The Olympian Ideal of Universal Brotherhood

Blavatsky Lecture 2012

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INTRODUCTION

"The race of mankind would perish, did they cease to aid each other. From the time that the mother binds the child's head till the moment that some kind assistant wipes the death-damp from the brow of the dying, we cannot exist without mutual help. All, therefore, that need aid have a right to ask it from their fellow-mortals; no one who holds the power of granting can refuse it without guilt."

Walter Scott, Scottish historical novelist, playwright, and poet

Brotherly – denoting 'fraternal feeling' and 'sympathy' or a 'feeling of kinship' – is an adjective we frequently use to describe a befitting behaviour between individuals. In this way it seems that the meaning of brotherhood is the same as 'kind feelings'. Also, if we evaluate brotherhood in light of our everyday experiences, we can see that we have the habit of linking the concept of brotherhood, to both how ideally we should behave towards others, and to the way we would like others to behave towards us. We all like to be treated with understanding and sympathy. For this reason we often associate the notion of brotherhood with virtues such as kindness, gentleness, compassion, goodness and understanding.

Sometimes we relate the notion of brotherhood to a single principle or idea: for example, to the idea of the essential unity of all things, prominent in theology and esoteric philosophy. We all have sprung from the same source and to it will return. Sometimes we relate it to self-sacrifice or self-abnegation, when personal interests are set aside for the sake of others or ideas.

We also often think of brotherhood as related to socio-political and cultural spheres. We may become upset when we see cruel political systems, or laws that produce conditions of

injustice, crushing the lives and dreams of other people. We tend to idealise a noble society: a society that would be able to offer equality in terms of opportunities for all based on a system that promotes tolerance, respect and freedom. So we associate the notion of brotherhood not only with moral virtues and abstract universalisms such as those of theology and esoteric philosophy, but also with institutions and culture which tend to make viable its practical realization.

We also tend to praise persons whose lives and works express virtues related to the notion of brotherhood, who were engaged in practical attempts to reform a determined society, or to raise and illuminate social issues related to the well being of minorities and marginalised social groups, or to promote human rights. Consider Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. When we think about either of them, we recognise that the ideas they promoted – such as non-violence - are good. So, persons like them, and many others, become a symbol of inspiration to all of us, because they represent ideas that deeply within ourselves we would like to see as a practical reality in the world: a peaceful and harmonious co-existence, based on respect and consideration to others.

Mahatma Gandhi
credit: Wikipedia

If we reflect on the concept of brotherhood we employ in our everyday lives, we will notice that we also consider it not only as a utopia but as a practical possibility. We may also notice the practical relevance of brotherhood because we are not isolated entities; we live in a shared world, and depend on social interactions to make our lives rich and meaningful. We all know the relationships between individuals in society can be greatly influenced by social circumstances. For example, with the recent economic crisis in many European countries, many of us have noted changes in the behaviour of others. Some people and groups have become more aggressive, others have been so seriously affected that they have lost everything they had;

racism is growing against minority groups, and so forth. All this affects each of us in one way or another, and some of us wish that social system could be improved in order to minimize the suffering and the problems of others, as well as our own.

Another aspect of brotherhood is the fact that the concept is derived from the idea of a family. The family is a social unit characterized by blood connection, marriage, and children. However, this micro social unit is also characterized by diversity. Its members do not always share common ideas and goals, and they are not usually equals. For example, one family member might be an esotericist, another one an orthodox Christian, and another one an atheist. The family is a sort of a micro social prototype of unity within diversity. It was from this prototype that the word brotherhood began to be used in association to organizations, and also to invoke the idea of a sibling-like obligation towards others.

In the case of fraternal organizations, the parent, in the nuclear family, is replaced with an ideology and a representative of that ideology, to whom the members owe the same allegiance and deference that they would owe to a parent in a family unit. There are all sorts of brotherhoods whose associates have common aims and are bound to help and support each other as brothers would do, including racist and criminal brotherhoods such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Mafia, religious and spiritual brotherhoods such as Sufis, Christians and so forth. However, a brotherhood as an organization is, in many levels, different from the micro social prototype of a family because it involves ties related to ideologies. This is so because such organizations only accept members who embrace their ideology. Therefore the virtues related to brotherhood such as love and compassion which necessarily involve tolerance are not necessarily present. Even though some of these groups may have discourses that promote such virtues, the very fact they are exclusivists and not universalists demonstrates how the concept of brotherhood may be used in ambiguous ways.

For these reasons and others, I intend to look at the concept of **universal brotherhood** at different levels, beginning with the idea of unity and universal brotherhood in the Ancient and Classical Hellenic thought, and in the perennial philosophy of Georgios Gemisthos Plethon and Helena Blavatsky. After that I'll focus on the evolution of the objects of the Theosophical Society as well as how some of its leaders interpreted universal brotherhood. I'll attempt to demonstrate that the view each leader had about universal brotherhood influenced the outward expression and the social impact of the Theosophical Society. Then I will briefly comment about the relevance of both tolerance and toleration in relation to universal brotherhood, and attempt to demonstrate that personalism and universalism are two different theoretical approaches; and that the former is not in harmony with the concept of universal brotherhood. Then I'll conclude by emphasising the relevance of universalism as well as the notion that personal progress, is closely related to, if not entirely dependent on, the society and the environment in which we live.

THE IDEA OF UNITY IN HELLENIC THOUGHT

" 'One world', 'the human community',' the brotherhood of man', are phrases on everybody's lips, and their theoretical validity is hardly called in question. The crucial issue, as we see it, is the gap between theory and practice: the paradox of a human race acknowledged in theory to be a single family, yet split by divisions of creed and colour which threaten its destruction. The solution is commonly sought not in reconsideration of the basic theory, but in the practical field of organisation, and attempts at practical world co-operation become more and more a characteristic feature of our time." (Baldry, 1965 p.1)

Since ancient times the question of the origin of all things, has intrigued philosophers, thinkers, poets, scientists and lay men. It has led people into the wonderful Odyssey of Homer, and the majestic Epic of Hesiod; into the wonders of Alexandria and into Plato's academy. It has led people into the mystical realms of Plotinus where the world has neither a beginning nor an end, into the Pythagorean universe of numbers where Monas was all that it was, and into the Kosmos of Anaxagoras who claimed nothing in the universe is separated. It has, equally, led people into the dark realms of Chaos which was all that it was before the world came to be, to the Orphic egg cracked by the serpentine god Chronus and his consort Anangke (Necessity) to create the universe, and to Hypatia's astrolabe, to try to measure the distance of the stars. It has led people into wonderful cosmological and metaphysical journeys, all which seem to share a common assumption: that everything originates from one single cause.

The idea of primal unity is intrinsically related to the concept of universal brotherhood, because it theoretically demonstrates

our interconnection and interdependence. When Plato discusses the nature of the universe, he acknowledges not only an essential unity that links us all, but also a universal soul which embeds everything with intelligence. In his 'Timaeus' he refers to the Macrocosm as living and intelligent [1] and claims that there is a world soul as well as individual one:
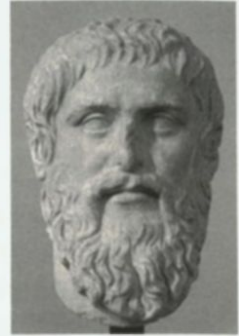
Plato, copy of portrait bust by Silanion
credit: Wikipedia

. . . when he was framing the universe, he put intelligence in soul, and soul in body, that he might be the creator of a work which was by nature fairest and best. Wherefore, using the language of probability, we may say that the world became a living creature truly endowed with soul and intelligence by the providence of God (Plato, *Timaeus*).

For Plato, we are not only linked to each other by the world soul, but also by our existence within the world, itself a living creature. On the other hand Plotinus in his cosmology focuses on three principles: the One, the Intelligence and the Soul and he does not refers to the 'beginning' of the Cosmos or to its 'end', but to a succession of emanations related to the three cosmological principles [2]. The idea of unity was so central for Plotinus that he even questions if there is anything else than unity:[3]

We hold that the ordered universe, in its material mass, has existed for ever and will for ever endure: but simply to refer this perdurance to the Will of God, however true an explanation, is *utterly inadequate* (Plotinus, *Ennead II-1-1*).

It is in virtue of unity that beings are beings. This is equally true of things whose existence is primal and of all that are in any degree to be numbered among beings. What could exist at all

except as one thing? Deprived of unity, a thing ceases to be what it is called: no army unless as a unity: a chorus, a flock, must be one thing. Even house and ship demand unity, one house, one ship; unity gone, neither remains thus even continuous magnitudes could not exist without an inherent unity; break them apart and their very being is altered in the measure of the breach of unity (*Ibid 6-9-1*).

Plotinus does not refer to the One as a 'concept' because he never defines it; nevertheless the One is the major basis of his philosophy. The One cannot be known or comprehended through reasoning, because such process necessarily separates and divide things. He claims that the One may be comprehended only through the direct experience of its mightiness. Such empiric experience may be achieved through practices

Plotinus
credit: Pictorial History of Philosophy

such as contemplation of the essence of all things. [4] In addition to that he asserts that such contemplation process does not lead the mind to return to the primeval essence, because the One is not a cause per se but a perennial feasibility.[5]

The pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras also refers to the essential unity of everything, but he highlights diversity:

> But before these was separation off, when [or, "since"] all things were together, not even any colour was manifest, for the mixture of all things prevented it—the wet and the dry, the hot and the cold, the bright and the dark, there being also much earth present and seeds unlimited in amount, in no way like one another. For none of the other things are alike either, the one to the other. Since this is so, it is necessary to suppose that all things were present in the whole. (frag. 4b) The things in the single cosmos are not separate from one another, nor are they split apart with an

axe, either the hot from the cold or the cold from the hot (Anaxagoras, cited in McKirahan, 2011).

Anaxagoras refers to an essential unity from which everything originates, and also to the diversity derived from such unity: by using, for example the notions of cold and hot. With this metaphor, he points out interdependence and interconnection because one phenomenon cannot exist without the other; diversity is essentially dependent on, and derived from unity and vice versa.

Anaxagoras, depicted as a medieval scholar in the *Nuremburg Chronicle* *credit:* Wikipedia

A different approach is followed by Alexander Polyhistor, who was a historian and philosopher generally known for his interpretation of Pythagorean teachings. Although very few of his writings were preserved, Diogenes Laertius paraphrases him: [6]

The beginning of all is unity (monas); unity is a cause of indefinite duality as a matter; both unity and indefinite duality are sources of the numbers; the points are proceeding from numbers; the lines – from the points; from the lines are plane figures; from plane are volumetric figures; from them – sensibly acceptable solids, in which four elements are – fire, water, earth, and air; moving and changing totally, they give rise to the universe – inspired, intelligent, spherical, in the middle of which is the earth; and the earth is also spherical and inhabited from all sides.

Pythagoras, from a fresco by Raphael. *credit:* Pictorial History of Philosophy

(*DL, VIII, 25,* Cited in Romanov, 2005).

Again we see the emphasis on unity and diversity. Pythagoras attributes to the Monas the origin of everything, and claims that the unfolding duality of life is dependent and connected to this fundamental unity that embraces all. In this manner Plato, Plotinus, Anaxagoras, Alexander Polyhistor and many other Hellenic philosophers in their cosmologic metaphysics acknowledged an essential unity that links us all and in this way embraced the abstract concept of universal brotherhood.

Now we shall briefly contrast the Ancient Hellenic thought, (9th – 6th centuries BC) with the Classical one (c. 5th – 4th centuries BC), beginning with the writings of Homer (850 BC), Hesiod (750 - 650 BC) and Aeschylus (525 – 455 BC) which played a formative role in shaping the Hellenic culture.

In the Homeric epics, there is no trace of nationalism. He expresses homogeneity without racial distinctions, such as those derived from the model of inferior and superior races. This can be exemplified when he narrates the case of the Hellenic and Trojan War. He acknowledges the heroes of both sides, and refers to the Trojans with the same reverence and respect he refers to the Hellenes. He also refers to those who speak a foreign language using the adjective *Allothrooi* or people who speak different languages. Only once he uses the word *barbarophonoi* (barbarian-speaker) to refer to the Carians, because they were speaking the Hellenic language in a very strange way. [7]

When discussing the Egyptians, Homer does not mention their dark colour, and he refers to the Ethiopians (Ethiopia is a Hellenic word that means 'Burnt-Face') in the following way: 'the 'Burnt-Faced-Men', of the far south, whose colour does not prevent them from being favourites of the gods' [8]. So, nationalism based on language or racial prejudice based on colour is not found in Homer writings. The main divisional patterns he stresses are related to
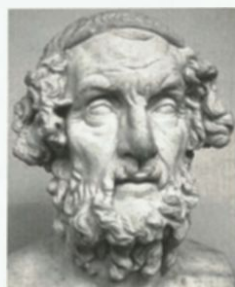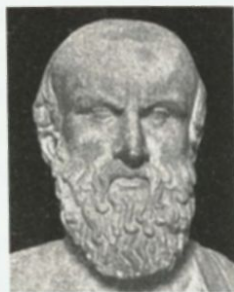

Idealized portrayal of Homer dating to Hellenistic period.
credit: British Museum

gender and socio economic status. [9] Women are considered inferior to men, [10] and the wealthy or the noble (*aristoi*) ones are said to be the best people. That which indicates the idea of brotherhood in the writings of Homer is when he refers to Zeus as the 'father of men and god' as well as to that which is common to all men is their mortality. [11]

Hesiod refers to the epochs of men: the Golden, the Silver, the Bronze and the Iron ages. The Golden Age is that period in which all humanity lived in peace and happiness, whilst the Iron is an epoch of hardship. The concept of the Golden Age could be considered as the 'germ of the idea that human nature is capable of a way of life which can end conflict and bring universal peace.' [12]

In the plays of Aeschylus prejudice based on colour is not expressed. One mention to colour is found on his play *The Persians*, but not as a prejudicial reference but in terms of skin colour contrast. [13]

Even though in the Ancient Hellenic literature there is no trace of racial prejudice, in the Hellenic Classical world, the idea of universal brotherhood was a foreign notion.

Bust of Aeschylus. from the Capitoline Museum, Rome

Amongst the Classical Hellenes, there were several sorts of divisions, inequities and separations. There were gender divisions, women were generally secluded and excluded from public life. There were class divisions, those born in wealthier families had more privileges in comparison with those born from poor families. There were inequalities in political status: slaves, free individuals, natives and foreigners. [14] Participation in the Olympic Games, as an example, was restricted to Hellenes only. Barbarians (defined as those who did not speak the Hellenic language) as well as women were not allowed to join the games. [15] It is also relevant to note that slavery amongst Classical Hellenes was not based on skin colour. Slaves were those captured during wars and taken from conquered lands:

[H]istorically it is pretty well proved now that the ancient Greeks and Romans knew nothing about race. They had another standard—civilized and barbarian—and you could have white skin and be a barbarian and you could be black and civilized (C. L. R. James quoted in Lang, 2002).

There were also divisions resulting from the animosity expressed toward outsiders, or against the citizens of one city towards the citizens of other Hellenic city: for example, the rivalry between Spartans and Athenians, or the Ionian against the Dorian.

Participation in the Eleusinian mysteries, is worth noting was open to women and to foreigners, who could speak the Hellenic language as well as to slaves. [16] Also the participation in the Kabirian Mysteries was open to all.

The reason why in Classical Hellas prejudice based on language became a social phenomenon seems to be the result from conflicts between the Hellenes and other people, such as the Persians, as well as contact with ideas of other cultures. For example Herodotus wrote that: 'The Egyptians' call all who do not speak their language barbarians'. [17]

In Ancient Hellenic literature there is no trace of racial prejudice based on colour or language. However they had social divisions based on socio economic status (the wealthy is the best one), gender division and slaves. Even though, the Ancient Hellenic thought did not get expressed an ideal society, the notion of universal brotherhood in the Western world can be traced to it in ideas such as the Golden Age and that Zeus was considered father of all men, and in the total absence of racial distinctions such as the idea of superior and inferior races.

Zeus. artwork by George Georgiadis

THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY: PLETHON AND BLAVATSKY

The perennial philosophy is based on universal truths common to all religions and spiritual traditions. It asserts that all religions express the same fundamental truths, no matter their cultural and philosophical background, because their core is the same: one, singular, a primal unity. And the perennial philosophy also involves the idea of the recurrence of an ancient wisdom, in various forms, throughout the ages: a resurgence or recrudescence of the primal. According to Aldous Huxley, the perennial philosophy is chiefly concerned with unity or 'the divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds' [18], and it includes three aspects: 'virtues, ethics; metaphysical truths; and the conjoining point where mind and matter (action and thought) takes place' (*Ibid*).   The concept 'Perennial philosophy' was used by Augustino Steuco (c. 1497 – 1548) in his book *De Perenni*

Aldous Huxley

Philosophia Libri, which was inspired on the ideas of Marcilio Ficino (c. 1433 – 1499) and Pico della Mirandolla (c. 1463 – 1494). [19] However, the idea of a perennial philosophy is older than the Renaissance; it is mentioned by Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 B. C.), Ammonio Saccas, Plotinus, St. Augustine and others. Cicero refers to it thusly in his book *Tusculanae Disputationes*: 'These things are of old date, and have, besides, the sanction of universal religion'. [20] Plotinus also acknowledges an ancient wisdom tradition by saying:
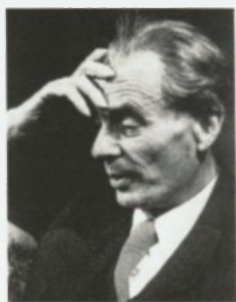
> These teachings are, therefore, no novelties, no inventions of today, but long since stated, if not stressed; our

doctrine here is the explanation of an earlier and can show the antiquity of these opinions on the testimony of Plato himself. (Plotinus, *Ennead 5-1-8*).

The perennial philosophy is intertwined with the notion of universal brotherhood, because it acknowledges fundamental universal metaphysical and ethical truths, through an all embracing eclecticism without socio-cultural biases and barriers. Such eclecticism is found in the work of G. G. Plethon (c. 1355? - 1452) and H. P. Blavatsky. Both supported in their own unique ways the existence of an ancient wisdom-tradition (the perennial philosophy) and focused on the three points outlined by Huxley: (1) virtues; (2) metaphysical truths; and (3) the conjoining point of thought and action.

While the work of H. P. Blavatsky is known to all of us that of Plethon is probably not, so a few words of introduction are in order. George Gemistus Plethon (c. 1355? -1452) was a philosopher of the late Byzantine Empire. At some point in his life, he left his home land (possibly Constantinople) and went to live in Hadrianopolis. [21] There he met Elissaeus, a polytheist Jew, who introduced him to Zoroastrianism. He also studied Neo-Platonism, probably before leaving Constantinople. [22] After, his teacher Elissaeus was burnt (by the Turks) as heretic, Plethon left Hadrianopolis and moved to Mystra in Peloponnese. [23] While living there he wrote several works on philosophy, geography and astronomy.
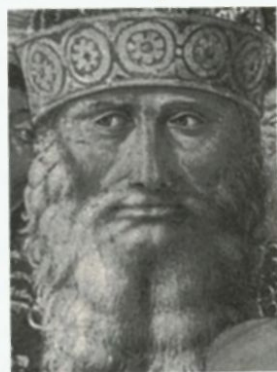
Portrait of Plethon, detail of fresc by Benozzo Gozzoli. Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence

He also wrote on politics and about the Peloponnesian affairs, proposing various political and social. [24] In these writings, Plethon proved himself to be a great philologist and philosopher, as well as a very experienced politician. [25] The Bishops of Peloponnesus honoured Plethon in various ways, and

eventually his fame reached the ears of the Byzantine emperor Palaeologus (c. 1404 - 1453). When the emperor visited Peloponnesus, he consulted Plethon about the union of the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. The threat posed by the Turks to the Byzantium Empire, made such a union highly desirable. [26] Palaeologus then invited Plethon to join him in the pre-synod meeting (1438) in Ferrara Italy, organised to discuss the union of the two Churches. During the synod in Florence, Plethon demonstrated that he was not so much concerned about ecclesiastical affairs, and was enthusiastically promoting Platonism and Zoroastrianism to the Florentines. [27]

Còsimo di Mèdici (c. 1389 - 1464) met Plethon in Florence, and became fascinated about his ideas on Platonism. [28] Còsimo introduced Plethon to Marcilio Ficino who was influenced by Plethon and began translating the works of Platonism and Neo-Platonism. During the same period Gemistos changed his name to Plethon. Ficino claims that he did so not because the 'Plethon' sounds like Plato, but because it was the ancient Hellenic word for Gemistos. His name change was considered as a step towards paganism, and

Còsimo di Mèdici.
fresco by Stanza della
Segnatura. Palazzi
Pontifici, Vatican
credit: Wikipedia

Matthew Kamariotis (the teacher, of the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, of Scholarius c. 1400 – c. 1473) said that the name Plethon was taught to Gemistos by demons. [29] While in Florence Plethon wrote his book De Differentii in which he presents Plato's philosophy as more profound and superior than the one of Aristotle. [30] This angered Aristotle's supporters, who also began suspecting that Plethon had pagan beliefs. [31] Plethon was discussing extensively philosophy with the Florentine humanists, and his discussions eventually became lectures. [32] Georgios Trapezuntios (1395? -1473), who had a great reputation as an Aristotelian, and was the secretary of Pope Nicholas V, writes that Plethon, during one of his lectures in Florence, said: 'in little time all the world with one soul and one heart will

embrace one religion' and then he asked him 'which religion the Christian or the Muslim?' to that Plethon replied 'the neutral, but not indifferent to our patron one'. [33]

Trapezuntios
credit: Wikipedia

Plethon at some level succeeded in reviving Platonic Philosophy in the West. Although Plato's philosophy was not entirely new in Italy, during the Renaissance, it was largely neglected in favour of Aristotelianism. When the synod was concluded Plethon returned to Mystra, where he began writing his greatest work: the *Book of Laws*. After his death the manuscript of the *Book of Laws* was given to Scholarius, who burnt it and attempted to suppress all the copies in circulation. Fortunately, Scholarius failed and sixteen out of the one hundred and one chapters that comprised the original book are preserved. These chapters were published for the first time in *Pléthon Traité des Lois*, 1858.

In the *Book of Laws* Plethon outlines his esoteric beliefs and supports the existence of an ancient wisdom-tradition. He does so by acknowledging a chain of wise men belonging to different religious traditions and philosophical currents including Zoroaster; the Magi of Media, Eumolpus (one of the priests of

Zoroaster as a warrior.
credit: Wikipedia

Dodoni and the mythical founder of the Eleusinian mysteries), Minos (the king of Crete), Lycurgus of Sparta, King Iphitos of Elis (the founder of the Olympic games), Numa Pompilius (the second King of Rome who introduced to the Romans a great number of sacred rituals), the Brahmans of the Hindus; the Kouretes (the dancers who protected the baby Zeus from being eaten by his father Cronus), the priests of Zeus in Dodona (the ancient oracle of Zeus), Polyeidus (an oracle who resurrected Minos' son), Chiron the centaur (the tutor of Achilles), Anaximander

(a pre-Socratic philosopher), Aristo of Chios (a Stoic philosopher), Pittacus of Mytilene; Solon of Athens, Thales of Miletus, Cleobulus of Lindos, Pythagoras and Plato as well as their students such as: Permenidis; Timaeus, Plutarch; Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. [34]

Plethon states that whoever wants to learn the truth, in the same way those from more ancient times did, will eventually erect its own science instead of adopting a foreign one. [35] However, he says that this is not possible for someone who follows the Sophists, because the Sophists followed those who were deluded before. [36] The Sophists do not belong to this succession of wise men, in Plethon's view, because they are concerned with self-promotion and fame rather than truth.

Plethon emphasises rational thinking, and claims that without the use of reason, reflection and investigation one cannot discern between what is good and evil. He emphasises the use of logic, and claims that reason is a divine gift. [37] In this vein he criticises Protagoras and Pyrrho: Protagoras for his claims that 'Man is the measure of all things' and that the knowledge of each man is the only reality; and Pyrrho for his belief that 'nothing is real' and that men cannot be a trustful source to comprehend the truth. Plethon acknowledges the existence of an ageless wisdom-tradition and that to in order to identify the truths of the same one should rely on logic.

Like Plethon, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 - 1891) believed in the existence of an ageless wisdom-tradition. In fact this notion is the cornerstone of her esoteric philosophy. In the preface of her first book, *Isis Unveiled*, she claims that her work is an appeal for the acknowledgement of both Hermetic philosophy and the universal Wisdom-Religion. [38] Furthermore in the same publication she stressed that because humanity has passed through different cyclical changes, one nation came after another and people

H. P. Blavatsky
in the 1870s

belonging to different cultural backgrounds, having their bases on ancestral traditions, created new religions clothing the universal wisdom religion with their own idiosyncratic costumes. Nonetheless, the main traits from this primordial 'Wisdom-Religion', were and are preserved. [39] She also uses the term 'Secret Doctrine' as a synonym for this primordial Wisdom-Religion. [40] Elsewhere Blavatsky refers to the Wisdom-Religion as a 'religion of reason' or Theosophy and she justifies the word 'religion by referring to its etymology, which she claims indicates that once humanity was united by way of their spiritual thought'. [41]

In the *Secret Doctrine*, H. P. B. states that her aim is to describe the basic exoteric features of ancient and contemporary religions and philosophy, because all of them express the primordial Wisdom-Religion. Thus she says:

> I sought to show that the TREE OF KNOWLEDGE, like Truth itself, was One; and that, however differing in form and colour, the foliage of the twigs, the trunk and its main branches were still those of the same old Tree, in the shadow of which had developed and grown the (now) esoteric religious philosophy of the races that preceded our present mankind on earth. (Blavatsky, 1890, *Mistaken Notions on the 'Secret Doctrine'*).

She also emphasises that 'the teachings, however fragmentary and incomplete, contained in these volumes [*The Secret Doctrine*], belong neither to the Hindu, the Zoroastrian, the Chaldean, nor the Egyptian religion, neither to Buddhism, Islam, Judaism nor Christianity exclusively. *The Secret Doctrine* is the essence of all these. Sprung from it in their origins, the various religious schemes are now made to merge back into their original element, out of which every mystery and dogma has grown, developed, and become materialised'. [42] Blavatsky's appeal to reason is similar to Plethon's: is necessary to use logic in order to

discern eternal truths, because what is true cannot be internally contradictory.

In the *Key to Theosophy,* Blavatsky says that the Theosophical Society aims to 'reconcile all religions, sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities'. [43] Here she echoes Plethon's vision when he replied to Trapezuntios that soon the world will embrace one neutral religion. However, I tend to think that when both Blavatsky and Plethon use the word 'religion' they did not mean the creation of a new religious body or institution, but instead the universal acceptance of perennial philosophy, which involves universal virtues and metaphysical truths as well as their practical application for the theoretical basis of universal brotherhood.

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

For much of the history of the Theosophical Society, the acceptance of its first object, to form a nucleus of the universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour, has been the only requisite for membership. However this has not always been so. When the Theosophical Society was first founded its objects were very different from what we know today; and from 1875 until 1886 they changed several times. To understand how and why universal brotherhood became the main objective of the Theosophical Society we need to look at the evolution of its objectives.

In 1875 the Theosophical Society had only one objective: 'to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe'. [44] The members were gathering at H.P. B's apartment, in New York at 46 Irving Place and things were running smoothly. Then a problem occurred with Charles Sotheran (c. 1847 - 1902), one of the board members. He began discussing their psychic and occult experiments in public. For this reason the Theosophical Society was transformed into a semi-secret organisation with 'secret signs and words of recognition' and every time that it was possible members were officially initiated. [45] It appears that there was a verbal agreement, amongst its early members and founders, forbidden any public mention about their occult and psychic experiments. Most of the original members of the Theosophical Society -- including Emma Hardinge Britten, who became a public critic of the TS and Blavatsky in later life -- respected the oath of secrecy, Charles Sotheran broke this agreement by referring to others some of the experiments they were doing. So, this episode led the founders to re-structure the Society. In Blavatsky's scrapbook there is a clip, from

The Spiritual Scientist, with Olcott's reply to the critics of Prof. Hiram Corson [46]:

> As for the Theosophical Society, our present experience with a certain person, who shall be nameless since his conduct has been such as to forfeit his right to recognition, has been a lesson that we mean to profit by. We are considering a proposition to organize ourselves into a secret society so that we may pursue our studies uninterrupted by the falsehoods and impertinences of outside parties. When we have secured the proof palpable of the Unseen Universe and its laws, we may publish it to the world, unless we should then be satisfied that some other critic as courteous and fair as Mr. Corson would denounce us as guilty of 'assumption,' 'pretention,' or 'brag'. (H. P. B. *Collected Writings, 1874 - 1878: vol. 1, p.194*).

Boris de Zirkoff mentions that underneath this clip H. P. Blavatsky added the following comment: 'Till the row with Sotheran the Society was not a secret one, as will be seen by this. But he began to revile our experiments & denounce us to Spiritualists & impede the Society's progress and it was found necessary to make it secret'. [47]

a young
Boris de Zirkoff

In a circular written, by Olcott on May 3rd, 1878, the restructuring of the Theosophical Society as a semi-secret organisation is outlined. Membership was divided into three Sections each one having three sub-Sections or degrees, with a total of nine degrees. The new members were admitted into the third degree of the third Section as probationers for an undetermined period of time. In addition to that they were also requested to sign a pledge of secrecy which is shown in this facsimile reproduction, signed by Thomas A. Edison (1847 - 1931).

THE

THEOSOPHICAL (✡) SOCIETY.

FOUNDED IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK, A.D. 1875

In accepting fellowship with the above named society, I hereby promise to ever maintain **ABSOLUTE SECRECY** respecting its proceedings, including its investigations and experiments, except in so far as publication may be authorized by the society or council, and I hereby **PLEDGE MY WORD OF HONOR** for the strict observance of this covenant.

Dated at Menlo Park n.g.
this Fourth day of April 1878

Thomas A Edison

FIG. 30

The Theosophical Society
Founded in the City of New York, AD 1875

Thomas Edison, 1878
credit: Wikipedia

In accepting fellowship with the above named society, I hereby promise to ever maintain **ABSOLUTE SECRECY** respecting its proceedings, including its investigations and experiments, except in so far as publication may be authorized by the society or council, and I hereby PLEDGE MY WORD OF HONOR for the strict observance of this covenant. [48]

Admission into the second Section was granted for those 'who have not yet wholly disenthralled themselves from religious prejudice, and other forms of selfishness, but have made a certain progress towards self-mastery and enlightenment'. [49] According to Jinarajadasa the initiation into the second Section resembles a Masonic ritual, though he does not specify which type of ritual. The TS ritual is preserved in the archives of the Theosophical Society and has never been published. The records

also indicate that the only member who was officially initiated in the second Section was the Buddhist High Priest N. M. Subhuti. [50]

For a member to be admitted into the first degree of the first Section - the highest or innermost one – that member had to prove that he or she was free from 'every leaning toward any form of religion in preference to another' [51] as well as from any family, political or social obligation. Another condition was that the member should be willing to give his own life (if necessary) for the 'good of humanity and any Brother fellow of whatever race, colour or ostensible creed'. [52] In addition to that the member should not drink alcohol of any kind and embrace a life of austere chastity. [53]

The objectives of the Theosophical Society were also reformulated at the same time to focus on the internal structure of the Society, 'to influence its members to acquire an intimate knowledge of natural law, especially its occult manifestation . . . to study and develop his latent powers . . . to oppose materialism . . . and every form of dogmatic theology . . . finally and chiefly, to aid in the institution a Brotherhood of Humanity, wherein all good and pure men, of every race, shall recognize each other as equal effects (upon this planet) of one Uncreated, Universal, Infinite, and Everlasting Cause'. [54]

Thus it is possible to see two different tendencies in the Theosophical Society during this period: the first was a focus on psychic experiments and investigation of practical occult powers; and in addition to that, the concept of brotherhood, and the spiritual unity.

In September of 1879, another circular entitled 'The Theosophical Society or Universal Brotherhood' was issued, indicating that the Society's objectives had once more been altered: 'to keep alive in man his spiritual intuition; to oppose and counteract . . . irrational bigotry in every form . . . ; to promote a feeling of brotherhood among nations; to seek to obtain knowledge of the laws of nature . . . ; to promote in every

practicable way . . . the spread of a non sectarian education . . . '
and so forth. [55] In this instance universal brotherhood is
presented alongside the name of the Theosophical Society; and
brotherhood is associated to 'kind feelings'.

In 1896, the Society's objectives were re-formulated in
substantially the form in which they exist today. As our focus is
on universal brotherhood, I outline the changes only related to
its first object:

> *1885:* To form a nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of
> Humanity, without distinction of race, creed or colour;
> *1888:* To form the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of
> Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or
> colour;
> *1896:* To form a nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of
> Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or
> colour.

When in 1888 the Eastern Esoteric School was founded by
H. P. Blavatsky the semi-secret character of the Theosophical
Society was removed. Several factors influenced the founders
but the main reason which led them to include universal
brotherhood amongst its objects is stated by Henry S. Olcott as:

> The idea of Universal Brotherhood was not there, because
> the proposal for the Society sprang spontaneously out of
> the present topic of discussion. It was a plain, business-like
> affair, unaccompanied by phenomena or any unusual
> incident. Lastly, it was free of the least sectarian
> character and unquestionably anti-materialistic. The little
> group of founders were all of European blood, with no
> strong natural antagonism as to religions, and caste
> distinctions were to them non-existent. The Brotherhood
> plank in the Society's future platform was, therefore, not
> thought of: later on, however, when our sphere of influence

extended so as to bring us into relations with Asiatics and their religions and social systems, it became a necessity, and, in fact, the ,corner-stone of our edifice (Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves (1874 - 78)*, pp.120-21).

The first use of brotherhood was related to the idea of a spiritual unity which binds us all. The second associated universal brotherhood with 'kind feelings'; in 1888 caste and sex were added, and the Society's aim to form 'the' (singular) nucleus of universal brotherhood; in 1886, that singular focus was removed, and the Society's aim to form 'a' nucleus, presumably one among many. From a Society initially focused on psychic investigation and occult phenomena, the adoption of universal brotherhood as its main aim characterizes a significant change in the focus of the organization, which became also concerned about influencing socio-cultural aspects.

THE LEADERS OF THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AND UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD

In the history of the Theosophical Society there have been many Fellows who wrote about universal brotherhood, and each of them expresses different as well as similar points of views about that objective. Some claimed that it is a law of nature; others that it is an ideal that will become a practical reality only during the Golden Age to come; still others that it is an idea that can be gradually inculcated in society through the promotion of virtues such as toleration, compassion, love or 'good feelings'. It is not possible in the limited time I have, to talk about all that has been said on this topic. For this reason I'll present a brief synopsis of the ideas of the most influential founders and leaders: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), Henry Steel Olcott (1832 -1907), William Quan Judge (1851 - 1896), Annie Wood Besant (1847 - 1933), George Sidney Arundale (1878 - 1945), Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa (1875 - 1953), Nilakantha Sri Ram (1889 - 1973), John B. S. Coats (1906 - 1979) and Radha Burnier (1923).

According to H. P. Blavatsky universal brotherhood is the foundation of true Theosophy and, in her 'Third Letter to the American Convention', she remarks that 'There are signs visible, though only gradually coming into sight, that its members are at last awakening from their apathy and setting to work in earnest to practice the first principle of true Theosophy - UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD. Gradually they are becoming alive to the duty of helping others, as they have been helped, by bringing a knowledge of the life-giving truths of Theosophy within the reach of all'. [56] Blavatsky was convinced that the fellows of the

Theosophical Society, during her life time, were gradually understanding the importance of universal brotherhood and working for its practical application, which she relates to the transmission of the knowledge of Theosophy.

Blavatsky does not associate universal brotherhood solely with the knowledge of Theosophy. She also relates to it practical humanitarian efforts that could gradually improve society and social lives. For example in another article entitled Recent Progress in Theosophy [57] she claims that universal brotherhood is not a utopia, but something to be worked for 'on the ordinary plane of social or national relations'. [58] In this manner she also links universal brotherhood to society.

In a different article entitled *What is Theosophy* [59] she explains that the Theosophical Society 'is nothing but the Universal Brotherhood; *the Brotherhood of Humanity*' and goes on saying 'All *Brothers, without distinction of social position, race, or colour*, offer the hand of friendship to one another ...' [60] Previously she claimed that universal brotherhood is the knowledge of Theosophy; now that the Theosophical Society also is universal brotherhood. However, she does not limit brotherhood only the relationship between its members, but extends the idea to the entire humanity. Then, she exemplifies her claim by saying 'The nobly born, proud, and wealthy Lord who, if he were not a Theosophist, would hardly permit a poor Hindu or Chinese to pass the threshold of his antechamber, treats his poor and more humble brother as his equal. Day and night, we work in common for the spiritual regeneration of morally blind individuals, as well as for the elevation of the fallen nations'. [61] She relates universal brotherhood to the structural aspect of the organisation, which accepts members of any socio-cultural background without any sort of distinction; and considers such social structure universal brotherhood.

There is also, however, a further point to be considered. In the *Key to Theosophy* [62] she asserts that the root of all problems is in the human character, which has been conditioned

by cause and effect. She claims that neither selfishness nor cruelties are natural conditions of an individual. In the nature-nurture controversy, Blavatsky is on the side of nurture: 'Now, true evolution teaches us that by altering the surroundings of the organism we can alter and improve the organism' [63] and she goes on saying: 'Every Theosophist, therefore, is bound to do his utmost to help on, by all the means in his power, every wise and well-considered social effort which has for its object the amelioration of the condition of the poor. Such efforts should be made with a view to their ultimate social emancipation or the development of the sense of duty in those who now so often neglect it in nearly every relation of life'. [64]

For Blavatsky universal brotherhood is linked to the promotion of Theosophy as well as to practical humanitarian efforts to improve society such, as social structures not based on socio-cultural and economical distinctions and prejudice, as the model they attempted to create in the Theosophical Society of the nineteenth century. In this manner she intertwines universal brotherhood with both theory and practise.

Henry S. Olcott the President-founder (from 1875 until 1907) of the Theosophical Society, asserts in his article *Applied Theosophy* that the first object of the organisation 'to form the nucleus of Universal Brotherhood' is so broad that any attempt to try to analyse it may lead to confusion. [65] He relates it to the Platonic Golden Age as well as with the Garden of Eden; the re-establishment of paradise on earth, [66] where all creatures

Henry Steel Olcott

would live without conflict and difference in a sort of ever-lasting happiness and peace. His vision expresses a sort of transcendentalism distant from social empirical realities. However, it shows optimism and the idea that one day may be possible that universal brotherhood becomes a practical reality.

In another article, entitled *How Best to Become a Theosophist* [67] Olcott refers universal brotherhood as one of the principles that binds individuals together: 'We are all individual and free as to personal beliefs, but are knitted together by the strong ties of intellectual reciprocity and universal brotherhood'. [68] In the same article he also uses the term 'Republic of Conscience' as a synonym for universal brotherhood. [69] This term is first found in an article of Blavatsky, entitled *What are the Theosophists.* [70] In this article, she defines the term as religious freedom within the Theosophical Society. She asserts that the organisation does not embrace any specific religion but offers equality of expression to all of them, and that its members should not try to impose their religious preferences upon others. She reinforces this by quoting a Buddhist axiom 'Honour thine own faith, and do not slander that of others'. [71] Olcott uses the term in the same context Blavatsky did: to emphasise an intellectual cooperation based on the understanding and respect to religious diversity. For him such intellectual acceptance is the practise of universal brotherhood; the acceptance of diversity based on the idea that we are all linked together.

In another article, *The Common foundation of All Religions,* [72] Olcott relates specific emotions to the idea of universal brotherhood. He states that the Theosophical Society is supposed to create a nucleus of universal brotherhood by focusing on what really matters: the search for truth as well as the promulgation of gentle feelings amongst men. [73] For Olcott universal brotherhood involves the idea of paradise on earth; intellectual reciprocity based on the idea we are all linked together and 'kind feelings' or virtues.

During the first meeting of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (1893), William Judge delivered a lecture, entitled *Universal Brotherhood a fact in Nature.* [74] In this lecture Judge claims that 'The Theosophist who knows anything about life insists that Universal Brotherhood is not a mere theory. It

is a fact, a living ever present fact, from which no nation can hope to escape; no man can escape from it, and every man who violates it violates a law, violates the greatest law of nature . . . ' [75] Judge attempts to support his argument not with transcendentalism, but with empirical examples that demonstrate how humanity, society and our social lives are in fact interrelated:

William Quan Judge

If you will notice you will find that when it rains over a certain area vast numbers of men are affected similarly. The rain has to fall on the fields in order that the harvest may grow, so that afterwards it may be gathered, and all the farmers are affected together by the rain. If you examine society you will find that at the same hour every day almost all the people are doing exactly the same thing. At a certain hour in the morning thousands of your citizens are going down that railway or rush all together to catch the train and at another few moments afterward they are rushing out of the train to get to business, all doing the same thing, one common thought inspiring them. That is one of the proofs -- a small one -- in social and business life that they are affected together, they are all united. Then in the evening they will come home at the same hour, and if you could see, at the same hour you would see them all eating together and digesting together, and then later on they are all lying down together at the same hour. Are they not united even in their social life? Brothers even in that? (Judge, 1893)

Judge believed that we are all united, and everything that happens in the environment in a way or another affects us all. This expresses the idea of an essential unity which binds us all; and this idea for Judge is a fact that demonstrates we are all

brothers. Such a unity for him can be traced not only in abstract metaphysical concepts, but also in everyday routines and patterns of our social lives. He says that ' . . . wherever you go, wherever you look, we are united; in whatever plane, the plane of mind as well as the plane of the body; the plane of the emotions, of the spirit, what not, we are all united, and it is a fact from which we cannot escape'. [76]

Judge is quite pragmatic and he attempts to illustrate his claim, that universal brotherhood is a law in nature, by offering examples related to our empirical experiences. So, through the use of metaphor, he manages to demonstrate a universal interdependence and interrelation that links us all, and stresses that this fact proves that universal brotherhood is not a lofty goal to be attained, a law of nature on which we all depend.

Annie Besant, the second international President (from 1907 until 1933) of the Theosophical Society, takes a different approach, and attempts to apply the idea of universal brotherhood to socio-political systems. Since the French Revolution the tripartite motto: liberté, égalité, fraternité (liberty, equality and fraternity or brotherhood) links to brotherhood equality and

Annie Besant

freedom. Annie Besant asserts that equality is based on the notion that we are all derived from the same source and to it we all will return, but in the material world, inequalities are the key note of nature. She dissociates égalité from brotherhood by saying that 'one shows the qualities of a saint; another the qualities of a criminal. One is born philanthropist, and another a barbarian. Are these equal?' [77] She continues saying:

Equal opportunity for all --- that perchance you may make in a far future; but equality of capacity to use it---that you

> cannot make . . . And so we have to face the fact that Brotherhood does not mean equality, but a real Brotherhood of elders and youngers, a great human family in which some are much older than others, and some are very young, very ignorant, very foolish (Annie Besant, 1912, *The Ideals of Theosophy* p.18).

Besant's assertion that equality is not a fact amongst men is based not only on her observation about innate differences amongst individuals, but also based on the notion of reincarnation; which points out that the souls of individuals have different ages. She relies on the idea of reincarnation to justify innate differences amongst individuals and claims that any socio-political system based on the idea that people are inherently equal is not in accordance with the idea of universal brotherhood. Notwithstanding, she believes that any social system, or organisation, should offer equal opportunities to all individuals, but should not be based on the idea that all men are equal:

> Our ideal of Brotherhood applied to the Government, claims power to the wise and not for the ignorant . . . The people have a right to happiness, but they can never get it for themselves to be guided to it by knowledge of those who understand . . . Now how to find the best? What is that problem? Everyone of us who studies must try to solve this problem . . . But you will not solve it until you realize the hopelessness of the present line of ruling --- or not ruling --- and accept the ideal that the best should govern. (Annie Besant, cited in *Pasricha*, p.107).

Like previous T. S. leaders, Annie Besant relates universal brotherhood to the idea of an essential unity that links us all. She also links that unity with the idea of an all embracing solidarity [78] and asserts that universal brotherhood could become a practical reality if socio-political systems are

structured in such a manner that those who are wise will rule and guide those who are not.

George Arundale, the third international President of the Theosophical Society (from 1933 until 1945) defines brotherhood as mutual understanding between people, religions and nations and stresses that the major work of the Theosophical Society is to promote such understanding. Arundale even refers to Theosophy as the science of understanding, and claims that

George Arundale

misunderstanding is the source of divisions and conflicts:
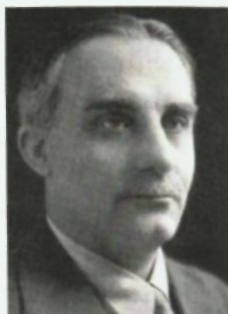
> In the midst of these various interpretations, however, let us realize that each is in fact an opportunity for increased understanding, even though one particular interpretation reigns supreme in our hearts. In misunderstanding lies most of the unhappiness which at present permeates the world. War is, of course, due to misunderstanding, born as such misunderstanding generally is of pride and selfishness. The oppositions between nations and between races are due to misunderstanding and results in terrible unhappiness. Religious conflict and the strange tendency to proselytization are entirely due to misunderstanding. And how terrible is the unhappiness which results. The Theosophical Society is, or should be, a Brotherhood of Mutual Understanding. Indeed, brotherhood means understanding (Arundale, 1936? in 'Theosophy as Beauty').

For Arundale brotherhood is exemplified by practical attempts to promote understanding amongst religions people and nations.

In contrast to Arundale, Jinarajadasa, the fourth international president of the Theosophical Society (from 1945 until 1953), espouses a more transcendental vision about

universal brotherhood. According to him Theosophists 'have been preaching for so many years the Idea of a Universal Brotherhood of Mankind. We need now to contribute another thought, and that is the Divinehood of Humanity'. [79] Jinarajadasa replaces the social emphases of previous leaders with a more abstract view, and links universal brotherhood with the idea of a new religion of humanity

C Jinarajadasa

which would come forth when humankind realizes its divine nature:

> It is true there is the ideal of Universal Brotherhood, but this remains merely a beautiful idea unless it is supplemented by a deeper Truth. This Truth, which exists in every religion, is the Divine Nature, resident in all Mankind, whether cultured or ignorant, civilised or savage, . . . On the basis of the Divine Nature resident in all Mankind there will slowly arise the new Religion of Humanity (*Ibid* p.273).

For Jinarajadasa universal brotherhood involves common beliefs related to spiritual truths. However he like Judge maintains that Brotherhood is a law in nature and not a mere dream:

> Our work as Theosophists is above all things to proclaim this message of Brotherhood. But we proclaim it not as an ideal, as some beautiful dream born in the imagination of tender-hearted men, but as reality, as a law of nature. Just as by the law of gravity all of us are held to the surface of the earth, in every place on its surface, so all of us are bound in the chains of one Brotherhood. To know ourselves as divine is the supreme task before us all. All else follows. When we have as our motto: "Divinity, Equality, Fraternity",

> Liberty follows as a consequence. For how should I ever
> dream of coercing my brother who shares my Divinity?
> (Jinarajadasa, 1943).

In this he asserts that universal brotherhood may become
a practical reality when humanity recognises its divine nature;
and when this happen a new religion will come forth. He also
relates it to a law which cannot be comprehended without
self-realization or enlightenment. This is why he requests
Theosophists to contribute with a different way of thinking and
to focus on the 'Divinehood of Humanity'.

Sri Ram, the fifth international President of
the Theosophical Society (from 1953 until
1973), considers universal brotherhood in a way
similar to Jinarajadasa. Sri Ram emphasises
that the self-realization of man's divine nature
is the root of human brotherhood. And he says
that there is no point to attempting social
changes if there is not such self-realization:

N Sri Ram

> Let all the existing social and political systems remain as
> they are, however imperfect and unsatisfactory they might
> be, given a genuine sense and feeling of brotherhood among
> the people who constitute those systems, the world will wit-
> ness a miraculous change; instead of being, as it is very
> largely, a surging chaos, and for innumerable people whose
> sorrows are hidden from our sight a near hell, it will become
> almost a paradise. (Sri Ram, 1967)

Sri Ram also stresses that 'the solution of all problems in
human relations is the simple yet profound truth of human
brotherhood, flowing from the fact that all human beings spring
from the same roots and are essentially of the same nature ... '
[80] He also claims that spiritual truths, when transmitted as con-
cepts, degenerates, and specifically applies this principle to uni-

versal brotherhood by saying 'Similarly, brotherhood, even when it is considered as a practical doctrine, and not merely suffered as an innocuous idea, is translated in terms of co-existence which asks only for the sufferance and toleration of those with whom one disagrees and whom one dislikes'. [81] He believes that the simple harmonious coexistence can be considered valuable, but it is 'a poor aim for a human being . . . This is because it is a concept placed on some shelf in our thinking and not a force that changes our thinking and behaviour in definite and positive ways . . . ' [82] So, Sri Ram has a more inwardly focused view about universal brotherhood, one that transcends worldly affairs and depends entirely on self-realization. Thus, for him self-realization is the only possible way that someone may comprehend profoundly what universal brotherhood means.

John Coats, the sixth international president of the Theosophical Society (from 1973 till 1980) claims that the practise of universal brotherhood is the expression of the highest principles of man. He associates it to virtues such as 'compassion justice, chivalry, consideration for the feelings of others, and constant attention to what we are doing to the people around us'. [83] For

John Coats

Coats universal brotherhood is related to virtues and the expression of the same in our social lives and interactions.

Radha Burnier, the current international president of the Theosophical Society, refers to brotherhood as 'something profound and lasting. It is a truth which each has to understand and realize for himself. The great teachers of the world did not speak about the numerous problems with which men concern themselves in the world. They went to the fundamental questions, the knowledge by which all else is known.' [84]

Radha Burnier

According to Burnier brotherhood depends on self-realization derived from a deep comprehension of life. Burnier believes it is possible to relate universal brotherhood to the process of enlightenment, because such profound realization depends of a state of mind able to penetrate in the core of things. Such change depends entirely of an inner regeneration which that leads the individual to see the world and things in a different way. Thus she goes on saying:

> . . . But to realize universal brotherhood may be different from the worldly affections so commonly experienced. Universal brotherhood has a quality into which the feeling of "my" does not enter at all. To have a brotherly feeling towards all people irrespective of the external relationship which they have to us is a way of exploring brotherhood. (*Ibid*)

She emphasises that the sense of separateness created by the 'self' in relation to other 'selves' ceases to exist when someone reaches such self realization; and that the absence of such sense is the real universal brotherhood. Her approach is very similar to the one Sri Ram had; not so concerned about social affairs but focused on the regeneration and self-realization of the human being.

Each of the theoretical positions I have outlined makes an important contribution to our understanding of not only how the leaders of the Theosophical Society interpreted universal brotherhood; but also how those different positions influenced the outward expression and social impact of the Theosophical Society throughout its history. Each time a new leader assumed the direction of the Society, that leader's interpretation becomes the key-stone of their work, and as a consequence this was reflected in the focus and overall activities of the Theosophical Society.

In my view, we should consider the Theosophical Society as having different phases, under different leaderships, and these phases can be characterised as extroverted and introverted. The leaders associated with the periods of extraversion are: Blavatsky, Olcott, Judge, Annie Besant. They considered universal brotherhood as an idea that should be followed by practical attempts to influence social changes. Each one of them attempted to do so in different ways: Blavatsky through her writings; Olcott through philanthropic activities as well as structuring the Theosophical Society in such a way that could embrace people from any religious and social background; Annie Besant through her socio-political efforts. It is worth noting that it was during these periods of extraversion that the organisation had a stronger social impact, as well as produced a great number of books.

George Arundale and John Coats were both international Presidents of the Theosophical Society for a very short period of time, their overall influence may not have led to a substantial change in the organisation.

The leaders associated with periods of introversion of the Theosophical Society are: Jinarajadasa, Sri Ram and Radha Burnier. During these periods the work of the Theosophical Society gradually becomes more focused on self- realization: an inner psychological transformation. Although the inwardly-focused leaders were (and are) supporters of social work, the overall social impact of the Theosophical Society lessened under their direction; because spiritual life is emphasised and social cultural efforts are considered less relevant. One can certainly make too much of this distinction between intraversion and extraversion. And I am certainly not interested in making invidious discriminations in which extroverted organizations are somehow more effective or successful than introverted ones. Nevertheless, the contrast is, for me as a Society member very concerned with the improvement of society, a striking one.

TOLERANCE, TOLERATION
AND DIVERSITY

' . . . tolerance is not just agreeing with one another or remaining indifferent in the face of injustice, but rather showing respect for the essential humanity in every person.'

William Ury

A nother aspect of universal brotherhood, that I'd like to explore is its duality: the presence simultaneously of socio-political and cultural engagement and religious (theological) and esoteric universalisms. Whereas the former is concerned with practical ways-and-means and empirical realities, the latter is concerned with salvation, enlightenment and metaphysics. This duality never has been bridged very well, within esotericism, in my view, nor has it been bridged well in the world of the mundane. Day after day we see violence increasing, wars, genocides, dogmatism and so many other sorts of problems generating tremendous suffering for so many people around the world. It is no wonder that universal brotherhood is considered by many an unattainable utopia.

I personally believe that, universal brotherhood can become a practical reality, but only when socio-political and cultural systems are based on the principles of toleration. This is so because we share a world where everywhere we go there is immense diversity: diversity in people's thoughts and beliefs, in their principles and values, in their personal backgrounds and ethnic heritages.

Also, we should not wish that everything should be the same, equal. Uniformity of anything leads to the stifling of creativity, because creativity is and will always be fundamentally about the expression of diversity. Instead of assuming or promoting sameness, my feeling is that we should celebrate the wonderful

diversity that exists in the world, and the creativity that arises from it.

However, and unfortunately, most divisions and conflicts stem from the refusal to tolerate diversity. Ethnocentrism is based on the idea that a certain nation and its people is superior than others. Racism is based on biological reductionism: the idea that some people who belong to a certain racial group are inferior or superior to others. Genocide is the 'the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of an ethnic, racial, religious, or national group'. [85] Dogmatism with respect to beliefs and ideas generate divisions and conflicts, and is unfortunately a common phenomenon amongst esotericists. I've met many who think they have a special spiritual rank because they embraced a certain body of beliefs, and who actively exclude others who may think differently.

Martin Luther King. A Nobel peace prize winner, who worked extensively against racism in the USA.
credit: Wikipedia

Tolerance is a non-judgmental mental attitude which involves the acceptance of diversity of opinions. It could be defined as benevolence, impartiality, leniency towards those whose opinions, practices, religion may differ from one's own: an open and a non-dogmatic genuine interest in ideas as well as the capacity for endurance or patience. The spirit of tolerance is expressed in many religious texts, including the Christians' Corinthians (1 - 13): ' . . . Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres... And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the great-est of these is love.' That non judgmental attitude is expressed similarly in Luke (6:37 - 42):

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. *Luke* 6:37 - 42

Tolerance is a virtue, and its core is self-control; because it presupposes the ability to resist the impulse to react negatively towards what we may find unpleasant or disagree with. [86] As regard to social institutions, tolerance presupposes the existence of an authority, laws, social systems that have the power to deny or to disapprove something but exercises self constraint. It involves authorities who exercise their power in circumspect, neutral, objective and unbiased ways. [87] Authority is not limited to government but also extended to social groups, institutions and so forth. For example the Theosophical Society's leadership has the power to expel a member as well as the duty to guarantee that the principle of freedom of thought is respected within the organization.

An example of tolerance, which involves a socio-cultural attempt, I find striking is that of the Emperor Akbar (c. 1542 – 1605) who embraced the Sufi notion of *Sulh-e-Kul* (or Peace to All). He adopted a policy of inter-religious tolerance and respect. He also built the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship) which was a place where people from different religions background to discuss religious matters. He encouraged Atheists, Buddhists,

Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Parsi, Janists, secular philosophers and lay people to assembly together in order to discuss their positions. Such assemblies took place every Thursday evening, when Akbar could be also present to watch them. His attempt exemplifies toleration applied to social sphere: 'respect for autonomy; a general commitment to pacifism; concern for other virtues such as kindness and generosity; pedagogical concerns; a desire for reciprocity; and a sense of modesty about one's ability to judge the beliefs and actions of others'. [88]

The individual is not isolated from society. In fact, whatever an individual thinks he, is in great degree the effect of his social interactions and social life. So, to attempt to create socio cultural organisations based upon the principle of tolerance is perhaps the first step towards the practical realization of universal brotherhood.

THEOSOPHY, GLOBALISATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

Globalisation is a term often used to describe the broad set of fundamental changes resulting from the increase in international trade and cultural exchange. One of its results, we are told, is that people from different cultural backgrounds and traditions come together and exchange more than goods: they exchange ideas, values and beliefs. And all parts are changed by these exchanges. Some argue that globalisation affects the traditions deeply rooted in a nation in fundamental way, and results with homogenization or a global 'monoculture'. Others argue that it increases heterogeneity.

One government, one religion and one language are some of the ideas related to globalisation. This creates a sort of uniformity, which has never been the aim of the founders of the Theosophical Society, because in essence Theosophists have always been multiculturalists. Theosophists in the nineteenth century worked extensively to revive the ancient cultural traditions of their respective countries, not to replace local traditions with a new 'global' religion. Olcott while in Sri Lanka worked extensively to revive local Buddhist traditions. Annie Besant while in India worked extensively to promote the revival of the purest forms of Hinduism. G. R. S. Mead, who was living in the West, concentrated on Western esoteric currents such as Hermeticism, Hellenism and so forth. Anna Kingsford concentrated on Christianity. In Greece, Theosophists worked to revive ideas of the ancient Hellenic traditions. These few examples demonstrate that Theosophists of the nineteenth century valued the
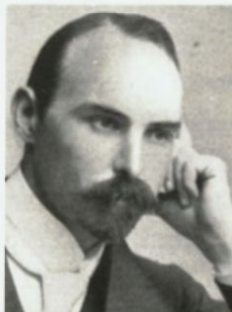
G. R. S. Mead

particular tradition of each country, and attempted to promote, their purest forms instead of replacing it with something new.

The work of Theosophists, during the nineteenth century, had as cornerstone the principle of multiculturalism with an all embracing tolerance. I think that is because they believed that, in order to understand what is common to all humanity, it is necessary to understand diversity. This was a major task for Blavatsky, who attempted to create a bridge between east and west: 'No previous civilization, has ever had the interest, the resources, or the inner need to hold the entire world in its intellectual embrace; to take the terrifying step, of renouncing, even blaspheming, its own religious tradition, in the quest for a more open and rational view . . . ' [89] But Blavatsky's apparent global perspective was not monocultural. It was a perspective that emphasized a deep knowledge of local diversities, underneath which one expected to find the ideas central to perennial philosophy.

Some Theosophists in the twentieth century have suggested that Theosophy will be the future religion of humanity. This is not only because Blavatsky associates with Theosophy the term Wisdom-Religion, but also because the *Mahachohan* says 'The Theosophical Society was chosen as the corner-stone, the foundation of the future religions of humanity'. [90]

His statement, however, has been misunderstood by many Theosophists, who think that the esoteric philosophy as exposed by Blavatsky, will become the future institutionalised religion of humanity. The Wisdom Religion is not one single and uniform system of beliefs. It is the universalisation of tolerance which may lead to peaceful and harmonic co-existence amongst nations and diverse traditions. The practical promotion of the first object of the Theosophical Society could gradually bring about socio-cultural tolerance, respect and peaceful co-existence amongst different traditions. The Mahachohan also says:

The doctrine we promulgate being the only true one, must, supported by such evidence as we are preparing to give become ultimately triumphant as every other truth.

Yet it is absolutely necessary to inculcate it gradually, enforcing its theories, unimpeachable facts for those who know, with direct inferences deduced from and corroborated by the evidence furnished by modern exact science. That is the reason why Colonel H. S. O., who works but to revive Buddhism, may be regarded as one who labours in the true path of theosophy, far more than any other man who chooses as his goal the gratification of his own ardent aspirations for occult knowledge. Buddhism, stripped of its superstitions, is eternal truth, and he who strives for the latter is striving for Theos-Sophia, Divine Wisdom, which is a synonym of truth *(Ibid)*.

When he says that the doctrine 'we' promulgate is the only true one, it gives the impression of a dogmatic statement. However, whilst carefully analysing his letter it is possible to see the doctrine he refers to is universalism instead of personalism. To illustrate the aforementioned, it is perhaps relevant to mention that both Pythagoras and Plato 'distinguishes between the individual and the universal, and thereby understands the individual through the universal. The individual Socrates participates in the universal, "human being." To understand the particular Socrates, first know the universal, then one can understand and account for the particular'. [91]

The universalism preached by the Mahachohan is evidenced when he stresses that the idea of self-illumination is selfish and that 'the self-sacrificing pursuit of the best means to lead on the right path our neighbour, to cause as many of our fellow-creatures as we possibly can to benefit by it, which constitutes the true theosophist'. [92] His doctrine includes the following points:

1. To demonstrate that religious traditions stripped out of superstition contains eternal truths.

2. To promote ideas that may practically react on moral codes such as truthfulness, purity, self-denial, charity and self-sacrifice.

3. To attempt to lead our neighbour to the right path (the one of virtues, tolerance and non-dogmatism) and to try to help as many people as possible.

The Mahachohan also says that the Theosophical Society was chosen as the cornerstone of the foundation of the future religions of humanity, because it is supposed to practise its first object 'universal brotherhood' through the promotion of ideas of benevolence and tolerance, to promote fellowship amongst nations especially the poorest ones which are often neglected, 'The white race must be the first to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the dark nations . . . ' [93] He implies that Theosophists cannot ignore such problems for the sake of personal psychological changes or self-illumination, but instead constantly to promote benevolence, philanthropy and social reforms. [94] And he defines Theosophists as those who are free from dogmatism, free from psychological dependence on 'salaried priests,' free from anthropomorphic conceptions as well as free from the idea of a personal God (which he considers harmful).

In addition to that he emphasises that the true religion or philosophy must be able to offer [practical] solution for every problem [95] saying 'That the world is in such a bad condition, morally, is a conclusive evidence that none of its religions and philosophies, those of the civilized races less than any other, has ever possessed the truth'. [96] The future religions he refers to are not those that ignore society and other human beings for the sake of transcendental ideals or for the promotion of personalism which concentrates entirely on self-illumination, but those that are based on universalism: the idea that the individual can be known through the universal.

The philosopher Josiah Royce (1855 – 1916) claims that 'our social experiences are our principal source of religious insight. And the salvation that this insight brings to our knowledge is salvation through the fostering of human brotherhood. Such salvation accrues to the individual so far as he gives himself over to the service of man, and to mankind in so far as men can only be saved together and not separately.' [97] Universal brotherhood implies

Josiah Royce
credit: Wikipedia

an all embracing universalism, where the individual is understood through the universal. That means neither the world nor society is neglected. So, universal brotherhood means that enlightenment, spiritual awareness, and regeneration involve social interactions as well as practical attempts to improve and reform the social environment.

Those who promote universal brotherhood do not neglect society or the world for the sake of personal progress; but realize that the path to self awareness passes through the world, rather than around or above. Any idea that emphasizes self-realization at the expense of social engagement is not, in my opinion, in harmony with the concept of universal brotherhood, and I believe that many the leaders of the Theosophical Society have embraced just such a universalism. This is especially true in the ethics outlined by H. P. Blavatsky, which included: a) duty such as labour for the well being of all; help the poor underprivileged; minorities and so forth. b) self sacrifice; charity. [98]

CONCLUSION

The world has many socio-politico and cultural problems. We are members of an organization that upholds universal brotherhood as the key objective of our Society. It could be that we think being insular and disengaged from the complexities of the world is the best way to achieve the personal transcendence, we think is either the centre of universal brotherhood, or the precondition for universal brotherhood. I don't think that will work. The personal arises from the social; I see that as an established fact. If we want to make a difference and play a meaningful role in making the world a better place, then we should return to the words of (some of) our founders and leaders, and re-orient ourselves: become extro-verted, comprehend that universal brotherhood involves an all embracing universalism, and a direct, engaged concern to the world in which we live.

I've been hearing many years now the praising of the divine, it is easy and comforting to think of heavenly things, to close our eyes and long to a union with the divine and with the transcendental. But where is the praise of humanity for other human beings? Let us sup-port each other, and as Kazantzakis says: 'Let us hold each other tightly, let us merge our hearts, let us create - so long as the warmth of this earth endures, so long as no earth-quakes, cataclysms, icebergs or comets come to destroy us - let us create for Earth a brain and a heart, let us give a human meaning to the superhuman struggle.' (Kazantzakis).

Nikos Kazantzakis
Greek philosopher and writer: famous for the novel, *Zorba the Greek*.
credit Wikipedia

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ERICA GEORGIADES

Erica Georgiades has been a member of the Theosophical Society for 20 years. She was first attached to the Brazilian Section, where she was (at a very young age) the Vice-President of Brazil's largest lodge and co-ordinator of the Theosophical Order of Service in the city of Sao Paulo. She moved to India, in 1994 where she worked on a voluntary basis - for two years – on international archives for the Headquarters of the Theosophical Society at Adyar. She is now affiliated to the Greek Section of the Theosophical Society. For six years she was a member of the national council and she is the President founder of the Theosophical Stoa (lodge) Hypatia.

Erica is the chief editor of the Greek magazine, *Hypatia*, founded in 2010. In 2006, together with a colleague she compiled the book, *H. P. Blavatsky on Yoga and Occultism,* which was published by the Theosophical Publishing House in Greece. She has been studying Hellenic philosophy and mythology extensively for many years, and is currently finalizing a book about the Hellenic Muses. Recently she wrote a paper about *H. P. Blavatsky and the Shipwreck of S. S. Eunomia* and is at present conducting research on Agardi Metrovich and H. P. Blavatsky. She is enrolled on a BA honours course in Social Psychology and Philosophy at the Open University in the United Kingdom. Erica has organised many theosophical conferences in Greece, including one recently on a theme of *Esoteric Tradition in the Ancient and Modern World,* which counted as participants prominent scholars and researchers dedicated to the study of the Western Esoteric Tradition as well as Eastern religions and philosophy.

Erica speaks four languages and has travelled extensively around the world and lectured in many countries. She lives in Greece with her husband, George Georgiadis.

FOOTNOTES

[1] McDonough, 2010
[2] Moore, 2008
[3] Ibid
[4] More, 2008
[5] Ibid
[6] Romanov, 2005
[7] Baldry, 1965, p.9
[8] Ibid, p.10
[9] Ibid, p.11
[10] Ibid, p.13
[11] Ibid, p.12
[12] Ibid, p.16
[13] Ibid, p.18
[14] Ibid, p.4
[15] Ibid, p.22
[16] Price, 1999
[17] Herodotus, cited in Baldry, pg.21
[18] Huxley, 1947, p.2
[19] Schmitt, 1966
[20] Cicero, p. 22
[21] Fotiades, 1945, pp. 59 - 64.
[22] Ibid
[23] Ibid
[24] Ibid
[25] Ibid
[26] Ibid
[27] Turner, 1911
[28] Fotiades, 1945, pp. 59 - 64
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid
[31] Ibid
[32] Woodhouse, 1986 p.156.
[33] Ibid

[34] Plethon, pp.90 - 94
[35] Ibid pp.99, 100
[36] Ibid
[37] Ibid, p.107
[38] Blavatsky, 1877, v. I, p.vii
[39] Blavatsky, 1877, v. II, p.216
[40] Ibid, p.212
[41] Blavatsky, 1890, *Neo-Buddhism*
[42] Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, preface, viii
[43] Blavatsky, 1889, *The Key to Theosophy*, Section 1
[44] Jinarajadasa,1925, p. 23
[45] Jinarajadasa,1925,p. 25
[46] de Zirkoff, in *H. P. B. Collected Writings*, 1874 - 1878: vol.1 p.193
[47] *H. P. B. Collected Writings*, 1874 - 1878: vol.1, p.193
[48] Reproduced in Jinarajadasa, 1925, p.29
[49] Jinarajadasa, 1925, p.28
[50] Ibid, p.27
[51] Ibid, p.26
[52] Ibid
[53] Ibid
[54] Ibid, p.26
[55] Jinarajadasa, 1925, p.245
[56] H. P. B., 1890
[57] Ibid
[58] Ibid
[59] Ibid
[60] Ibid
[61] Ibid
[62] H. P. B. 1889, Section 12
[63] Ibid, 2
[64] Ibid
[65] Olcott, 1889
[66] Ibid
[67] Olcott, 1880

[68] Olcott, 1880
[69] Ibid
[70] H. P. B., 1879
[71] Ibid
[72] Olcott, 1882
[73] Ibid
[74] Judge, 1893
[75] Ibid
[76] Judge, 1893
[77] Annie Besant, 1912, *The Ideals of Theosophy* p.17
[78] Besant, 1912, *Popular Lectures on Theosophy*, p.7
[79] Jinarajadasa cited in Chaure, 1952, p.273
[80] Sri Ram, 1967
[81] Ibid
[82] Ibid
[83] Coats, 1974
[84] Burnier,1968
[85] Funk, 2010
[86] Ibid
[87] Fiala, 2004
[88] Ibid
[89] Godwin, 1994
[90] Mahachohan, 1896
[91] Buford, 2011
[92] Mahachohan, 1896
[93] Ibid
[94] Ibid
[95] Ibid
[96] Ibid
[97] Royce, 1912, p.58
[98] Hejka-Ekins, 2012

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