosmology, which served as the foundation for her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine*, which she began writing in 1884 and ultimately published in 1888. The Mahatma letters dealt with many basic metaphysical issues such as the existence of a personal God (which Blavatsky claimed the Masters denied), the problem of evil, the nature of soul, spirit, and other elements of the human being and what happens to them after death, where the universe came from, how humans arose, etc.⁸ These original handwritten letters consisted of correspondences between Blavatsky (through the guise of mystical Masters) and her responses to the metaphysical inquiries from Hume and Sinnett, who acted as 'sounding boards' for Blavatsky's modernist, syncretic philosophy. It should also be noted that other

⁷ Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 27.

⁸ Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 71.

Mahatma letters were sent to various individuals and early Theosophists throughout this time period, though the letters that pertained to cosmology seemed to have been sent primarily to these two individuals.

Blavatsky's response to these questions was overwhelming and included a complex and deliberately disorderly cosmological system of globes, rounds, root races, and sub-races, all of which would become the expressions for Blavatsky's view of time and salvation. The difficulty facing the modern scholar is to systematize and find meaning in these unorganized letters, many of which contradict each other. In 1936, Harold and William Loftus Hare published *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters? The First Thorough Examination of the Communications Alleged to have been received by the Late A. P. Sinnett from Tibetan Mahatmas*. The subtitle of the work explains the main thesis. While their analysis establishes the Theosophical context of the letters, the authors are more concerned with disproving the historicity and originality of these doctrines than they are with identifying a coherent soteriological system within them. The only serious undertaking towards systematizing the cosmology and soteriology in these letters was performed by Adam Warcup in his *Cyclical Evolution* (1986). In this work, Warcup attempts to organize and arrange block quotations taken from Blavatsky's major writings in relation to cyclic time and combine them into one complete and final system; however, he focuses primarily upon the totality of Blavatsky's writings as a homogenous unit, not from a chronological and progressive perspective as this study attempts.

This next section will examine the main concepts found in these letters in order to ascertain the significance that Blavatsky placed on time and its connection to salvation/soteriology. It has already been noted that the two main purposes of time created an intentionally confusing and jumbled chronology and by doing so made her teachings superior. At this stage, 'time' was rapidly becoming the soteriological vehicle that implemented punishments and rewards, yet this vast system was the result of Blavatsky's exposure to Indian texts in the event known as the 'Oriental' shift.

2. Purposefully Perplexing: The Function of Time in the Mahatma Letters

At this stage in her writings, Blavatsky's philosophy of time and cosmology was slowly evolving in complexity, becoming the defining soteriological element. In *Isis Unveiled*, time had been divided into four ages and some mention was made of the yugs and cyclical history, though this was largely Western in nature, utilizing Godfrey Higgins' theories of cycles in *Anacalypsis*. Still, a connection and harmonization of these various elements was never clearly defined or explained.⁹ As such, in *Isis Unveiled*, there was no real developed system and cosmology, but in these Mahatma Letters a new (albeit confusing) cosmology was being inserted into these earlier teachings. Throughout these letters Blavatsky attempted to harmonize *Isis Unveiled* (her conceptualization of the *prisca theologia*) with this new cosmology, though oftentimes these connections and explanations are insufficient and contradictory.¹⁰

One such contradictory element that evidences the influence of the East was Blavatsky's shift towards the doctrine of reincarnation after explaining in *Isis Unveiled* (1877) that this was not a typical process in the spiritual evolution of the soul. It is important to grasp that through these letters Blavatsky attempted to maintain consistency with her earlier teachings, as she insisted that they all originated from the same source, her ancient wisdom tradition. An important point that deserves consideration is that Adam Warcup, in his systemization of Blavatsky's cosmology, attempts to systematize all of Blavatsky's writings on cyclical time; however, he never once quoted from *Isis Unveiled*. This attests to the evolution of Blavatsky's cosmology and philosophy of time given that Warcup was well acquainted with this writing. This implies that these letters mark a dramatic shift in Blavatsky's complex view of cyclical time and cosmology (even though Warcup failed to notice it).¹¹

What previous writers have overlooked in studying this time period is that throughout the Mahatma letters Blavatsky understood and exploited the human

⁹ Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory', p. 53.

¹⁰ *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. by A. Trevor Barker, (Theosophical University Press, 1975), pp. 45, 129, 130, 131, 182, 183.

¹¹ In fact in his work Warcup quotes the *Mahatma Letters* thirty-seven times, the *Collected Writings* six times, and the *Key to Theosophy*, the *Theosophical Glossary*, and 'How to Study' once; however, in this work Warcup quotes from *The Secret Doctrine* 163 times showing the evolution of Blavatsky's 'cyclical evolution' and cosmology in her later writings.

inability to grasp ideas of eternity and vast periods of 'deep time'. She continuously invoked these vague concepts in her writings to cloak her philosophy with a sense of mystery. She eagerly connected these vast and perplexing periods of cosmological (mythological) time with her own view of phenomenal (historical) time. When she finally discovered the vast time periods of Indian/Eastern time they seemed to be a natural fit into her cosmological system.

I want to argue that Blavatsky deliberately used her philosophy of time to confuse her readers and prove that she was the only initiate who understood the ancient wisdom tradition. When asked for a rational explanation for these time divisions by either Hume or Sinnett, Blavatsky would hide behind her occult hermeneutic. She would explain that she was only permitted to reveal small pieces of this philosophy of time to uninitiated mortals. In reality, given the large number of contradictions in these writings relating to time, her hesitancy in fully explaining each statement was probably her method of hiding the fact that even she herself (and her Masters) did not understand how to reconcile phenomenal (historical) and cosmological (mythological) time. Hiding behind her gigantic view of cosmological time, Blavatsky seemingly had the upper hand in any debate related to cosmology or world origins; thus, to quote Joscelyn Godwin, Blavatsky created a 'tremendous system of Globes, Rounds, Root Races, and Sub-races that still has the average Theosophist flummoxed.'¹² Blavatsky's view of time will now be studied thematically for its connection to soteriology, while connecting them to Blavatsky's purposes of time identified earlier in this section. This soteriological system will reveal a unique system that has largely been overlooked. While the following section is dense it evidences the complexity of Blavatsky's time and its measurement and her deliberate and genuine confusion in dealing with the subject of time, along with her continual alterations.

II. Confusing Terms: A Glossary of Time-Related Terms

The complexity of Blavatsky's philosophy of time is best seen in the pseudo-Eastern terms she employed to describe this vast cosmology. She utilized Eastern terms and time measurements and her own definitions, thereby adding to the

¹² Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time*, p. 71.

complexity of this system. Also, to make this subject even more perplexing she continuously changed her definitions and added new terms and time divisions. The result was that she was able to successfully baffle some of the most intellectual minds of her day (including her own). This confusion is evident in all of the major terms she employed to define time, though each of these elements had a specific soteriological purpose.

1. Rounds (manvantaras): Connecting the Cosmological with the Phenomenal

The first term that was a key component in Blavatsky's philosophy of time was a period of time known as a 'round'. A 'round' was part of Blavatsky's strategy of connecting spiritual evolution (phenomenal/historical time) with the ebbs and flow of the vast periods of the universe (cosmological/mythological time). A 'round' became one of the most foundational elements of her later cosmology. Blavatsky's primitive conceptualization of the 'round' seemed to have been first introduced in a *Theosophist* article titled 'The Pralaya of Modern Science' in 1880.¹³

The term round was defined as the passage of a monad from globe A to globe Z (or later determined to be globe 'G') through each of the four kingdoms (mineral, vegetable, animal, man). A completed round was defined as a complete run through the globes.¹⁴ Then another larger division of time was a Mahamanvantaras ('maha' meaning great) which referred to a completion of seven rounds. At the end of each mahamanvantara the soul would then be given a temporal period of rest.

Following this mahamanvantara a person could receive memories of their past lives; however, this seemed to contradict another Mahatma letter that maintained that a full remembrance of past lives could only come before a Nirvana

¹³ H. P. Blavatsky, 'The Pralaya of Modern Science', *The Theosophist*, 2.1 (1880), 11–12. Blavatsky's desire to 'Orientalize' her philosophy of time was evidenced in her equating of this term 'round' with an Eastern division of time known as a 'manvantarra' (which means the age or period of a Manu) in Mahatma Letter XIV (9 July 1882), though this association would become unclear in later letters. Blavatsky switched between these two terms throughout these letters making it confusing to the general reader. Though the term 'manvantara' was used throughout the Mahatma letters and in the *Theosophist* this term was not clearly defined by the Masters as relating to a period of Manu as found in Eastern religious traditions (actually the word 'manu' is never used in the Mahatma letters) until 1883; thus, Blavatsky initially divorced an Eastern term from its context in order to give her philosophy an Oriental flavor. This will be a continuous theme found throughout these letters- redefining Eastern terms (and scientific concepts) to fit into her cosmology.

¹⁴ Mahatma Letter XIV in *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 78.

(the absorption of the soul into its divine source).¹⁵ Given this inconsistency, Blavatsky attempted to reconcile these two opposing statements by explaining that at the end of each of the seven rounds comes a less 'full' remembrance 'only of the devachanic experiences taking place between the numerous births at the end of each personal life. But the complete recollection of all the lives...omniscience-in short- comes but at the great end of the full seven Rounds...'¹⁶

Blavatsky further maintained that the present race of humanity was on its fourth round of the post-pralayan cycle of evolution, though she never clarified what this designation meant.¹⁷ Blavatsky's view of rounds combined Darwinian evolution with contemporary anthropology and seemingly could align with the evolutionary theories of French anthropologist Jean Louis Armand De Quatrefages (1810–1892) and his early view of migrations.¹⁸ Note the following evolutionary process and composition of the soul through each round:

¹⁵ 'Yes, the full remembrance of our lives (collective lives) will return back at the end of all the seven Rounds, at the threshold of the long, long Nirvana that awaits us after we leave Globe Z. At the end of isolated Rounds. We remember but the sum total of our last impressions, those we had selected, or that have rather forced themselves upon us and followed us in Deva Chan...' *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 171.

¹⁶ '...the 'threshold' of Nirvana meaning an indefinite period. Naturally a man, a Seventh-rounder (who completes his earthly migrations at the beginning of the last race and ring) will have to wait longer at that threshold than one of the very last of those Rounds That Life of the Elect between the minor Pralaya and Nirvana— or rather before the Pralaya is the Great Reward, the grandest, in fact since it makes of the Ego ...virtually a God, an omniscient, conscious being, a candidate- for eternities of aeons- for a Dhyan Chohan...Enough – I am betraying the mysteries of initiation.' *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 198.

¹⁷ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 77.

¹⁸ Blavatsky's spiritual evolution (at a minimum) did not seem to contradict the teachings of Quatrefages' and his view of evolution and origin: Each of the root races will recur on each of the seven globes labelled A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. A round consisted of a completed journey through each of these globes. In each progressive round, the makeup of the monad changed—during the first round the monad is a super—spiritual, ethereal being with a loosely organized body. (There would be no record of this first round since the monad was pure spirit and would be considered unknowable outside of special revelation.) In the second round, the monad was gigantic and ethereal, but its body was growing firmer and more condensed. Also, it was still less intelligent than spiritual. Quatrefages made provision for this second round suggesting that '[t]his is a fact of the greatest importance. In the presence of this instability of the organic components, the decided persistency of form and proportion among living beings can hardly be understood, and the mind is enabled without difficulty to admit the possibility of the most extensive alterations. Truly, we are ignorant of the cause which brings these changes, about, determines the order of their succession and includes them within impassable limits; but at all events, we may glance at one of the chief processes which Nature sets at work to create, develop, maintain, and destroy, under the influence of life.' Armand Quatrefages, *The Human Species* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1879), p. 5. In the third round, the monad has a perfectly concrete and compacted body more like an ape than a man; it continued to rise in intelligence. In the middle of this round, the monad's body improved in texture and it became a rational human being. In keeping with this philosophy Quatrefages noted that: '...it appears as a well established fact, that in savage races the number and complication of the cerebral convolutions are less than in intelligent and civilized races.

In the first round the soul is a spiritual or ethereal being and is non-intelligent. In each race the soul grows 'more and more into an encased or incarnate being...and like the animal and vegetable he develops monstrous bodies correspondent with his coarse surroundings.'¹⁹

In the second round the soul is gigantic and spiritual but is becoming a more physical being 'yet still less intelligent than spiritual.'

In the third round the soul now has formed a physical body, 'at first the form of a giant ape. And more intelligent than spiritual...In the last half of this third round his gigantic stature decreases, his body improves in texture...and he becomes a more rational being- though still more an ape...'

In the fourth round intellect develops along with speech 'from the fourth race language is perfected and knowledge of physical things increases.'

The fifth round is similar to the fourth with the same struggles.

The sixth and seventh rounds are never explained.²⁰

The ambiguity associated with the sixth and seventh rounds exemplify Blavatsky's desire to be intentionally confusing and mysterious. She claimed that half-way through every 'round' humanity would pass 'the axial point of the minor manwantaric circles' after which time spirituality decreases and the Ego (the essence of the soul) begins to struggle. This same half-way point is also found in the middle of a minor manwantara (i. e. 7 rounds; thus, every 3½ rounds a struggle occurred).

Blavatsky assimilated this new cosmology with an earlier doctrine which was discussed in the previous chapter — the eighth sphere. In *Isis*, the eighth sphere was a place of justice where the exceptionally wicked souls were annihilated and it also served as the abode of elementals. According to Blavatsky, on the fifth round,

Intellectual culture would then seem then to exercise an entirely special action upon the cortical layers, and to favour their development.' *The Human Species*, p. 406. Thus, according to Blavatsky, during the second round these gigantic pre-human creatures possess minimal mental capacities which corresponded with Quatrefages' anthropological ideology (though to Blavatsky intelligence appears to be negative when it is compared to spirituality). This illustrated that Blavatsky may have been more heavily influenced by contemporaneous theories of anthropology than previously suspected. In Mahatma letter XIV, this alignment with Quatrefages appears more evident: '2nd Round.- He is still a gigantic and ethereal... yet still less intelligent than spiritual; for mind is a slower and more difficult evolution than the physical frame and the mind would not develop as rapidly as the body.' *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 87. During the fourth round intellect was fully developed and human speech was invented. The concept that language is the highest manifestation of intelligence is propounded by Quatrefages (*The Human Species*, pp. 21-22). In the fifth round, the transcendental faculties are developed and physical intelligence has advanced (*Esoteric Buddhism*, p. 131).

¹⁹ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 87.

²⁰ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 87–88.

halfway through the grand cycle/mahamanvantara, humans would again appear on the earth and would either pass on or be annihilated in the eighth sphere though this teaching was not updated until August of 1882.²¹ As already noted, the eighth sphere was an important tenet of Blavatsky's cosmological structure of the universe as it provided a cosmic justice. It remained an indispensable part of spiritual evolution in Sinnett's summary of the Mahatma letters published under the title *Esoteric Buddhism* in 1883.

Blavatsky's evolutionary scheme consisted of cause and effect within the descent/ascent of the soul; thus, the overall soteriological purpose was nearly identical to that of Spiritualism — the perfecting and spiritualizing of the soul.²² A round/manvantara was Blavatsky's method of connecting the soul to her cosmological system of cyclical evolution while providing a complex explanation for this process.

2. Globes: Western or Eastern?

Globes provided another confusing element to Blavatsky's view of time that also aligned with the historical current of Western Esotericism. The cosmological construction described in the Mahatma letters diverged from the earlier construction of the universe presented in *Isis Unveiled* as a circle where the beginning and end come together at the point of 'emanation and re-absorption'. In this earlier cosmology, this circle was composed of innumerable smaller circles. There was also 'a certain distance between each of the spheres, purposely marked, for after the accomplishment of the circles through various transmigrations, the soul is allowed a time of temporary nirvana during which space of time the atma loses all remembrance of past sorrows. The intermediate ethereal space was full of strange beings.'²³

In *Isis Unveiled*, the soul did not return to the earth to be reincarnated save only in exceptional circumstances; however, in the Mahatma letters the spiritual journey of the soul (or monad as it is later termed) spanned across multiple

²¹ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 77–78.

²² *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 177–78.

²³ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 348.

reincarnations and spheres, alternating between a world of causes and effects within a differing cosmological structure of the universe:

An orb or rather an epicycloids formed of rings like a chain- worlds inter-linked together, the totality representing an imaginary endless ring, or circle...if using a more familiar term we call the Great Cycle the Macrokosm and its component parts of the inter-linked star worlds microkosms-...as they descend, each world presents itself naturally more and more shadowy...²⁴ like a rosary composed of white and black beads alternating with each other, so that concatenation of worlds is made up of worlds of CAUSES and worlds of EFFECTS, the latter- the direct results produced by the former...²⁵ one is active the other-passive, the world of causes *positive*, that of effects - *negative*.²⁶

The world had changed from a circle to an epicycloid and the soul became incarnated on alternating worlds of causes and effects; however, even the specifications of this layout would change slightly in Mahatma Letter No. XIII (sent on January 1882). In this letter, Blavatsky altered the structure of her cosmological universe — it appeared that the world of causes and effects became part of the same sphere and was no longer separated as suggested in this earlier cosmology.²⁷

In Mahatma Letter no. XIVa (sent on 9 July 1882), Blavatsky explained the inter-planetary evolution of the soul, tracing its journey from sphere to sphere (later called globes). It was in this letter that the number of globes was finally revealed. The soul must travel through seven subjective and seven objective spheres in each Maha Yuga. Before this 'revelation' the number of globes in this universe was never specified.²⁸ This septenary revelation followed Blavatsky's septenary division of the soul first taught in her 'Fragments of Occult Truth,' published in the 1881 volume of the *Theosophist*. One of Blavatsky's methods of organizing her philosophy was to make everything based on (or divisible by) the number seven, which she explained in *The Secret Doctrine* was the key number of this present round of humanity as it signified completion.

²⁴ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 73. This cosmological transition from the tantalizing world of effects described above leads to many unanswered questions, though Blavatsky avoids these issues by noting that 'I must pause, for volumes would hardly suffice to explain all that was said by me in this letter.' *Ibid.*, p. 49.

²⁸ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 348.

There were seven levels of evolution all occurring at the same time on the same sphere. There seemed to be no consistent order to this evolutionary system, though one universal tenet was that in this evolutionary process each soul ended their round at the same time. Blavatsky stated that: 'these different rates are so adjusted by man stopping longer in the inter-planetary spheres of rest, for weal or woe, that all kingdoms finish their work simultaneously on the planet Z, though no one can be more than one round ahead of their kind.'²⁹ She propagated that all of the monads in this chain end at the same time on the same sphere, giving some sort of order to this vast evolutionary process.

The concept of a soul traveling across seven spheres was not unique to Blavatsky and the idea can be found throughout Western literature, including: the spheres found in Plato (c. 360 BCE), the *Corpus Hermeticum* (1st–2nd century CE), Dante Aligheri (1265-1321), Immanuel Kant (1755), the Seeress of Prevoist (1845), and the division of Andrew Jackson Davis' 'Summerland'.³⁰ Regardless as to how Blavatsky derived this complex cosmology, the results remained the same: when the soul travelled through all seven spheres/globes it had completed one round/manvantara, and after seven rounds/cycles on the seven spheres the soul had completed a mahamanvantara/great round. The soul's cyclical incarnations on these spheres/globes will now be examined.

3. Races: The Western Race to Nirvana

During the 1880s, there were many scientific and pseudo-scientific theories as to how and where humanity originated. Evolution was becoming a popular explanation for the development of life. The starting point of humanity was placed in various localities, including in the traditional Euphrates Valley near the biblical

²⁹*The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 95–96.

³⁰ A quote from Mahatma Letter XIX shows that Blavatsky was familiar with Dante's *Divine Comedy*: 'Reality and *fact* if described would yield a far more terrible *Inferno* than even Dante had imagined!'. *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 123. An unlikely source, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) could very possibly have been an influence on Blavatsky, particularly in her view of an 'eight sphere' in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*. In Dante's *Paradiso*, Dante's soul ascends up to the eighth sphere, though in this story the eighth sphere is a place of heavenly retreat. Hanegraaff notes that this planetary evolution was a common theme in the post-Copernican eighteenth century. See Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 475. In Andrew Jackson Davis' conceptualization of the Summer Land there were six spheres with the seventh sphere being the place of the divine. See Andrew Jackson Davis, *Views of Our Heavenly Home: A Sequel to a Stellar Key to the Summerland* (Boston: Colby & Rich, 1877), pp. 107–08; Andrew Jackson Davis, *A Stellar Key to the Summerland* (Boston: William White & Company, 1867), p. 66.

Garden of Eden, the Ukraine valley and even the continent of Africa. Thus, the search for origins became directly connected to the notion of 'race'. Anthropologist and Sanskrit scholar Max Müller was credited as one of the first to use the term 'Aryan' as a designation for an Indo-European 'race'. In Blavatsky's opinion, these Aryans settled in India and were a more highly evolved race, though this idea was only hinted at by Blavatsky in the Mahatma letters. These races were connected not just to time, but also served to elevate the Eastern races to a racially superior position. Time became an important factor because it separated superior races from inferior ones; thus, the older a race was, the more advanced it had become. Time had become the crucial element separating the evolved races from the under-evolved, thereby defending the superiority of India and Blavatsky's teachings.

Blavatsky's philosophy of time was divided into intervals of rounds which were further broken down into groups of incarnations called 'races'. A 'race' defined the various incarnations of the soul upon the seven globes/spheres. At first there was some dispute as to how many races humanity must enter. In a Mahatma letter sent in June of 1882, Morya [a guise for Blavatsky] contradicted science which said there had been four races inhabiting Europe to note that there were not four but five. Then the next month, Koot Hoomi [another subpersonality of Blavatsky] explained that there were in fact 'seven root-races, and seven sub races or offshoots.'³¹ This discrepancy evidenced that Blavatsky's philosophy was continuously evolving, especially in her conceptualization of time and cosmology. In the final version, there were seven races that lived on each of the seven spheres/planets as these time divisions were made to fit into Blavatsky's time scheme that utilized multiples of seven (her septenary schemata). It should already be evident to the reader that the number seven gave some order to Blavatsky's cosmological teachings though this number itself has its own archaic mystical associations with ascension.³²

³¹ Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time*, p. 71. The use of different names and personalities serves to further confuse the reader. The astronomer Pierre Simon Laplace who Blavatsky quoted extensively in *The Secret Doctrine* maintained the Victorian belief in seven planets in the universe. See Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Pierre-Simon Laplace 1749–1827: A Life in Exact Science* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 174.

³² Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 47.

Blavatsky's racial evolution was used to place the races of India in a position of superiority as the cradle of all civilization. It also elevated her own argument that 'The oldest branch of the fifth race are Indians who evolved in Central Asia more than one million "years ago." Yet Asia, as well as Australia, Africa and America have remnants of the fourth and third races, defined as cavemen and Iberians. Indian has more seventh ring [race] men of the fourth race than Europe and more of the first ring of the fifth round.'³³

By elevating the universal status of India, Blavatsky was implying that the Indian race was spiritually superior and more evolved than all others. As a result, any person with direct access to Indian culture and its advanced spiritual teachings would be in a place of authority; this implied the superiority of Blavatsky and her Eastern Masters. Blavatsky went on to assert that most of the population of India belonged to the seventh race and even housed more fifth rounders than any other country — an idea that only bolstered her claim to be connected to the ancient wisdom tradition.³⁴ It seemed that the cosmology put forth in these Mahatma letters was accomplishing the two purposes identified at the beginning of this section: 1) to present her Theosophy as a more advanced revelation (especially from other organizations most notably the Spiritualist movement) and 2) to prove the superiority of the Masters/mahatmas thereby revealing the true ancient wisdom religion which could be found more accurately in Indian philosophy.

In Blavatsky's progressive spiritual evolution, the higher the race (and round) the more evolved the individual soul had become; thus, the seventh race (and also the fifth round) was more evolved in Blavatsky's ideology of spiritual evolution, which led to a whole intricate system of racial anthropology which would be further expounded in her *Secret Doctrine*. Also in this text, for the most part, Blavatsky used the terms 'ring' and 'race' interchangeably, though in her later writings she seemed for the sake of simplicity to have decided upon the term 'race' using it primarily.³⁵

Blavatsky's primitive doctrines of time and spiritual evolution in *Isis Unveiled* evolved into complex ideas of root and sub-root races, noting that 'the individual

³³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 121.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

entities in them are unconsciously to themselves performing their local earthly sevenfold cycles — hence the vast difference in the degrees of their intelligence, energy and so on.’³⁶ Trompf noted that ‘in *Isis*...teachings about prior and etheric “Root Races”...has hardly been formulated, and it is more antediluvian (decidedly pre-Noachian) [Western] esoteric knowledge that she stresses... root race theory [is] absent in *Isis*.’³⁷ Trompf seemed correct in his general assessment and antediluvian connection, yet (as pointed out previously) one of the most influential sources on Blavatsky’s time-scheme was Godfrey Higgins. Higgins declared that it was impossible to combine all religions into one system — history would not allow it. Still, Blavatsky would ultimately solve Higgins’ dilemma of connecting the world’s chronologies together in *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), but at this point she had not worked it out yet.

The infinite scope of Blavatsky’s cosmology was expounded as the soul incarnated into seven kingdoms, in seven races and in seven rounds but also through ‘an infinitude of sub-rings [race] or subordinate whirls all in series of sevens.’³⁸ It seemed that these seven races could be further divided into groups that Blavatsky calls sub-races. Again, Blavatsky combined her phenomenal time (globes and races) with eternal movement through her theory of rounds which makes this system much more complex, philosophically advanced, and longer in duration than had been initially conceived in *Isis Unveiled*.

Each globe contained seven parent races with numerous offshoots of sub-races, and after completing these seven races/rings the soul would be transferred onto the next globe or placed into the subjective world. It was concluded that humanity as a whole was on the latter half of the fifth race of the fourth round, while these letters explained that certain advanced individuals were on the first race of their fifth round.³⁹ Blavatsky further asserted that ‘we have fifth round men among us because we are in the latter half of our septenary earth being. In the first half this could not have happened.’⁴⁰ Attempting an explanation of this enigmatic statement, Blavatsky noted that most of Earth’s so-called religious leaders were

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁷ Trompf, ‘Imagining Macrohistory’, p. 55.

³⁸ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 80–81.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

part of this fifth-round (like Buddha and later Jesus, Plato, etc.). This idea would become an important part of her later *Secret Doctrine* and applied to her conceptualization of the Masters.⁴¹

Occasionally, Blavatsky connected her cosmological time to historical personages such as Buddha and she would continue to assimilate myth and history through connecting root races with historical (and pseudo-historical) events while employing Western scientific terms for time divisions. Blavatsky continued to utilize Charles Lyell's time divisions such as the 'Eocene' and 'Miocene' which he had coined in his monumental scientific work *Principles of Geology*.⁴² These geological divisions provided Blavatsky with another system of articulating, organizing, and ordering her mixed view of time and spiritual evolution; her use of scientific terms instilled her philosophy with a sense of empiricism.

4. Yugs: An Eastern Time Division for a Western Audience

Blavatsky assimilated another aspect of Eastern time divisions into her cosmology, again giving it the appearance of an Oriental philosophy. She divided time into segments of smaller periods that could be expressed in terms of years. She superficially mentioned yugs in *Isis Unveiled*, but never expanded on this concept. In the Mahatma letters, yugs became an important unit of time connecting cosmology/mythology to phenomenal/history. These yugs (or yugas) occurred seven times on each globe — once for each race.⁴³ The yug is an Eastern time division that in its proper context refers to period of time based on the quality of life or dharma (natural law); however, at this stage Blavatsky's use of this term seemingly divorced it from its original association with the quality of dharma (the word dharma is never used in the Mahatma letters).⁴⁴

5. Kingdoms- A Western Idea fit into an Eastern Time Division

The term 'kingdom' would be familiar to most Westerners as Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) developed this categorization in relation to living things. He divided them into the following three distinct kingdoms within his work *Systema Naturae* (1735): 1)

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 96–97.

⁴² Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time*, p. 71.

⁴³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 121.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

animal kingdom (*regnum animale*), 2) vegetable kingdom (*regnum vegetabile*) and 3) a mineral kingdom (*regnum lapideum*). This was an idea that Blavatsky may have read in Lyell's *Principles of Geology* ([1830-3], II, pp. 268–270), though this was a popular subject among nineteenth-century scientists and can hardly be traced back to any one of precursor.⁴⁵

What remains important was that Blavatsky used this Western scientific term in her cosmological scheme of objective time, illustrating her assimilation of Eastern reincarnation theory with Western science. These kingdoms that the monad must incarnate into consisted of four identities, including mineral, vegetable, animal, and human states and were stages within her progressive evolutionary scheme (though the nature of kingdoms would be expanded in a Mahatma Letter No. XIV to adhere to the septenary doctrine).⁴⁶

The nature of the various kingdoms was also explained in these letters: 'in the mortal world' there are three recognized kingdoms — mineral, vegetable, and animal — humanity is a combination of the three (though the Masters believed in seven kingdoms). Each of these kingdoms was subjected to seven rounds and seven kingdoms 'all of these have to run their seven rounds during the period of earth's activity — the Maha Yug.'⁴⁷ As to the exact number of incarnations, Blavatsky claimed to remain ignorant noting that: 'All I can tell you is that within the Solar Manwanatara the number of existences or vital activities of the monad is fixed but there are local variations in number in minor systems, individual worlds, rounds, and world rings, according to circumstances.'⁴⁸

Blavatsky also engaged the subject of consciousness, stating that: 'Up to man "life" has no responsibility in whatever form; no more than has the foetus who in his mother's womb passes through all the forms of life — as a mineral, a vegetable, and animal to become finally *Man*.'⁴⁹ Consciousness was a capability beginning in the human kingdom. Also, the process of spreading life through the various globes was expounded by Blavatsky, who stated that it was through an

⁴⁵ The word 'kingdom' was also used in the *Raj Yoga* to describe a region of the body Maahtma Giana Yogi Sabhapaty Swami, *Vedantic Raj Yoga* (New Delhi: Pankaj Publications, 1977), p. 11.

⁴⁶ This septenary nature of 'kingdoms' is found in A. P. Sinnett (unspecified), 'Fragments of Occult Truth: No V. The Evolution of Man', *The Theosophist*, 4.2 (1882), 46–48 (p. 47); and Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

eternal life-wave that life was created on each globe/sphere, a concept that would become its own chapter in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*.⁵⁰

6. Obscuration/Pralayas/Night of Brahma

A 'pralaya' is an Eastern term that refers to a period of rest which Blavatsky assimilated into her cosmology to follow the period of activity known as a manvantara/round. This term was used in *Isis Unveiled* as synonymous with a 'Night of Brahma'. This again evidenced Blavatsky's attempts at 'Orientalizing' her philosophy. Blavatsky equated her 'Nights of Brahma' with the term 'pralaya' as early as in 1882; however, she did this only in passing. These terms and periods would later go on to play a larger role in her cyclical cosmology. One of Blavatsky's fundamental beliefs associated with time was its eternal duration and motion; thus, this rest applied only to the evolutionary process. Blavatsky maintained that 'universal perpetual motion which never ceases...even during the interludes between the pralayas or "nights of Brahma."' ⁵¹ A 'pralaya' followed a round/manvantara; however, there were different types. This level of depth evidences the first purpose of the philosophy of time outlined in this chapter: to intentionally confuse her readers.

A special pralaya occurred following the period of time known as a MahaYug—or the great time period which somehow became the equivalent of a mahamanvantara even though earlier it was equated with a manvantara/round (7 yugs per each globe/sphere) and 49 yugs (a Mahayug) which made this scheme all the more confusing and contradictory. Blavatsky proceeded to redefine a MahaYug as a completion of seven cycles in each kingdom.⁵² After the seventh round on each world, the planet would begin to disintegrate and another pralaya or period of rest commences. This pralaya would destroy everything including the planet; however, this doctrine was contradictory. Each globe had its own individual rules of evolution and was not completely destroyed as they would eventually be recreated

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–75.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–139.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

in the same state that they were in before the pralaya occurred like 'a stopped time piece rewound.'⁵³

Given all of these discrepancies and confusing terms, I am arguing that it was Blavatsky's intent was to make these time periods intentionally confusing and inaccessible. The complex nature of these pralayas was further divided in the later Mahatma letter No. XV, written on 10 July 1882, into three different types: 1) The universal or Mahapralaya and manwanatara, 2) The solar pralaya and manwanatara , and 3) the minor pralaya and manwantara.⁵⁴ The role of these different manwanataras in Blavatsky's septenary structure of the universe was detailed in relation to pralayas or periods of rest and provides even larger time divisions than the other terms afforded, making Blavatsky's cosmology all the more complex.⁵⁵ During this solar pralaya each planet was annihilated and the monad was temporarily placed into nirvana when: 'the whole purified humanity merges into Nirvana and from that inter-solar Nirvana will be reborn in higher systems. The string of worlds is destroyed and vanishes...'⁵⁶

Blavatsky further complicated this doctrine by distinguishing a pralaya-like period called an 'obscuration' that seemed to be a microcosmic form of a pralaya which divided races/rings. These obscurations were always preceded by great cataclysms in her racial evolution:

The approach of every new 'obscuration' is always signalled by cataclysms- of either fire or water. But, apart from this, every 'Ring' or Root Race has to be cut in two, so to say, by either one or the other...having reached the apex of its development and glory the fourth Race- the Atlanteans were destroyed *by water*; you find now but their degenerated, fallen remnants, whose sub-races, nevertheless, aye- each of them, had its palmy days of glory and relative greatness. What they are now- you will be someday the law of cycles being one and immutable.⁵⁷

One cataclysm had to occur between each race of beings after it had reached its zenith of physical intellectuality. There was even a set of rules governing the spiritual evolution of rounds and their duration which distinguished them from their

⁵³ Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 94, 97.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 156-57.

Pralayas.⁵⁸ This distinction would be changed in her later writings when Blavatsky would engage 'obscuration' and 'pralaya' interchangeably, but at this early state Blavatsky attempted to separate these terms adding to the detailed complexity of her view of time.⁵⁹ This ambiguity implied that only her and her Masters were an authority on universal time and chronology.

7. Kama Loka: The Eastern Version of 'Summerland'

According to Blavatsky, following bodily death the soul travelled through a series of spheres, which appeared to be a reconceptualized form of Andrew Jackson Davis' Summer-land. While in Davis' early philosophy there was no conceptualization of judgment or punishment for the soul, Blavatsky's early spiritual evolution provided forms of judgment evidenced in these subjective worlds and in the previously mentioned eighth sphere of annihilation; these places of judgment would later be replaced by the law of cause and effect (e. g. karma). One such sphere was a realm called Kama Loka which was also the abode of Blavatsky's elementals. The subject of duration in this realm was elaborated upon in Mahatma letter no. XXc and seemed to be a place of refining the spirit:

Whether his stay in Kama Loka has to last but a few moments, hours, days, weeks, months or years; whether he died a natural or a violent death; whether it occurred in his young or old age. And whether the Ego was good, bad, or indifferent,- his consciousness leaves him as suddenly as the flame leaves the wick, when blown out.⁶⁰

Blavatsky's philosophy stated that those who experienced a natural death would remain from 'a few hours to several short years' within the earth's attractions (e. g. in the Kama-Loka). There were exceptions to this rule, especially in the case of suicides and those who died a violent death; thus, the purpose of this 'experience/locality' seemed to be the refinement of the monad/soul.⁶¹ The

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

⁵⁹ The terms obscuration and pralaya were equated by Jean Raymond: a kalpa was 'preceded by an equal period of quiescence or 'obscuration,' called in Hinduism a Pralaya. Jean Raymond, 'The Nights and Days of Brahma: The Oscillating Universe', in *H. P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine*, ed. by Virginia Hanson (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1988), pp. 100–44 (p. 144). Also, these two terms were equated in *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 69 and in a later letter sent to Sinnett quoted in Letter XXVIII, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 64.

⁶⁰ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 128.

⁶¹ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 112.

geography of 'Kama Loka' was later divided into seven lokas (place or abode), the seventh of which was called the 'Territory of Doubt,' as noted in the Avatamsaka Sutra, an idea Blavatsky seemingly borrowed from Samuel Beal's *Catena of Buddhist Scripture* (1871), further evidencing her Westernized Orientalist understanding of these Eastern concepts.

Every world in the sphere of effects was said to have a Tathagata or a Dhyanchohan 'to protect and watch over, not to interfere with it.'⁶² This theory would be combined with her conceptualization of the Masters/mahatmas/manus whose roles would be elaborated upon in future writings. This served to elevate the status of the Masters and became one of the recurring main purposes behind the creation of this complex view of time. Blavatsky further attempted to assimilate the afterlife of Western Spiritualism into an Orientalist view of afterlife states. Referring to Kama-Loka as the 'Summer-land,' it was a dwelling place for 'shells, the victims and suicides and this sphere is divided into innumerable regions and sub-regions corresponding to the mental states of the comers at their hour of death'. This divided this area into three Eastern terms or the 'Tribuvana (three worlds), namely: Kama, Rupa, and Arupa-Lokas.'⁶³ The similarities between this afterlife and Spiritualism prompted the Theosophical critic and Orientalist Arthur Lillie to remark that 'Buddhism has been transformed into American Spiritualism.'⁶⁴

According to Blavatsky, while both Spiritualism and Buddhism proposed a similar afterlife journey, only Buddhism provided a fuller understanding of the other states associated with Devachan (to be explored later). Devachan was dissected as a state of existence and not a locality, comprised of Rupa-Loka, Arupa-Loka, and Kama-Loka as the three spheres of ascent.⁶⁵ The relationship between Devachan and Kama Loka was further clarified and explained in relation to the spiritual evolution of the soul/monad.⁶⁶ The geography for this subjective

⁶² Ibid., p. 108.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 198–99.

⁶⁴ Arthur Lillie, *Koot Hoomi Unveiled; or, Tibetan 'Buddhists' versus the Buddhists of Tibet* (London: The Psychological Press Association, 1884), p. 5.

⁶⁵ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 198–99.

⁶⁶ 'From Kama Loka...the newly translated souls; go all (but the shells) according to their attractions, either to Devachan or Avitchi. And those two states are again differentiating *ad infinitum*—their ascending degrees of spirituality deriving their names from the lokas in which they are induced. For instance: the sensations, perceptions and ideation of a devachanee in Rupa-Lokas, will, of course, be of a less subjective nature than they would be in Arupa-Loka in both of which the devachanic experiences will vary in presentation to the subject-entity. Not only as regards

'existence' mirrored Andrew Jackson Davis' Summerland in many aspects. However, Blavatsky reconceptualized this Western concept in Eastern terms. This accomplished two goals: 1) it seemingly differentiated her Theosophical Society from Spiritualism and also 2) made these realms vast and difficult to ascertain for her readers.

8. Bardo

The term 'bardo' was used to describe the period between death and rebirth (this term is related to the after death journey of the soul throughout the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*). 'Bardo' may last anywhere from a few years to an entire kalpa (though this term was never defined in these letters). The 'bardo' period was divided into three 'sub-periods': Period 1) when the Ego enters Kama-Loka, which can last from a few minutes to a number of years; Period 2) when it enters into its 'Gestation State, which is a 'very long' state sometimes beyond comprehension; and Period 3) when it is reborn in the Rupa-Loka of Deva-chan, which is based on the amount of good Karma and therefore varies.⁶⁷ It is curious that the term 'bardo' seemed to only have been used as a designation in these Mahatma letters and disappeared in Blavatsky's later writings, adding to the confusion of understanding Blavatsky's philosophy again fulfilling the main purposes set forth at the beginning of this chapter.

9. Planet of Death

Another unique locality introduced (and found solely) in these Mahatma letters was the 'Planet of Death', which was a 'whirlpool whither disappear the lives doomed to destruction.'⁶⁸ It was between Kama-Loka and Rupa-Loka and it is at this point that a struggle between the principles of the soul takes place. In her commentary on the Mahatma Letters, Joy Mills equated the two terms 'Planet of Death' and the 'eighth

form, colour, and substance, but also in their formative potentialities, But not even the most exalted experience of a monad in the highest devachanic state in Arupa-Loka (the last of the seven states)—is comparable to that perfectly subjective condition of pure spirituality from which the monad emerged to 'descend into matter,' and to which at the completion of the grand cycle it must return. Nor is Nirvana itself comparable to Para Nirvana.'

The Mahatma Letters, p. 199.

⁶⁷ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. vii, 107.

sphere', echoing G. de Purucker's explanation in his *Occult Glossary*.⁶⁹ In a later letter (No. 23A) the question is asked 'What is the nature of the life that goes on in the 'Planet of Death?' To which the 'mahatma' responded that this is 'a question I have no right to answer.'⁷⁰ Though these two terms (eighth sphere and planet of death) eventually became synonymous, it remains unknown if they were originally meant to become identical terms further complicating this cosmological system.

10. Devachan: An 'Eastern' Version of Heaven

Devachan was described as a type of heavenly afterlife experience/locality. It was commented that in Devachan 'all unrealized hopes, aspirations, dreams, become fully realized, and the dreams of the objective become the realities of the subjective existence.'⁷¹ Devachan was a perpetual dream-state where no pain or grief could exist—it was pure, unbridled happiness.⁷² Though there were differing degrees of reward in this state, all monads experienced it in various levels of intensity, determined by how 'evil' or 'wicked' their lives may have been lived: 'Hence all those who have not slipped down into the mire of unredeemable sin and bestiality — go to the Deva Chan. They will have to pay for their sins, voluntary and involuntary, later on. Meanwhile they are rewarded...'⁷³ The time period spent in Devachan could be anywhere from 'years, decades, centuries, and milleniums [sic],' depending on the quality of karma in the individual.⁷⁴ Every effect had to be proportionate to its cause (i. e. just). The human perception of time in Devachan was that it was a taste of eternal bliss in which 'a million years is no longer than a second'.⁷⁵

There was another question related to the soul (or ego) receiving its memory of former lives in Devachan, to which Blavatsky responded that it depended upon its nature:

⁶⁹ Joy Mills, *Reflections: on an Ageless Wisdom* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2010), p. 265.

⁷⁰ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 148, 176.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁷² Mahatma Letter XVI. *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 99–116.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷⁵ Time in Devachan became a popular subject explored later in the March 1883 article 'Fragments of Occult Truth', *The Theosophist*, 4.42 (1883), 131–135. *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 127.

Every just disembodied *four-fold* entity— whether it died a natural or violent death [including suicides]...loses at the instant of death all recollection, it is mentally—*annihilated*; it sleeps it's akasic sleep in Kama-loka. This state lasts from a few hours, (rarely less) days, weeks, months – sometimes to several years. All this according to the entity, to its mental status at the moment of death, to the character of its death, etc. That remembrance will return slowly and gradually toward the end of the gestation (to the entity or Ego), still more slowly but far more imperfectly and incompletely to the shell, and fully to the Ego at the moment of its entrance into the Devachan.⁷⁶

Thus, most souls had to travel to Kama-Loka in transition to Devachan. This 'forgetfulness' mentioned above justified why many human beings retain no memory of their past lives.

Mahatma Letter No. XXV (2 February 1883) delved into Blavatsky's understanding of time and its relationship to the afterlife. Here the nature of Devachan was described as a dream of realistic vividness that no life-reality could match. And that this 'dream lasted- until karma was satisfied in that direction...and the being moves into the next area of causes.'⁷⁷ The notion of time in Devachan was further engaged in Mahatma Letter No. XXc, which stated that 'a million of years is no longer than a second.'⁷⁸ This seemed contradictory as it was noted that 'the more merit, the longer period of devachan. But then in Devachan...all sense of the lapse of time is lost: a minute is as a thousand years...'; thus, there was an ambiguity and a time-discrepancy.⁷⁹

Blavatsky responded to this inconsistency in two ways. First, she insinuated that time had little bearing in the afterlife states of subjectivity by noting that: 'This remark and such ways of looking at things might as well apply to the whole of Eternity, to Nirvana, Pralaya, and what not...', obviously referring to the limits of human intellect in understanding such things as eternity and nirvana as no human mind could fully comprehend these concepts.⁸⁰ Secondly, Blavatsky explained that this was Eastern philosophy, and she was not surprised that Westerners could not grasp it. She continued to note that her recipients 'fail to take in the whole magnitude of our philosophy, or to even embrace at one scope a small corner —

⁷⁶ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 187.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 191–92.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

the devachan — of those sublime and infinite horizons of “after life.” She further explained that:

No, there are no clocks, no timepieces in devachan, my esteemed chela, though the whole Cosmos is a gigantic chronometer in one sense. Nor do we, mortals...take much, if any, cognizance of time during periods of happiness and bliss, and find them ever too short; a fact that does not in the least prevent us from enjoying that happiness all the same- when it does come.⁸¹

Elsewhere, Blavatsky explained that human time and its duration were relative to the observer and his condition/state (echoing a Kantian sensibility explanation for time):

I may also remind you in this connection that time is something created entirely by ourselves; that while one short second of intense agony may appear, even on earth, as an eternity to one man, to another, more fortunate, hours, days, and sometimes whole years may seem to flit like one brief moment; and that finally, of all the sentient and conscious beings on earth, man is the only animal that takes any cognizance of time, although it makes him neither happier nor wiser. How then, can I explain to you that which you cannot feel, since you seem unable to comprehend it?⁸²

Blavatsky definitely recognized the abstract nature of time and decided to shroud her teachings in this confusing philosophy to instill in them a sense of mystery, and to give them the impression that they were superiorly intellectual.

Again the finitude of human intellect is pointed out as Blavatsky observed that it was impossible to explain cosmological (spiritual, subjective) ideas to phenomenal (physical, objective) beings, as they could not fully understand something that they could not experience: ‘Finite similes are unfit to express the abstract and infinite; nor can the objective ever mirror the subjective....Time is not a predicate conception and can, therefore, neither be proved nor analysed, according to the methods of superficial philosophy.’⁸³ In the subjective worlds, time could not be measured as it was conveniently ‘abstract’ and ‘infinite’. These other ‘subjective worlds’ provided Blavatsky with an open realm that possessed different scientific laws and its landscape could be as vast as her imagination allowed. Certainly, Blavatsky’s imagination was vividly eclectic and could be traced back to

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., p. 194.

⁸³ Ibid.

her childhood stories of pre-historic beasts expanding down into her own literary fictional works such as *Nightmare Tales* (1892) and *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* (1892).⁸⁴

Blavatsky continued to expand her view of Devachan as a transitory state in which the attainment of gradual oblivion was followed by total oblivion and then finally birth into another personality in the world of actions determined by the karma of the Ego.⁸⁵ This eternal evolution continued until the end when ‘the being reaches the end of the seventh round, or- attains in the interim the wisdom of an Arhat, then that of Buddha and thus gets relieved for a round or two,- having learned how to burst through the vicious circles- and to pass periodically into the Paranirvana.’⁸⁶ There was no final release of the soul only a temporary ‘time-out’ period; however, it seemed that one could eventually manipulate time and even begin to control it.

11. Avitchi: An Eastern Hell

If Devachan could be viewed as a heavenly type of afterlife ‘destination’, then Avitchi could be seen as its inverted ‘hellish’ experience. Blavatsky suggested some clarifications on the state of Avitchi as a place of punishment for the wicked monads, differentiating this experience from the eighth sphere. Inhabitants of this place came because their sixth principle had left them, and the seventh having been extinguished did not go to the eighth sphere as ‘he must not be simply annihilated but PUNISHED; for annihilation, i.e. total oblivion...constitutes per se no punishment...’⁸⁷ Annihilation was too merciful a punishment for certain wicked souls which allows a glimpse into the thought process of Blavatsky and her belief in the existence of evil under extenuating circumstances.

According to the Mahatma letters, Christianity had inadvertently turned Avitchi into the biblical notion of ‘hell’, a connection that was the result of an article series ‘Fragments of Occult Truth.’ Blavatsky wrote that: Avitchi has been

⁸⁴ A.P. Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky: Compiled from Information Supplied by Her Relatives and Friends* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1913), pp. 27–28. Though both of these fictional stories were not published in English until 1892, they had been written between the years 1879–1880 and published in the earlier Russian publication *Suski Vvestnik*. See H. P. Blavatsky, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindustan* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1908), p. iii.

⁸⁵ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 195.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

‘vulgarized by the Western nations into Hell and Heaven, and which you have entirely lost sight of in your Fragment....And to complete your Fragment without risking to fall again under the mangling tooth of the latter [Roden Noel] honourable gentleman’s criticism — I found it necessary to add to devachan — Avitchi as its complement and applying to it the same laws as to the former.’⁸⁸ According to Noel, the concept of Avitchi was added by Blavatsky in an attempt to give balance and justice to her philosophy; however, this belief in ‘avitchi’ would soon be discarded.⁸⁹

Blavatsky attached a sobering reality to this cosmological philosophy which was outside of phenomenal (human) time and therefore seemed to be more of an eternal torture chamber than a temporary place of punishment. Thus, she clarified:

Have you ever given a thought to this little possibility that, perhaps it is because their cup of bliss is full to its brim, that the ‘devachanee’ loses ‘all sense of the lapse of time’; and that it is something that those who land in Avitchi do not, though as much as the devachanee, the Avitchee has no cognizance of time- i.e., of our earthly calculations of periods of time?⁹⁰

If in Devachan time moved quickly due to a positive experience, then in Avitchi time would move slowly because of the excruciating experiences the soul was enduring. The nature of Avitchi remains distinct in this letter from its function in *Esoteric Buddhism* (where it is a returnable destination) and here is called the ‘Hell; from which there is no return...’ Blavatsky never really expounded upon the idea of Avitchi (punishment and hell), which was replaced in *The Secret Doctrine* when karma was sufficient for all punishments. Each of those terms was included as they validated the two purposes for Blavatsky’s time that I set forth in the introduction. The term ‘avitchi’ (or the concept of an eternal ‘hell’) never appears once in the 1,500 page span of *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky’s complicated historical-mythological evolution has been described in detail in this section, but how does this fit into Blavatsky’s larger soteriology?

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 197.

⁸⁹ Roden Noel was

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 193–94.

III. Superiority, Soteriology and Spiritual Evolution

Blavatsky's soteriology is another unique 'Blavatskiysm'. In her spiritual evolution, karma became the force that propelled the soul through this vast network of time and evolution — karma determined the destination and the duration spent in the afterlife locale. It also guided the soul through its eternal evolution across the various races; therefore, time and spiritual evolution were deeply connected. It is also worth mentioning that evolution in the nineteenth century was directly associated with a move towards improvement (i. e. time = evolution = improvement) an idea that Blavatsky utilized in her writings.

1. Making Sense of All the Confusion

It should seem apparent to the reader by this point, that all of these various calculations and time divisions can be confusing largely because there was no uniformity in the terms Blavatsky employed; she used several different words to describe the same period of time; for example, 'rings' and 'races' were used interchangeably (for the most part), three different terms (mahayug, manvantara, and round) all described the same period of time, while two other terms (pralaya and obscurations) were occasionally used synonymously and at other times were separated. Also, a similar ambiguous word usage was applied to the terms 'planet of death' and 'eighth sphere'.

This prompts the question: 'Why was Blavatsky creating such a complex cosmological structure of the universe?' The answer can be found in a division of Blavatsky's main purposes of her cosmology: 1) to separate her philosophically evolved Theosophical Society from Spiritualism, 2) to build up the superiority of her Masters and 3) to present a vast, complex, and incomprehensible philosophy of time that could only be revealed through the ancient wisdom tradition (via the Masters). It is intriguing that even Blavatsky herself could not keep up with the complexity of her time and in April of 1883, she was criticised for confusing the 'major' (maha) and 'minor' cycles. She justified her confusion by adding to her cosmology: the Earth's solar system was only one of numerous other universes connected to the sun; when one universe is in a period of activity — this period of activity is called a maha or great cycle. This maha cycle, when compared with the other universes (attached to the same sun), is called a minor cycle. Despite her

best attempts to reconcile this issue, it seemed that at this point even the Masters were having a difficult time remembering the details of this complex cosmology.⁹¹ The three practical purposes of Blavatsky's time listed above all attempted to prove that her ancient wisdom tradition, her Masters and her Theosophical Society were superior — 'Time' was the very element that made her form of Theosophy worth studying.

2. Blavatsky's Defense of her Contradictory Chronology

The aforementioned response calls attention to two defence patterns that can be identified in Blavatsky's philosophy and occult hermeneutic. In order to maintain the infallibility of the Masters and her ancient wisdom tradition, whenever Blavatsky was criticised for a discrepancy, rather than admit to making a mistake, she would instead add a new element to her cosmology that would explain away the problem issue. This defence mechanism was noticed above and can also be witnessed in her explanation for the anti-reincarnation statements in *Isis Unveiled*. Instead of admitting a discrepancy or mistake she rather explained that this was due to the soul being divided into seven parts and therefore she was not mistaken, but merely unaware. This is a typical philosophical apologetic employed in her writings.

The second defence mechanism was that frequently throughout her writings, Blavatsky would claim that the Masters were not at liberty to explain their entire philosophy as a finite mind could not possibly understand infinite ideas.⁹² She continually engaged this defence. Instead of it being the Masters mistake, the blame was placed on the questioner's under-evolved intellect. It appeared that Blavatsky was intentionally and consciously trying to confuse her readers in order to give the appearance that she possessed a superior knowledge of time and eternity.

Blavatsky's view of time could be classified as an open (infinite) view of cyclical evolution based on the duality of matter and spirit as exemplified in *Isis Unveiled*. Her conceptions of spiritual evolution fit inside this Neo-Platonic dualism and as Wouter Hanegraaff noted, when 'emanation and manifestation reaches a

⁹¹ H. P. Blavatsky, 'Old and New Methods', *The Theosophist*, 4.7 (1883), 151–52.

⁹² For comparison in these similar styles see Mahatma Letter XII, *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 70; and Mahatma Letter XXIV, *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 180–81.

natural limit, the direction is reversed and a process of “evolution” back to unity begins...in this case, the whole achieves a “higher” level of integration at the completion of the cycles [i. e. a higher level of ‘spirit’ is obtained at the end of every race and round]. The higher level may be the end of the process or it may be the beginning of a new cycle. The results can be pictured as an evolutionary *spiral*...⁹³ Hanegraaff’s statement certainly applies to Blavatsky’s view of time, spiritual evolution and the soul’s descent/ascent to spirit that was continuously evolving like an infinite spiral. Yet, the driving force behind the soul’s journey was finally claimed by Blavatsky following her relocation to India — karma. According to Blavatsky, physical evolution was a unique syncretism of Western and Eastern concepts that was continually progressing while its spiritual evolution consisted of the soul’s open evolution propelled by its karma and its descent/ascent towards spirit. As Hanegraaff went on to note concerning Blavatsky’s evolutionary syncretism:

...for Blavatsky, progressive spiritual evolutionism was far more central than the belief in reincarnation *per se*. She certainly did not adopt evolutionism in order to explain the reincarnation process for a modern western audience; what she did was to assimilate the theory of karma within an already existing western framework of spiritual progress. This has implications for the question of her ‘orientalism.’ It is not the same that she moved from an occidental to an oriental perspective and abandoned western beliefs in favour of an oriental one. Her fundamental belief system was an occultist version of romantic evolutionism from beginning to end; and karma was adopted in order to provide this evolutionism with a theory of ‘scientific causality.’⁹⁴

Even following her relocation to India and her implementation of Eastern sources, Blavatsky continued to maintain a decidedly progressive view of evolution.

The eclectic spiritual journey made by Blavatsky (from Spiritualist to Hindu to Buddhist) was reflected in her teachings and through the assimilation of religious traditions; ‘time’ and its manipulation would stand out as an appealing doctrine to early initiates, as will be evidenced in the next chapter. It is important here to observe the purposeful complexity and unique structure of time in these Mahatma letters. This uniqueness would become more evident to the mainstream (and to Blavatsky) once Sinnett had combined and summarized these teachings in

⁹³ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 159–60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 471–72.

Esoteric Buddhism (1883), which prompted Blavatsky to write *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888.

Karma and Septenary Division

The soul (or a 'monad' as Blavatsky called it) was viewed as continuously progressing through this cosmological universe with the law of 'karma' (also known as the law of retribution) which propels the soul from matter to spirit; however, this was another instance where Blavatsky had hijacked an Eastern term and 'Westernized' it. Her reconceptualization of 'karma' separated her Theosophy from Hinduism and Buddhism. Any historian must be careful in making any sweeping generalizations about Hindu and Buddhist conceptualizations as these belief systems come in many various forms and versions; however, Harold and William Hare believed that they had stumbled across some general inconsistencies between Theosophy and both Vedantism and Buddhism — a religion to which Blavatsky converted in 1880:

Having deprived the Vedanta system of its characteristic deity, the Mahatmas [Blavatsky] feel equal to providing Buddha's soul-less system with a soul floating above our heads. His technical terms are abundantly employed in the Letters, and often incorrectly. Nirvana, in twenty cases, is rightly used only in one, being casual or wrong in the rest...Karma, common to Hindu and Buddhist teachings, ambles through the book without lucid exposition, but received in many passages 'trans-Himalayan' touches.⁹⁵

The Eastern scholar Meera Nanda concluded that 'for all the loan words from Hinduism, Blavatsky's view of karma and rebirth constitute a break from classical Hindu doctrine' again evidencing that Blavatsky maintained a distinct (what can only be labelled as a) 'Blavatskian' interpretation of these Eastern concepts.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Harold Edward Hare and William Loftus Hare, *Who Wrote the Mahatma Letters?* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1936), pp. 113–14.

⁹⁶ As the Freemason W. L. Wilmhurst noted in 1919: '...that curious cross-drift of oriental lore...the theosophical movement associated with Madame Blavatsky, which...[appeals] rather to the intelligence than to the religious spirit in man, introduced to the Western understanding some cosmological principles previously unknown to it. This somewhat enigmatic lady was doubtless an 'initiate' of some kind; she was...a medium for the transmission from less exalted sources of certain truths concerning world-processes long held in the wisdom-teaching of the older East, but with which the West was unfamiliar...This graft of Eastern upon Western ideas was presently...succeeded by the Kingsford-Maitland theosophic revelation...' W. L. Wilmhurst, 'Seekers' Problems: (I) Theosophy', *The Seeker: A Quarterly Magazine of Christian Mysticism*, 15 (1919), 94–104 (p. 99).

For Blavatsky, karma was a ‘mechanism for progress — the soul, like everything else in nature, only moves forward toward perfection,’ a process that continues evolving through this huge cosmological process; however, ‘this progressive view of karma and rebirth are at odds with the traditional Hindu view which allows for regression from the human to animal stages.’⁹⁷ It seemed then that Blavatsky’s view of spiritual (and therefore physical) evolution corresponded more to other nineteenth-century progressive views of evolution. As Frederick Conner noted, ‘even though evolution does not have to imply progress, to most people in the 19th century the suggestion of a movement from worse to better was at the heart of the theory.’⁹⁸ This progressive Victorian interpretation of ‘evolution’ seemed to have been reflected in Blavatsky’s spiritual evolution that did not allow for the regression of the soul (only the annihilation of it!) and made other more evolved races superior; therefore, Blavatsky’s Westernized form of ‘karma’ and reincarnation had as little to do with nineteenth-century scientific conceptualizations as it did with Eastern religions.

In her view of spiritual evolution, Blavatsky adopted (spiritual) karma as the guiding force of life as opposed to the (physical) natural selection that Darwinism suggested. This again evidenced Blavatsky’s focus on spirit over matter (a dualism seen throughout this entire complex cosmology). Natural selection, according to Darwin, claimed that the ‘preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations’ was the overall guiding force of intelligent life (survival of the fittest but *not the strongest*); however, all of these variations were based on physical traits.⁹⁹ Blavatsky was suggesting a spiritual evolution based on the spiritual traits of the soul and the survival of the fittest soul (i. e. karma); thus, there remains a clear difference between Blavatsky’s spiritual evolution and Darwin’s physical evolution. It was this defense that James Santucci argued cleared Blavatsky from any connection to Nazism and their racial ideologies.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Meera Nanda, ‘Madame Blavatsky’s Children: Modern Hindu Encounters with Darwinism’, *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 279–344 (p. 308).

⁹⁸ Frederick William Conner, *Cosmic Optimism: A Study of the Interpretation of Evolution by American Poets From Emerson to Robinson* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), p. 4.

⁹⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle For Life* (London: John Murray, 1861), p. 84.

¹⁰⁰ James A. Santucci, ‘The Notion of Race in Theosophy’, *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 11.3 (February 2008), 37–63 (p. 38).

Septenary Constitution: The Seven Principles of the Soul

One important series of articles drastically changed Blavatsky's perception of spiritual evolution and provided an excuse for her ignorance of reincarnation — the septenary division of the soul.¹⁰¹ As already alluded, a series of articles appeared in *The Theosophist* on October 1881 entitled 'Fragments of Occult Truth' which reprinted large excerpts from the Mahatma letters. The author of the first three articles was A. O. Hume and the remainder were written by A. P. Sinnett, though Madame Blavatsky clearly had a level of influence on them. John Patrick Deveney concluded that these 'articles are a watershed in Theosophical history and mark the separation of Theosophy from the Western occultism' and also Spiritualism.¹⁰² Deveney's comment could be seen as an understatement, since following this series an entirely eclectic philosophy from the Masters was put forth using Eastern terms that would differentiate Theosophy from any similar movement (including Spiritualism). One of the most original concepts of this new ideology was the philosophy of time.

The post-mortem journey of the seven parts of the soul were further elucidated by Blavatsky in Mahatma Letter No. XVI. Here the different states are described, which the septenary constitution of humanity must go through following death — when a human dies his second and third principles die with him and the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh principles form a quaternary. Following this division, there was a battle between the lower (fourth and fifth) and higher (sixth and seventh) principles. If the higher principles won this battle, these two principles entered into the 'Gestation' states and the lower two principles remain empty shells and roam in the earth's atmosphere, transforming into elementaries (which again served to demarcate the Theosophical Society from the generally accepted tenets of Spiritualism). If, on the other hand, the lower principles were victorious, then the

¹⁰¹ The septenary (seven) constitution of man was first explained to the world by the publication of another recipient of the Mahatma letters, Allan Octavian Hume. Hume explained that each monad was comprised of seven separate principles: 1) the physical body, 2) the vital principle, 3) the astral body, 4) the astral shape, 5) the animal consciousness (ego), 6) the spiritual intelligence, and 7) the spirit. A. O. Hume, 'Fragments of Occult Truth: Number One', *The Theosophist*, 3.25 (1881), 17–22.

¹⁰² John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 520.

sixth and seventh principles went on to become reborn while these lower two principles entered into a 'great whirlpool of human Egos.'¹⁰³

The results of this battle determined the destination of these principles.¹⁰⁴ This struggle between the higher principles and the lower ones was further elaborated upon in Mahatma Letter no. XX where this conflict was referred to as 'the hour of the last Judgment.'¹⁰⁵ The struggle became an integral tenet in Blavatsky's philosophy of spiritual evolution during this time period, though it would be slightly altered in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* and would become an evolving concept in Blavatsky's later works.¹⁰⁶ The implications of this struggle reveal the individualistic culture of the Victorian Era and the soteriology of Spiritualism — the purification of the soul from matter to spirit. This led Blavatsky to develop a unique cosmology that will now be defined.

3. Nirvana and Soteriological Implications

While the final destination of the soul was never clearly explained in these writings, there were occasional hints towards an 'eternal rest'.¹⁰⁷ Karma again was described as the guiding principle and in the afterlife the soul (or parts of it) would either end up in Devachan or Avitchi.¹⁰⁸ The subject of incarnations has been discussed in some depth, though in different incarnations the human being may not remember their past lives; but, 'the real full remembrance of our lives will come but at the end of the minor cycle—not before.'¹⁰⁹ Blavatsky also made two clarifications on the nature of humanity: 1) 'The potency for evil is as great in man—aye greater—than the potentiality for good...' and included her own cyclical view of eschatology.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ In her later work, the fifth principle, Manas, is subdivided into Lower and Higher/Upper Manas for the purpose of this struggle and evolutionary soteriology. See H. P. Blavatsky, 'E.S. Instruction No. III', *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings 1883–1884–1885*, ed. by Boris de Zirkoff, 15 vols (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House), XII, 623–24.

¹⁰⁵ This conflict of the principles of the soul was also later connected with Blavatsky's conceptualization of shells in Mahatma Letter XXIIIB. *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁶ Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 67–68.

¹⁰⁷ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 116. Also, see Edwin Arnold, *The Light of Asia: Or the Great Renunciation* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1892), pp. 68, 128, 176.

¹⁰⁸ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

But at the close of the minor cycle, after the completion of all the seven Rounds, there awaits us no other mercy but the cup of good deeds, or merit, outweighing that of evil deeds and demerit in the scales of Retributive Justice. Bad, irretrievably bad must be that Ego that yields no mite from its Fifth Principle, and has to be annihilated, to disappear in the Eighth Sphere. A mite, as I say, collected from the Personal Ego suffices to save him from the dreary fate. Not so after the completion of a great cycle: either a long Nirvana of Bliss (unconscious though it be in the, and according to, your crude conceptions); after which- life as a Dhyan Chohan for a whole Manvantara, or else 'Avitchi Nirvana' and a Manvantara of misery and Horror as a ---- you must not hear the word nor I- pronounce or write it...enough. I have said too much already.

Following a great cycle the soul would first be placed in a 'long' nirvana of bliss (though still temporary), followed by going through an entire round/manvantara as a god-like being (Dhyan Chohan).

Mahatma Letter No. XXV, written on 2 February 1883, seemed especially important to Blavatsky's soteriology as it suggested that the monad's main purpose was to evolve through this vast eternal universe through the various globes, kingdoms, races and rounds. And yet, despite the ambiguity of having no final soteriology, Blavatsky would occasionally suggest that an amnesic state of absolute rest existed which was a concept similar to the Eastern concept of absorption though she never seemed to commit to this soteriological end. At one point, she even defined nirvana 'as a State of Absolute Rest and assimilation with Parabrahm — it is Parabrahm itself' though elsewhere this conclusion was ignored.¹¹¹

A belief in a 'final Nirvana' was also included, though the name is ambiguous as the soul never came to a final rest in any permanent sense, but instead continued to 'resume its pre-cyclic state of atomic distribution.'¹¹² The term Nirvana is another word which Blavatsky had 'borrowed' from its original Eastern context, though she again redefined its meaning to fit her own ideologies. According to the Victorian Orientalist Samuel Beal (by whom Blavatsky was heavily influenced), the term Nirvana was 'a condition incapable of beginning or ending (without birth, without death).'¹¹³ *It is illogical to say that nirvana is temporary in its*

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 198.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 67.

¹¹³ Samuel Beal, *Abstract of Four Lectures on Buddhist Literature in China* (London: Trubner & Co., 1882), p. 145.

original context as nirvana was by very definition outside of human time and understanding. In a letter written to her sister on 11 December 1877, Blavatsky expressed that this term had been incorrectly interpreted by all Oriental scholars noting that ‘nirvana is a word which none of our Orientalists have as yet rendered with any degree of accuracy... [it] means the ultimate, the complete destruction of the human individuals.’¹¹⁴

Later in Mahatma letter no. XXV, Blavatsky expressed her disagreement with the ‘absurd’ translation of nirvana as ‘annihilation’ and went on to explain that time was merely an illusion (maya) and ‘only that actually exists in eternity which is subjective, in the spiritual world, the Subjective of the very highest grade, in which there is no more any trace of human thinking, but everything is divine and pure: it is without beginning, as without end, it always was. This is Nirvana...’¹¹⁵ Blavatsky understood that the Eastern definition of nirvana was that this state existed outside of time; however, in order to make this concept fit into her progressive evolutionary time scheme of eternal motion, nirvana ironically became a temporary state.

Blavatsky further maintained that the subjective world (Avitichi, Devachan. etc.) was ultimate reality and the objective world (earthly) was merely an illusion. Despite this definition of ‘nirvana’ as destruction and a state of timelessness, Blavatsky’s use of this word remains obscure and sometimes she explained that nirvana occurred on Earth and at other times she seemed to connect it to the subjective world (such as Devachan). One thing remains clear—nirvana was connected to Blavatsky’s cosmological process of evolution and rebirths which occurred continuously throughout eternity in an infinite duration:

This, as we know, is repeated endlessly throughout ETERNITY. Each man of us has gone this ceaseless round, and will repeat it for ever and ever. The deviation of each one’s course, and his rate of progress from Nirvana to Nirvana is governed by causes which he himself creates out of the exigencies in which he finds himself entangled. This picture of an eternity of action may appall the mind that has been accustomed to look forward to an existence of ceaseless repose.¹¹⁶

Blavatsky admitted that her eternal cosmology would not be appealing to many Westerners; yet, her construction of this eternal progression revealed something

¹¹⁴ Letter 100 (written on 11 December 1877), *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky: 1861 – 1879* (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 2003), p. 380.

¹¹⁵ *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky*, p. 380.

¹¹⁶ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 68.

about her deep seated beliefs. This prompts the question, 'What was the true purpose behind her version of nirvana?' Some light can be shed on this question through the writings of modern South Asian scholar Steve Collins. Collins (seemingly agreeing with Blavatsky's above definition) noted that Nirvana was 'the ultimate aim of Buddhism' which is most commonly seen as a 'freedom from rebirth' as well as a form of 'liberation'; however, these notions refer 'to a place (metaphorically), state, or condition where there is no death because there is also no birth, no coming into existence, nothing "made" by conditioning...and therefore, no time.'¹¹⁷

As opposed to Buddhist notions that had a period of activity that ended in nirvana, Blavatsky's soteriology was an endless journey that alternated between periods of time (objective/historical world) and timelessness (subjective/mythological world), reflecting her Spiritualist roots. Instead of reaching one final destination (such as nirvana was), the soul was continuously evolving throughout all eternity through this complex system of rounds, root races, and sub-races. Collins went on to explain his belief that nirvana was the doctrine that gave life any real soteriological meaning and justice within Buddhist theology:

the problem of evil and injustice is understood as part of the cosmic scheme of karma, cause and effect, a scheme in which, ultimately, there is no injustice, for all get their just desserts. But the sequence of lives as a whole, the very fact of conditioning and karma, finds its own resolution, its own avoidance of meaningless chronology, in the possibility of Release. Such a final end...cannot be imagined: but that is not its purpose. Nirvana provides the full stop (period) in the religious story...it is the moment of ending which gives structure to the whole.¹¹⁸

Blavatsky's use of a temporary 'nirvana' left her with a 'meaningless chronology' which she tried to justify throughout the Mahatma letters. As Collins noted, nirvana was meant to be the culmination of life; however, in Blavatsky's cosmology, the Buddhist soteriological goal of nirvana is lost. This then prompts the question: What is the soteriological point of life in a time scheme that never provides the soul with a final release or liberation (to say nothing of 'eternal life')? Why did Blavatsky create a confusing ideology with an apparent infinite number of chances for redemption?

¹¹⁷ Steve Collins, 'Nirvana, Time, and Narrative', *History of Religions*, 31.3 (1993), 215–46 (p. 230).

¹¹⁸ Collins, 'Nirvana, Time, and Narrative', pp. 233–34.

While French suggests Blavatsky's disdain for Christianity and hell, this seems too simplistic.¹¹⁹ While this disdain might be part of the reason, there seems to be more to it. It should be concluded that Blavatsky's eternal chronology (while not giving any final release or nirvana) instilled value into two of the main purposes that have been identified as integral to her philosophy of time: 1) the divinity of the Masters which suggests that every soul has the potential to become divine, implying a pseudo-Darwinian spiritual 'survival of the fittest' soteriological goal (survival as opposed to annihilation in the eighth sphere); and 2) the transcendental nature of the ancient wisdom tradition as a saving knowledge (i. e. gnosis) able to assist the soul in its evolution into a higher level or round. This 'gnosis' provided the practitioner with two abilities: 1) the ability to manipulate elements of nature (such supernatural powers as those claimed by both Blavatsky and Olcott) and 2) the ability to evolve at a quicker pace, which was the soteriological purpose of humanity according to Blavatsky.

In his study on the nature of Blavatsky's Masters and their connection to macro-history, French has noted a similar conclusion:

Consequently, the enlightened esotericist is able to shorten the trajectory of his or her personal development by stepping upon the path to Master-ship...the Masters benevolently deign to assist those few aspirants possessed of sufficient insight and resourcefulness to initiate the journey of the 'Deifying Vision' within...their primary soteriological task is to provide a living example of a sophiology not dependent upon institutionalized religion or science; they, like Hermes incarnate the necessity for a *tertium quid* [a third way].¹²⁰

This 'third way' mentioned above was a combination of these elements—science and theology along with mythology and history. Notwithstanding the implications of French's statement, the soteriological role of the Masters was not just to provide an ideal example or to emancipate the world from religious bigotry or scientific materialism, but rather their existence (if it could ever be proved) served to validate the existence of this vast evolutionary scheme that Blavatsky was putting forth in her writings. If the Masters did exist there would be proof that human beings were

¹¹⁹ Brendan James French, 'The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, August 2000), I, 210.

¹²⁰ Brendan James French, 'The Mercurian Master: Hermes' Gift to the Theosophical Society', *Aries*, 1.2 (2001), 168–205 (pp. 185–86).

part of this larger chain of spiritual evolution which would in turn substantiate Blavatsky's ancient wisdom tradition as the one Truth (as well as elevate the status of Blavatsky as a key initiate). For example, her Masters became an integral part of her time scheme as they assisted humanity in their evolution; thus, the main goal of time seemed to be based on Spiritualism i. e., the eternal progression (and the evolution) of the soul.

IV. Conclusion

Three purposes and implications of Blavatsky's eternal time scheme have been identified in this chapter and they remain crucial for understanding Blavatsky's overall philosophy of time. *The first purpose for Blavatsky's philosophy of time was that it served to demarcate her Theosophical Society from mainstream Spiritualism.* This was accomplished through her septenary division of the soul, belief in annihilation, her belief in reincarnation, her belief in the role of the Masters within this cosmology, and her Oriental/Western esoteric cosmology. She also reconceptualized Spiritualist themes, such as turning Andrew Jackson Davis' Summerland into Kama-Loka. Also, her cyclical view of history went against Christian Spiritualism, which largely held to a linear view of historical events. Blavatsky's use of Oriental terms also served to further separate her Theosophical Society from Spiritualism, at least from a superficial perspective.

While Blavatsky attempted to distinguish her Theosophical Society from both Spiritualism and Spiritism during this time period, it has been suggested that she combined the world-views of both of these two philosophies. Blavatsky believed in the limited Spiritist (and a mainstream Spiritualist) soteriological view of the universe. This maintained that humanity's spirit evolved until it had reached perfection. At the same time this was only accomplished after a series of incarnations with help from the supernatural (the difference being that in Spiritualism this evolution was spiritual and in Spiritism this evolution was physical). Theosophy, on the other hand, believed that adepts and initiates possessed the power and ability to manipulate the 'astral light' and communicate simply by using one's individual will from the natural world. By combining these two

beliefs, Blavatsky's Theosophy could be seen as a combination of occultism (Western Esotericism) and Spiritism, only 'Orientalized'.

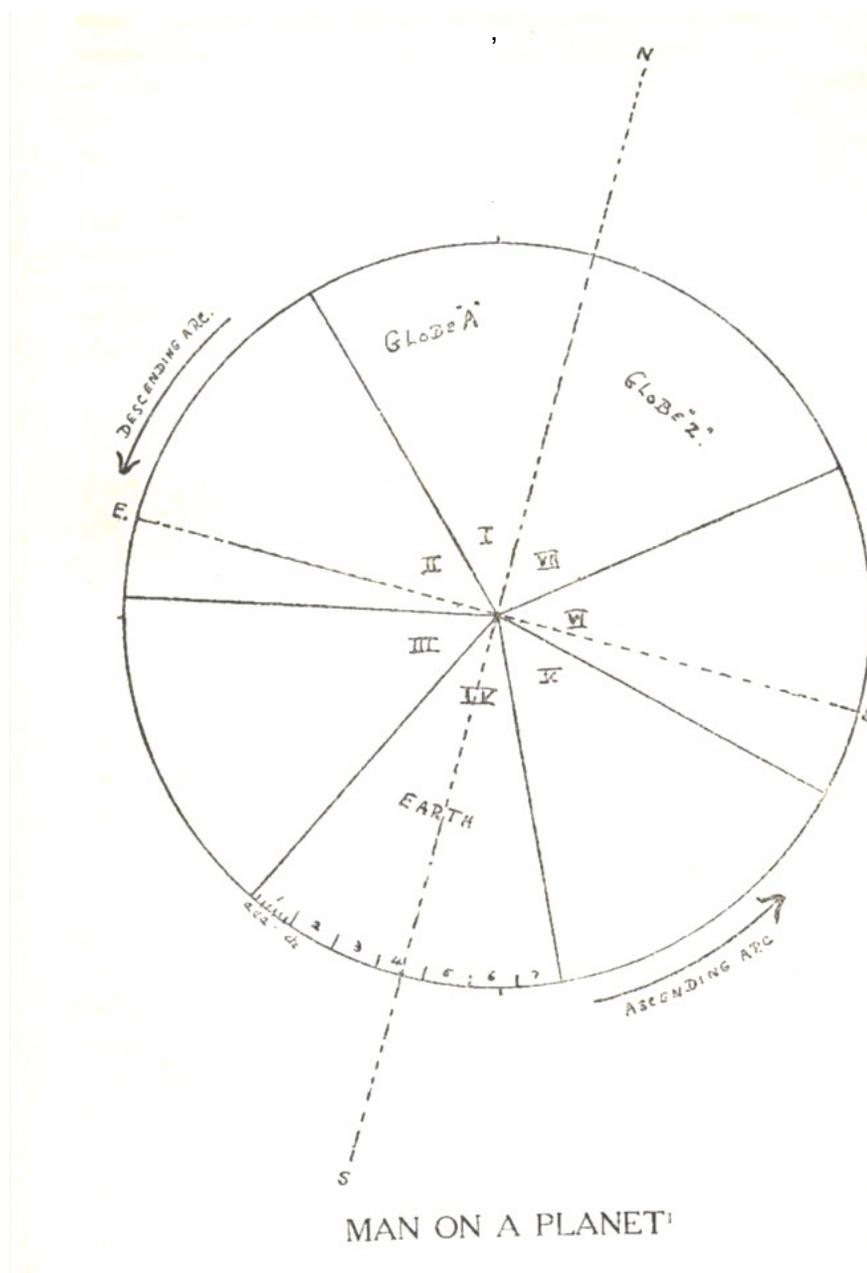
The second purpose was that her belief that time proved the existence and superiority of her highly evolved Masters. Her cosmology gave the Masters a valuable role in the evolutionary process in order to guide humanity and teach them the gnosis (the ancient wisdom tradition). At the same time, her Masters instilled her cosmology with a defined purpose to evolve spiritually advanced souls through the various root-races and rounds; thus, her cosmology and her Masters were metaphysically connected to one another and became associated with her 'avataric evolution,' which would figure prominently in her later *Secret Doctrine*.

The third purpose for Blavatsky's philosophy of time during this stage was to make it extremely vast and complex so that it necessitated the existence of an ancient wisdom tradition. This implication was inherent in the Eastern time scheme that she began to engage during this time. Her fascination with Eastern sources gave her the framework to develop her own cosmology that placed a heavy emphasis on revealing an ancient wisdom tradition as opposed to focusing on the attributes of a God or any other deity. Eastern cosmology also provided Blavatsky with an already established framework rooted in antiquity (i. e., Eastern texts).

Also noteworthy was that in order to prove the necessity/purpose for her philosophy of time, Blavatsky maintained that the people of India were a more highly evolved race; therefore, any communication from these people would be more advanced than other Western cultures, whether it came from Egypt or Western Spiritualism. This instilled Blavatsky's Masters and her ancient wisdom tradition with authority as representative of the fifth round. She also attempted to confuse her readers through her use of vast periods of time, her use of different words to express the same ideas, and her continually changing definitions of certain terms. It should be noted again that this entire vast cosmology was laid out primarily in a private correspondence. While the occasional letter was printed in the *Theosophist*, it was the publication of one particular Society member named Alfred Percy Sinnett that would publicly connect this cosmology to the Theosophical Society. It all began in 1883, with the publication of *Esoteric Buddhism* which forever changed the trajectory of the Theosophical Society.

Figure 2: Evolution of 'Man' through Root Races and Globes

Taken from the *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, compd. by A. T. Barker
(New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1924), p. 85.



CHAPTER 5

From Confusing Cosmology to Chronological Cycles: *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), *The Theosophist* and the Development of Blavatsky's Philosophy of Time

The cosmological system put forth in the previous chapter was not part of any one unified, logical system. Rather, it had been disseminated through handwritten letters sent primarily to two individuals — A. P. Sinnett and A. O. Hume. Access to these mysterious letters was restricted primarily to these two figures and they were not made available to the average Theosophist.¹ Indeed, public access to the Mahatma letters was not widespread until the early twentieth century. Most individuals living in the nineteenth century would have known their contents solely through Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883) and through the occasional letter that was reprinted in the *Theosophist* (especially in the series 'Fragments of Occult Truth'). While *Esoteric Buddhism* summarized the philosophical Mahatma letters, this was a follow up to Sinnett's earlier work *The Occult World* (1881), which reprinted some of these earlier letters and recounted his first encounters with H. P. Blavatsky.

I. *Esoteric Buddhism*

Esoteric Buddhism (1883) is a fascinating book that addresses the place of reincarnation on different planetary spheres, cosmic cataclysms, and a process of spiritual evolution that spans vast periods of time. This work was Alfred Percy Sinnett's compilation of the Mahatma letters that appeared covertly, written by Blavatsky as she developed her own cosmological structure of time and spiritual evolution. *Esoteric Buddhism* was based upon the Mahatma letters that Sinnett had received between the years 1880 and 1883; he summarized them into a methodologically systematic work that would be palatable and accessible to the general public.

¹ One early member C. C. Massey attempted to obtain copies of these letters, but was ultimately denied access to them. C. C. M., 'The Metaphysical Basis of Esoteric Buddhism' (n. pub.), [1883?], p. 6. For further information on the life of C. C. Massey see Jeffrey D. Lavoie, *A Search For Meaning in Victorian Religion: The Spiritual Journey and Esoteric Teachings of Charles Carleton Massey* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press).

Esoteric Buddhism remains one of the most important Theosophical writings on Blavatsky's overall philosophy of time and cosmology. One of the main purposes of this book was to present Blavatsky's elaborate spiritual evolution to a more mainstream audience. It was in this summary that the uniqueness of Blavatsky's time-scheme became most obvious. This work combined Eastern concepts (which were borrowed from the Orientalists given Blavatsky's elementary comprehension of Sanskrit), comparative mythography (notably Godfrey Higgins) and Spiritualist views of progression and spiritual evolution which she would default to in her letters. It was in *Esoteric Buddhism* that her eclectic view of time became obvious and was combined into one distinctive and fascinating system, becoming a foundation for future Theosophical ideologies. Blavatsky's time scheme, when understood in light of her highly-evolved Masters, provided the reader with the ability to understand time (activity/inactivity) and begin to control not just this present life, but thousands of future incarnations as well. It was in this book that this system first became distinguishable, though it would become more fully articulated by 1888 in Blavatsky's major work *The Secret Doctrine*. It is important to recognize that Sinnett's work was the only major voice for disseminating the Masters' teaching in the early 1880s.

1. The Life of A. P. Sinnett

Sinnett is an intriguing character in his own right. Born in north London on 18 January 1840, he was the youngest son of five children. Alfred's father made a living through journalism and literature, but he died relatively young at age 45 (in 1844) when Sinnett was only five years old. This left Sinnett's mother as the sole provider, a role she fulfilled by using her literary talents and 'indefatigable industry'.² Sinnett described his mother as a 'woman of quite exceptional literary talent and of unusual mental culture'.³ As a result of his family's poverty, Sinnett attended the cheapest schools in the Camden and Kentish Town area where they resided. Eventually, through an exhibition procured by his aunt Sarah Fry, Sinnett attended the London University School at Gower Street. His schooling would not last long, due to his inability to grasp the Latin language. Sinnett's mother

² *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1986), p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

eventually withdrew him from the school and the young Alfred procured a job as a mechanical draughtsman.⁴

Sinnett entered the world of journalism, starting as an assistant sub-editor for *The Globe*, though after a short time he was dismissed. Alfred then began working as a freelance writer, writing articles in various publications such as the *Morning Chronicle*, *Birmingham Daily Gazette* and the *Manchester Guardian*.⁵ He became better known in journalistic circles, and in 1865 he was invited to become the editor of the *Hong Kong Daily Press*. This senior three-year appointment in colonial journalism would be the turning point in his career. After returning to London, on 6 April 1870, Sinnett married Patience 'Patty' Edensor. Patty had a remarkable dedication towards faithfully recording the events of both her and Alfred's life in various diaries that she kept. She managed to fill 31 volumes, which Sinnett frequently cited throughout his autobiography, though these diaries have been lost over the years.

In 1872 Sinnett was offered the editorship of *The Pioneer* — the leading English daily newspaper in India. As a leading organ of Anglo-Indian public opinion, *The Pioneer* provided the medium that would connect Sinnett to Blavatsky. Sinnett had already heard about her first major book *Isis Unveiled* (1877) from a 'great friend' John Herbert Stack. Upon hearing that its authoress was moving to India, Alfred decided to seek them out writing a note in his paper about Blavatsky and Olcott — the founders of the Theosophical Society.⁶ Shortly afterwards, Olcott contacted Sinnett, initiating a steady correspondence between himself and the Theosophists. Sinnett soon afterwards invited Blavatsky to visit with him and his wife at their house in Simla.

On 4 December 1879, this meeting occurred and the events surrounding this occasion are recorded by Sinnett in his publication *The Occult World* (1881). Around the fall of 1880, Sinnett began to receive correspondence from some hidden Tibetan masters.⁷ Sinnett's writings seemed to have been written with the

⁴ Ibid., pp. 4–5.

⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁶ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷ For the progression in the definition of the Masters and their successive Hinduization, then Tibetanization, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Coming of the Masters: The Evolutionary Reformulation of Spiritual Intermediaries in Modern Theosophy', *Constructing Tradition: Means and*

approval and support of these Masters (and thereby Blavatsky), even though the accuracy of *Esoteric Buddhism* would later be questioned by both Theosophists and critics alike. In spring of 1883, Sinnett decided to move back to London, where he joined the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

Sinnett had organized, summarized, and published the 'Mahatma Letters' he had received in his book *Esoteric Buddhism*, printed in June 1883. Initially, Sinnett had a direct link to the Masters, using Madame Blavatsky as his medium; however, after several years Sinnett began to notice that the Master's inclinations always seemed to align with Blavatsky's.⁸ This, along with Blavatsky's lack of appreciation and her belittling attitude towards him, created a rift between the two. Sinnett's own personal views on the authorship of the Mahatma Letters were recorded in his autobiography: 'I had, even then, the gravest doubts as to the genuine character of these blue pencil notes, but I was somehow drawn into the conversazioni and I am not surprise [sic] to find in the diary a remark to the effect that I did not speak up to my usual level.'⁹ As already suggested, Sinnett wrote his autobiography by looking at his wife's diaries that had been kept during this time period so that he was able to fairly recollect the events that transpired during these early days of the Theosophical Society. This provides a general context for understanding *Esoteric Buddhism* and its role in the early Theosophical Society.

2. Time in *Esoteric Buddhism*: Cosmological Terminology

There was a very slight difference between the concept of time found in the Mahatma letters and the concept of time in *Esoteric Buddhism* and though the differences are minor and likely come from transcription errors, they deserve mentioning. These slight discrepancies have prompted James Santucci, the editor

Myths of Transmission in Western Esotericism, ed. Andreas B. Kilcher (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 161–178.

⁸ *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett*, p. 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29. Looking at Sinnett and his publications, it appears that Sinnett's faith wavered back and forth, but the important aspect here is that even at this early stage he had 'grave doubts' that the pencil notes were written by the masters. He appears to have been suspicious even in the early days. He wrote in 1905: 'The correspondence as a whole was terribly contaminated by what one can only treat as Madame Blavatsky's own mediumship in the matter... The extracts I published in *The Occult World* were selected with great care and they, I feel sure, reflected the Master's thought with sufficient accuracy. But it must always be remembered that correspondence from a Master, precipitated through the mediumship of a chela cannot always be regarded as His ipsissima verba [very words].' See Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa, *The Story of the Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1946), p. 25.

of *Theosophical History*, to ask the question: who was the real synthesizer — Sinnett or Blavatsky? Santucci views Sinnett as an independent worker pulling together these doctrines for his own purposes, yet given the ‘minor’ nature of these changes, this hidden agenda seems unlikely.¹⁰ Rather, it seems much more logical that most of these changes were due to transcription errors or other careless copying mistakes. Despite minor differences, *Esoteric Buddhism* drew largely upon the terms employed in the Mahatma letters and merely attempted to systematize their philosophy. It presented a cosmological structure that consisted of an eternal spiritual evolution occurring within the objective and subjective realm, though (like the Mahatma letters) no definitive numerical figures were given out (i. e., days, months, years, etc.).

Cosmological Chronology

The first key element of time in *Esoteric Buddhism* was that it was eternal, it had no beginning and no ending.¹¹ Man began as a monad and continued through seven root races on each of the seven globes. Each race lasted for a duration of roughly one million years, a number that Sinnett had derived from a representative number used in Mahatma letter No. XIII.¹² Of those one million years, only 12,000 of them were lived in objective existence, i.e. time spent on the (physical) globes. The rest of that time would be spent mainly in the subjective (spiritual) sphere of Devachan (though if one was exceptionally wicked in one incarnation one might end up in Avitchi for a short period). This meant that out of one million years, 988,000 years were spent reaping the effects of karma.¹³ In Mahatma Letter No. XIV (9 July 1882), written to A. O. Hume, this number appears to be slightly different. It is said that each man will live in all his lives upon our planet (in this Round) for 77,700 years, and will be placed in the subjective spheres 922,300 years, though the reason for this discrepancy seems to have been due to a transcription error made by Sinnett (or possibly by A. T. Barker in his compilation of these letters). Karma

¹⁰ James Santucci, ‘Editor’s Notes’, *Theosophical History*, 13.4 (2007), 1–2.

¹¹ A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 3rd ed. (London: Tübner & Co., 1884), p. 181.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20. Sinnett was quick to remind the reader that this was a rough number and served more as an illustration than as an exact figure.

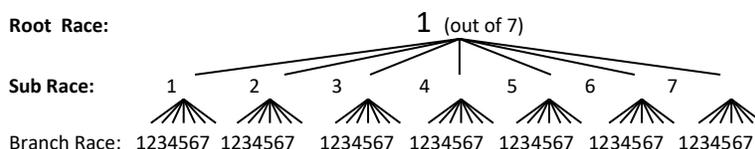
¹³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 83. It appears that Sinnett had altered this number, switching the term ‘race’ with a ‘round.’

was the deciding factor in determining where the monad resided upon death, the length of time that it stayed in its destination, and the intensity of its afterlife.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, karma would become the integral metaphysical solution for reconciling reincarnation and science without depending on the providence of God. Wouter Hanegraaff hypothesized that

Blavatsky had not yet solved this problem [reconciling reincarnation and science] when she wrote *Isis Unveiled*, but subsequently realized that karma provided the long sought-for answer. The index to *Isis Unveiled* listed a considerable number of references to metempsychosis, reincarnation and transmigration, but only three to karma (plus a fourth to the appendix added in 1886...). In *The Secret Doctrine*, on the other hand, karma had definitely moved to the centre stage, while reincarnation and its cognates were mentioned far less often... She presented it (karma) as the universal law of nature which safeguards cosmic justice within an encompassing evolutionary framework [this is the cosmological framework of time and soteriology that this chapter describes].¹⁴

As noted in the Mahatma letters, there were seven divisions of races on each globe. There were seven root races, but within these seven root races were 7 sub races, and within the seven sub races there were 7 branch races:



If each monad in each race incarnated once, the total number of incarnations in each globe would be 343 (7 branch races x 7 sub races x 7 root races); however, each monad incarnated typically at a minimum of two times and some even more frequently.¹⁵ In the Mahatma letters, it was also said that ‘one life is lived in each of the seven root-races; seven lives in each of the 49 sub-races- or $7 \times 7 \times 7 = 343$ and add 7 more. And then a series of lives in offshoot and branchlet races; making the total incarnations of man in each station or planet 777.’¹⁶ In *Esoteric Buddhism*, there was no way to ascertain how many incarnations one would have on each globe except that it was more than 343. After death the monad (now stripped

¹⁴ Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press), p. 482.

¹⁵ Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 50–51, 117.

¹⁶ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 83, 119. The reason behind the change here is unknown.

down) would enter a period of gestation before reaching Devachan and then the monad would be reincarnated.¹⁷

While in *Esoteric Buddhism* Sinnett suggested certain calculations associated with certain time periods, he stopped short of actually doing the multiplication out in most instances, but the Theosophical critic Arthur Lillie was not as accepting and proceeded to multiply out the following figures:

At all his 4,802 deaths man passes into a paradise of happiness and rest, a world of effects, the average life there being probably 8,000 years between each re-incarnation, Thus the life of man in this world of effects which is called Devachan, is $4,802 \times 8,000 = 38,416,000$ years. This seems a very long time, but in a conversation I had on the subject, (1) I was informed that although the Brothers were shy as to giving exact quotations in figures, it was yet understood that the probable duration of a finished soul on the planets was more like 70,000,000 years.¹⁸

It is unfortunate that Lillie did not identify the individual with whom he had this alleged conversation about these time divisions. What remains obvious at this stage is Blavatsky's large view of time and evolution as well as the fact that even her critics took her chronology seriously and attempted to make sense of it.

Each of the root races would recur on each of the seven globes labelled A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.¹⁹ As previously mentioned, one round consisted of a completed journey through each of these globes. In each progressive round the 'spirit to matter' composition of the monad changed, as explained in the Mahatma letters. Also, as in the Mahatma letters, there was a point during the middle of the fifth round where each monad underwent a karmic judgment.²⁰ If the Ego was judged to not be worthy of continuing its spiritual evolution due to its karma, then it was sent to the eighth sphere of pure matter for dissolution.

Following the seventh round was a pralaya followed by the merging of the seventh race with Nirvana. After merging into Nirvana the monad was reborn into 'the higher systems,' but there is no indication as to what this means. This is the overall structure of cosmology and time presented in *Esoteric Buddhism*.

¹⁷ Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 88–89.

¹⁸ Lillie, *Koot Hoomi Unveiled*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁹ For the first time in the history of this world Blavatsky reveals that there are seven spheres in the objective world and seven spheres (lokas) in the subjective realm (devachan), though the septenary division of Devachan is only mentioned in passing in *Esoteric Buddhism. The Mahatma Letters*, p. 78.

²⁰ Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 166–67.

3. The Response to the Philosophy of Time in *Esoteric Buddhism: East vs. West*

Since the Theosophical Society was relocated to the East in 1879, it absorbed many elements of Indian culture, but to what degree remains a continued subject of debate. Joscelyn Godwin has remarked on the coherency of the cosmological system presented in *Esoteric Buddhism*, critiquing that ‘the explanation in Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism* of rounds, root races, and sub-races was anything but lucid.’²¹ A similar response was reflected by contemporaneous readers in the nineteenth century, leading to several questions being submitted to the editor of the *Theosophist* (Blavatsky), requesting some clarifications of its doctrines (which will be explored below). Two Theosophists attempted to defend *Esoteric Buddhism*: the Indian Theosophist Mohini Mohun Chatterji (1858–1926) and Laura C. Holloway-Langford (1848–1930) in their book *Man: Fragments of Forgotten History*; however, as this work was published in 1884, it falls outside the chronological parameters of this chapter.²² What remains relevant to 1883 were the articles published in *The Theosophist* following the publication of Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism*. This series of articles proved that this time-scheme elicited much attention from Theosophists and other interested parties.

Several booklets were written by leading Theosophists in order to engage the teachings put forth in *Esoteric Buddhism*. The first was ‘A Letter Addressed to the Fellows of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society by the President and a Vice-president of the Lodge’ published by Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland. In this privately circulated booklet Kingsford categorized the teachings put forth as the Sāṅkhya and that ‘we find, indeed, Buddhism the germ of all the apparently novel doctrines contained in Mr. Sinnett’s book from which doctrines, as presented by him, I am compelled to dissent; for Buddhism...represents an esoteric and spiritual philosophy of which Mr. Sinnett’s version is a materialised reproduction.’²³ This booklet accused these teachings of being materialistic Buddhism. Subba Row responded to this with his own booklet defending its teachings; however, Row’s

²¹ Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 73.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

²³ Anna Kingsford, ‘A Letter Addressed to the Fellows of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society by the President and a Vice-president of the Lodge’ ([n. p.], [n. pub.], [1883?]), pp. 46–47.

defense was countered by a curious pamphlet printed by C. C. Massey titled 'The Metaphysical Basis of Esoteric Buddhism'; in this booklet, Massey goes further in his categorization of this Buddhism by suggesting a direct school which had the same source — the Swabhavikas.²⁴

Despite this categorization by certain members of the London Lodge that Blavatsky's teachings were Eastern, not everyone agreed with this analysis. Arthur Lillie, a colonel in the British army and an early critic of the Theosophical Society, wrote a small pamphlet criticizing the supposed Buddhist doctrines found in *Esoteric Buddhism*. He claimed that they were not consistent with any known Eastern belief system that he was aware of. He was stationed in India (around Azimgurh) throughout the Santal rebellion of 1855 and the Great Indian Rebellion of 1857. His premise was that the Buddhism of *Esoteric Buddhism* was not the Buddhism of Tibet at all.

Lillie argued that *Esoteric Buddhism* contained the 'Buddhism of the South altered, and, indeed, stultified to fit in with the teachings of a French book of magic written by a gentleman under the pseudonym of Eliphas Lévi.'²⁵ He concluded that Blavatsky's use of certain terms was not in keeping with Buddhist interpretations. Lillie also noted that the following terms were either added or taken out of context: Blavatsky's unique interpretation of karma, annihilation, septenary constitution of the soul, the after-life locality of Kama rupa, Devachan, and her reconceptualization of reincarnation. He went on to describe the soteriology presented in *Esoteric Buddhism* as 'Buddhism...transformed into American Spiritualism' due to what Lillie perceived as its 'illogical' view of karma which 'has given up the main tenet of Buddhism to supply a want felt by the members of the Theosophical Society.'²⁶

It is curious that a similar sentiment was expressed by the Eastern guru Swami Vivekananda who had become offended by Henry Olcott, claiming that the Theosophical Society was nothing more than an 'Indian grafting of American Spiritualism — with only a few Sanskrit words taking the places of ghostly raps and taps, and Mahatmic inspiration that of obsession by ghosts'; he further noted that

²⁴ C. C. M., 'The Metaphysical Basis of Esoteric Buddhism', pp. 23-34.

²⁵ Lillie, *Koot Hoomi Unveiled*, pp. 1, 4, 5, 7

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the Indians have 'no need or desire to import religions from the West.'²⁷ Thus, the Easterners noted the distorted Western elements in Blavatsky's philosophy ('Blavatskyisms') and the Westerners noticed a distorted Eastern view. What both of these parties failed to realize was the originality of Blavatsky's philosophy, especially as it related to time and that it also presented a pseudo-scientific myth for the Victorian Age. She had succeeded in creating a chronology that incorporated a vast breadth of global intellectual knowledge that validated the superior status of her revelations. *Esoteric Buddhism* represents a milestone in Blavatsky's cosmology as it was the first attempt (by Sinnett) to compile the contradictory writings of the Mahatma letters into one unified system. Though other later attempts were made by Theosophists it seemed that the interest that this work elicited revealed the value of this cosmology. While the Mahatma letters present Blavatsky's private teachings primarily written to two individuals, contemporaneous with these letters Blavatsky also published a monthly periodical which was intended for public circulation that deserves further consideration.

II. *The Theosophist*

When the Theosophical Society relocated to India in February 1879, a means of communicating the Eastern exploits of the Society and connecting its fledgling branches in a cost-effective manner was required.²⁸ It was soon decided that in order to disseminate its teachings and give news updates, the Theosophical Society would create their own publication with its main purpose being to function as the official organ of the Theosophical Society. They established a monthly newspaper titled the *Theosophist*. Olcott noted in his diary that:

The Theosophist was founded in October 1879 and there appeared its first ten volumes 429 pages (royal 8vo) of translations from the Sanskrit, and 935 pages of original articles on Eastern religions, philosophical, and scientific subjects, mainly by writers of Oriental birth; several hundred

²⁷ Swami Vivekananda, 'Stray Remarks on Theosophy', in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, ed. by (same as above) 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1955), III, 207–27 (pp. 208–09).

²⁸ In fact, in a letter in the British Museum written by H. S. Olcott in November 1880 it is noted that '[t]he monthly expenses for postage and stationery—the postage of the journal *The Theosophist* included—do not exceed the sum of 50 Rupees month(!)' Mahatma Letters, VII, 65 (lines: 5–10), ADD:452898.

lectures were given by myself, besides hundreds more by our colleagues in India, America, and Ceylon...²⁹

Despite Olcott's direct involvement, Blavatsky was the editor of this periodical that disseminated the teachings of Theosophy on a monthly basis while also utilizing the experience and literary talents of veteran publishers Sinnett and Olcott. The full title of this periodical was *The Theosophist: A Monthly Journal devoted to Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism: Embracing Mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Other Secret Sciences*, demonstrating the Oriental shift in Blavatsky's philosophy while still noting an 'embracing' view of Western philosophies such as Mesmerism and Spiritualism.

The Theosophist allows the researcher to understand some of the key sources that influenced Blavatsky during her early years in India.³⁰ Each article printed in *The Theosophist* from this time period was meticulously reviewed and edited by Blavatsky herself and she even occasionally added her own commentary in the editorial notes at the bottom of the page. These editorial comments illustrate how she assimilated and interpreted these diverse articles and sources into her own philosophical framework. Indeed, these editorial notes provide a valuable gauge for Blavatsky's own philosophy during the early 1880s, yet they remain an almost untapped resource of information by modern researchers.

1. Esoteric Buddhism and the *Theosophist*: A Reaction against this Cosmological Chronology

Sinnett's compilation of the Mahatma letters in *Esoteric Buddhism* caused quite a commotion in the pages of *The Theosophist*, resulting in a series of articles titled 'Some Inquiries Suggested by Mr. Sinnett's "Esoteric Buddhism,"' which ran from September to November of 1883. In this series, certain clarifications were made, including an explanation for the discrepancy between the nature of the moon and the spheres, the destruction of the human race, the birth of Buddha, and the Nebular theory (an idea which would figure prominently in Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* [1888]). As noted previously, these articles prove that following the

²⁹ Henry S. Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The Only Authentic History of the Theosophical Society: Third Series, 1883–1887* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904), p. 335.

³⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Helena Blavatsky* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2004), p. 52.

publication of *Esoteric Buddhism* there was widespread interest in clarifying and understanding its chronology.

Though the Mahatma letters had been summarized by Sinnett in *Esoteric Buddhism*, it should also be noted that large portions of the original Mahatma letters had been published earlier in *The Theosophist* under the title ‘Fragments of Occult Truth’. Later critiques of this book provoked Blavatsky to rush to the defense of Sinnett. Blavatsky explained that ‘it was not in the contemplation, at the outset of the work begun in ‘Fragments,’ to deal as fully with the scientific problems of cosmic evolution, as now seems expected. A distinct promise was made, as Mr. Sinnett is well aware, to acquaint the readers of this Journal with the outlines of Esoteric doctrines and—no more.’³¹ The justification for this reluctance to divulge information was further explained: ‘A good deal would be given, much more kept back, especially from the columns of a magazine which reaches a promiscuous public’.³² There existed a clear pedagogical difference between the purpose of the Mahatma letters and the *Theosophist*, at least according to Blavatsky’s above remark — one was private the other public.

These ‘Inquiries’ were published in the September issue of *The Theosophist* in 1883 and were the result of ‘many points that perplexed’ one particular reader identified merely as an ‘An English F.T.S.’. Only a few of these responses are relevant to Blavatsky’s conceptualization of time which further expounded certain elements of Blavatsky’s cosmology.³³ Blavatsky continued to combine mythology and history, defending her universal cosmological chronology of *Esoteric Buddhism*, maintaining that this scheme was consistent with empirical history.³⁴

Previous scholars such as Trompf and French have presumed that Blavatsky’s cyclical view of time were her way of protesting against scientific materialism and philosophical positivism, but it seemed that Blavatsky’s direct reference of biblical figures such as Noah, Enoch, etc. and their chronology proved that her argument was much larger — she was attempting to refute the entire linear chronology of Western Christianity which she believed dominated nineteenth-

³¹ H. P. Blavatsky, ‘Reply to an English F. T. S.- Answers’, *The Theosophist*, 4.12 (1883), 295–310 (p. 296).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

³⁴ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 89, 94.

century Western culture.³⁵ The roots of this purpose were deep-seated and were exhibited as early as *Isis Unveiled*, for, as one critic remarked, a more appropriate title would have been *The Horrors of Christianity Unveiled and the Excellencies of Hinduism Praised*.³⁶ Also, it was during the early 1880s that the stance of the Theosophical Society and its relationship to Christianity was being questioned by such early Christian Theosophists as Anna Kingsford, Edward Maitland, 'H. X.' (A. O. Hume), C. C. Massey and even George Wyld, who resigned as president of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society on 2 July 1882. Wyld's resignation was due to his belief that the ideals of the Society had changed considerably and thereby denigrated Christianity.³⁷ The stance Blavatsky took on Christianity became an important topic from this time period that had implications which would affect many members of the early Theosophical Society.

The implications of Blavatsky's chronology were indirectly connected to this topic. The connection between cyclical time and Christianity has been discussed by the modern Indian historian Thomas Trauttmann. Trauttmann summarized the Christian presuppositions towards biblical chronology in the nineteenth century and its early interactions with Eastern chronology. He noted that 'the western response to ancient Indian conceptions ... arose before the vast expansions of traditional European conceptions of time, more especially before the expansions, in the mid-nineteenth century, of human time from the narrow limits of the biblical chronology.'³⁸ He went on to observe that two main critiques were suggested by these early Christian Westerners — 'the vast length of the ages' and 'their cyclicity,' suggesting that the main critique was that cyclical time belittled the significance of each individual life in favour of advocating a linear chronology that was 'filled with a sequence of unique events...[forming] a single cycle, of fall and

³⁵ Trompf noted that Blavatsky's cyclical time revealed the progression of mankind 'not the unilineal evolutionism of such "blind leaders of the blind" as Huxley, Comte or the London materialists.' Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky', p. 279; Brendan James French, 'The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H. P. Blavatsky and C. W. Leadbeater', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sydney, 2000), I, 116–17.

³⁶ Carl T. Jackson, *The Oriental Religions and American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations* (Westport, C Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 160.

³⁷ C. C. Massey, *For Private Circulation Only: The British Theosophical Society and Resignation of G. Wyld* (n. p., n. d. [1882]), p. 1.

³⁸ Thomas R. Trauttmann, 'Indian Time, European Time', in *Time: Histories and Ethnologies*, ed. by Diane Owen Hughes (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), pp. 167–97 (p. 176).

redemption, Paradise lost and Paradise regained.³⁹ Instead of embracing a soteriological view of a unique string of events moving towards a final solution (i. e. the Second Coming of Christ), Blavatsky held an opposing theory: that cycles were the key towards understanding history and cosmology, but this belief in cyclical time seemed to divest life of any meaning, or did it?

Trautmann identified that one of the main implications of an Eastern cyclical time scheme was that it placed a greater emphasis on discovering eternal truth than it did on understanding the attributes of gods or deities. This focus on the truth appealed to Blavatsky, whose philosophy of time has already been shown to have been directly connected to her ancient wisdom tradition. Trautmann suggested the following connection between the implications of cyclical time, reincarnation, and truth:

...the doctrine of world ages shows an unmistakable tendency in the texts to expand without limit, creating, as I have said, an eternity within time through which the transmigrating soul must be needlessly reborn. This expansive tendency expresses not only the endlessness and pointlessness of samsara [the wheel of rebirth] but the location of truth and liberation from samsara in an eternity outside time. The transmigration doctrine establishes a principle superior to the gods, a moral law that is impersonal and to which all persons, whether divine or human, are subject. This contributes to the formation of an idea of Truth (or the religious law, or the teachings of the Buddha, and so forth) that is uncreated and eternal, having ultimately no person as its source and lying beyond time.⁴⁰

Trautmann's description of this 'idea of Truth' as eternal, untraceable, and lying beyond time validates one of the main purposes of time in Blavatsky's system. This 'Truth' was Blavatsky's reconceptualized *prisca theologia*, which she had attempted to unveil in her 1877 work *Isis Unveiled* and which she would put forth in her 1888 work *The Secret Doctrine*. It is curious that Blavatsky's view of time evolved into what it became in these Mahatma letters; however, it seemed as far back as *Isis Unveiled* that she was focused on 'unveiling' the truth of all reality. Her fascination with Eastern sources and time gave her the framework to develop her own cosmology, one that placed a heavy emphasis on prioritizing the teaching/law over the nature of gods, whether personal or otherwise. A cyclical cosmology seemed to have been the missing element in Blavatsky's philosophy of time that

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 187.

provided her with both an established framework rooted in antiquity (i. e., Eastern texts) and which emphasized what she had been emphasizing for so long — the revelation of absolute truth which she had access to as an initiate of the Masters. Blavatsky seemed to find what she was looking for through her visit to India.

Given her emphasis on a law rather than a law-giver, Blavatsky rejected the linear biblical chronology and its implications for a history whose existence revolved around a relationship with a divine being. Biblical history was not congruent with her personal soteriology, which took the Spiritualist law of progression and brought it into the physical world (with theories of physical evolution not just spiritual) including an descent/ascent evolution into a god-like being after a duration of multiple cycles and numerous periods of time spent in both the subjective and objective worlds.

2. The Previous Writings of Blavatsky: Other Shifting Philosophies

Blavatsky continuously attempted to assimilate her earlier teachings (especially *Isis Unveiled*) within these new teachings put forth in the Mahatma letters and the *Theosophist*, especially through the series 'Fragments of Occult Truth'; however, these sources contained some seeming discrepancies. These issues drew a response from Charles Carleton Massey (1838–1905), the head of the London branch of the British Theosophical Society who later resigned membership in 1884. Massey published some remarks in the 8 July 1882 issue of *Light Magazine* in an article titled '*Isis Unveiled* and the *Theosophist* on Reincarnation'.⁴¹ The inconsistencies between the views of reincarnation between *Isis* and the 'Fragments of Occult Truth' were an issue that haunted Blavatsky. This prompted her to develop her septenary constitution of the soul which allowed certain parts of the soul to reincarnate, thereby providing for this discrepancy and explaining that

⁴¹ 'By-the bye you must not trust *Isis* literally. The book is but a tentative effort to divert the attention of the Spiritualists from their preconceptions to the true state of things. The author was made to hint and point out in the true direction, to say what things *are not*, not what they are.' *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 45. Cf.: 'She [Blavatsky] is a fanatic in her way, and is unable to write with anything like system and calmness, or to remember that the general public needs all the lucid explanations that to her may seem superfluous. [*Isis*] really ought to be re-written for the sake of the family honour...Don't you see that everything you find in *Isis* is delineated, hardly sketched—nothing completed or fully revealed.' *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 129–31. Cf. also: 'Many are the subjects treated upon in *Isis* that even H. P. B. was not allowed to become thoroughly acquainted with...namely that the 'septenary' doctrine had not yet been divulged to the world at the time when *Isis* was written.' *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 182–83.

Isis Unveiled was focusing on the entirety of the soul which could not reincarnate. In his article, Massey reprinted Blavatsky's belief that these two teachings could not contradict each other because they came from the same source — 'the Adept Brothers'.

Massey responded with his own doubts even though he considered himself a 'long-suffering student of the mysteries...but after all, two and three will not make just four; black is not white, nor, in reference to plain definite statements, is "Yes" equivalent to "No."⁴² In Mahatma letter No. XVII written on June 1882, Blavatsky connected Buddha's exceptional nature with the earlier teachings put forth in *Isis*: 'Buddha is a sixth round being and is one in a billion and since He sacrificed Nirvanic bliss and Rest for the salvation of his fellow creatures and will be re-born in the highest- seventh ring of the upper planet. Till then He will overshadow every decimillennium (let us rather say and add "has overshadowed already" a chosen individual who generally overturned the destinies of nations, See *Isis*, Vol. I pp. 34 and 35 last and first para.on the pages).'⁴³ In Mahatma Letter No. XXIV, written in autumn of 1882, Blavatsky assimilated the information she presented in *Isis* into her present cosmological structure, noting that *Isis* does not contradict this teaching, but rather concealed it not having been aware of the septenary doctrine when *Isis* was written. This serves to prove the statement that Blavatsky's philosophy in the 1880s was still being formulated.

III. Conclusion

It was following these Mahatma letters and their compilation and summary in *Esoteric Buddhism* that Blavatsky realized what she had created in the Mahatma letters. This surprise was evidenced in Sinnett's autobiography: 'The catastrophe [of the Hodgson report- see note below], in my opinion, justified the regret I had freely expressed when Madame Blavatsky announced her change of plans and her intention of coming to Europe, to play a part in the unexpected enthusiasm which

⁴² C. C. Massey, 'Isis Unveiled and the Theosophist on Re-incarnation', *Light Magazine*, 2.79 (1882), 322–23 (p. 323).

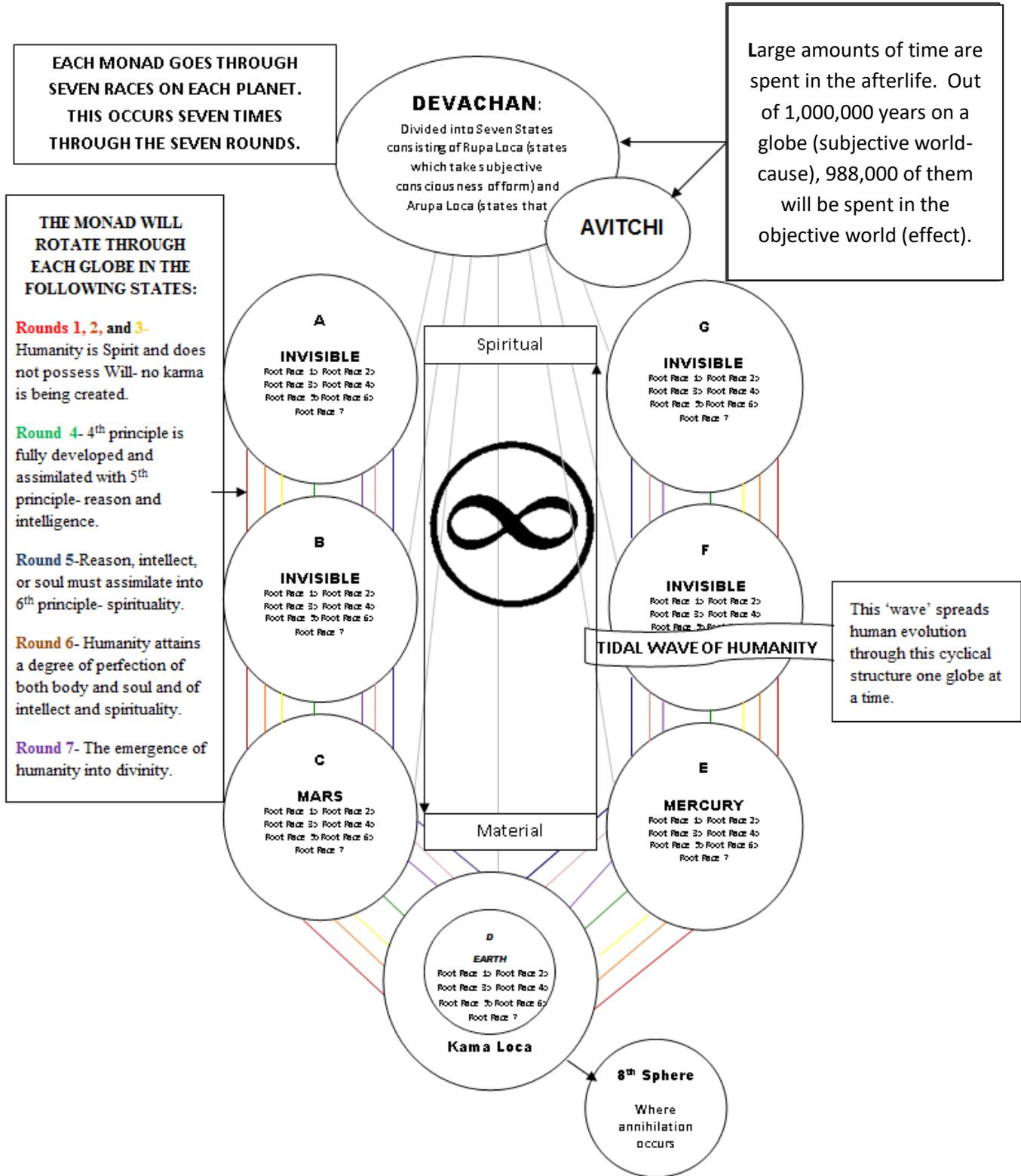
⁴³ *The Mahatma Letters*, p. 117.

Esoteric Buddhism had excited.⁴⁴ *Esoteric Buddhism* must be seen as the turning point in Blavatsky's philosophy of time for, once Sinnett took the time and energy to bring all of the Mahatma letters together, this unusual cosmology prompted Blavatsky's own elaboration, which she would give in her later writings and most fully in her *The Secret Doctrine*.

Blavatsky's philosophy of time throughout this period was contradictory but there were some key features that are clear: each soul underwent seven journeys around seven spheres. Each of these seven journeys were called rounds and during each round the composition of the body was different, moving from a physical composition to a spiritual one. While on these spheres, the soul was incarnated into seven root races for an unspecified amount of sub-races. After a completed journey through all seven spheres a cataclysm would occur. This would be followed by a period of rest during which time the soul was placed into the subjective sphere of devachan, a temporary nirvana, or it went to kama loka to be refined. If the soul had been exceptionally evil, it would be sent to avitchi and undergo a period of temporary punishment. This cyclical cosmology had implications on Blavatsky's soteriology which focused on the law rather than the lawgiver. All of these concepts would be further expanded in 1888, when Blavatsky published her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, which will be explored in the next chapter.

⁴⁴ *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett*, p. 28. The Hodgson report was an evaluation release by the Society for Psychical Research that would severely tarnish Blavatsky's reputation.

Figure 3: The Cosmological Chronology of Esoteric Buddhism



CHAPTER 6

The Time for Salvation: Mystical Experiences and the Writing of *The Secret Doctrine*, 1884-1891

This study has examined the soteriological importance of Blavatsky's philosophy of time in her teachings. This has been achieved by utilizing a unique chronological approach that has rarely been attempted due to its complexity: tracing the intellectual development of Blavatsky's teachings as they progressed. From this perspective, each of her writings can be seen as a separate rung on a ladder leading upwards with each rung building on the previous one. According to this ladder analogy, this chapter is the final rung at the top of the Blavatsky ladder. In these years, her complex view of time was finalized. Most historians and critics have dismissed Blavatsky's view of time for being overly complicated and non-sensical, yet this philosophy became one of the most original contributions in all of Blavatsky's teachings. In order to better understand Blavatsky and her own time period, it is essential to grasp this doctrine at some level as it became directly intertwined with her concepts of spiritual evolution/soteriology.

As I have argued, in *Isis Unveiled* Blavatsky derived her notions of time largely from Godfrey Higgins and his comparative mythography; however, during these earlier years she was unconcerned with explicating any chronological system or racial ideologies. Instead, she was attempting to 'unveil' her ancient wisdom tradition that she believed undergirded Spiritualism and every other major world religion. I have also argued that Blavatsky later used time in the various Mahatma letters as a metaphysical mystery validating the authority of her 'ancient wisdom tradition'. This placed the authority of her Masters as superior to previous esoteric teachings since they were the only ones who could understand such a vast and complicated system. By 1888, Blavatsky had published *The Secret Doctrine*, which tied together these two earlier views of time. Her unique philosophy of time as purported by the Mahatma letters proved the reality of the ancient wisdom tradition put forth in *Isis Unveiled* that could only be revealed with the assistance of her mysterious Masters.

One of the questions that Blavatsky answered in the pages of *The Secret Doctrine* was ‘how did this system fit into her racial ideology that incorporated rounds anroot races while still remaining empirically viable?’ In *The Secret Doctrine*, she included numerous charts and explanations for this cosmic view of the universe and spiritual evolution that brought a balance to her philosophy of time that has never been recognized before now.

It was also during this time period that Blavatsky linked this confusing time scheme with an ancient source that has also been greatly overlooked by modern historians namely, Horace Hayman Wilson’s (1786–1860) translation of the *Vishnu Purana*. This Eastern purana connected Blavatsky’s chronology to a source that was largely unknown in the West and continued to mask her philosophy of time in the romanticized Eastern mystique. At the same time, the *Vishnu Purana* provided a connection to a widely accepted religious tradition that she used to verify the existence of her own ancient wisdom tradition. This work allowed Blavatsky to assign actual numerical calculations to her teachings that she had previously (and intentionally) avoided up to this point. This purana remains crucial towards understanding her view of time; however, it should be noted that it was not actually discovered by Blavatsky until 1886. Several other points of progression (‘rungs of the Blavatsky ladder’) during this time period deserve mention first, as they also contributed towards making ‘time’ a distinctive trait in Theosophy.

Additionally, this intellectual progression must be contextualized into the historical events which were occurring in the Theosophical Society from this time period. After all, no historical event occurs in a vacuum and these events had a direct effect on her writings. This was an intriguing time period in the early history of the Theosophical Society, since it suffered multiple attacks. One such attack came from a group of Western academics. This exposure prompted many early Theosophists to defend their beliefs through letters and articles sent to various Spiritualist publications; it was in these correspondences that the subject of time was frequently engaged. This chapter will solidify the importance, complexity, and uniqueness of Blavatsky’s philosophy of time in her teachings.

Also, in this chapter, new pieces of evidence will be examined, which will demonstrate the uniqueness of Blavatsky’s view of time and her intentionality in

using it to verify her own teachings. It all began when the 'West' collided with the 'East' in an unflattering report circulated by the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) that critiqued the Theosophical Society.

I. Background

1. The Theosophical Society, 1884-1888: Beginning of the End or End of the Beginning?

In 1884, certain members of the Society became acquainted with the Society for Psychical Research, a group of academics associated with the University of Cambridge who conducted spiritual research. The SPR was founded in 1882 by several prominent researchers, including Edmund Gurney (1847–1888), Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901) and Sir William Fletcher Barrett (1844–1925), with the Cambridge professor Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900) serving as its first president. The goal of this society was to investigate that large body of debatable phenomena 'where no ordinary motive to fraud...can come in.'¹ In other words, it sought a serious 'scientific' investigation of psychical phenomena. It would seem only natural that the SPR became interested in the Theosophical Society, with the various rumors of phenomena pouring into England from the Romanticized East.

The SPR first initiated contact with the Theosophical Society by inviting certain members to be examined during the Theosophists' return visit to England. This included Henry Olcott, who described this in his own words: 'On the 11th May (1884) I had my first sitting and examination with Messrs. F. W. H. Myers and J. Herbert Stack.'² Blavatsky, on the other hand, was initially hesitant of beginning a relationship with this academic organization, but Olcott finally convinced her to allow the Theosophical Society to become involved with SPR's scientific investigations. Blavatsky later scapegoated Olcott, claiming that she would never

¹ Henry Sidgwick, 'President's Address: First General Meeting', in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research: 1882-1883* (London: Trubner and Company, 1883), pp. 10–11.

² Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: 1883-1887*, 6 vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1904) III, 102. An article appeared in the October 1884 edition of the *Theosophist* which praised the efforts of the Society for Psychical Research though cautioning them to adopt a more deductive form of reasoning. 'Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research', *The Theosophist*, 6.1 (1884), 21–22.

forgive him for ‘thrusting our phenomena upon the attention of the gentlemen scientists of the P. R. S.’³

An informal meeting was held on 2 May 1884 at the house of F. W. H. Myers ‘for the purpose of taking such evidence as to the alleged phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society as might be offered by members of that body at the time in England or as could be collected elsewhere.’⁴ This led to an official meeting on 11 May that elated both Olcott and Blavatsky. This was in turn followed by a regular stream of correspondence throughout the months of May and June. During this time, Theosophical members Olcott, Mohini M. Chatterji, and Alfred Percy Sinnett were all interviewed by members of the SPR, including Frank Podmore, the historian of Spiritualism, and Sinnett’s friend, Herbert Stack. Gomes has pointed out that:

The SPR asked these Theosophical Society members a series of impromptu questions gathering enough testimony to justify the June 30 general meeting of the SPR during which time Herbert Stack read a ‘Further Report on phenomena attested by members of the Theosophical Society.’ A large group of interested Theosophists attended, including the Sinnetts, Miss Arundale, Col. Olcott and Mme. Blavatsky.⁵

During a meeting on 30 June 1884 Sinnett wrote that ‘Olcott did something unprecedented. He began addressing the board in what Sinnett described as ‘an extraordinary tactless character’.⁶ Olcott explained that he could prove that astral projection was possible and began waving around a cream colored scarf which he claimed had materialized before his very eyes by an Indian guru. Sinnett elucidated that the leaders of the SPR were intensely careful to keep all its proceedings on the level of the upper-class culture. Now ‘Colonel Olcott with all the goodness and devotion to the cause was not in tune with the taste of cultivated Europeans.’⁷ Sinnett’s wife Patty made the following notation in her diary: ‘Colonel Ol. made a

³ Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves*, III, 102.

⁴ See/Cf. *A Short History of The Theosophical Society*, comp. by Josephine Ransom (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938), p. 199; ‘Statement of the General Meetings in May and June, 1885’, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (London, Trubner and Co., 1885), III, 201.

⁵ Michael Gomes, *The Coulomb Case: Occasional Papers Volume X* (Fullerton, CA: Theosophical History, 2005), p. 4.

⁶ *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1986), p.29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

dreadful goose of himself and made O.L. ['Old Lady' referring to Blavatsky] furious and ashamed.⁸

Later on that same evening, certain Theosophists decided to meet up at the Sinnett household. During this meeting, Blavatsky publically and acrimoniously chastised Olcott, which prompted Sinnett to record in his autobiography that 'her face was white from the intensity of her emotion; she spoke so loudly that I was afraid she would disturb the neighbours and she reviled the unfortunate Colonel until he was driven to ask her if she wanted him to commit suicide.'⁹ Sinnett insisted that all of the Society's later troubles could be traced back to this one event that occurred on this fateful evening when Olcott spoke out of turn. Sinnett went on to articulate that the SPR leaders had all their 'teeth set on edge' by the Colonel's unhappy outbreak. All of this was the 'fruits of that miserable evening, the 30th June 1884.'¹⁰ So it was Olcott's disagreeable interactions with this organization that pushed the SPR to investigate the Theosophical Society headquarters. This investigation was led by Richard Hodgson (1855 – 1905), who made the trip to India in order to witness these alleged acts of phenomena. This was only one of several important events that would combine to threaten the future of the Theosophical Society.

Around this same time, other events were transpiring at the Theosophical headquarters. In 1884, the expulsion of Alexis Coulomb and his wife Emma from the Theosophical headquarters prompted a series of rash attacks against Blavatsky and the Society. Emma Coulomb (originally Emma Cutting) had first met Blavatsky in Cairo, Egypt in 1872. Then, when Blavatsky left for Odessa, Cutting married one Alexis Coulomb, a Frenchman whose family ran a local hotel. The couple fled the country after an attempt at fraudulent bankruptcy and turned up in Calcutta in 1874 before moving on to Ceylon. The Coulombs joined the Theosophical Society on April 3 on the eve of the Founders' first tour of Ceylon when Olcott asked Mme. Coulomb to take over the household duties.¹¹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 27–28.

¹¹ Gomes, *The Coulomb Case*, p. 6.

Coulomb had managed to work her way back into Blavatsky's inner circle of confederates. She would eventually defect and in 1884 published some letters and accusations that were absolutely devastating to Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society. In *Some Account of My Intercourse with Madame Blavatsky From 1872 to 1884: With A Number of Additional Letters and a Full Explanation of the Most Marvellous Theosophical Phenomena* (1885), Coulomb admitted her role in the duping of certain Theosophical Society members and potential candidates. She explained some of the desperate measures that Blavatsky employed in order to cloak these Mahatma letters with a sense of mystery. One such letter was dropped off the top of a mango tree and thereby fell 'perpendicularly through the air,' while elsewhere in this publication other forms of trickery were described, including the sending of certain forged 'Mahatma letters'.¹²

In compiling his report for the SPR, Hodgson took seriously the allegations and the testimony made by the Coulombs. It seemed that Hodgson initially began this investigation with an open mind, believing that the Mahatma Letters were possibly the result of genuine psychic phenomena; however, his opinion soon changed. Through a series of investigations and interviews with several prominent Theosophists including Damodar, Mohini, and Olcott, Hodgson eventually concluded that:

From these Blavatsky-Coulomb documents it appears that the Mahatma Letters were prepared and sent by Madame Blavatsky, that Koot Hoomi is a fictitious personage, that supposed 'astral forms' of the Mahatmas were confederated of Madame Blavatsky in disguise- generally the Coulombs; that alleged transportation of cigarettes and other objects, 'integration' of letters, and allied phenomena ... were ingenious trickeries, carried out by Madame Blavatsky, with the assistance chiefly of the Coulombs... I finally had no doubt whatever that the phenomena connected with the Theosophical Society were part of a huge fraudulent system worked by Madame Blavatsky with the assistance of the Coulombs and several other confederates, and that not a single genuine phenomenon could be found among them all.¹³

¹² Emma Coulomb, *Some Account of My Intercourse With Madame Blavatsky From 1872 to 1884: With A Number of Additional Letters and a Full Explanation of the Most Marvellous Theosophical Phenomena* (London: Elliot Stock, 1885), pp. 37, 42, 44–46.

¹³ Richard Hodgson, '2. Account of Personal Investigations in India, and Discussion of the Authorship of the "Koot Hoomi" Letters', *Proceeding of the Society for Psychical Research: Volume III*, pp. 207–211 (pp. 209–210).

While in the end Hodgson expressed gratitude towards the generosity that the Theosophical Society extended to him in their hospitality and allowing him to interrogate their members, he left India disappointed by the results of his investigations. Hodgson went on to write his report, publishing an initial conclusion in the Society's privately circulated *Journal* in December of 1884 and his full report was released in the SPR's *Proceedings* in 1885.¹⁴ This report was devastating for the Theosophical Society and, as Sinnett recorded in his *Autobiography*, it 'had the effect of completely shattering the Society, which melted away until it was only represented by a few faithful adherents — the Arundales, Varleys, Keightleys and some others.'¹⁵

This was one of the most important events in the early history of the Theosophical Society, this report publicly denounced the Society as fraudulent. Still, Blavatsky would rebuild her reputation again based in no small part to the new membership of the social reformer Annie Besant (1847–1933) and the publication of *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888. The publishing of this major work followed another remarkable event in the early history of the early Theosophical Society that would validate Blavatsky's perceived calling from the Masters — a near death experience. This event will now be examined.

2. Divine Guidance: Writing the Magnum Opus from 1886–1888

Esoteric Buddhism remained an important work in the early Theosophical Society, as it was the misunderstandings that became associated with this book that prompted Blavatsky to begin writing her own explanation of the Masters' teaching in her work *The Secret Doctrine*.¹⁶ Even though advertisements for this work began as early as 1884, the manuscript was left practically untouched until September of 1885. In a letter written to Sinnett in October 1885, Blavatsky voiced her belief that this book would clear her name in mainstream society, which was in some way connected to her chronological 'calculations':

¹⁴ 'The result of his investigations was one which could hardly give pleasure to any party. No one interested in psychical research could hear with satisfaction that so great a mass of apparently well-attested phenomena were in fact, referable to fraud and credulity.' *Ibid.*, p. 420.

¹⁵ *Autobiography of Alfred Percy Sinnett*, p. 31.

¹⁶ Sven Eek, *Damodar and the Pioneers of the Theosophical Movement* (Adyar, Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965), p. 278.

I am very busy on Secret D. The thing at New York is repeated- only far clearer and better. I begin to think it shall vindicate us. Such pictures, panoramas, scenes, antediluvian dramas, with all that! Never saw or heard better. Your calculations, 'the best and truest that can be given at this end of the 5000 y. of Kaliyug.' Watch your impressions and turn your back on the S.P.R. and its rabid idiots.¹⁷

The vindication that Blavatsky spoke about would vindicate her from the two main opponents already mentioned earlier in this chapter — Emma Coulomb and Richard Hodgson. In 1884, the Coulombs left the Theosophical Society, causing many problems for Blavatsky among the Christian missionaries in Madras and to anyone else who would listen.

To make matters even more distressing, during this time period Blavatsky suffered from severe agonizing bouts of pain from her health condition and struggle with Bright's disease. There were periods during this summer when Blavatsky was close to death. At one point a miracle occurred which Countess Wachtmeister described:

I gave a bitter cry and knew no more. When I opened my eyes, the early morning light was stealing in, and a dire apprehension came over me that I had slept, and that perhaps H. P. B. had died during my sleep- died whilst I was untrue to my vigil. I turned round towards the bed in horror, and there I saw H. P. B. looking at me calmly with her clear grey eyes, as she said, 'Countess, come here,' I flew to her side. 'What has happened, H. P. B.- you look so different to what you did last night.' She replied, 'Yes, Master has been here; He gave me my choice, that I might die and be free if I would, or I might live and finish *The Secret Doctrine*....and now to make it complete, fetch me some coffee and something to eat, and give me my tobacco box.'¹⁸

According to her testimony, Blavatsky's life was extended for the express purpose of finishing up *The Secret Doctrine*, a work which would reveal the universal chronology to the world at large. Following these events, Archibald and Bertram Keightley, both Cambridge educated professionals, assisted Blavatsky and ultimately helped her to organize her writing, the very book that she had been given an extension of life to complete — *The Secret Doctrine*.

Certainly by understanding the details of this miraculous recovery one could understand how the characters involved could have viewed Blavatsky's recovery

¹⁷ Alfred Percy Sinnett, *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1913), pp. 236–37.

¹⁸ Constance Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences of H. P. Blavatsky and 'The Secret Doctrine'* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893), p. 75.

as proof for the existence of her Masters. These beings were allegedly guiding their prophet, giving her just enough life to publish this important work (and also to establish an 'Esoteric Section' of the Theosophical Society). This belief was evident among her followers, as Bertram Keightley wrote in a letter that: 'No one can fail I feel, to see in this chain of events the guiding hand of her Master & in deed his direction becomes plainer & more obvious when the story is known in all its minute personal detail...'¹⁹ It seemed that Blavatsky's health improved likely because her will was strong, as she had some pressing unfinished business left to attend to and desired to publish her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine*.

It was also during this same time period (April 1886) that the ambitious Blavatsky founded another periodical called *The Path*, which was intended to be an independent Theosophical publication edited by the esotericist, William Quan Judge (1851 – 1896); then on September 1887 she went on to establish yet another journal titled *Lucifer* as a general occult periodical which she herself edited along with the assistance of Mabel Collins. Blavatsky's personal role in these publications varied as she mostly devoted herself to publishing her greatest work *The Secret Doctrine*.

Following the publication of this book in 1888, she went on to establish an Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society where these doctrines could be even further expanded and disseminated to a more private and devoted audience. In July of 1890, Blavatsky made the decision to relocate her headquarters to number 19 Avenue Road in London. This move inadvertently set off an irreversible chain of events that would ultimately end with the death of this Russian mystic. The details were printed by her sister Vera in an 1895 edition of *Lucifer*:

The winter of 1890 was, as we all know, very severe in London, and from the spring of 1891, the influenza, this new scourge of humanity which has the gentlest appearance and does not show its claws until later on, joined issue with the inclemencies of the season and carried off a larger proportion of the world than all the other diseases- our old friends- who do not deceive people by their airs of innocence. The whole community at 19, Avenue Road, was taken ill with it during the months of March and April. The younger members recovered, H. P. Blavatsky succumbed.²⁰

¹⁹ Keightley, Bertram to Skinner; April 17, [1887?]. Cambridge (MA), Andover-Harvard Library, bMS 516/1 (50).

²⁰ Vera P. Jelihovsky and 'Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Lucifer*, 16.92 (1895), 99–108 (p. 105).

The life of the infamous, eccentric and influential mystic H. P. Blavatsky came to an end at the age of fifty-nine. Now that an examination of these contextual, life-events have been examined, a source analysis of key writings that influenced her time and cosmology in this work deserve mention. In the midst of these tumultuous times for the Theosophical Society, several important works were published that remain relevant to this ongoing philosophy of time.

II. Source Analysis

1. Time Matters: *Man* (1885)

It was during Blavatsky's stay in London with Francesca Arundale that Theosophists Laura Holloway and Mohini Mohun Chatterji co-authored the work titled *Man: Fragments of Forgotten History* (1885). This book sought to clarify the doctrines first put forth in *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883).²¹ This curious work validates the general thesis of this study: that time was a critical element of Blavatsky's thought. Time, especially as put forth in *Esoteric Buddhism* (and the Mahatma letters), even became a subject of intrigue among the early Theosophists and was a defining characteristic of future Theosophical doctrines. Holloway herself had received several Mahatma letters and sought to publicize these teachings. In response to this work, Blavatsky (through the persona 'Koot Hoomi') advised Sinnett to:

Try to save 'Man' by looking it over with Mohini, and by erasing from it the alleged inspirations and dictation by 'Student' [a term applied to Holloway?]. Having had also 'an object and a purpose' in view, I had to leave her under her self-delusion that this new book was written with the view of 'correcting the mistakes' of *Esoteric Buddhism* -of killing it- was the true thought...Upasika [HPB] was ordered to see that Mohini should carefully expunge from it all the objectionable passages...'²²

And yet while it seemed Blavatsky did not think it was wise to publish this work, nonetheless, she wrote 'I...will not permit it to remain unpublished.'²³

²¹ For a full-length biography on Laura Holloway-Langford see Sarah Diane Sasson, *Yearning for the New Age: Laura Holloway-Langford and Late Victorian Spirituality* (place: Indiana University Press, 2012).

²² See Mahatma Letter CXXXIV, *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett*, comp. by A. Trevor Barker (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1992), p. 361.

²³ Ibid.

Around this same time, Blavatsky wrote another letter to Sinnett so he could 'realise what led even Mohini off the right mechanical track and made him write the unutterable flapdoodle he has in *Man* — from the simply mechanical-cosmos-arrangement standpoint and tolerably correct one, if understood as applying to the "simultaneous evolution" of the six races.'²⁴ This note was followed by more than five pages concerning the nature of rounds and a detailed explanation of them.

This letter remains particularly interesting because Blavatsky admitted to her contradictions and inability to make sense of her own complex philosophy of time: 'I am not myself very steady upon those things and liable to mix up things and produce mistakes. But Master said to me that if "nothing happened out of the way" (?) He would help and the Mahatma also, as They are often here now for the Secret Doctrine.'²⁵ A year following this admission Blavatsky wrote a letter that she intended to publish in the *Theosophist*, though it never appeared in this publication. This letter remains important because it articulated Blavatsky's attitude towards the subject of time during this period. It recognizes a discrepancy between *Man* and *Esoteric Buddhism*: 'Having received and still receiving a number of letters from Theosophists asking me for the meaning of the great discrepancy between the doctrine of Rings and Rounds in Esoteric Buddhism and *Man*- and enquiring which of the doctrines I approve of and accept, I take this opportunity to declare the following...'²⁶

Blavatsky went on to denigrate *Man* by saying that it was 'the production of two 'Chelas' of whom one the 'Eastern Chela' was a 'pucka' disciple, the other the 'Western Chela- a candidate who failed.' She explained that she would 'never recommend the book as a standard work on Theosophy as it now stands' as Holloway had 'left it in a chaotic half-finished condition' because the Masters had abandoned her. Mohini did the best that he could without any further assistance from the Masters as he prepared the manuscript, leaving it to stand on its own

²⁴ Letter CXVIII, *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett and Other Miscellaneous Letters*, comp. by A. Trevor Barker (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1925), p. 245.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 352.

²⁶ H. P. Blavatsky, 'To the *Theosophist*—1885', *H. P. Blavatsky Collected Writings 1883—1884—1885*, comp. by Boris de Zirkoff, 15 vols (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House), VI, 412—13 (p. 412). [7 November 1885]

merits. Blavatsky maintained that it added little new information to this fascinating and complex view of time; rather, she suggested her own work:

In justice, we must say that, with the exceptions of those portions that relate to the Rounds, Root-Races and Sub-races in which there is a most terrible confusion, there is very important information in it. But on account of the confusion above described, it cannot be recommended as a book of reference. In the *Secret Doctrine*, all the errors and misconceptions shall be explained away and corrected, I hope.

Man's philosophy of time was incorrect, as noted in the above quote, and no attempt was made by Blavatsky to reconcile its teachings with *Esoteric Buddhism* because the true teaching would soon be published in *The Secret Doctrine*.

Blavatsky referred snidely to *Man* in the pages of *The Secret Doctrine*:

...an attempt to present the archaic doctrine from a more ideal standpoint...to render some teachings partly gathered from a Master's thoughts, but unfortunately misunderstood. This work also speaks of the evolution of the early Races of men on Earth, and contains some excellent pages of a philosophical character. But so far it is only an interesting little mystical romance. It has failed in its mission because the conditions required for a correct translation of these visions were not present. Hence the reader must not wonder if our volumes [*The Secret Doctrine*] contradict some earlier descriptions in several particulars.²⁷

In other words, *The Secret Doctrine* was superior to *Man* because it was a writing officially sanctioned by the Masters (i. e. Blavatsky's 'occult hermeneutic'); therefore, any discrepancies between these two works were due to the inferiority of the earlier *Man*.

Despite the best attempts of leading Theosophists to clarify the chronology and cosmology put forth in *Esoteric Buddhism*, it seemed the only initiate who maintained an uninhibited access to the sources (whether Blavatsky's psyche or real invisible Masters) of these teachings was Blavatsky herself. *Man* must thereby be relegated to merely a passing section in an understanding of Blavatsky's philosophy of time in *The Secret Doctrine*, though it was still an important work for its value in pushing Blavatsky to publish her own explanations/clarifications.

Few scholars have noted the importance of *Man* in Blavatsky's own writings, but none have suggested its primary value was not in the information it purported,

²⁷ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), I, 160.

but for what it revealed about its authors — they were interested in understanding Blavatsky's view of time and cycles. Thus, *Man* brings this study one step closer in its general thesis, arguing that the subject of 'time' was a key doctrine that elicited much interest in the early Theosophical Society. Following the publication of *Esoteric Buddhism*, more than a few individuals attempted to reconcile its chronology and teachings. As already mentioned, the series of articles published in *The Theosophist* from 1883 titled 'Some Inquiries Suggested by Mr. Sinnett's "Esoteric Buddhism"' continued the discussion of Blavatsky's chronology. Also as previously noted, Arthur Lillie's interest in Blavatsky's time calculations as presented in his booklet *Koot Hoomi Unveiled* (1884) further attest to this fascination.

Writers also specifically engaged Blavatsky's philosophy of time in *The Secret Doctrine* which can be exemplified throughout the pages of the Chicago Spiritualist publication, the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*. Perhaps most notably in a 10 November 1888 article titled 'Theosophy: The Aim of the Movement and the Main Features of the Belief'. In this article, the author E. I. K. Noyes, a self-proclaimed member of the Theosophical Society, applies Blavatsky's chronology to nineteenth-century culture using social Darwinism as an explanation for its evolutionary system.²⁸ In another anonymous article known only as 'The Secret Doctrine', the author summarized Blavatsky's teachings on time and the natural response to such a complicated philosophy remarking that 'It make's one's head swim to think of it. She glides over these aeons as glibly as if they were but yesterdays.'²⁹ These articles (and of course *Man* itself) are indicators that, as this thesis has argued, time was a defining trait in Blavatsky's teachings. Furthermore, following this work an Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society was established in 1888 whose purpose was to 'promote the esoteric interests of the Theosophical Society by the deeper study of esoteric philosophy.'³⁰ Though not

²⁸ E. I. K. Noyes, 'Theosophy: The Aim of the Movement and the Main Features of the Belief', *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 45:12 (10 November 1888), 2-3 (p. 2).

²⁹ 'The Secret Doctrine', *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 46:14 (25 May 1889), 1. See also Gerald Massey, 'Esoteric Buddhism: The Lost Atlantic and the Symbolic "Seven"', *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 1.8 (1883).

³⁰ H. S. Olcott, 'The Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society', *Lucifer*, 3.14 (1888), 176.

directly connected to time, Blavatsky would use this section of the society to expound further details of her Victorian mythology.

A thorough explanation of time would be published in Blavatsky's major writing *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), when she defended her chronology and evolution concepts, although this final work drew from several obscure sources that have been largely ignored. These sources will now be examined for their role in revealing the Eastern element of Blavatsky's 'Western' view of time and exhibiting her unique scavenger ideology. They also provide a unique philosophical framework/chronology which would allow her to completely and logically combine all of the world's major religions into one system (and answer Godfrey Higgin's quandary on time). *Man* serves as one example as to how Blavatsky's time and cosmology were engaged by her contemporaries; however, several others were even more influential.

2. 'Light on the Path' and Eastern Chronology in the 'Theosophist' (1885)

As noted above, *The Secret Doctrine* more fully explicated Blavatsky's chronology, and in it she referred to one influential article in the *Theosophist* that deserves examination. The article entitled 'Light on the Path' first appeared in the November 1885 issue and was written by Justice P. Sreenevas Row, a judge of the City Civil Court in Madras.³¹ This article described a view of time derived from several Puranas, though it was claimed that this 'Eastern' philosophy of time had already been proven in the works of the Orientalist Samuel Davis and scientist Thomas Huxley, evincing its empirical nature (as a true Victorian *mythos*).³²

Row connected the subject of time and eternity to karma and argued that 'it is impossible to conceive of human existence without karma' (or cause and effect) as it formed 'a circle, a wheel of life as it were, rolling on from eternity to eternity.'³³ He identified karma as an eternal principle that was connected to two other limitless principles: the eternal duration of time and the eternal limits of space; thus,

³¹ 'Retirement of Judge Sreenevas Row', *Supplement to the Theosophist*, 20.8 (1899), xxxvi—xxxvii (p. xxxvi).

³² P. Sreenevas Row, 'Light on the Path', *Theosophist*, 7.74 (1885), 113—120 (p. 114). Row quotes Thomas Dick, *Dick's Works: The Christian Philosopher, Or, The Connection of Science and Philosophy with Religion*, 2 vols (Philadelphia: Edward C. Biddle, 1840), II, 45.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

time and movement (evolution) were connected to cause and effect as karma propelled the soul through eternal time and infinite space.³⁴ Row's infinite view of time and space aligned with many contemporary Spiritualist notions, a fact that Blavatsky would have surely noted. This overlap would have served as proof that true Spiritualism was part of this ancient wisdom tradition which Blavatsky was revealing in her writings.

It is curious that in this article Row quoted the *Vishnu Purana*, arguing for the existence of a Kalpa as being equal to a life of Brahma and consisting of a reign of fourteen Manus that includes a Maha Yuga. Each of these 'Maha Yugas' contained four yugs which 'is respectively as the numbers 4, 3, 2 and 1'. Perhaps it was this article that made Blavatsky aware of the *Vishnu Purana* in the first place, though this idea must remain speculative. Row next proceeded to publish a chronological chart which Blavatsky would reprint verbatim in *The Secret Doctrine* II, 68-69 with the breakdown of yugas.³⁵ Blavatsky acknowledged the importance of this article in her footnotes combining its chronology with her own; however, the next source remains an unpublished and relatively unknown letter written by Blavatsky to the noted Kabbalist James Ralston Skinner.

3. Andover-Harvard Letter to James Ralston Skinner (1887)

An unpublished letter was discovered by the author at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA. This pertains directly to Blavatsky's philosophy of time. This communication was sent by Blavatsky on 17 February 1887 and received by one James Ralston Skinner (1830-1893). 'Ralston', as he preferred to be called, remains an under-appreciated figure in nineteenth century history. As both a lawyer and a writer, Ralston spent his earlier years serving in the United States military. It is also known that he studied and practised law with his uncle, the former Governor of Ohio, the Secretary of Treasury in the Cabinet of Abraham Lincoln, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court the prominent Salmon P. Chase (1808–1873).³⁶ Ralston was also a noted kabbalist who wrote the book *The Key to*

³⁴ Ibid., p. 115.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 115-116.

³⁶ F. O. S., 'Samuel Wiggins Skinner', *Harvard College Class of 1880: Secretary's Report, Number VII* (Boston: John Woodbury, 1905), pp. 57-60.

the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery and the Source of Measures in 1876.³⁷ This letter to Ralston evidences Blavatsky's earlier engagement of time and chronology, immediately pre-dating the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*.

It should be first noted that Blavatsky's only complaint with Ralston and his writings was his attitude towards biblical chronology. She explained in her own words that he was 'too enthusiastic about the Jews altogether & sacrifices history of facts to his preconception in favour of the Hebrew which *is not* an ancient language unless one accepts — Bible Chronology. But it is his only fault I find in him & I hope I am mistaken in his fanatical views.'³⁸ Thus, while Blavatsky's chronology differed from Ralston's, it is in this letter that Blavatsky began to reconcile her teachings with the various world religions through one powerful philosophy: root races.

These 'root races' became the metaphysical connection that allowed Blavatsky to combine all the world's *mythos* into one unified system, an idea which was fully expounded upon in *The Secret Doctrine*. Blavatsky explained her differing chronology from Ralston's by explaining that he had begun with the fourth Atlantean race, whereas Blavatsky began her history from the third hermaphroditic Lemurian races. It should further be noted that this 'root-race confusion' would be a common theme employed by Blavatsky in her later writings to justify any discrepancy in the various chronologies of world religions.

As for the origin of humanity, Blavatsky suggested an ideology that connected her pre-historic root-races with her own unusual view of Darwinian evolution, suggesting that it was the 'the orang., the chimpanzee who are the descendants of the Atlantean giant. But all this will be in my Secret Doctrine if you will judge.' She further maintained the superiority of this ancient wisdom tradition over science because in her philosophy of cyclical time a major cataclysm occurred in Atlantis leaving no 'link' to be discovered. She inadvertently acknowledged the Darwinian 'missing link' and combined her views of 'Theology' and 'Science':

Thus, you see, that assigning 18 or 19 million years as the time for the *physiological* evolution of man, from the ethereal, sexless, bisexual man &

³⁷ *The Salmon P. Chase Papers: Volume 1, 1829-1872*, ed. by John Niven (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), p. 155.

³⁸ Blavatsky, H. P. to Edward J. Buck, March 3, 1887, Cambridge (MA), Andover-Harvard Library, BMS 516/1 (14).

woman races there was ample time for him (man) to become as he is now; and except in size, never to alter much since 859,000 y. ago when the first Atlantean men swept a ways [sic] down into the seas. The geologists & anthropologists may be searching for the *missing link* till doomsday, they will not find it, except, as said before 'giant' skeletons, perchance...

According to Blavatsky, science was insufficient to explain spiritual evolution and rounds as the earlier races were spiritual and left no proof of their existence; therefore, the physical origin of humanity needed religion in order to understand both spiritual and physical evolution.

This proved Blavatsky's continued desire to reconcile science with religion through her grandiose mythology. In another part of this letter, Blavatsky exhibited her 'Indo-centric' belief, explaining that any secrets related to races found in the Hebrew Bible were merely derivations of the truths found in the Puranas, or Esoteric philosophy (or what she later called the mysterious 'Books of Dzyan'). This belief confirmed the existence of the ancient wisdom tradition. Blavatsky connected this tradition to her cyclical chronology; yet, she clearly diverted from Lyell's theory of uniformitarianism:

This will be regarded as, & proclaimed nonsense by both believers in the Jewish Chronology, of 7,000 years since the worlds creation & by the geologists & biologists who know only of *man as he is now*. [in direct contrast to the law of uniformity!] and dare not assign authority to the moon race beyond some 100,000 years. ³⁹

Blavatsky believed her ancient wisdom tradition was scientific and reconciled her chronology with contemporary science.⁴⁰ This letter also exhibited the expanding of Blavatsky's 'root race' philosophy, identifying a 'sweat born' and hermaphrodite race which seemed to have been a newer notion first developed during this time period. This assertion can be proven by examining an undated letter written to Sinnett around the year 1886.

In this letter, Blavatsky explained that she needed Mohini to proof-read certain sections of *The Secret Doctrine* that employed Sanskrit terms, noting 'there

³⁹ Blavatsky, H. P. to James Ralston Skinner, February 17 1887, Cambridge (MA), Andover-Harvard Library, bMS 516/1 (12).

⁴⁰ 'Thus our globe said in Esoteric philosophy to be inhabited by man 18,000,000 y. & the globe since its incrustation about 350,000,000 does not differ much from modern science. Reade demands 500 mill years since sedimentation began in Europe, Lyell, 240 mill, Darwin 300, & Huxley 1000 million years! A touching harmony is exact science...' bMS 516/1 (12).

are more secrets of initiation given out in the Introductory Chapt. than in all *Isis*. And what comes after is still more interesting... Fancy Masters giving out the secret of the 'Divine Hermaphrodite' even! And so on.'⁴¹ This appeared to have been the stage when Blavatsky developed her belief in these races, which were divided by their sexual habits. These root races would later become the tools which allowed her to combine all of the world's religion into one 'coherent' theological belief. This letter also revealed one final key towards understanding Blavatsky's view of time that has remained unexamined until now.

A. Influence on *The Secret Doctrine*

The most important element of this letter to Ralston relating to Blavatsky's philosophy of time was that it provided part of a major list that would be printed verbatim in *The Secret Doctrine* II, pp. 68-69. Therefore, the main teaching in this work on time was first developed through correspondence with Ralston in 1887. The calculations are as follows. Note that Blavatsky derived her belief in the time of humanity on this planetary chain from *Esoteric Buddhism*, proving its influence on Blavatsky's chronology:

But Eastern or Aryan chronology teaches us as based upon geological records that-
From the beginning of cosmic evolution up to the Hindu year Tarana (1887)- the number of years elapsed is ---- 1,955,884,687.

The mineral, vegetable & animal (lower) kingdom up to man have taken to evolve 300,000,000 years.

Time from the first appearance of humanity on our planetary chain (See Sinnet's Esot. Buddhism- equals ---1,664,5000,987 years

The number of years that elapsed since the 'Nawas create Manvantara (or our Aryan Adam.

Man in the present human form after the deluge (which is a cosmic astronomical and geological cataclysm not simply a flood) to the present year 1887, is just ---18,618,728 years. Of other periods we may not speak now.

⁴¹ Letter LXIX, *Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 172.

This list was combined with the previous list in the 1885 edition of the *Theosophist* (examined in the previous section) and served as the major passage on time in *The Secret Doctrine*. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky would explain where these numbers came from and identified one further significant source — the Tirukkanda Panchanga.⁴²

B. Tirukkanda Panchanga

Blavatsky determined the calculations put forth in this letter from a rare pamphlet referred to as the *Tirukkanda Panchanga*. The title Blavatsky assigned to the Tamil calendar (Tirukkanda Panchanga) was actually an incorrect translation as the name of the Panchanga was actually ‘Tiru (=Sri) Ganita (=mathematical) Panchangam’ in Tamil and ‘Drik-Ganita-Panchangamu’ in Telugu.⁴³ The specific edition of this calendar used by Blavatsky to compute these figures has been lost over time; however, as these calendars were published on a yearly basis, the Theosophical Library in Adyar does hold several earlier editions, the closest one being from 1880–1881 (and 1878–1880 which was referenced to verify figures). It seems that by adding six to seven years onto the figures available in this edition one can recreate the figures for the 1886-1887 edition.

Calendar for the Vikrama Year (1880-81) (As compared to page 69 in *The Secret Doctrine* II written in 1887 which is printed in boldface though these calculations were also recorded in Blavatsky’s letter to ‘Ralston’):

According to Sri Surya Siddhanta :

Years that passed since Brahman-kalpa:	1,972,948,980
Years that passed since Creation (Srishti)	1,955,884,980
	[from 1879-90 so add +7]

⁴² Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 67–68.

⁴³ Chintamani Raghunathacharyulu and Tadakamalla Venkata Krishna Rao, *Tiru Ganita Panchanga* (Chennapuri: Vyavahara Tarangini Mudrakshara Sala, 1880). A special thanks must be extended to David Reigle for providing me with a copy of this rare source.

I. From the beginning of cosmic evolution up to the Hindu year Tarana (or 1887) 1,955,884,687 years [it seemed Blavatsky had switched the 9 to a 6].

Years that passed since SWAYAMBHAVA Manu 1,664,500,981 [+6]
 III. Time, from the first appearance of 'Humanity' (on planetary chain.
 1,644,500,987 years.

Years that passed in Vaivaswata Manu 18,618,728
 IV. The number that elapsed since the 'Vaivasvata Manvantara' - or the human period- up to the year 1887, is just 18,618,728 years.

Based on a comparison of these two charts, it seems obvious that Blavatsky utilized this Tamil calendar in many of her calculations except one: the 'Years that passed since Brahman-kalpa'; thus, the figures for these calculations were copied directly from this Eastern calendar known as the *Tiru Ganita Panchanga*. Aside from these identical calculations, the remaining time periods were based on the two sources explored earlier in this chapter, evidencing that the most detailed explanation of time in *The Secret Doctrine* was derived from a compilation of these three earlier sources. Observe the finalized chart as it appeared in *The Secret Doctrine* in a section that was arguably the clearest explanation of Blavatsky's chronology:

360 days of mortals make a year		1
Krita Yuga contains	1,728,000	
Treta Yuga contains	1,296,000	
Dwapara Yuga contains	864,000	
Kali Yuga contains	432,000	
The total of the said four Yugas constitute a Maha-Yuga	4,320,000	
Seventy-one of such Maha-Yugas form the period of the reign of one Manu.....	306,720,000	
The reign of 14 Manus embraces the duration of 994 Maha-Yugas, which is equal to	4,294,080,000	
Add <i>Sandhis, i. e.</i> , intervals between the reign of each Manu; which amount to six Maha- Yugas, equal to	25,920,000	
The total of these reigns and interregnums of 14 Manus, is 1000 Maha Yugas, which consti- tute a Kalpa, <i>i. e.</i> , one day of Brahma.....	4,320,000,000	
As Brahma's Night is of equal duration, one day and night of Brahma would contain	8,640,000,000	
360 of such days and nights make one year of Brahma make	3,110,400,000,000	

100 such years constitute the whole period of
Brahma's age, *i.e.*, Maha-Kalpa311,040,000,000,000

This section has evidenced that the chronological chart put forth in the *Secret Doctrine* was in reality a combination of three sources revealing the eclectic nature of her writing: 1) the *Tirukkanda Panchanga* (*Tiru-Ganita Panchangam* [1885]), 2) the 1886 *Theosophist* article 'Light on the Path', and 3) the letter to James Ralston Skinner written in 1887. By 1887, Blavatsky had fully assimilated her phenomenal view of time which shrouded her teachings in mystery and also allowed for her to assimilate any world religion through her root races. This idea will be expounded in *The Secret Doctrine*, though these sources provided the philosophical and numerical foundations for Blavatsky's view of time.

III. Philosophical Time in *The Secret Doctrine*

1. Teachings of *The Secret Doctrine*

The Secret Doctrine was a two-volume set consisting of roughly 1,500 pages that focused on Blavatsky's fundamental teachings, including spiritual evolution, the septenary constitution of the soul, karma and reincarnation, along with the origin of the universe to name a few. This work was based on a text called the Stanzas of Dzyan, a mysterious 'Archaic Manuscript' consisting of 'palm leaves made impermeable to water, fire, and air, by some specific unknown process,' which Blavatsky claimed to merely copy and comment upon under the inspiration of the Masters.⁴⁴ This manuscript was allegedly written in an unknown mystical language which Blavatsky called Senzar and to this day it has still not been identified with any known language in existence.⁴⁵ The main chronological chart in this work has already been examined; however, there were other ideas related to time that deserve consideration.

In comparing this work to *Isis Unveiled*, Carl Jackson commented that '*Isis* had outlined Theosophy's major teachings; *Secret Doctrine* attempted to provide a

⁴⁴ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 31.

⁴⁵ David and Nancy Reigle have continued to research the origin of the elusive Book of Dzyan and its language. Their research has been published in a collected writing: David Reigle, *Blavatsky's Secret Books* (Mecosta, MI: Wizard's Bookshelf, 1999).

systematic explanation.⁴⁶ Though Jackson's remark suggests a continuity in the doctrines presented, which was not always the case, his analysis verifies that each work played a distinct role in the development of Blavatsky's philosophy. *Isis Unveiled* defended Blavatsky's unique Western Esoteric form of Spiritualism and comparative mythography, whereas *The Secret Doctrine* put forth an entirely unique cosmological system of the universe through assimilating world religions which were mixed together with her own ideologies and the doctrines put forth in the Mahatma letters.

This massive work was divided into two separate volumes: 'Cosmogogenesis' and 'Anthropogenesis'. Though a third volume was published posthumously as a collection of essays, it consisted of material that had been edited out of the original Würzburg manuscript (which was a 'rough draft' of sorts).⁴⁷ There were three fundamental positions explained in its pages: 1) the existence of an omnipresent, eternal, boundless, and immutable supreme being which was infinite, 2) the eternal nature of the universe that is a playground for numberless universes which were cyclically appearing and disappearing, and 3) the identity of all souls with the universal soul and their spiritual evolution through the cycle of incarnation and their subject to the cyclic and karmic law.⁴⁸ All three of these concepts were directly connected to time and chronology, proving the general thesis of this work: time was a key teaching in Blavatsky's philosophy.

The first volume 'Cosmogogenesis' was concerned with disseminating Blavatsky's elaborate cosmology. The entire universe was said to follow a cyclical time pattern of millions of years divided into 'yugas' and 'kalpas' based on the cosmology exhibited in H.H. Wilson's translation of the *Vishnu Purana*. The entire cyclical universe revolved around two main periods of existence—activity which Blavatsky again connected to the Eastern terms 'days and nights of Brahma' and the intermittent 'rests' were called Pralayas (this was a continuation of the same terminology employed earlier in *Isis Unveiled* and *Esoteric Buddhism*). The concept

⁴⁶ Carl Jackson, *Oriental Religions in American Thought: Nineteenth-Century Explorations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), p. 166.

⁴⁷ David Reigle argues for this very point in his book. H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine Würzburg Manuscript: The 1885-1886 Version with the Stanzas of Dzyan and H. P. B.'s Accompanying Commentaries* (Cotopaxi, CO: Eastern School Press, 2014), p. xiv.

⁴⁸ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 14–17.

of rounds, root races, and the astral light were further explicated from their initial appearance in *Esoteric Buddhism* in connection with the seven spheres and planets. The sevenfold (septenary) constitution of the soul was also expanded to apply to the entire universe except the One Supreme Being who remained outside of human comprehension. Blavatsky in a very circular manner explained the process of emanation from the divine, which included her descent/ascent theory and the creation of a celestial hierarchy of various mediations, including a varying level of planetary spirits. Included in this cosmology was Blavatsky's Eastern idea of *fohat*, which provided the link between matter and spirit and was the electric ever-propelling life-force of the universe. Blavatsky continued expanding many of the basic ideas expounded in *Esoteric Buddhism* in this first volume, including the evolution of the soul beginning as an elemental and then incarnating through the various 'kingdoms' of life from mineral to vegetable to animal to man and then eventually into a god-like being.

Another main theme found in this first volume was the concept of 'maya,' an Eastern term denoting an illusion which 'is an element which enters into all finite things, for everything that exists has only a relative, not an absolute, reality, since that appearance which the hidden noumenon assumes for any observer depends upon his power of cognition'.⁴⁹ This concept of 'maya' echoed the teachings of the spiritualist, Mary Baker Eddy and her new religious movement known as Christian Science (in fact, Christian Science was on occasion confused with Theosophy see foot note below).⁵⁰

The second volume 'Anthropogenesis' set forth the subject of personal evolution and the history of each individual root race. The classification of various root races was built on the basic structure explicated in *Esoteric Buddhism*. This volume also dissected the chronology of the universe, focusing on prehistoric ages while continually challenging the Darwinian theory of evolution throughout its pages. Furthermore, this work expounded upon Blavatsky's complicated racial anthropology and attempted to pinpoint the true origin of humanity. In this volume, Blavatsky developed and tried to validate the descent/ascent theory mentioned in

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 71.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 39. Miss Dodge, 'A Short Sketch of What Christian Science is Not', *Woman's Herald* (1891), 402.

Isis Unveiled concerning the soul's descent into matter and its subsequent ascension back into a spirit composition. Blavatsky further assimilated the various world religions and chronologies into one universal source; therefore, Jesus, Osiris, and Hermes were all the same soul reincarnated at different stages in the history of the world based on the all-pervading septenary law.⁵¹ Thus, according to Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine* was the essence of the one universal tradition from which all the world religions had been derived (and perverted). Underlying both of these volumes was the philosophical framework of Eliphas Lévi (1810–1875), the influence of Alexander Winchell's *World-Life* (1883), and H. H. Wilson's *Vishnu Purana*. Drawing occasionally on her unusual allegorical biblical hermeneutic, Blavatsky created her own complex narrative of world history and prehistory by combining ancient philosophy and world mythologies into one mega, empirical religio-*mythos* — Theosophy.

2. The Philosophy of Time in *The Secret Doctrine*

It is the argument of this study that the philosophy of time is a main tenet of Theosophy and remains the key towards understanding Blavatsky's teachings (and not the Masters as other writers have claimed though their role is important in time and cosmology). It is this sophisticated chronology that was one of the most distinguishing features of her teachings, differentiating her work from other contemporaneous writings and Spiritualist teachings. Furthermore, Blavatsky's philosophy of time was not as non-sensical or trivial as previous scholars have presumed.

The main passage that engaged the subject of time in *The Secret Doctrine* can be found in volume II, page 69 though this chapter has already been dissected and contextualized as a combination of three sources. It should be noted that the only other researcher to have seriously considered the implications of Blavatsky's philosophy of time in a macro-historical framework is Garry Trompf. Trompf suggested an 'overview of the chronology put forth in *The Secret Doctrine*: it allowed for an expansive account of the "Root-Races" set within a vast cosmohistory of the *kalpas*, a cycling of great ages that hold within their eternal motions

⁵¹ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 358–59.

descents of spirits towards the physical condition as found in our world and the challenge of (re) ascent back to the One behind the All.⁵² Trompf summarizes Blavatsky's philosophy of time, recognizing that the cosmology found in *The Secret Doctrine* was based largely on the Mahatma letters though slightly altered.⁵³

He also observes the importance of periods such as the kalpa and manvantara that became the 'vehicle' in Blavatsky's writing that gave purpose to her ancient wisdom tradition thereby connecting history and mythology:

Blavatsky appropriated the Indian epical visualization of great cycles (of *kalpa* and *manvantara*) as the conceptual vehicle by which to view cosmohistory undergoing periodicity and constant renewal through time, yet presented her total vision- her neo-Gnostic *mythos* included- in the guise a synthetic teaching deriving from a far-distant Source in time.⁵⁴

Trompf's designation of Blavatsky's writings as a neo-Gnostic *mythos* confirms that she was assembling the ultimate, modernist Victorian mythology that incorporated both 'Science' and 'Theology'. Still, the larger implications of Blavatsky's chronology remain underemphasized, as well as the main purpose for creating these various root races. The main role of these root races was to connect all of the religions and their chronologies together (though this conclusion seemed outside the scope of his study on macro-history).⁵⁵

Though researchers have engaged Blavatsky's view of time at a superficial level, few have concentrated on the influence of the *Vishnu Purana* in direct relation to time. In fact, Trompf in his research on macrohistory only mentioned this source in passing, while French (for all of his valuable insights) never once mentioned this work throughout his 750+ page thesis. This oversight reveals a lack of understanding of Blavatsky's philosophy of time and chronology. In *The Secret Doctrine*, Wilson's translations and calculations were prominently assimilated into Blavatsky's teaching.

There were three distinct purposes of time in *The Secret Doctrine* that connected to her earlier philosophy: 1) to connect Blavatsky's cosmology to an

⁵² Garry W. Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from *Isis Unveiled* (1877) to *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)', *Literature & Aesthetics*, 21.1 (2011), 43–71 (p. 57).

⁵³ Trompf, 'Imagining Macrohistory', pp. 57, 66.

⁵⁴ G. W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner, and Guénon', in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), pp. 269–96 (p. 281).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

ancient religious text (i. e. *Vishnu Purana*) which gave authority to her cosmological system; 2) to prove her own superiority as an initiate of the Masters, and 3) to establish her doctrine of 'root races' which allowed her to fully assimilate the major world religions into one 'coherent' system thereby proving the existence of the ancient wisdom tradition. Blavatsky had finally figured out a way of validating her 'unprovable' time periods by assimilating this ancient text thereby giving her teachings an air of authority.

3. Blavatsky and the *Vishnu Purana*: Connecting to Ancient History

The chronology put forth in *The Secret Doctrine* merely reiterated Blavatsky's earlier cosmological system with one major exception—it assimilated these time schemes with Wilson's *Vishnu Purana*. Michael Gomes notes the importance of this latter work, observing that it 'served her better than any other book, supplying almost 130 references.'⁵⁶ It seems that the majority of these references related to the subject of time and cosmology.

It is also important to consider that the influence of this book was immediately recognized by followers of Blavatsky. A booklet was published by N. C. Ramanujachary titled the *Vishnu Purana in The Secret Doctrine* which attempted to trace the influence of this Eastern purana on Blavatsky's philosophy. Ramanujachary noted the following points of influence from the *Vishnu Purana* on

⁵⁶ Michael Gomes *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), p. 147. He goes on to list several of them: On p. 89, vol II, S. D., subsection 'On the Identity and Differences of the Incarnating Powers,' H.P.B. discusses the Progenitors of Man, 'called in India "Fathers," Pitara or Pitris.' Stating that there are Seven classes of Pitris, she turns to the Hindu Puranas for support. Line 15 of that page ('moreover, the *Vayu Purana* declares...') compares with Wilson's note on chapter XIV, book III (V. P., vol. 3, p. 158), 'Again, the *Vayu Purana* declares the seven orders of the Pitris have been, originally, the first gods, the Vairajas, whom Brahma, with the eye of Yoga, beheld the eternal spheres, and who are the gods of gods.' He proceeds to give the Sanskrit sloka for corroboration. H. P. B. gives no source, beginning 'with the eye of Yoga...' Following on line 18, 'and the *Matsya* adds...' compares with Wilson's note (vol. 3, p. 159), 'The *Matsya* agrees with this latter statement, and adds, that the gods worship them' (gives Sanskrit sloka). Line 19 adds, 'the *Harivansa* (S. I, 935) distinguishes...' compares with Wilson (vol. 3, 159), 'The *Hari Vamsa* has the same statements, but more precisely distinguishes the Vairajas as the one class only of the incorporeal Pitris.' Line 24, 'In the *Raivata Manvantara*...' to 'deities called Rajasas,' is a quote from Fitzedward Hall (vol. 3, p. 17), giving a variation on the sloka. H. P. B. has 'Manvantara' for his 'patriarchal period.' She passes down a few lines and says, 'As remarked by a far more able Sanskritist than Wilson...and gives a quotation by him on the derivation of the term 'Manasa' with source '(*Vishnu Purana*, book III, ch. I, p. 17,),' the only time the book is cited on her page. With all the other passages she is quoting a translation or a summation, but when she gives a personal opinion, she identifies the source. Gomes, *Theosophy in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 148.

The Secret Doctrine which revealed a deeper connection than just her philosophy of time; these elements included: two aspects of the One principle; seven eternities; Pradhana; evolution of the universe; the sevenfold sun; bodies of Brahma; Sarai and Sri; the two classes of Pitris, and the idea that the universe was a direct expansion of the Divine substance.⁵⁷ This summary noted the influence of the *Vishnu Purana* on Blavatsky's writings, though exactly how much she actually borrowed from this text remains uncertain.

What can be determined is that one of the most important sections related to time was the section in 'Cosmogogenesis' titled 'The Days and Nights of Brahma'. In this section Blavatsky utilized long quotations from Wilson's translation of the *Vishnu Purana* and developed an eschatology and chronology based on this purana (and often times without citation).⁵⁸ She also concluded that these calculations could not be taken literally 'since those which especially concern the Manvantara or Kalpas have to be understood in their several references' noting that 'no computation of either the Four Ages, of the Manvantaras, has ever been unriddled by our very learned Orientalists'; thus, they could only be verified by an initiate.⁵⁹

In his research, Brendan French observes several points in which Blavatsky altered the traditional kalpa theory. First, he argued that kalpa theory was fatalistic and cosmic, placing no emphasis on the individual. He also claimed that the influence of Spiritualism dictated an optimistic progressivism 'her esotericism would avail little if Theosophists were not able somehow, even in small subtle ways, to accelerate, decelerate or alter the process of temporal reticulation.'⁶⁰ Blavatsky's philosophy of time combined Spiritualism and kalpa theory allowing for some manipulation of cycles as purported in *The Secret Doctrine*:

But these cycles- wheels within wheels, so comprehensively and ingeniously symbolized by the various Manus and Rishis in India...do not

⁵⁷ N. C. Ramanujachary, *Vishnu Purana in The Secret Doctrine* (Madras: Prapti Books, 1989).

⁵⁸ The *Vishnu Purana* is referenced in relation to time on the following pages of *The Secret Doctrine*: I, 19, 336, 348 (cosmology/origin), 360 (origin), 370–71, 376–77, 419–21, 445–48 (seven creations/origin), 454, 456–57 (evolution/origin); II, 48, 146, 155, 162, 183, 232, 307, 320, 550, 565, 572, 611, 624.

⁵⁹ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 369–70.

⁶⁰ Brendan French, 'The Mercurian Master: Hermes' Gift to the Theosophical Society', *Aries*, 1.2 (2001), 168–205 (p. 188).

affect all mankind at one and the same time...mastery can be achieved only through INITIATION.⁶¹

As previously noted, the early Theosophical Society was an occult training ground that taught the *practice* of occult powers (i. e. astral double/projection), the manipulation of elementals, and other phenomena of clairvoyance. Following the publication of *The Secret Doctrine*, it was clear that these occult powers could be developed to manipulate time in some form, though this ability came only through advanced application and the assistance of the Masters. It should be noted that even though 'mastery' was possible, time remained one of (if not) the most powerful forces in Blavatsky's cosmological system.

Blavatsky seemingly did not have access to the *Vishnu Purana* until after the majority of the Mahatma letters were written (and subsequently *Esoteric Buddhism*). This is clear from two letters written to A. P. Sinnett. The first letter was written by Blavatsky around March of 1886 and it concerned Sinnett cashing in a cheque for her and his purchase of books which included Wilson's translation of the *Vishnu Purana* volumes one through eight.⁶²

While Sinnett had formulated a detailed structure of cyclical time in *Esoteric Buddhism*, he went to great pains not to assign dates or specific numerical calculations to this cyclical structure of time. Throughout these earlier years, Blavatsky herself rarely assigned numerical figures or exact years to her elaborate cosmology. It was not until the year 1886 (presumably after obtaining a copy of the *Vishnu Purana*), when writing *The Secret Doctrine*, that Blavatsky began to assimilate the time periods of the yugas into her view of time and soteriology. This

⁶¹ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 703.

⁶² The *Vishnu Purana* may have been known to Blavatsky before 1886, as seen in a letter printed in the December 1883 issue of the *Theosophist* from the president of the Madras Theosophical Society, R. Ragoonath Row. Row takes a list of Morya masters from the Puranas and asks what relations are to Blavatsky's mahatmas. One of the puranas he quotes from is the *Vishnu Purana*. R. Ragoonath Row, 'The Purana on the Dynasties of the Moryas and the Koothoomi', *The Theosophist*, 5.51 (1883), 99. Blavatsky further wrote to Sinnett in their published letters: 'If you can have it changed and send me the money in English Bank notes, I would ask you to get for me (I) Wilson's Purana (his other works I do not want) and then the best, the most complete work on Odin and the Scandinavian Mythology.' *The Letters of HP Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, ed. by A. T. Barker (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1973), p. 197. She also wrote: 'Thanks for Wilson. But I will send you £2 for the three or four other volumes, from Chapter VI Book IV to Book VI ending with Ch. VIII. You have sent me 3 volumes in which I find Book IV ending with Ch. V.' *Ibid.*, p. 224.

was when her cosmological calculations started to contain specific numerical figures.

Blavatsky began to assimilate the figures put forth in the *Vishnu Purana* into her own beliefs, demonstrating that her writings were superior to Sinnett's (as she argued throughout this work). It is important to note that Blavatsky was generally aware of Eastern chronology much earlier because she clearly referenced the yug divisions in *Isis Unveiled*,⁶³ however, her knowledge of these time divisions was superficial and was more likely to have come from her readings of Godfrey Higgins than any Eastern source.⁶⁴ Wilson's translation significantly deepened Blavatsky's knowledge of Eastern Chronology. This realization allows the reader to analyze the magnitude of the effect that Wilson's translation made on Blavatsky's concept of time: it served as the 'missing link' while providing her with historical precedence — the *Vishnu Purana* was an ancient text within a major religious tradition.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky also advanced her ideas about root-races. One should bear in mind that the term 'root race' was never used in *Isis Unveiled*, proving a distinct progression in Blavatsky's writings. Blavatsky's belief that 'rounds' (divisions of time) were connected to the quality and state of human life seemed to be an obvious link to the Eastern 'yugas'. The idea that rounds and yugas could be used interchangeably was found in the introduction to *The Secret Doctrine*; thus, one way that Blavatsky connected her new ideas to her older teachings was by making terms interchangeable.⁶⁵ While at times Blavatsky used these terms interchangeably, she was not consistent in her use of certain terms as noted elsewhere.⁶⁶ In *Esoteric Buddhism*, Blavatsky never employed the terms

⁶³ The term 'Eastern chronology' here is used as opposed to 'Puranic chronology' since at this point it appears that Blavatsky's knowledge of the Puranas was limited. After 1886, the term 'Puranic chronology' was employed to reflect her adaption of the *Vishnu Purana*. It should be noted that in *Isis Unveiled* there are several references to the terms 'day and nights of Brahma' in *Isis Unveiled*, II, 424. Cycles are also mentioned in regard to Hindu chronology, but are only explained not necessarily endorsed. See Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, II, 156.

⁶⁴ H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, 2 vols (Pasadena, CA: Theosophical University Press, 1988), I, 32.

⁶⁵ The 'illustration' spoken of in 'Isis' relates to the evolution of these Races and of our 4th and 5th Race Humanity in the Vaivasvata Manvantara or 'Round'; each Round being composed of the Yugas of the seven periods of Humanity; four of which are now passed in our life cycle, the middle point of the 5th being nearly reached.' H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), I, p. xlili.

⁶⁶ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 147.

'yuga' or 'kalpa', but this changed in *The Secret Doctrine*. Again, Blavatsky seemed to be intentionally ambiguous lending an element of mystique to her philosophy.

4. *The Secret Doctrine* Compared to Earlier Theosophical Writings

To some degree, Blavatsky incorporated numerical figures in *The Secret Doctrine* to prove the superiority of this 'revelation' over Sinnett's in *Esoteric Buddhism* (again based on the *Vishnu Purana*). This belief seems confirmed by comparing Sinnett's calculations to Blavatsky's: 'Thought is baffled, say even the adepts, in speculating as to how many of our solar pralayas must come before the great cosmic night in which the whole universe, in its collective enormity, obeys what is manifestly the universal law of activity and repose, and with all its myriad systems passes itself into pralaya.'⁶⁷ Blavatsky answered this metaphysical challenge in *The Secret Doctrine*, proving her unique relationship with the Masters and explaining that: 'The Cosmic or Universal Pralaya comes only at the end of one hundred years of Brahma... 100 such years constitute the whole period of Brahma's age, i.e. Maha-Kalpa.... 311,040,000,000,000.'⁶⁸ This quote evidenced that by bringing in numerical figures derived from the *Vishnu Purana*, Blavatsky was finally able to argue for her superiority as an initiate into an advanced understanding of occult doctrine that Sinnett was not able to access. The philosophy of time and cosmology in *The Secret Doctrine* served not only to connect Blavatsky's cosmology into an ancient religious text, but also to prove her own elevated status as an initiate of the Masters. The fact that Sinnett was not allowed to give out specific figures and calculations referring to time periods, root races, and incarnations has already been mentioned seemingly because Blavatsky had not figured out how to assimilate her eternal view of time at that earlier stage.⁶⁹

5. Root-Races: Reconciling World Religions

Garry Trompf has argued that Blavatsky's root races resolved two philosophical problems: 1) it provided an etiological explanation for the various races of humanity as opposed to the Sons of Noah being the three progenitors of humanity as

⁶⁷ A. P. Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 3rd ed. (London: Tübner & Co., 1884), p. 172.

⁶⁸ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 69–70.

⁶⁹ Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, pp. 119–20.

typically espoused by orthodox ministers of this time period (e. g. George Pember, Alexander Hislop, Charles Spurgeon, etc.). These root races also explained that the large discrepancies between civilized and uncivilized groups which became a pressing issue among contemporaneous anthropologists, how could various races evolve at different stages (e. g. aborigines) if they all had access to both the Masters and her reconceptualized *prisca theologia*?

Not only did these root races serve as a more advanced explanation for various races that relied more on evolutionary theory than a monotheistic Divine providence (i. e. Trompf's evolutionism vs. primal monotheism), but also 2) explained the existence of negative circumstances without maintaining a belief in original sin. Blavatsky saw the Fall of Man as an allegory explaining humanity's descent into matter and evidence for her cyclical view of history. This concept of a spiritual fall remains indirectly connected to her view of time (i. e. it occurred through her doctrine of 'rounds'). There was one other primary purpose for developing this doctrine of root races which has been hinted at throughout this chapter.

These root races were Blavatsky's attempt to combine the chronologies of all the world religions into one unified system. It was apparent that until this point this connection was not possible, as Godfrey Higgins had pointed out earlier in his *Anacalypsis*.⁷⁰ This issue of chronology was identified by Max Müller (1823–1900), the contemporary Orientalist and anthropologist, who noted an inconsistency in harmonizing the various chronologies of the world's major religions together:

...as to any similarity between the Four Yugas of the Brahmans and the Four Ages of the Parsis, we can only say that, if it exists, no one has as yet brought it out. The Greeks, again, who are likewise said to share the primitive doctrine of the Four Ages, believe really in five, and not in four, and separate them in a manner which does not in the least remind us of Hindu Yugas, Hebrew patriarchs, or the battle between Ormuzd and Ahriman.

⁷⁰ Blavatsky does explain the combination of 'yugas' with 'races': 'The Dvapara Yuga differs for each Race. All races have their own cycles, which fact causes a great difference. For instance, the Fourth Sub-Race of the Atlanteans was in its Kali-Yuga, when destroyed, whereas the Fifth was in its Satya or *Krila* Yuga. The Aryan Race is now in its Kali Yuga, and will continue to be in it for 427,000 years longer, while various "family Races," called the Semitic, Hamitic, etc, are in their own special cycles. The forthcoming 6th Sub Race — which may begin very soon — will be in its Satya (golden) age while we reap the fruit of our iniquity in our Kali Yuga.' Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 147.

While Müller believed that combining the world chronologies could not be achieved due to various discrepancies and inconsistencies involved, Blavatsky argued that they could be combined, but only if one accepted her systematic belief in root races.⁷¹

She admitted that the chronology she constructed in her ancient wisdom tradition appeared inconsistent; yet, she claimed that each religion wrote within a specific chronology that was relevant to their specific 'root race'. Blavatsky explained that the inconsistencies in the various chronologies were due to 1) the fact that these leaders were part of a higher 'divine' race (a concept shown in *Isis Unveiled*); and 2) the fact that these religious leaders have been reincarnated throughout the various root races, thereby, perplexing the ancient readers and recorders. She noted that:

They will recognize, then, the cause which produces in history and chronology certain riddles of the ages; the reason why, for instance, it is impossible *for them* to assign any reliable date to Zoroaster, who is found multiplied by twelve and fourteen in the *Dabistan*; why the Rishis and Manus are so mixed up in their numbers and individualities; why Krishna and Buddha speak of themselves as *re-incarnations*, *i. e.*, Krishna is identified with the Rishi Narayana, and Gautama gives a series of his previous births; and why the former, especially, being 'the *very supreme* Brahma,' is yet called *Amsamsavatara* — 'a part of a part' only of the Supreme on Earth. Finally, why Osiris is a great God, and at the same time a 'prince on Earth,' who reappears in Thoth-Hermes, and why Jesus (in Hebrew, Joshua) of Nazareth is recognized, cabalistically, in Joshua, the Son of Nun, as well as in other personages. The esoteric doctrine explains it by saying that [1] *each of these (as many others) had first appeared on earth as one of the seven powers of the LOGOS, individualized as a God or 'Angel' (messenger); then, mixed with matter, [2] they had reappeared in turn as great sages and instructors who 'taught the Fifth Race,' after having instructed the two preceding races, had ruled during the Divine Dynasties, and had finally sacrificed themselves, to be reborn under various circumstances for the good of mankind, and for its salvation at certain critical periods; until in their last incarnations they had become truly only 'the parts of a part' on earth, though de facto the One Supreme in Nature.*

This is the metaphysics of Theogony. And, as every 'Power' among the SEVEN has (once individualized) in his charge one of the elements of creation, and rules over it, hence the many meanings in every symbol,

⁷¹ Max Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop: Essays on the Science of Religion*, 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1867), I, 153–54.

which, unless interpreted according to the esoteric methods, generally lead to an inextricable confusion.⁷²

Accordingly, any discrepancies concerning the subject of time could easily be explained by the deeper, occult meaning of these chronologies (i.e. her views of races and rounds): The Genesis seven-day week was really an esoteric allegory about the creation of Root Races.⁷³ Each week actually stood for a 360-day solar year, making the whole week consist of 2,520 days.⁷⁴ The Persian traditions of twelve cycles of 7,000 years each was compared to the scheme of time associated with the seven successive renewals of the globe that would last 7,000 years, the total duration being 49,000 years. This of course referred to the ‘seven rounds, seven root races, and sub-races the truly occult figures though sorely confused.’⁷⁵

My arguments is that one of the main purposes for Blavatsky’s conceptualization of root races was that they allowed her to achieve her life’s ambition of creating a nineteenth century mythology that reconciled all of the world’s religions into one unified system. Blavatsky was able to solve the problem that she first encountered in the writings of Godfrey Higgins as identified in the second chapter. Higgins’ misunderstanding behind combining the various religions and their chronologies was a failure to ascertain that they had occurred within different root races and rounds. These root races (time-divisions) provided a ‘logical’ argument for the existence of the ancient wisdom tradition which was in keeping with Blavatsky’s desire to connect ‘Science’ to ‘Theology’ (history and mythology) as first articulated in *Isis Unveiled* (1877).

This advanced view of time allowed her to assimilate all Eastern and Western *mythos* and religious histories into the ultimate modernist religion — the ancient wisdom tradition of Theosophy. Blavatsky’s chronology was valuable because it rationalized the theories of previous comparative mythographers and connected these theories to her Western Esoteric form of Spiritualism using scientific ideologies dressed in Eastern terms; thus, Blavatsky’s teachings were

⁷² Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 358. Italics added.

⁷³ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 181, 410, 705. Blavatsky combines the chronologies of the *Vishnu Purana*, the Bible, and the Zohar (cf. *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 623–25).

⁷⁴ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 395. Elsewhere Blavatsky refers to the biblical timeline as a ‘queer chronology’ and quotes Whiston in his belief that ‘the Hebrew text has been grossly altered...especially in the interval next after the Deluge.’ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 395.

⁷⁵ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 394–98.

both religiously syncretic and pseudo-scientific. As proved by this study, Blavatsky's view of time was anything but simple, and remains one of the main doctrines which distinguished her Theosophical Society from any other contemporaneous movement such as Spiritualism, Christian Science, Mesmerism, etc.

IV. Conclusion

The years from 1884–1891 witnessed some incredible events both for Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society. It was during this time period that Blavatsky's tumultuous private relationship with the Coulombs became public. This was followed by the circulation of a major report compiled by Richard Hodgson of the SPR which denounced Blavatsky as both a fraud and a spy. These two issues pushed many Theosophical members to resign the Society altogether and created a low ebb in its early history. It was also during these years that Blavatsky's kidney issues took a turn for the worse and made her ill to the point of death; however, her miraculous medical recovery and the equally miraculous recovery of the Theosophical Society in the public's opinion proved to the world that neither Blavatsky nor her Society would be taken down without a fight.

It was during this unsettled time that public interest on the subject of time and chronology developed as a result of *Esoteric Buddhism*. Several important works were written that related to this topic. The first one was the book *Man* written by Theosophists Laura Holloway and Mohini though without the compliance of Blavatsky and her Masters. This book attempted to systematize the chronology put forth in *Esoteric Buddhism*; however, Blavatsky disapproved of this writing and withdrew any support for this project. *Man* illustrated that early Theosophists were intrigued with notions of Theosophical chronology and cosmology put forth in the teachings of the Masters.

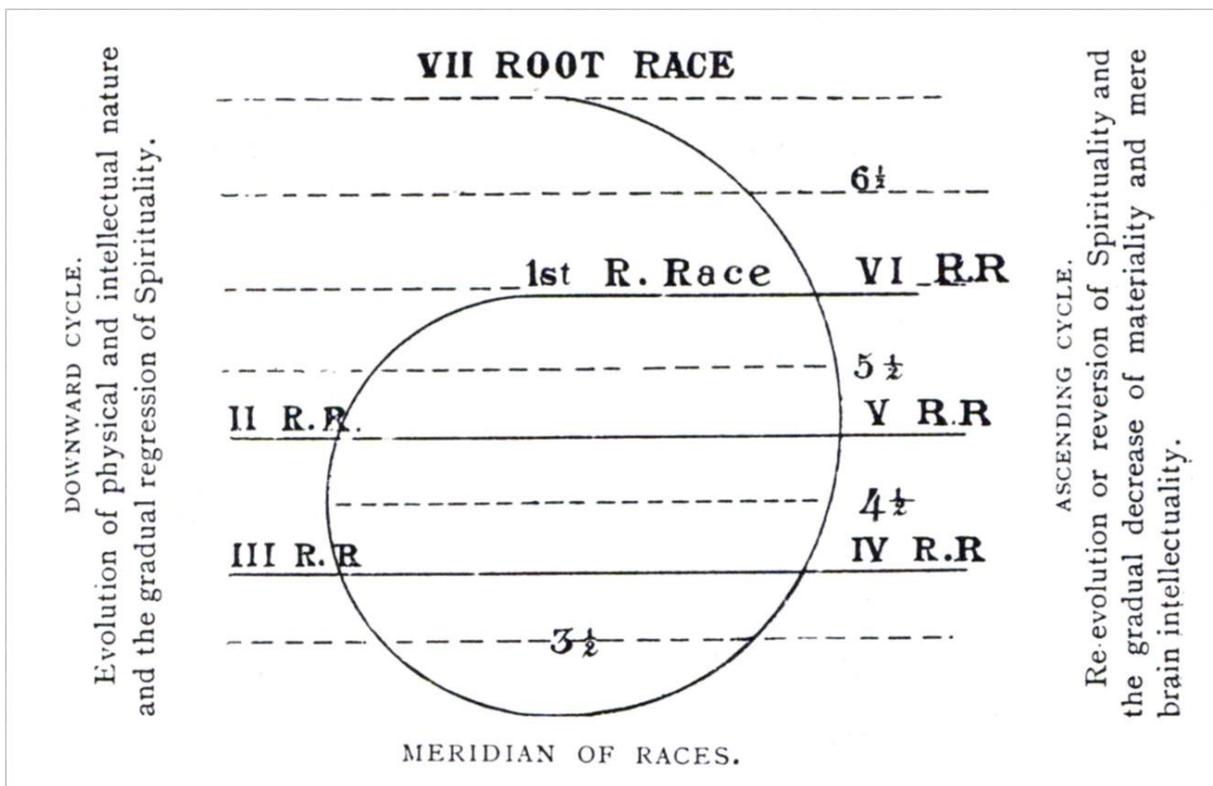
While *Man* proved to be a disappointment in various circles, it may have been the driving force that pushed Blavatsky to author her own summarization and commentary on the Masters' teachings. It was in *The Secret Doctrine* that Blavatsky's complex chronology was given out complete with numerical calculations derived from the *Vishnu Purana* and the three other main sources

identified in this chapter: 'Light on the Path' an article in the Theosophist written by P. Sreenevas Row, a previous unpublished letter written to James Ralston Skinner, and the *Tiru Ganita Panchangam*, a yearly Tamil calendar written in Telugu. The diversity of these three sources illustrated the eclectic, scavenger approach Blavatsky took towards her writings; in the end her main list of time divisions were a compilation that included the three above sources combined with the calculations put forth in H. H. Wilson's translation of the *Vishnu Purana* which connected her elaborate and complex Victorian mythology to a real, phenomenal time and history.

The view of time compiled in *The Secret Doctrine* maintained three distinct purposes that have been observed in this chapter: 1) to connect Blavatsky's cosmology to an ancient religious text (i. e. *Vishnu Purana*) giving her religious precedence, 2) to prove her superiority as an initiate of the Masters, and 3) to enable her to completely assimilate all of the world's religions with their chronologies into one 'unified' system. These three points prove that the complexity of Blavatsky's philosophy of time was certainly intentional. She made it purposefully confusing and contradictory as a way of proving that her ancient wisdom tradition was more advanced than even the most intellectual minds could conceive. After all, it was not just about history — it was about a spiritual evolution from the *in illo tempore*.

Figure 4: Downward Cycle of Root Races in The Secret Doctrine

H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, 2 vols (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), II, p. 300.



CONCLUSION

This project has surveyed the philosophy of time in Blavatsky's cosmology as it became one of the major doctrines identified throughout her writings. It was on this chronological cornerstone that Blavatsky constructed a complex Victorian mythology that assimilated Western esotericism, science, Spiritualism and Eastern religious traditions into one belief system- Theosophy. Blavatsky was intentional in her philosophy of time making it cosmological, contradictory, and so complex that very few individuals could properly understand it save for a select few (i. e. Blavatsky, a few associates and her 'Masters'). If Blavatsky could develop one universal chronology that connected all of the world religions together then her movement could boast something that few others could— a truly modernist, scientific, universalist and religious belief system; in other words, the ultimate Victorian *mythos*. This appeared to be her metaphysical goal to create a spiritualism that combatted the philosophical materialism and religious fundamentalism/fanaticism of her day.

By reforming the Modern Spiritualist movement, Blavatsky had a loose framework of spiritual evolution that she combined with comparative mythography. She claimed that each of the major world religions were all different parts of the true ancient wisdom religion that unfolded at different evolutionary stages in human history. She borrowed many of her theories from the mythographer Godfrey Higgins, whose writings provided her with a basic outline for her philosophy of time. Still, Blavatsky added her own unique interpretations to Higgins' ideas, garbing them in Eastern terms and 'Blavatskyisms' thereby defining her own distinctive views and teachings.

In 1875, she founded the Theosophical Society in New York though she eventually relocated it to India in 1878 and converted to Buddhism in 1880. This marked an Eastern shift in the Theosophical Society and specifically Blavatsky's teachings; however, it wasn't until 1886 that she discovered a text whose chronology coincided with her own cyclical beliefs—the *Vishnu Purana*. This work became the foundation for time and cosmology in her major book *The Secret Doctrine* while adding an ancient source and precedence to her chronological

system. In the pages of *The Secret Doctrine*, Blavatsky solved the problem of reconciling the various religious traditions and their chronologies, a point that alluded previous comparative mythographers (as even Higgins himself identified in *Anacalypsis*). Her solution, answered Higgins' earlier question: How could all of these major religions fit together if their chronologies contradicted each other? Blavatsky's solution to this problem was the concept of root races.

Root races were intervals of time that occurred at different 'rounds' in human evolution allowing every major world religion to be 'philosophically' conceivable; therefore, root races became the missing piece to Blavatsky's universalist puzzle suggesting that this was not an 'either/or' solution but a 'both/and'. Not only did root races allow world religions to exist harmoniously side-by-side, but *The Secret Doctrine* advanced her earlier agendas as set forth in *Isis Unveiled* and the Mahatma letters. The chronology of *The Secret Doctrine* proved the superiority of the Masters. It also illustrated the vast and complex spiritual ascent/descent of the soul, all the while demarcating Theosophy from contemporaneous religious and philosophical movements. In this regards, the subject of time was not just a side point in her teachings, it became *the* main point that distinguished her ancient wisdom tradition from every other tradition/religion. For Blavatsky, time was both the soteriological problem and the solution as it became the only all-powerful force in her vast cosmology. It is because of time's perplexing though primary role in her teachings, that it will continue to be a subject considered by both students and researchers alike.

Blavatsky's philosophy of time continued to be expanded even after her death. It went on to influence many currents of modern esoteric thought, beginning with the teachings of the second generation Theosophists, Annie Besant (1847–1933) and Charles W. Leadbeater (1854–1934). These two applied Blavatsky's chronology into a detailed prehistory that followed the evolution of one monad through its various lives in their pseudo-historical collection titled *The Lives of Alcyone* (1924). The influence of Blavatsky's chronology was not limited strictly to Theosophists and extended to such individuals as the American psychic, Edgar Cayce (1877–1945); the founder of the Anthroposophical Society, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925); the Nazi sympathizer Savitri Devi [Maximiani Portas] (1905–1982);

the German nationalist, Guido von List (1848–1919); and the Russian mystic, Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947). As recently as 1993, a Russian Esoteric School of Theosophy was formed for the express purpose of studying the chronological teachings of Blavatsky. Nicholas Roerich's teachings were read alongside *The Secret Doctrine* in order to identify a detailed chronology which led to the development of a 'Chakra Calendar' (see figure 5 below). This calendar recorded sacred cycles that were utilised by members to harness the spiritual energy of specific days and years in the cosmological calendar.

While it is outside the scope of this study to trace and examine each of these historical currents, they all reveal the powerful influence that Blavatsky's Victorian *mythos* and chronology exerted on modern history and serve as potential subjects for future research. Also, at a higher level the format of this thesis has served as a theoretical model exemplifying a chronological and evolutionary approach towards Blavatsky's teachings and its inherent value. This thesis has demonstrated a detailed intellectual history which has validated the complexity of Blavatsky's philosophy viewing it as a kinetic, evolving system that changed over time based on life circumstances and external and internal influences. This multi-faceted approach recognises that Blavatsky was far more intelligent, complex and open minded than previous research has presumed.

Blavatsky's life serves as an ideal case study for such an intellectual approach, given that it has been extensively documented and she produced a large number of articles, books and notes spanning much of her adult life; however, this evolutionary approach could be applied to any historical figure with a similar *dossier* (including writers, philosophers, social reformers, scientists, etc.). In such cases, identifying and dissecting key ideas/themes and exploring their evolution throughout the writing process (both published and unpublished) will provide a rare glimpse into the state of their minds and intellectual process.

An intellectual historiographical approach allows the researcher a fuller understanding of not just the completed, final product (whether a book, article, speech, etc.), but to appreciate the progression of ideas that led to the completion of such a work. One can only wonder, which of these is more valuable to the modern historian? The final writings/theories, or the evolutionary thought-process

behind them which reveal the mental struggle of the writer and, as a result, their humanity. 'Time' is only one such subject and a similar approach could be applied to various other topics in Blavatsky's vast writings including an examination of her views on socialism, Indian nationalism, Christianity, and even the development of lost civilizations to name a few.

In many ways it was Blavatsky's search for truth that served as the guiding force for her life's ambition and work. Her desire for truth, whether directly or indirectly, became the catalyst behind many of her major decisions such as running away from her early marriage towards adventure, her involvement with Spiritualism, her relocation to India, her belief in the Masters and, as noted in this thesis, her belief in time. As Blavatsky attempted to find and fit together the various pieces of the grand puzzle that she called 'Theosophy', her personal mantra remained the same: 'there is no religion higher than truth.' In many ways this thesis compliments Blavatsky's mantra. It is only by using multiple historical sources to separate fact from fiction and by dissecting and analyzing her writings that the 'truth' of her life and experiences begins to come into clearer focus.

Blavatsky believed that she had discovered a unique message for the world, one that reconciled the secrets of religion, science and philosophy together. It was delivered to her from the mystical Masters (whether human or spiritual) and because she believed in the authenticity of this 'truth', she would do whatever it took to get this message out to the world. If that meant forging letters from invisible Mahatmas, exaggerating claims and evidence, or using common Spiritualist-type parlor tricks to get attention, Blavatsky believed that the end justified means. Yet, at the end of the day, Blavatsky appears as sincere and genuine as any mystic or theologian that preceded her (even if by her own admission, she was not as disciplined as many of them were). Still, it was her goal to make sense of the universe and to *unveil* the *secret doctrine* of ultimate truth and reality to a modern, Victorian audience. Based on the intensive research of this study the author maintains that Blavatsky sincerely believed in the spiritualism of her writings and attempted to give assurance, hope and stability to the unsettled climate that made up the Victorian era.

It is the author's sincere desire that the 'truth(s)' revealed in this thesis would encourage further research into this field of study. The field of Western Esotericism remains an open territory for any scholar or researcher to traverse. It is a territory so vast that it transcends academic disciplines and flows over into any number of fields including music, science, history, art, religion, and philosophy.

Figure 5: Kala-Chakra from Russian Esoteric School of Theosophy

<http://resht.ru/eng/>
(1993)



APPENDIX A

Blavatsky Beyond: Blavatsky and her Connection to Nazism

The primary focus of this study has been on ascertaining the evolution of Blavatsky's philosophy of time, but it is also imperative to understand how this philosophy was later interpreted (and misinterpreted) throughout history, especially through its eventual admixture with Nazi ideology. For many years, writers have suggested a link between Blavatsky and the Nazi movement, though most serious efforts to define this connection slowly turn into wild conspiracy theories that build upon a number of ambiguous associations. To date, little effort has gone into identifying a connection between Blavatsky's philosophy of time and Nazi ideologies. The most admirable attempt at defining this connection was published by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke in his major book *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, first released in 1985 (based on his 1982 doctoral thesis for Oxford University). The question remains: was there a connection between H. P. Blavatsky and the racial views propagated by Nazi Germany? This chapter will explore this link, which solidified through the writings of a German mystic named Guido Karl Anton List (1848–1919), whose ideas indirectly became assimilated into the foundation of Nazi philosophy.

Also, while none would deny the depth of Hitler's racism, many modern academics have attempted to exonerate Blavatsky from any 'racist' accusations, claiming that her racial teachings were meant to be spiritual and not physical; some have even gone so far to claim that her anti-Semitism was largely due to her anti-Christian perspective, but is this accurate?¹ As such, one of the aims of this chapter is to more fully examine Blavatsky's anti-Semitism through the examination of the unpublished 'Ralston' letter mentioned in the previous chapter.

¹ This spiritualizing of Blavatsky's root-races was suggested by James Santucci. See James A. Santucci, 'The Notion of Race in Theosophy', *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 11.3 (2008), 37–63 (p. 39). More recently, Isaac Lubelsky maintained that Blavatsky's ideas did not differ from other nineteenth century writers and that her anti-Semitism was primarily based on her disdain of the Christian Church. See Isaac Lubelsky, 'Mythological and Real Race Issues in Theosophy', in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. by Olav Hammer (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 335–56 (p. 342).

Aside from printing this newly discovered letter, this study will also offer another unknown piece of indirect evidence linking Guido von List to the notorious Adolf Hitler. This chapter provides an original contribution to both Western Esotericism and World War 2 history by presenting newly discovered information in both fields. It is the general thesis of this chapter that Blavatsky's philosophy of time became an appealing Theosophical element to German nationalists because it provided a powerful pre-history that made the Aryan race superior and thereby made 'lower' races inferior; this racial chronology, mixed with nationalism, would prove to be a deadly combination as it was taught through one German mystic.

I. Guido Karl Anton List (1848–1919)

This section will focus on the writings and life of the infamous German mystic named Guido von List who exerted influence on key Nazi leaders (and likely even Adolf Hitler himself). It should be noted that List was not the only German nationalist who combined Theosophical chronology with German mythology, racial ideas and radical conspiracy theories; however, List has been chosen because his works clearly exhibits a direct connection to Blavatsky's chronology and philosophy of time, exemplifying her indirect influence on him.

Guido Karl Anton List has been the subject of only one full-length biography written in 1917 by Johannes Balzli titled *Guido v. List - The Rediscoverer of Ancient Aryan Wisdom - His Life and His Work (Guido v. List. Der Wiederentdecker uralter arischer Weisheit)*. As the first-born son, List was marked to carry on the family business, but destiny had other plans for this would-be German mystic. Though he maintained the family business at the request of his father Karl August List, it was not unusual for List to turn his various business trips into opportunities to explore the picturesque landscapes of the region, which he managed through his skill in hiking and mountaineering; List was also a gifted artist and painted a variety of family portraits and German landscapes.²

In 1871, List became a correspondent of the *New German Alpine Newsletter (Neue deutsche Alpenzeitung)* a pan-German association and an editor for

² David Luhrssen, *Hammer of the Gods: The Thule Society and the birth of Nazism* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), p. 21.

Austrian Alpine Association (Österreicher Alpenverein). In 1877 (the same year *Isis Unveiled* was published in New York), List's father passed away, which pushed him to abandon the family business in order to devote himself fully to his journalistic writings. In 1888 (the same year as the release of Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* in London and New York), List published his first historical novel titled *Carnuntum*, an accomplishment which made him a recognizable mainstream author gaining the attention of important political and economic leaders of prestigious German nationalist movements.³ Throughout his lifetime, List was influenced by the writings and teachings of various Theosophists, including Max Ferdinand von Sebalt (1859–1916), Franz Hartmann, M.D. (1838–1912), and even the head of the German Theosophical Society, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925); however, despite this amicable relationship (both were members of the Iduna — a society with the subtitle Free German Society for Literature), Steiner did not seem to exert any considerable influence on List or his writings.⁴

List published numerous articles and books between the years 1890-1903, and tirelessly worked on improving his literary capabilities and developing his writing style. It was shortly after this time period that List's writing took on a noticeable esoteric focus. This focus followed an intense cataract surgery in 1902 (the same year the final installment of Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* was published in German translation) that left List blind for nearly a year. In the midst of this handicap, List described a mystical vision that he experienced 'during the months that my eyes were bandaged...previously unperceived Laws of Generation and Evolution belonging to our Aryan people, of its emotion, intellect, speech, and writings, came to me.'⁵ This vision led him to compose the research reports that would later be published by the Guido List Society (Guido-von-List-Gesellschaft), an organization established in 1908.

The List Society's membership roster boasted several high-profile individuals, including the spiritualist and theosophist Friedrich Wannick,

³ Guido von List, *The Secret of the Runes*, trans. by Stephen E. Flowers (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1988), p. 5.

⁴ *The Secret of the Runes*, p. 6. See also Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), pp. 51, 54.

⁵ Lührssen, *Hammer of the Gods*, p. 28.

theosophist General Blasius von Schema (1856–1920), occultist Max Seiling, Ariosophist Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874–1954) and Friedrich Schwickert (1857–1930), the occultist whose writings focused on discovering the elixir of life.⁶ While the List Society was an exoteric order, List went on to found an esoteric order in 1911 which he called the High Armanic Order (HAO, Hoher Armanen-Orden) whose membership was prestigious and consisted of wholly middle and upper-class German males. List believed in the original German religion called Wotanism which was his own revision of ancient Norse traditions (as recorded in *Edda*) combined with Blavatsky's chronology. In List's occult philosophy, he switched the Blavatskian focus from India to Germany, making it *the cradle of Aryan civilization* and the birthplace of this one true religious tradition. List's philosophy borrowed numerous Theosophical elements, including a belief in cyclical time, root-races, Atlantis, symbolism (taken directly from *The Secret Doctrine*) and a preoccupation with revealing the one true ancient German language and religion that had been perverted by Christianity (i. e. the *prisca theologia*).

List assimilated Theosophy, along with its spiritual evolution and root races, into his volkish ideology. Root-races allowed Blavatsky to combine many of the chronologies of world religions into one system, but to List these races provided a method of asserting the superiority of the German race through nationalism. In most of his research reports, he included drawings of medieval heraldry complete with Germanic symbols of coats and arms and (like Blavatsky) also attempted to 'contextualize' his teachings in ancient writings such as Tacitus' *Germania*. Many of List's teachings were built upon the base of German Nationalism — he envisioned a strong and united Germany as it moved away from a semi-feudal collection of principalities towards an organized nation-state in 1871. Also, deeply imbedded into this early German nationalism was a volkish ideology.

The term 'volkish' is difficult to define (even though the German word *völkisch* is literally translated to 'people' in English) because of the cultural connotations attached to it. The volkish circles of nineteenth-century Germany greatly contributed to the anti-Semitic actions of Nazi Germany, though not

⁶ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, pp. 54–55.

exclusively, as anti-Semitic ideas permeated contemporaneous Western culture through the various disciplines of anthropology, linguistics, and evolutionary science. George Mosse (1918–1999), who has been dubbed the ‘volkish historian,’ identified a direct connection between volkish ideology and anti-Semitism:

According to Volkish theorists, the nature of the soul of a Volk is determined by the native land scape. Thus the Jews, being desert people, are viewed as shallow, arid, ‘dry’ people, devoid of profundity and totally lacking in creativity. Because of the barrenness of the desert landscape, the Jews are a spiritually barren people. They thus contrast markedly with the Germans, who, living in the dark, mist-shrouded forests are deep, mysterious, profound.⁷

The term volkish implied a spiritual link between a citizen and their home country—it is no wonder that adherents to many volkish movements typically maintained a deeply rooted nationalistic sentiment.⁸ Mosse believed that the volkish movement greatly contributed to the events that led to the mass extermination of the Jewish race; thus, Blavatsky's philosophy of time appealed to German volkish nationalists as a powerful tool which validated their belief in the inferiority of ‘lower’ races and helped them to de-humanize other ‘less-evolved’ civilizations.⁹ The enormous influence of Blavatsky's philosophy of time on List will be proven throughout this chapter, validating the thesis of this chapter: that Blavatsky's chronology was one of the most appealing Theosophical teachings to German nationalists.

A linkage between Theosophy and the volkish ideology could be evidenced throughout the German Theosophical movement's history. This connection can be demonstrated through the publication *Prana*, which called itself a German monthly for applied Spiritualism published by the Theosophical publishing press at Leipzig. The editor was List's biographer Johannes Balzli, who was also the secretary of the Guido List society, which was founded to spread the Master's teaching and to finance his publications. Franz Hartmann, an honorary member of that society, ‘was one of *Prana*'s most frequent contributors as was C. W. Leadbeater, the stormy Anglican curate whom Madame Blavatski had taken with her to

⁷ Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 4–5.

⁸ See George Mosse, ‘From Romanticism to the Volk’ in *The Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 13–30. For further information on the connection between the transition of German liberalism into volkish ideologies and their connection with nationalism reference Eric Kurlander, ‘The Rise of Völkisch-Nationalism and the Decline of German Liberalism: A Comparison of Liberal Political Cultures in Schleswig-Holstein and Silesia 1912–1924’, *European Review of History*, 9.1, (2002), 23–36.

⁹ Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, p. 86.

India...Guido von List himself contributed to its pages...' as did Lanz von Liebenfels.¹⁰

List eventually wrote seven separate research reports that were later published by the Guido List Society; however, the seventh one has been lost. List's reliance on Blavatsky was exhibited throughout these works as he continuously cited her philosophy; however, he seemed especially captivated with her philosophy of time and chronology — several of these reports that engage this philosophy of time will now be examined.

1. *Die Religion der Ario-Germanen (The Religion of the Aryo-Germans)*

1909/1910

This particular book evidenced List's assimilation of *The Secret Doctrine* into a German framework. Joscelyn Godwin, the noted Theosophical historian, described *The Religion of the Aryo-Germans (Die Religion der Ario-Germanen)* as being 'Theosophical through and through.'¹¹ Godwin noted the similar elements in List's writings compared to Blavatsky's. This similarity becomes most evident in List's chronology. While List occasionally cited Blavatsky throughout the opening part of this work, it should be noted that this book remained largely based on her *Secret Doctrine*. In fact, many teachings found throughout this work, including several diagrams, were taken directly from *The Secret Doctrine*. Several of these common elements included a focus on making German the secret holy language, a fixation on the number seven, and an admiration of the Incomprehensible One. List also assimilated Blavatsky's root races using a similar format: 3rd Root race-androgynous, 4th root race-sexes split, 5th root race the present human race. List utilized Blavatsky's teachings to justify his own cosmology, only instead of using Sanskrit terms he utilized German words. This included taking the concept of 'karma' which List called 'garma' and assimilating it into a German context, utilizing the Norse deities (Norn and Urdam) as the progenitors of the various races.

¹⁰ George L. Mosse, 'Racism the Occult, and Eugenics: The Mystical Origins of National Socialism', in *The Nazi Holocaust Part 2: The Origins of the Holocaust*, ed. by Michael R. Marrus (Westport, CT: De Gruyter, 1989), pp. 43–58 (pp. 49–50).

¹¹ Joscelyn Godwin, *Atlantis and the Cycles of Time: Prophecies, Traditions, and Occult Revelations From the Teachings of Rudolf Steiner, Edgar Cayce, Rene Guenon, and Others* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), p. 123.

The relevance for this study was that List derived numerical mystical patterns from the *Edda* text believing that these calculations came to 432,000 and connected his philosophy to Blavatsky's chronology which he fully endorsed:

The interpretation based on our Arya-Germanic traditions, which flow out sparingly, but which nevertheless supply all the information we ever need, would lead us too far astray here, and due to our limited space we recommend H. P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* which gives a summary of the most important numbers having to do with years as which the mystical numbers 4320 forms the basis.¹²

As noted above, List borrowed the same diagrams that Blavatsky used in *The Secret Doctrine* and applied them to his own work. He reconceptualized Blavatsky's teachings to fit into his pro-German philosophy and assimilated her chronology into his reading of the *Edda*.¹³ 'The calculation is simple: $500 + 4 \times 10 \times 800 = 432,000$. If we consider that Wuotan is thought of as a god of time in this ring, then those 432,000 Einherjar indicate years...But what do the 432,000 years mean?'¹⁴

It is interesting that List deferred to Blavatsky's system of time in *The Secret Doctrine* in relation to his own views on world chronology and cosmology, noting that the: '... numbers relating to yearly cycles are given here according to H. P. Blavatsky: Such a ring or circle (cycle) comprises 4320 years, and such a cycle came to an end in the year 1897; therefore, there is now a new age coming into force, one which is installing a new form of development.'

He further connected his Aeon of Wotanism with a Maha-yuga and a Day of Brahma:

A Day of Brahma is indicated there as having 4,420,000,000 years and a Night of Brahma has the same length. This means that the length of time for creation (materialization of the spirit) is 4,320,000,000 years and the time for the dissolution of matter into spirit (Surtur) has the same duration before a new cycle begins...¹⁵

Next, List noted an eschatological reference which employed a specific duration of years that proved his reliance on Blavatsky:

¹² List, *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk*, p. 48.

¹³ Guido von List, *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk: Esoteric and Exoteric* (Smithville, TX: Runa Raven Press, 2005), p. 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

From this series of enormous numbers, which are cited here according to H. P. Blavatsky, one more may be introduced which indicates the age of humanity up to the year 1910: The years of our reckoning of time stand at exactly 18,618,751 terrestrial years, while the cosmic development of our solar system began exactly 1,955,884,710 earth-years ago, and therefore 2,364,411,590 years will be needed before there will be a return to Ur.¹⁶

The number 18,628,751 minus 23 (1910–1887 = 23) years equals ‘18,618,728’ and the number 1,955,884,710 minus 23 equals ‘1,955,884,687’—both of these numbers were taken directly from Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine* II, 69, proving List’s reliance on Blavatsky’s philosophy of time. While utilizing Blavatsky’s chronology might appear harmless enough, the major issue was the way List combined a linear eschatology into a cyclical (and recurring) framework. This connection will be explored in a later section.

2. Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen: Zweiter Teil (1911)

List maintained the existence of a Jewish conspiracy which had initially developed out of Judaism. Both Jews and Jesuits figured prominently into his wild conspiracy theories, with List claiming that:

these two main parts of the party hold each other in balance, seemingly they even fight; and during the fighting times...they hold hands under the table...from this seemingly divided main stem of the party countless separate fractions branch out, iridescent like a chameleon, which fill the Houses of Representatives with their bickering and thus obstruct or thwart the work of those, who really want or can serve the good of the people.’

This Judaic party united ‘clericalism and liberalism,’ using them ‘to harm the Germans, yes, against the Germans a mad war of extermination is being led, what can most obviously be seen in the leadership of the party groups.’¹⁷

Following this statement, List continued on a tirade against the Slavs which he believed were part of this Jewish conspiracy to repress Germanic culture, noting that the implementation of the Slavic language (an apparent reference to a piece of legislation that allowed civil servants to speak both German and Czech) evidenced a shift away from German culture toward the Czech.¹⁸ Viewing the Slavs as

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁷ Guido von List, *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen: Zweiter Teil* [GLB 2a] (Leipzig and Vienna: [n. pub.], 1911), p. 25.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 25–26.

invaders will figure prominently into List's eschatology and soteriology in a later section. Also in this work, List quoted Lanz's literal assimilation of Blavatsky's racial terminology focusing upon the superiority of the Aryan/German race:

...the day will come, on which the half breed lot [non-Aryan], state, civilization, religion and society will have to be destroyed, erased from the earth, because no statesman and no financial minister will be able to satisfy the demands of that lazy, senseless and infested hoard of beasts. The day will also come, yes; it is already here- according to the reports of French newspapers- when they will seriously stride to implement my suggestion to breed a new kind of slaves from the anthropoid and the lower races, to blow out the flame of life of the socio-democratic shallow thinking.¹⁹

In another footnote in this book, List noted his militant stance against the Jews: 'The day of reckoning between the German imperial power and the international power of Jews is closer, than the dull dreamers believe. Our time will see much more blood, because this enormous question can only be answered through blood and steel.'²⁰ Elsewhere, within the pages of this same work an 'anti-Semitic' article was reprinted that List had published on 12 February 1896 in *Ostdeutsche Rundschau* that was titled 'The Jewish State and Nation' ('Die Juden als Staat und Nation'). This research report in particular strongly evidenced List's militant view of anti-Semitism and deserves to be considered within its historical context.

In the 1870s, Vienna's economy was primarily agricultural and it was still fortified by a protective wall erected in the seventeenth century that was initially designed to defend the city against invading Turks. The years of the 1880s and 1890s, witnessed many changes in Vienna — the tearing down of these protective walls, the liberal influence of modernity in religion and society, and the progressive strides in Victorian industry all could be seen as invasive elements that threatened the way of life to residents of nineteenth-century Vienna. More importantly there was a rise in immigration, as Vienna became a melting pot for a multicultural society. People immigrated from throughout the empire, including Poles, Ukrainians, Serbs and Croats, Italians, and Czechs. This influx of immigration transformed Vienna into a multiracial society, changing it from a predominantly German city into one of the first multiracial metropolises of its day. Also, it is

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

important to understand that the deep roots of anti-Semitism were firmly planted in German culture, dating as far back to the writings of the German Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546), who (as List quoted in his book List, *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen: Zweiter Teil*) said things like: 'Dear Christ, after the Devil you do not have a bitterer, more powerful enemy than a full-blooded Jew.'²¹ It is within this context that List's anti-Semitism must be understood.

3. Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen (1914)

The sixth report is the most important for this study as it evidence List's in-depth engagement of Blavatsky's time cycles. It was called *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen* and it appears to be the most exhaustive of all of his works. Believing that he had discovered the common root of all languages, List sent an earlier draft copy to the Imperial Academy of Science in Vienna, yet 'on 4th June 1903 the author received his manuscript back from the Academy with a filled out pre-printed form in which the admission of the work...had been declined without mention of a reason.'²² List believed that he had discovered 'the highest and holiest...the proclamation of the Aryo-Germanic advent of the twilight of gods — the Strong One from Above, he is ascending' which evidenced a strong apocalyptic association in this work.²³

In this way, List assimilated the Norse cosmological tree, 'Yggdrasil' with Blavatsky's philosophy of time (i. e. root-races), claiming that it was an Aryo-German racial tree that was associated with the fifth root race; this paralleled Blavatsky's 'Genealogical tree of the Fifth Root Race'. Its association with the Aryan Race evidenced List's alignment with Blavatsky's 'Aryan' fifth root race.²⁴ It seemed obvious that this entire work assimilated Blavatsky's philosophy of time and root races, reconceptualizing it for an early twentieth-century German culture.

²¹ Ibid., p. 23. For two of Luther's major anti-Semitic works see *Von den Juden und Ihren Lügen* [*On the Jews and Their Lies*] and *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi* [*Of the Unknowable Name and the Generations of Christ*] both published in 1543. Luther's writings were used liberally within promoting Nazi propaganda; however, whether Luther used the term 'Jews' in reference to a spiritual or racial group has recently been the subject of dispute even if his meaning seems obvious.

²² Guido von List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache*, [GLB 6] (Leipzig: [n. pub.], 1914), p. 4.

²³ List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache*, p. 18.

²⁴ *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 452.

Blavatsky explained that 'it must be inferred that each of the four preceding sub-races has lived approximately 210,000 years; thus each family race has an average existence of about 30,000 years.' List nearly quoted Blavatsky verbatim, noting that 'we can conclude that every previous sub-race lived for about 210,000 years and every one of its branch or adjoining races needed about 30,000 years to completed its cycle from creation to being...'²⁵ Also, List continually observed that the Aryan race developed 15,000 years ago and that Buddha and Osiris were both Aryans, an idea first suggested by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*.²⁶ Blavatsky's chronology was very specific and unique and the fact that these calculations match up directly evidence a direct connection between Blavatsky's philosophy of time and List's.

Blavatsky's complex view of rounds in *The Secret Doctrine* followed a similar evolutionary pattern that List would apply to racial construction (though it seemed that List may have confused the terms 'round' with 'race'):²⁷

...the remains of a 'proto-human' will never be found, although the man of earth as a spiritual ego is as old as earth itself, with which he has constantly- while adapting to it- changed his form and living conditions. Accordingly he has on his earth, while it was still a fiery liquid and was crackling with fiery steam and rain, had to have a fiery-ethereal form himself and such a form is to be found in the geological residue or is still not recognizable. In no way did the first nor the second race correspond with our present understanding of physicality and neither was the third race gifted with a thick body shell which can be found in the following races, a fact which can explain a lack of their remains...man, the master of the earth is not a random breeding result of the lower animal and plant world, but stands upon the earth as a crown of creation fully conscious as a spiritual ego from the beginning of the earth, spiritually unchanged but materially changing his form to adopt to the conditions.²⁸

Therefore, a direct assimilation of Blavatsky's spiritual evolution and rounds seems obvious. Still, List's reliance on Blavatsky's chronology does not end there.

Blavatsky had defined a sidereal year as 25,868 and that the fate of every nation is

²⁵ List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache*, p. 18; *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 454.

²⁶ *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 387; II, 235. List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache*, pp. 21–22, 27, 30–31, 33.

²⁷ It seems List derived this passage from *The Secret Doctrine*, I, 188–89, 252.

²⁸ List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache*, p. 13.

'16,000 years hence.'²⁹ List in turn noted that the 'Aryo-germans...still have a lifespan of about 16,000 years left. It seems that there is a connection with the sidereal or solar year, which lasts 25,868 years, a number which nearly corresponds with the lifespan of a branch race.'³⁰ There remains a direct connection between Blavatsky's chronology and List's, yet there is one more connection that must be identified.

List became aware of Blavatsky's writings through a 1901 German translation of *The Secret Doctrine (Die Geheimlehre)* by Wilhelm Friedrich (1897–1901). In List's work, he consistently assimilated elements of Blavatskian Theosophy and chronology as exhibited in the chart included in *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache* (1914) and reprinted here in English translation. As Goodrick-Clarke noted, this chart 'sought to reconcile the geological periods of the Earth, as established by contemporary paleogeography, with the stages of a theosophical round lasting 4,320,000,000 years, or kalpa in Hindu chronology.'³¹ List's cyclical vision of time was derived in no small part from Theosophy which is revealed in the following chart (and by his repeated admissions in *The Religion of the Aryo-Germanic Folk*):

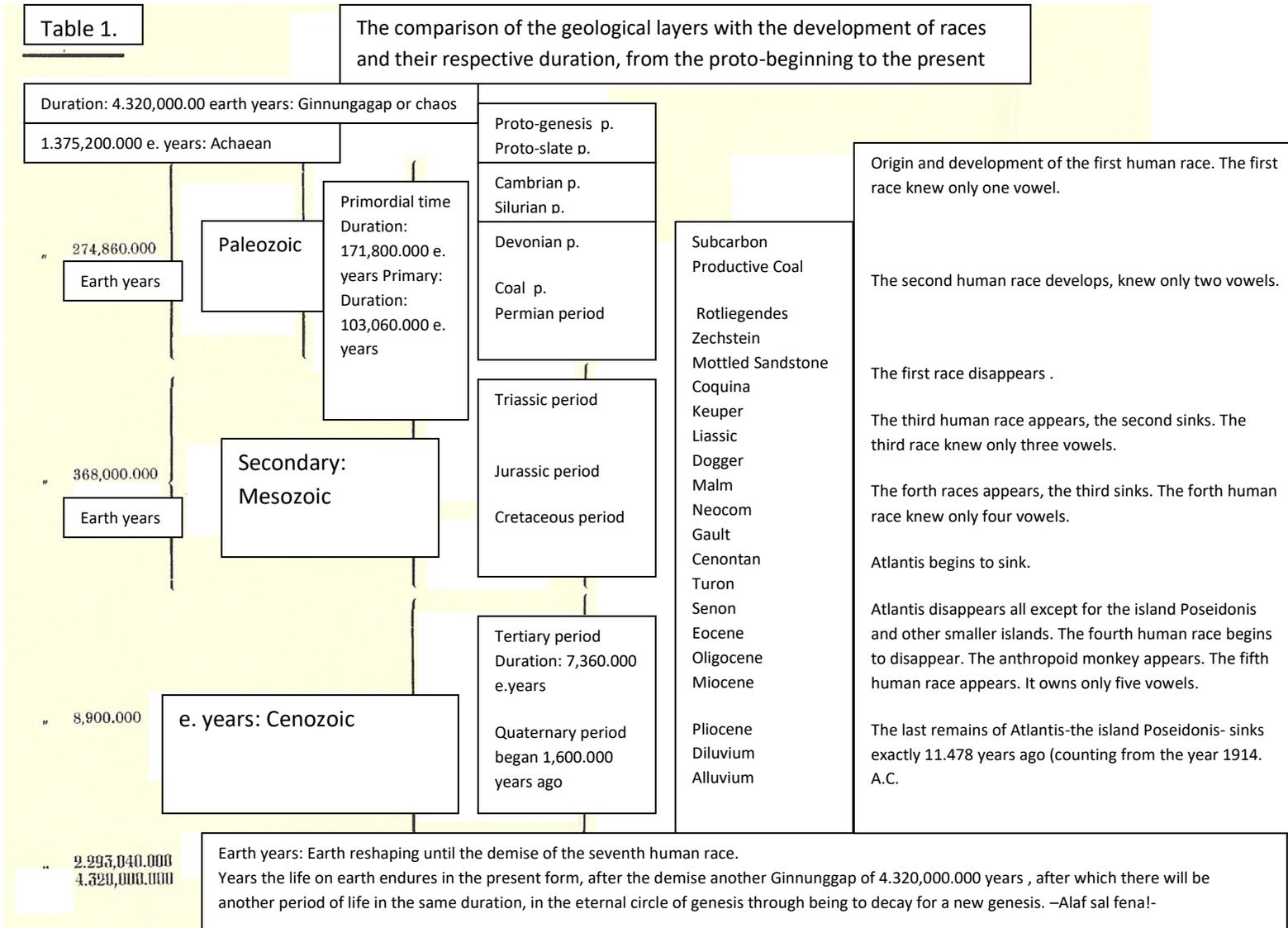
²⁹ *The Secret Doctrine*, II, 345.

³⁰ List, *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache*, p. 21.

³¹ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, p. 54.

Figure 6: H. P. Blavatsky's Chronology in Guido List's Philosophy

Loose leaf in *Die Ursprache der Ario-Germanen und ihre Mysteriensprache* (1914)



In this chart several key features help identify the Blavatskian influence; these elements include the following: the division of humanity into seven races, the eternal cyclical recurrence of decay and creation, and the Eastern time division of 4,320,000,000 years (a 'Day of Brahma'). There is one other striking similarity — List seemingly compiled this chronological chart based directly on *The Secret Doctrine* II, pages 710–715 and her elaborate assimilation of nineteenth-century evolutionary divisions and her own root-race theory. Thus, Blavatsky's prehistoric

chronology was misinterpreted and reconceptualized into a Germanic format by List in the early twentieth century.

II. The Theosophical Society and Guido von List

The first German Theosophical Society was established in July 1884 under the presidency of Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden (1846–1916) at Elberfeld, the hometown of the Gebhards (the same family that housed Blavatsky in 1886); another Theosophical Society was soon established in Vienna in 1886. Franz Hartmann (1838–1912) was an active Theosophical Society member who was instrumental in disseminating Blavatsky's teachings and in 1889 founded (along with Alfredo Pioda and the Countess Constance Wachtmeister) a theosophical monastery at Ascona.

Hartmann began his affiliation with Spiritualism after being introduced to the materializations of the medium N. D. Miller. He initially joined the Theosophical Society in 1883 following a steady correspondence with co-founder Colonel Henry Olcott. Hartmann travelled to India to visit the Theosophical compound during its Oriental shift and temporarily became the president during Blavatsky and Olcott's absence in 1884. He defended the Society from various attacks, including the devastating Hodgson Report, claiming that all of these issues were created by the detracting members Emma and Alexis Coulomb in order to discredit the Society to the Western world.³² From 1882, Hartmann published and translated Eastern texts and Blavatsky's teachings in his publication *Lotus Blossoms (Lotüsbluthen)* (1892–1900). In 1886, the Vienna Theosophical Society was established which went on to influence both List and Lanz. List was directly influenced by the Berlin theosophist Max Ferdinand von Sebalt, Hartmann, Hugo Göring, and Paul Zillman. Zillman was the first person to publish both List and Lanz on subjects relating to Western esoteric currents and the Theosophical doctrines found a welcome place in early twentieth-century German culture.³³ Perhaps one of Germany's most influential Theosophists, Franz Hartmann in a *Lotüsbluthen* article noted some of the similarities between Blavatsky and List's writings:

³² Wm. Emmette Coleman, 'Alleged Exposure of Madame Blavatsky's Marvelous Occultic Phenomena', *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, 38.16 (1885), 2–7 (p. 2).

³³ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, p. 30.

The newly published work of Guido List 'The pictographic script of the Aryo-German' could justifiably be placed side by side to H.P. Blavatsky's 'Isis Unveiled'; for the author has lifted the thick veil covering the history of the germanic antiquity and provided us with a deep understanding of the secret teaching of the old Germans and the meaning of their symbolism. The teachings of the deity, the seven principles, evolution etc., unveiled in the process, correspond exactly with the secret teaching of the Indian people and are therefore confirmed by the later.³⁴

Thus, a link between these two mystics was noted even by contemporaneous followers, though this connection was likely due to List's heavy reliance on Blavatsky's prehistoric chronology. To give a glimpse into the connection between Blavatsky and the Nazi movement, in 1927 the issue as to whether Madame Blavatsky was Jewish in nationality was raised in the leading Anti-Semitic, Nazi leader Alfred Rosenberg's publication *Monthly Devoted to the Jewish Question in All Countries (Der Weltkampf: Monatsschrift für die aller Länder)*. In this issue, it was determined that Blavatsky was not Jewish but merely Baltic in nationality. Yet, the fact that her racial history would even be called into question demonstrates the strong undercurrent of anti-Semitism and its place in German Theosophical Societies.³⁵

1. Blavatsky's Races: Physical or Spiritual

James Santucci (editor of the independent academic journal *Theosophical History*) has argued that Blavatsky's philosophy of races applied primarily to spiritual races, whereas List interpreted this racial ideology literally, applying these standards to physical races. Santucci claims that race was merely a term of convenience which was not used to refer to physical traits, but spiritual ones which 'must be considered from a different perspective, one that is cosmic and ultimately divine in scope.³⁶ This spiritual nature went through various stages of reincarnations and lengthy cyclical progressions — eventually reaching its perfection as a spiritual god-like being. Admitting *The Secret Doctrine* was the main source for Theosophical conceptions of race, Santucci went on to note that there are spiritual, intellectual and physical differences between the seven root races and in rounds

³⁴ Franz Hartmann, 'Rundschau in der ausländischen theosophischen Literatur', *Neue Lotusblüten*, 2 (1910), 370.

³⁵ Mosse, 'Racism the Occult, and Eugenics', p. 54.

³⁶ Santucci, 'The Notion of Race in Theosophy', p. 39.

observing that the physical traits are minor compared to the spiritual ones.³⁷ He then asks the question 'was racial inequality a prevailing opinion of the early Theosophical Society?' admitting that 'the evidence suggests not, but that does not preclude the charge that many ideas behind Nazism may be based upon certain teachings found in Blavatsky's writings...'³⁸ Santucci also correctly observes that the concept of the messiah in Theosophy (or the World Teacher) was more prevalent in the later writings of the second generation of Theosophists (such as Annie Besant and Charles W. Leadbeater) than in Blavatsky's earlier teachings.³⁹ Despite this admission, Santucci suggests a possible historical connection between Blavatsky and these later Nazi ideologies, though he does not suggest any direct links. A similar connection was employed by Olav Hammer, who specifically mentioned List in his works.

Hammer attempted to explain the difference between Blavatsky and List: List conceived of an Aryan race with superior qualities including a pan-Germanic nationalism and anti-Semitism, which Hammer argued was originally an 'Orientalist discourse' that List had transformed into a German nationalist agenda. This viewed the cultural outsider or 'other' as being inferior and needing to be destroyed, thus, dehumanizing lower races. Blavatsky, on the other hand, combined an Orientalist discourse with Romanticism, constructing 'a historical myth which incorporated races and sub-races, but only on rare occasion were her writings overtly racist, which seemed based largely on her contempt for the Abrahamic religious practices.'⁴⁰ According to Blavatsky, the Jews' role in history was to have transmitted the most misunderstood and distorted interpretations of the ancient wisdom religion to the first 'Christians.' Hammer remains correct in his analysis of Blavatsky and her opinion of the Jews as an 'other' of society as exemplified in two excerpts from the recently discovered letter written to James Ralston Skinner:

The old Books teach that the Jews are a hybrid race (or A Wilder rightfully thought) of Hamitic/Caucasian & Aryan Hindu races. They were outcasts, & had lived long enough in India among the Aryans to learn esoteric wisdom of Maimonides...They have done this in the most ingenious & clever way

³⁷ Ibid., p. 38.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁰ Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Brill: Leiden, 2004), p. 121.

imaginable & have proceeded thereby to bring long series of generations into the idea that they (the Jews) were the 'chosen people 'of Jehovah,' the Christians an improvement on that chosen people. But, I say again- they have neither of them, given anything new or original whatever, in the real esoteric meaning...the Hindus [are], at any rate, now the only people on earth who have preserved the original archaic doctrines.⁴¹

Despite being accurate in many of their conclusions, these two researchers have attempted to downplay Blavatsky's racial influence on the Nazi movement. They largely overlooked her own anti-Semitism which cannot be separated from her racial views. At certain points within her writing, Blavatsky's anti-Semitism remains indisputable — her own opinions seem to carry her views past a simple frustration for the Jewish 'religious' monotheism and evidence a blatant anti-Semitic belief as found elsewhere in this letter:

Now don't be angry with me for what I said of the Jews. I don't like them for the harm they have done the world & their grasping, selfish, hideous egotism. They the 'chosen people'!! Oh shadow of Lord Buddha one thing is very suggestive. The most commercial, money-making grasping notion the world over- the English have chosen the fictitious deity. They could ever have a member; the phallic god, answering marvelously at the same times their immoral, hypocritical character, their beastly sensuality and cast. I am going to tell it to them in so many words in my S.D.⁴²

Despite this anti-Semitic tendency which went further than either Santucci or Hammer seemingly admitted, Blavatsky never appeared to advocate for physical violence against any race. There is no denying that List took his anti-Semitism to another level by bringing these pre-historic spiritual root-races and bringing them into the natural history of the Aryan (fifth) root race. He justified this belief with a unique Jewish conspiracy theory which he credited to the writings of Wilhelm Obermüller. This theory deserves consideration.

List believed the entire Hebrew Bible was propaganda that disguised the true history of the Jewish people as the oppressors of Near Eastern nations, including the group called the Aryan Israelites. List's mythology revealed a complex Jewish conspiracy working to oppress the Aryan Israelites (or the Ammonites). He claimed that the Jews stole their 'heroic stories' of the 'old Aryan heroic poetry of the Israelites which was edited by the Rabbis in a Jewish sense and degenerated

⁴¹ Cambridge (MA), Andover-Harvard Theological Library, bMS 516/1 (16).

⁴² Ibid.

to that travesty, which remains can still be recognized in the Bible.’⁴³ List even viewed the conversion of Constantine as proof of a Jewish takeover and believed that the Jews had taken over the true Israelites, subsuming their race through trickery and deceit, which demonstrates his fear of the ‘other’ and being overrun by invading races:

... the ‘Jew’, who rather calls himself ‘Israelite’ than ‘Jew’, will have a reason for this: he has to be called after the nation, in which he has nestled himself, so that one can assume that even the ‘Israelites’ were a non-Jewish people, who have completely been consumed by the ‘Jews’, who then took over their land, property and literature. And the...organic creation of the Jewish people, as new ethnographic and historiographic research has shown to be true...that not once- according to that law- should happen that the Jews are to be known as ‘Wiener’, ‘Austrians’, ‘Germans’ and so on, as they are now known as Israelites, which means that they will not absorb these lands, devour these people, take over their land, property, history, art and literature, like they have done two thousand years ago with the Israelites.⁴⁴

List further maintained that the ‘Exodus’ (when the Jewish people had left the captivity of the Egyptians) was a piece of Jewish propaganda — what really happened was that the Egyptians rebelled against the ‘Hebrews,’ forcing them to leave Egypt, though he believed this ‘Exodus from Egypt’ represented a ‘successful anti-Semitic state action that- sadly- was never repeated in the history of mankind.’⁴⁵ List's anti-Semitism echoes the writings of other German nationalists such as his follower (and the first to refer to adherents of this ideology as Ariosophists) Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, who developed a whole elaborate mythology that demonized the Jewish race. List went on to quote Lanz (who was also seemingly influenced by Blavatsky's teachings), writing the ominous statement: ‘A day will come in which the whole mongrelized brood [Mischlingsbrut] which destroys customs, religion, and society must be wiped off the face of the earth.’⁴⁶

Robert G. L. Waite identified two steps that List believed were critical to combatting this Jewish conspiracy: 1) the establishment of a racially pure state and

⁴³ von List, *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen*, II, 178.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 180–81.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁴⁶ Robert G. L. Waite, *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (New York: Da Capo Books, 1992), p. 96.

2) the establishment of a new Reich under an Araharl or a 'self-chosen Führer'.⁴⁷ List was also associated with Georg von Schönerer's group, an organization 'of anti-Semitic pan-Germanists, and contributed to their official publication.'⁴⁸ It is important to understand that there was a direct connection between List's overall racial views and his nationalistic occult beliefs as Goodrick-Clarke observed:

List's blueprint for a new Pan-German empire was detailed and unambiguous. It called for the ruthless subjection of non-Aryans to Aryan masters in a highly structured hierarchical state. The qualification of candidates for education or positions in public service, the professions and commerce rested solely on their racial purity...these ideas, published as early as 1911, bear an uncanny resemblance to the Nuremberg racial laws of the 1930s and the Nazi vision of the future...[also] the similarities with Himmler's plans for an SS order-state are striking.⁴⁹

List remains an important figure in attempting to understand the racial attitudes that formed the social background out of which the Nazi 'standards' would eventually emerge. He combined his volkish racial views with his view of German mythology, fitting them into a political framework while 'tapping into the ideas on root races that had been propounded by H. P. Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society...he was in fact specifying and identifying very much with the German Aryan race.'⁵⁰ It could be argued that List misinterpreted Blavatsky's cosmical view of spiritual evolution and root-races which he applied to physical races and a Western apocalypticism; thus, Blavatsky's chronology provided German nationalism with a unique, though dangerous, eschatology.

2. Blavatsky's Chronology, Soteriology and List

List's chronology echoed Blavatsky's, which included a belief in the basic themes already examined in this study, such as cosmic rhythms, the ebbs and flows of the universe, root races, sub-races, periods of activity and inactivity, and the individual's successive reincarnation in each round. As already implied, List diverted from his acceptance of Theosophy in his soteriological beliefs. Blavatsky's

⁴⁷ Robert G. L. Waite, *The Origins of the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Meckler Corporation, 1989), p. 342.

⁴⁸ Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁹ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, pp. 63-64.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Occult Roots of Nazism', *Lapis Magazine* (2009) <http://egregores.blogspot.com/2012_09_06_archive.html> [accessed 12 March 2013].

soteriological aim was an eternal cyclical time with an optimistic, evolutionary progression and the majority of time being spent in the subjective realms of Devachan, nirvana and other states.

List's soteriology seemed to have been one of the main distinguishing elements of his belief system. Blavatsky's adherence to cyclical time inferred that there was no final soteriology. As Goodrick-Clarke noted, List 'rejected this oriental fatalism regarding time and destiny in favour of Judeo-Christian notions of salvation. Although he had adopted theosophical materials for his cosmology, he was loath to accept its limited soteriology.'⁵¹ Instead, List maintained a soteriological belief in the restoration of the traditional world through a national revival, which led him toward Western apocalypticism. Despite List's disdain for Christianity, his 'explicit assumptions of linear time and a unique, final redemption jar continually with the cyclical implication of theosophy throughout his writings. In due course List's vision of a pan-German empire was almost wholly' based on Western apocalypticism.⁵² List adopted Blavatsky's teachings for his pre-historic cosmology (i. e. PAST); however, for his eschatology he adopted a Western apocalyptic framework (i. e. FUTURE).

This led to a pessimistic view of the present, while looking ahead to a New Age (or Reich) of future prosperity, which has historically been connected to a linear Western eschatology (i. e. the Second Coming of Jesus or a 'general resurrection'). Traditional Jewish and Christian (linear) views of eschatology differentiate between the present and the future of humanity. The impending future event is usually recognized through a series of cataclysms and catastrophes. This belief structure demands a need for an eschatological empire led by an emancipator or Messiah figure who will offer a soteriological solution in order to liberate the marginalized and chosen (elected) people group — this saviour would lead these 'elect' to victory and set up an impending New Age/Reich.⁵³ The Nazi empire has been identified by Norman Cohn as a millenarian movement in his

⁵¹ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, p. 79.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ For a detailed discussion of Christian apocalypticism see C. Marvin Pate, *The End of the Age Has Come: The Theology of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), pp. 64–65.

classic work titled *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, an idea further confirmed by recent scholarship.⁵⁴

In preparing for this future victory, this messiah figure would experience ‘messianic’ or ‘apocalyptic woes’. This term ‘messianic woes’ refers to a temporary period of ‘trials and tribulations’ that must occur before this future New Age can be implemented. These ‘woes’ could be identified with a number of diverse hardships from plagues to droughts to a poor harvest. It seemed that the tribulation which List feared most was largely nationalistic — the fear of an invading pro-Czech foreign policy. From the years 1879–1893, the Slavs were continuously attempting to dominate the German culture of Austria. Adding to this fear, a language ordinance passed on 5 April 1897 by Count Kasimir Badeni (1846–1909) decreed that all civil servants would have to speak both Czech and German, resulting in a rising protest of German nationalist countersentiments.⁵⁵ One such protest seemed to have come from List, who wrote a booklet titled *The Invincible an Outline of Germanic Philosophy*, which was published in 1898. In this work, List sets up a volkish structure that is intimately connected to nationalism:

...the highest goal of the education of the folk, is only attainable when the irrevocable laws of evolution, according to which the All is formed, whereby each advances in the development of its own kind and race, are taken into account. But these goals can in no way be attained if a foreign, and often even hostile, spirit is force [sic] upon the folk-soul...It is therefore above all a compelling necessity to institute a national curriculum for the education of the folk in the schools, and that this is to begin in the earliest grades and continue throughout the schooling to establish such a planned national folk-education by means of a ‘Folk-Way-Teaching’ [Volkssittenlehre] (National-Morality), which has to be treated as an obligatory educational objective.⁵⁶

For List, the loss of national identity could have been viewed as a part of Germany’s ‘messianic woes’ and allowed justification for anti-Semitic writings and behaviours. This apocalyptic myth serves as a powerful emotional and spiritual

⁵⁴ For other works confirming this millenarian aspect of the Nazi empire see: James Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1980); Robert Wistrich, *Hitler’s Apocalypse* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985); David Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Rudolf Agstner, *Austria and Its Consulates in the United States of America since 1820* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2012), p. 162.

⁵⁶ Guido List, *The Invincible: An Outline of Germanic Philosophy*, trans. by Edred Thorsson (Smithville, TX: Runa Raven Press, 1996 [1898]), p. 9.

need for those who are in dire need of comfort and hope in times of trouble and oppression. Though Blavatsky approached this subject by noting that various spiritual leaders (i. e., Masters) appeared to assist humanity in their evolution in a non-violent manner, List seemingly believed in a ‘messiah’ who would purify and unite Germany, which implied violence and military force as exemplified throughout the second volume of *Die Armanenschaft der Ario-Germanen* (it should be remembered that Germany did not exist as a nation until 1871). Thus, List's combination of cyclical time with a linear soteriology paved the way for a Nazi regime along with a ‘messianic figure’ as exemplified in a 1918 letter sent to his ‘faithful disciples’. This letter, which served as the ‘preface’ of his *Die Rita der Ario-Germanen* (1920), explained that an empire would arise that would destroy the Jewish state and uphold volkish ideals and that in 1932 a racially pure community would be established by rooting out the Jewish conspiracy; this prediction was only off by one year as the Nazi Party would rise to power in 1933 with Hitler being appointed as the Chancellor of Germany.⁵⁷

4. Guido von List and Adolf Hitler: The Connection

While there is no direct evidence connecting List and Hitler, there is some indirect links, one of which has never before been noted—the discovery of an unusual book in Hitler's personal library which will be examined below.⁵⁸ This indirect evidence deserves examination. Goodrick-Clarke notes that Hitler's knowledge of List rested ‘upon the testimony of a third party and some literary references.’⁵⁹ These included a 1959 lecture given by Wilfried Daim (1923–) where it was suggested that ‘Hitler frequently mentioned his reading List and quoted the old master's books with enthusiasm. Hitler also told him that some members of the List Society at Vienna had given him a letter of introduction to the President of the Society at Munich.’⁶⁰ Also in 1921, Dr. Babette Steininger (a member of the Nazi Party) presented to Hitler Tagore's essay on nationalism as a birthday present that

⁵⁷ Waite, *The Psychopathic God*, p. 97.

⁵⁸ Lührssen, *Hammer of Gods*, p. 42; Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, p. 198; Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, pp. 75–77.

⁵⁹ Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, p. 198.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–99.

contained a personal dedication which read: 'To Adolf Hitler my dear Armanen-brother,' suggesting a connection between Hitler and List's 'Armanenschaft'.⁶¹

Another questionable piece of evidence for this link could be found in Elsa Schmidt-Falk's claim that 'Hitler was particularly inspired by List's *Deutsch-Mythologische Landschaftsbilder*, of which he possessed the first edition'. Also, according to Schmidt-Falk, Hitler 'had a high opinion of *Der Unbesiegbare* (1898) and discussed most of the Ario-Germanic researches with her.'⁶² She made several other claims connecting List to Hitler, though this source remains suspicious.

Other pieces of secondhand information exist including Goodrick-Clarke's assertion that Hitler told a List disciple in Munich that he had a recommendation letter to big Businessman Wannieck, the Munich industrialist, honorary chairman and, most important, patron of the List Society.⁶³ George Mosse further connected List to Hitler through his associates such as Alfred Schuler, who more directly assimilated List's ideas into a volkish framework and Tarnhari (Ernst Lauterer) who will be explored below.

Recent scholarship has revealed deeper social connections between these two personalities. Brigitte Hamann in her work *Hitler's Vienna* (2010) concludes that 'there can be no doubt that young Hitler was familiar with List's theories while he was in Vienna,' claiming that certain of Hitler's ideologies could only have been derived from List's writings. To defend this position, Hamann quotes a speech given in 1920 Munich where Hitler credited the Aryans from the north as the originators of all human culture — according to Hamann this statement remains identical to what List wrote in his book *The Names of Germania's Tribes*.⁶⁴ Hamann also observes that during Hitler's period in Vienna, List's main works appeared in rapid succession. They were covered so extensively in the pan-German newspapers (which it is known that Hitler read) that readers could inform themselves thoroughly without ever having to buy one of his books. Also, there are indications in the memoirs of Hitler's friend August Kubizek that young Hitler not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

⁶⁴ Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna: A Portrait of the Tyrant as a Young Man* (New York: Tauris Parke, 2010), pp. 211–12.

only studied von List's works in the papers, but owned at least one of Guido von List's books personally.⁶⁵

Another indirect connection has recently been uncovered by the author following a closer perusal of Hitler's library recently housed at Brown University. It has been well-documented that Hitler's personal library was initially seized by the U. S. army and the collection was broken up and dispersed among several United States leading institutions. One such receiving institution was Brown University, which holds in its Rare Books and Manuscripts Department a copy of 'Aus den Traditionen der Laf-tar-ar-Sippe der "Lauterer": eine Weihegabe an alle Treubefundenen' written by Tarnhari (Ernst Lauterer). This book strongly builds upon the teachings of Guido von List and directly engages many of List's theories, citing the master himself. In fact, List's writings were prerequisites for understanding the teachings put forth in this small booklet as it could 'only be understood, if one has a thorough knowledge of the main works of List'. Lauterer included numerous references to List, including a direct quotation in the dedicatory section, engaging his peculiar style of word order levels and at one point even referring to his writings as the 'truly genius discoveries of the germanologist Guido von List in the field of rune studies, Armanism, the Aryo-German pictographic script and the Aryan proto-language' going so far to calling List's work 'supernatural'.⁶⁶ This suggests that if Hitler had read this book in his library (which seems possible given its condition), then he would have been aware of List indirectly, having had a detailed overview of his theories through this booklet.

And if there remains any doubt that this book was part of Hitler's personal library the bookplate remaining inside the front cover reveals the owner: 'Ex Libris Adolf Hitler':⁶⁷

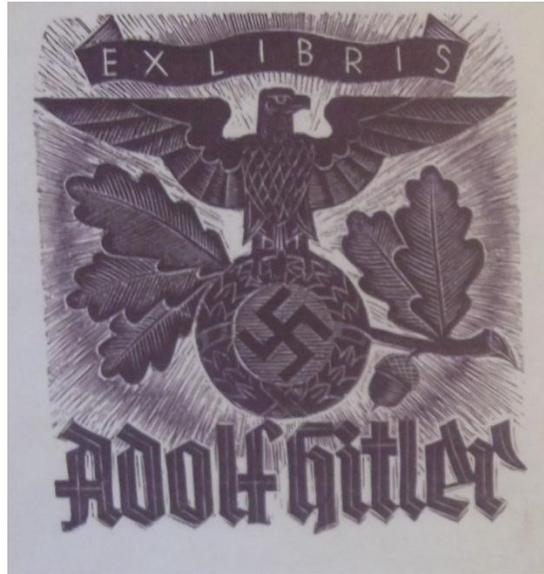
⁶⁵ Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna*, p. 299.

⁶⁶ Tarnhari, *Aus den Traditionen der Laf-tar-ar-Sippe der 'Lauterer': eine Weihegabe an alle Treubefundenen* (Wien: Guido von List Society, [n. d.]), pp. 3–7, 60–63, 81–82.

⁶⁷ Tarnhari, *Aus den Traditionen der Laf-tar-ar-Sippe der 'Lauterer'*, p. 94. Part of Hitler's library collection at Hay Library [CS629L38x 1910]. For a full annotated bibliography of Hitler's reconstructed library that includes the Brown University collection as an addendum, see Philipp Gassert, *The Hitler Library: A Bibliography* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001). Though seemingly no other works by Guido von List appear in any other books held by Hitler or in the collections that have been cataloged.

Figure 7: Adolf Hitler's Book Plate

From the inside cover of Tarnhari, *Aus den Traditionen der Laf-tar-ar-Sippe der 'Lauterer': eine Weihegabe an alle Treubefundenen* (Wien: Guido von List Society, [n. d.]), Hay Library, Brown University



This booklet serves as one further indirect connection between Guido von List and Adolf Hitler, thereby suggesting what scholars have claimed for years: the probability of Hitler being influenced by List's nationalistic and volkish ideologies (though to what extent remains unknown).

III. Conclusion: Blaming Blavatsky

Blavatsky's philosophy of time was deeply embedded in her teachings, a point proved throughout this thesis. It should also be noted that Blavatsky's teachings and influence on List indirectly connected her to Nazi Germany though to what degree must remain speculative. While it may be tempting to blame the racial ideologies that led to the Holocaust on the root-races and racial implications of Blavatsky's chronology, it must be understood that Blavatsky never promoted violence of any type and on any race or root-race — her evolution and chronology was (as Santucci argued) largely spiritual. It should also be noted that one of the most famously preserved goals of the Theosophical Society is the belief in the Brotherhood of Humanity. Blaming Blavatsky's teachings for the horrific events of

Nazi Germany merely perpetuates the pattern of demonizing the 'other' in history. This is not a full pardon for Blavatsky as she did maintain her own anti-Semitic ideology, though it does exonerate her as the main root of Nazi racism — she is merely one of many cultural contributors. Upon performing this research it seems that Blavatsky's teachings merely served as an outlet for another ideology much more powerful than her notions of root-races and rounds — nationalism. This nationalism was exhibited in nearly every single one of List's major research reports through his printing of Germanic heraldry, seals and traditions and was an ideal that found common ground with Hitler as he maintained a strong sense of German Nationalism throughout his 'reign'.

It is nothing new to suggest that nationalism was one of the main contributing factors leading to the Holocaust; however, what this chapter has managed to accomplish is three-fold: 1) a further clarification of the relationship between List and Hitler, 2) an admission for Blavatsky's anti-Semitism and 3) an example of how influential her philosophy of time and chronology was on the larger world. Indeed, Blavatsky's writings which were meant to propagate her own Theosophical Society and its idea of a universal brotherhood were hijacked by List and were transformed into a powerful mythology for racial oppression and dehumanizing other races; it is for this unfortunate connection with List (and thereby Hitler) that Blavatsky will not easily be forgotten by the world at large.

APPENDIX B

Contextualizing the Blavatsky-Skinner Letter: 17 February 1887

In researching this thesis, the author stumbled across a rare letter in the manuscript collection in the Andover-Harvard library at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, MA; this was the same archive where the ‘William Judge Letters’ were discovered by Michael Gomes in the 1990s. A detailed investigation of the archive, revealed a previously neglected though important letter. It was written by H. P. Blavatsky on 17 February 1887 to James Ralston Skinner (1830–1893). ‘Ralston,’ as he preferred to be called, remains an under-appreciated and under-studied figure in Victorian history. As both a lawyer and a writer, it is believed that Ralston spent his earlier years serving in the United States military. It is also known that he studied and practiced law with his uncle, the former Governor of Ohio, Secretary of the Treasury in the Cabinet of Abraham Lincoln, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Salmon P. Chase (1808–1873).¹ During the early 1850s, Ralston managed many of Chase’s properties, much of their correspondence is stored in this archive collection (though largely irrelevant to this study).² While the purpose of this section is to highlight the key themes from this letter, these brief biographical details are essential towards understanding Ralston’s reasons and requests as found throughout this correspondence.

Most of the letters that comprise the personal papers of J. R. Skinner are acknowledgments from those who received complimentary copies of his book *Key to the Hebrew-Egyptian Mystery in the Source of Measures* (1875) two of whom include the notable figures Hargrave Jennings (1817–1890) the British Freemason, Rosicrucian, and occult author along with the Victorian geologist William Denton (1823–1883). Despite these numerous letters (several of which critique and engage the information presented in his book *Source of Measures*) one letter alone stands out in this collection—a letter he received from one of the founders of Theosophy—Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891).

¹ F. O. S., ‘Samuel Wiggins Skinner’, *Harvard College Class of 1880: Secretary’s Report* (n. p., 1905), pp. 5–60.

² *The Salmon P. Chase Papers: Volume 1, 1829-1872*, ed. John Niven (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), p. 155.

It will seem apparent to anyone who has read Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* that this letter presents some of the basic philosophical tenets found in this later work; this is not surprising given the fact that Blavatsky had begun working on this book as early as 1886 though it presents this information from a more casual perspective. Curiously, not only does this letter contain Blavatsky's endearing term 'flapdoodle,' but she also uses the unflattering term 'humbug' to refer to several prominent individuals including the French barrister, Louis Jacolliot (1837–1890) and Asiatic researcher, John Bentley (1757–1824).³ A few of the more important concepts contained in this letter deserve attention.

I. In Praise of Ralston

The first important contribution of this letter is found in Blavatsky's admiration for Ralston and his writings. In this letter, Blavatsky expressed her belief that Ralston was likely a reincarnation of two of the greatest Greek mathematicians in history, Archimedes and Euclid; she further praised him as a 'great mathematician' and 'an (occult) genius.' Blavatsky went on to offer Ralston adulation through a closing remark noting his ability to lead the Theosophical Society: 'If I could pass you what I know & add that knowledge to your mathematics I would die happy; for I would leave this esoteric philosophy & the Theos. Soc, in your hands.'⁴ Despite this obvious high estimation of Ralston, nevertheless, she had several issues with his book, one of which was a misprint in his *Source of Measures* concerning the spelling of the word 'Argabhatta.' Also, in spite of Blavatsky's high esteem for his work, it seemed that this respect was not mutual. The nature of this letter implies that Ralston had requested for Blavatsky not to quote from their personal correspondence and that she should leave his name out of *The Secret Doctrine* altogether. This prompted Blavatsky to write:

Now you ask me not to mention your name or mention it the least I can. I quote considerably from the 'Source of Measure.' How can I quote & let out your name? So how can I quote without quotation marks? 'You say otherwise make what you like of my MSS & letters'. How can I if you won't let me give

³ Blavatsky, H. P., 'Helena Petrovna Blavatsky to Skinner'; 5 April 1887. James Ralston Skinner Papers, bMS 516/1 (16). Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

⁴ Ibid.

you credit for what you say? I would like very much to discuss a few points. I did do in my appendices- simply saying 'a kabalist, a great mathematician', or 'a correspondent' 'a friend' etc. etc.⁵

Blavatsky's desire to properly cite Ralston in her writings seems unusual to anyone who has read William Coleman's accusations of plagiarism against Blavatsky, especially in *The Secret Doctrine*. Still, the question remains, 'was Blavatsky worried about academic dishonesty' or 'was she hoping to use Ralston to add authority to her own writings?' The latter appears to be the most likely conclusion given her proclivity for citing unpublished, informal sources (e. g. private correspondences, letters, conversations, etc.).

II. Mastering the Masters

The second point of interest in this letter was Blavatsky's discussion of the infamous 'Masters.' Throughout this letter Blavatsky describes the 'Masters' as real physical beings and apologetically defends them:

Say, why did you labour under the impression that I was lying about Masters? Can one lie about *living* men? And why should I have invented them or still support the 'invention' since for 12 years & especially for the last three, I am made a martyr for the truths I told? Ah, dear sir, no woman in her right sense, not a man either, would go willingly into such hell as I have & persisted in having Spiritualists, Christians, materialists, scientists, & the whole world with two thirds of our own theosophists to boot...But they exist nevertheless.⁶

Blavatsky also defines the role of these Masters in her daily spiritual life and in the large evolutionary scheme of Theosophy which is especially interesting for this thesis:

We honour...aspects, but would no more think of praying to them, or ministering or propitiating them, then the 'face of *Moses*' in the moon. We recognize them, that's all, occasionally we *feel them*. They can help us; but only when karma permits them to; since they are as much under the inalterable & immutable law of karma, as we are ourselves. They—all of them—have been, are, or will be men. No highest Molsehim can become such unless they have won their epaulettes & spurs on the battle field of life and terrestrial probation. Masters will be Dhyan Chohans someday in Eternity so will you be & I & dear Dr. Buck...⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Blavatsky continued to defend her belief in the ‘real physical’ Masters instead of ‘spiritualized’ masters, which would have led to her acceptance by Spiritualists:

I have but to say a word, to bamboozle the world with the confusion that our Masters are ‘Spirits’ not living men & I will have the millions of Spiritualists turn in my favor. I have but to be a hypocrite & pander to Christians recognizing or even leaving their Jehovah quiet & Jesus alone—as a *god*. & I will make friends of the whole Christian world. The Roman Catholics offer me this day, any amount of money I like—if even *without believing*. I turn Roman Catholic. Shall I listen to them? Better starve & be hung in India innocent, than to lie in anything in this world of lies.⁸

Ironically, in Blavatsky’s opinion it was her physical view of the Masters that kept her isolated from other ‘orthodox’ religious traditions. Blavatsky’s connection between the Masters and her philosophy of time is expounded upon throughout this letter and clarifies their role in her larger *mythos*.

III. The Humanity of Blavatsky

The third element revealed in this letter is Blavatsky’s fiery personality and her own personal struggles. She writes about the inability to hold her tongue:

But what can I do? Not with my reputation, I am unable to flatter & lie & have the bad habit of saying what I think to every man, woman, or child that I find on my way.... I say again I am a jackass in mathematics & unable to put my thoughts in figures & symbols on your plane.⁹

Obviously, Blavatsky struggled with keeping her opinion to herself, but she also accepted her limitations. Furthermore, this letter provides a rare glimpse into Blavatsky’s depression following the Kiddle incident, the ridicule of the Spiritualist presses, the Hodgson Report (her reference as a Russian spy proves this), and the isolation into which they drove her:

Me, if I had not been forced by my oath & vows to do so. I have lost friends, country, money, & health, to serve only as manure for the field of future Theosophy. And now that I am alone, abandoned, by nearly all whom I am [a] begger & implored by our Hindu theosophists to return to India.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

This letter also revealed another common trait noted earlier in this study:

Blavatsky's mixed attitude towards *Isis Unveiled* (a similar denigrating thought process is found in her article 'My Books' and throughout the Mahatma letters and *The Secret Doctrine* as noted previously):¹¹

But all you say is known to Eastern occultism & you may find more than anything in *Isis*, vague hazy, & put in my flapdoodle jargon English, still the spirit of it is there, but you have created a tangible, *objective body* for that which in my work may be regarded as a shadowy phantom of imagination.¹²

IV. Blavatsky and the Jews

Finally, the fourth and one of the most controversial elements in this letter was Blavatsky's explanation for the origin of her anti-Semitism which she attempts to explain:

Now don't be angry with me for what I said of the Jews. I don't like them for the harm they have done the world & their grasping, selfish, hideous egotism. They the 'chosen people'!! Oh shadow of Lord Buddha one thing is very suggestive. The most commercial, money-making grasping notion the world over—the English have chosen the fictitious deity. They could ever have a member; the phallic god, answering marvelously at the same times their immoral, hypocritical character, their beastly sensuality and cast. I am going to tell it to them in so many words in my S.D.¹³

Blavatsky's main disagreements with the Jews was based on her own understanding of their egotistic beliefs that they were the Chosen People, but also for the 'fact' that their religion was based on the fourth root race and a perversion of the earlier pagan texts i. e. time was her argument against them (further validating the importance of understanding Blavatsky's philosophy of time)!

This brief summary contextualises this letter into the modern discussion of Theosophical studies. This letter provides more details about the Masters and their role in this larger evolutionary process making it especially relevant to this thesis as several sections have been quoted throughout. The letter in its entirety is currently being published by *Theosophical History* and is still in the process of being formatted. Given the nature of this letter and its controversial content it is likely that

¹¹ *The Mahatma Letters*, pp. 45, 129, 130, 131, 182, 183.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

it will become an essential source for future research on the subject of Blavatsky and the state of the Theosophical Society during this time.

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