

Imagining Macrohistory? Madame Blavatsky from *Isis Unveiled* (1877) to *The Secret Doctrine* (1888)

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In Memoriam: Alfred John Cooper¹

Introduction

The term ‘macrohistory’ denotes the envisaging and representation of the human past as a vast panorama, great movements of human activity held ‘in the mind’s eye’ or in a unitary vision. When such broad encompassments also incorporate the pre-human past and even the possible future of everything, then one may refer to cosmological macrohistory (or ‘cosmo-history’), or, if the atmosphere of a *mythos* is strong, to a mythological macrohistory. Many will suspect that mental acts of encapsulation entailed in ‘doing macrohistory’ are inevitably unreliable and methodologically inadmissible because the myriad facts to be embraced, both known and unknown, could never be accounted for in any one synoptic view. Certainly the macrohistorical visionary will have to resort to a picturing or imaging through some kind of model, paradigm or diagrammatic procedure, and in almost all cases, a species of *meta*-history (of a conceptual ‘framing’ superimposed on data) will result. In the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic-Marxist trajectory of thought, four primary ‘idea-frames’ of macrohistory have stood out. These are, first, *progress*, or the idea that past events show an overall improvement of things; second and contrarily, *regress*, the outlook that affairs have steadily worsened; third, *recurrence*, the apprehension that everything is basically repetitive (if not cyclical); and lastly, the view that nothing can be fully understood without a sense of an utterly final consummation, an *eschaton* (end) or *apokatastasis* (restoration of all things) or millennial ‘showdown’, as against some limited *telos*. Of course these basic scaffolds – progress, regress, recurrence and ‘apocalyptic’ – can be adjusted to

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accommodate each other; hence the spiral (or a cycling up, or down, or up-and-down in succession); or the construing of a depreciating world as a monotonous story of venalities; or an announcing that the *Endzeit* fulfils the meaning of prior ages or dispensations; or a positing of successive worlds, each cosmos separated by an enormous eschatological-looking catastrophe; and so forth.²

What actually are these conceptual frameworks? Have they a legitimate place in thought or must they remain forever suspect? Are they fully grounded in social realities or are they unwarrantable extrapolations, always bordering on fiction? In this small space, of course, we make no pretence to resolve all the relevant thorny philosophical problems. Suffice it to say that it is useful to distinguish ‘more critical’ from ‘more speculative’ macrohistory to comprehend what will be argued in this article about the remarkable envisagements of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. By ‘critical’ we refer to contemporary exercises in ‘doing big history’ (long-term trends, massive developmental shifts, specific continuities in the past over *la longue durée*, and so on) as distinct from standard empirical work on topics or periods, or micro-study. In the English-speaking world, renowned critical macrohistorians include Edward Gibbon (covering around thirteen-hundred years of Eurasian affairs in rich detail) and Arnold Toynbee (world history in twelve volumes), albeit two scholars with highly contrasting views on life.³ By ‘more speculative macrohistory’ we mean those taking in both conjectures about the pre-recorded past and futurological projections, particularly those evoking non-standard models of explanation or transformation (with unusual theories of consciousness change, ‘lost’ civilizations, planetary collisions, extra-terrestrial visitations, etc. and with eschatologies radically departing from traditional

² Garry W. Trompf, ‘The Future of Macro-historical Ideas’, *Soundings*, vol. 62, no. 1 (1979), pp. 70-89 and ‘Macrohistory and Acculturation: Between Myth and History in Modern Melanesian Adjustments and Ancient Gnosticism’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1989), pp. 621-648; cf. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

³ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London: A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776-1788); Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933-1961); cf. Johan Galtung and Sohail Inayatullah (eds), *Macrohistory and Macrohistorians* (New York: Praeger, 1997) for current critical macrohistory.

pictures).⁴ In all (re-)constructions of the past, appeals to highly general concepts are inevitable and necessary, for even very specific clusters of events will require placement in a wider scheme of things. These concepts, such as those conveying long-term amelioration or decline, or great spatial developments like colonization and empire, or socio-political transformations calling for description as ‘rise and fall,’ revolution, reform or some type of cultural adjustment, are handy ‘colligations’ in the historian’s toolkit. The appropriateness of their uses in critical history is meant to depend on the researched ‘facts’ themselves, though of course many colligations are ‘received collective knowledge’ for anyone to cite as an *exemplum* whenever apt (‘look what happened in the French Revolution’) or make quick intelligibility of innumerable details that very few have time to investigate.⁵ The danger in colligatory thinking is that bundles of social phenomena (especially civilizations, religions, nations, movements, and so on) become reified in discourse, as if they ‘act independently’ when ‘on the ground’ only humans can be decisively ‘purposive agents.’⁶ Once colligatory impressions of past developments become *idées fixes*, moreover, another danger will lie in their possible prejudicial discursive manipulation (for example, ‘all oriental regimes have been despotic and soon become decadent’)⁷ or their bolstering of speculation loosened from critical restraints.

Now, the deployment of colligations, including such paradigms as progress, regress, recurrence and ‘apocalyptic’ we first discussed, naturally involve the use of imagination. The imagination is stock-in-trade for thinking and doing history: without time machines, as researchers constantly piece together evidence they are forever required to imagine what might have or is most likely to have happened, and they often have to bridge the gap between their own times and the past as a “foreign country,” or so engage

⁴ Start with Garry W. Trompf and Lauren Bernauer, ‘Producing Lost Civilizations’, in *Handbook of New Religions and Cultural Production*, eds Carole M. Cusack and Alex Norman (Leiden: Brill, 2012) [forthcoming].

⁵ William Walsh, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (London: Hutchinson, 1958 [1951]), pp. 59-64.

⁶ Robin Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), pp. 285-295; Garry W. Trompf, ‘Of Colligation and Reification in the Representation of Religion and Violence’, in *Ecumenics from the Rim: Explorations in Honour of John D’Arcy May*, eds John O’Grady and Peter Scherle (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. 179-184.

⁷ See Karl Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1957); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003 [1978]).

empathetically with authors of texts and key actors of history that they even try to imagine being someone else.⁸ Debates surround the question of whether the uses of imagination in historical study inevitably make historiography as literature a partly ‘fictive’ exercise, and with the challenge of post-modernity came all sorts of ‘deconstructive’ analysis based on suspicions that culturo-centric *Weltanschauungen* and special pleading for prevailing powers or resistant activity infected most ‘historical reconstructions.’⁹ A difficult question exists as to whether history writing, if it is to get beyond chronicling, depends on interpretative “emplotment,” as Hayden White calls it (that is, a ploys parallel to literary plots), or on something more special like intuiting “a contour” ort “pattern” of events, as I myself have it (in preserving the long-inured difference between licensed enquiry and unlicensed creativity).¹⁰ For heuristic purposes, a distinction is usefully made (one going back to the brilliant Giambattista Vico) between two types of imagination (in Vichian terminology *fantasia*). One is constrained by the facts (Vico’s *verum factum* principle), the other is promiscuously creative (at base ‘poetic’) and cannot be made subject to the same kind of regulations and criticisms of the former unless it pretends to represent reality in an inappropriate (let us say ‘literal’) way.¹¹ By this method of discrimination one may honour ‘the imaginal’ as

⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956 [1946]), pp. 282-302.

⁹ For guidance, Georg Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1997); cf. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980); Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2006); Werner Paravicini, *Die Wahrheit der Historiker* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2010).

¹⁰ White, ‘Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth’, and the response to White’s position by Saul Friedlander, ‘Probing the Limits of Representation’, both in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1997); Garry W. Trompf, *The Idea of Historical Recurrence in Western Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), vol. 1, pp. 2-3; Garry W. Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retribution* (London: Continuum, 2000), chapter 1.

¹¹ For guidance, Garry W. Trompf, ‘Vico’s Universe: “*La Provvedenza*” and “*la Poesia*” in the New Science of Giambattista Vico’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 2 (1994), pp. 55-86, cf. Donald Verene, *Vico’s Science of Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) (with caution).

whole realm of human experience, but reserve the right to depreciate fantastical history for betraying the facts (as well as the right to discern the falsely or vainly ‘imaginary’ in religion when it is presumed to give a worthy description of the divine).¹² On this basis, colligatory concepts as such receive a respectability for being necessary components of the historical imagination, but they will obviously be subject to adverse reaction if their application does not square with known evens or if ‘fantasy’ seems to overtake ‘veracity.’

Theosophical Macrohistory

In their reflections on time, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and other leading protagonists for the Theosophical movement applied all four basic contours or schemata of macrohistory (progress, regress, repetition and teleology), and it is the concern of this piece to see what she (more particularly) makes of them.¹³ It is crucial that Blavatsky locates her treatment of these frames within ‘speculation’ that is occult or esoteric. Now, ‘esoteric macrohistory’ is itself a discernible manner of reflection upon the whole human past, conceiving temporal processes as the unfolding descent of all Creation from the Divine, eventuating in the materialization of humanity, and culminating in the re-ascent of purified souls back up to their true home. This we have described as a ‘cosmic U-curve,’ because, although it is ideally a circling from God to God, the process is broken by the contingencies of time, including the power of evil to block the accomplishment of return. In antiquity this paradigm is famously reflected in the Gnostic *mythos*, according to which the hierarchies of beings (aeons) issue from the One, lessen in power as descended emanations and give rise to matter, which is typically taken as lowly and marred, with humans (as sparks of the divine) being trapped in its conditions and in need of liberation. The Hermetic treatises conform to this general model. In subsequent adaptations of emanationism and ‘mystical recovery’ within the great monotheistic traditions, the approach to matter was contrastingly positive (“good,” as with Jewish Kabbalism, responding to *Genesis* 1: 10-31), and Creation and ‘body’ were taken as *necessarily* materializing. In early modern Christian Theosophy, famously in Jacob Boehme’s expositions, the universe unfolds within and through the divine, and Creation follows fore-ordained stages that, once consummated in Adam and Eve (and affected by their Fall), already involves a universal yearning to return

¹² See also Henri Corbin, ‘*Mundus Imaginalis* au l’imaginaire et l’imaginal’, *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme*, vol. 6 (1964), pp. 3-26.

¹³ The next eleven paragraphs form an expanded version of the first part of my article ‘Theosophical Macrohistory’, in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, eds. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden: Brill, 2012), [forthcoming].

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to the womb of all. This envisioning stimulated scientific ideas about evolutionary processes in nature (thus Charles Bonnet), and about the development of the mind/spirit from the pre-conscious to *Selbstbewusstsein* and eventually back to the Absolute in the history of consciousness (thus Hegel). Before the Theosophical Society formed, the descent and return paradigm still endured (more particularly through Carl von Eckhartshausen, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin and Pierre-Simon Ballanche) along with older yet related frames. Two among the older ones were, first, the postulate of a *prisca theologia*, with essentially the same extra-biblical truths allegedly being transmitted along a 'chain' of ancient sages from Noah, Hermes, Zoroaster on to Pythagoras and Plato (an idea popular from Renaissance times); and, second, the tripartite division of history into the stages of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the last stage presaging the spiritualization and de-institutionalization of religion (a vision circulated by enthusiasts for Gioacchino de Fiore's theology from the thirteenth century onwards).¹⁴

To contextualize the impressive macrohistorical ideas of Madame Blavatsky, who co-founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, we should ponder the conflicting European interpretations about the course of time and the past in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. By then Darwinian evolutionism (and its requirement of 'natural selection') widened in its appeal, and in terms of *historical* interpretation, the pressure was on to accept developments in human affairs as self-generating processes without need of direct divine intervention. Humanity slowly crept out of 'ape-conditions' and lived in pitiful stone-age savagery for many thousands of years before civilizations arose. Forms of (ideological) *materialism* understandably emerged in positive response to this evolutionist outlook, including historical materialism, which read social changes as altered economic circumstances, from grim vulnerability to harsh environments, through barbarian confederacies to urban life (thus Marx and Engels, using Lewis Morgan), and there was also a defence of matter as intrinsically capable of producing its own evolutionary possibilities (Ernst von Haeckel).¹⁵ Negative reactions to these naturalisms, however, were hardly in short supply, most typically as conservative reassertions of biblical truths – of direct divine Creation and an idyllic Eden. Special compromises were attempted by intellectuals to resolve

¹⁴ Garry W. Trompf, 'Macrohistory', in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, eds Wouter Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), vol. 2, pp. 701-17, and *The Idea of Historical Recurrence*, vol. 1, chapters 1, 3; vol. 2, chapters 6-9.

¹⁵ For preliminary guidance, Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man, and Reason: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, chapters 2-7, 11.

the tension. Biologist Alfred Wallace, for instance, acclaimedly the first enunciator of natural selection, precluded 'Man' from evolution (and as a Spiritualist projected a great cycle from an original homogeneous race to our future as a 'higher' homogeneous one). Eminent philologist and founder of comparative religion Max Müller was as happy as Wallace to accept pre-human evolution, but could not bring himself to believe that the complexities of human language arose from the grunts and growls of the animal kingdom; while the compromise of health reformer Florence Nightingale lay in her efforts towards a "process theology."¹⁶ Among wider groups of literate Europeans, accepting that traditional biblicism no longer worked did not usually lead them into liberal ('higher critical') hermeneutics, for that required much mental effort. Strands of 'new thought,' including popularized Blavatskyite Theosophy, that offered access to ancient esoteric, often Eastern wisdom (and its psychic powers), gained in influence and attractiveness during the last quarter of the century. In one very general sense those championing this line of thought reacted against the prevailing naturalism of evolutionary scientists for the same reasons 'old-fashioned' defenders of the Bible did. They sensed in bald evolutionism a terrible de-spiritualization of life, granting legitimacy to materialistic attitudes when people's over-preoccupation with 'things' was swamping concerns for the 'spirit.' They thus offered solutions and new prospects (even of a new kind of progress) to forestall such disturbing tendencies, and wanted to present their positions scientifically on the one hand and as replacement of ecclesial externalities and moribund dogma on the other.¹⁷

The Theosophical general vision of history, as first fleshed out to impressive proportions by Blavatsky in the mid-1870s, was primarily intended to stem the tide of "latter-day Materialism," countering those "materialistic Scientists" who hoodwink the public into utter subservience towards their "many illogical theories," as if the evolved universe had no "intelligent Powers and Forces" and no "ideal plan" behind its "infinite and eternal *Energy*." She sensed that the new "archaeologists [were] trying to dwarf antiquity, and seek

¹⁶ See Andrew Woodfield, 'Darwin, Teleology and Taxonomy', *Philosophy*, vol. 48, no. 183 (1973), pp. 35-49; Garry W. Trompf, *Friedrich Max Mueller as a Theorist of Comparative Religion* (Bombay: Shakuntala, 1978), pp. 58-63; Valerie Webb, *Florence Nightingale: The Making of a Radical Theologian* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2002), pp. 237-246, 335-336.

¹⁷ See for example, Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), esp. chapter 15; James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen (eds), *Controversial New Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 224-230.

to destroy every claim to ancient Wisdom,” which included the insight in old religious texts that all the gods and heroes were our ‘true’ forebears, not any of the primates.¹⁸ Apparently Blavatsky’s first inclinations had been to find the foil to a flatly progressive and unilinear “evolution” in eternal Egypt. Wavering over Spiritualism in Cairo, by 1872 she was a member of “a secret Lodge in the East” (the Brotherhood of Luxor) that would transform into the TS in 1875.¹⁹ In Egypt’s acclaimed escape from the Flood (see Plato’s *Timaeus* 22-26) and Hermes/Thoth as most ancient sage (who, in thousands of books written before the pyramids, imparted knowledge from “the darkest ages”), Blavatsky would find the ideas that high civilizations (such as Atlantis) preceded ours and that our world resulted from prior emanations in declivity from the divine. The vision of significant stages of emanation descending from the divine towards earth and the possibility of our mystical ascent, or her version of the great cosmic U-curve, was to remain fundamental for her. In this she believed she was purveying essentially the same esoteric insights of the (Chaldaean-‘originated’) Kabbalah, the Apocalypse, the ‘Nazarenes’, Pythagoras, the Druzes, and so on, transmitted in a long ‘chain’ with later links in Boehme’s Christian Theosophy and Giordano Bruno’s neo-Pythagoreanism. She worked on the premise that this teaching – this “hidden wisdom” or “secret doctrine” – had the same source, and that Hermes Trismegistus, Enoch and Abraham were even same person, her agenda vouchsafed by a personal revelation of “century after century, ... epochs and dates” during a sickness in 1875.²⁰

On the other hand, all the literature that most affected her during the 1870s had placed the origins of wisdom of the great religions in India of “the Mystic East,” not the Middle East. That reflected the ongoing effects of the

¹⁸ H.P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York: J.W. Bouton, 1877), vol. 1, pp. 279, 281, 676, vol. 2, pp. 311-315.

¹⁹ ‘Letters’, in *Collected Writings* [vol. 15], ed. John Algeo (Wheaton: Quest, 2003), vol. 1, no. 59 (1875); Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, pp. 308-309; cf. Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chanel and John Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995).

²⁰ ‘Letters’, 59 (p. 205); and see *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 9, 93-98, 406-407, 572, cf. pp. 13-17, 532, vol. 2, pp. 38, 91, 131-132, 236 (first quotations), 311-313, 382, 495, cf. also ‘Letters’, no. 121 (p. 447); and on the vision(s), Mary Neff, *Personal Memoirs of H.P. Blavatsky* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1967 [1937]), p. 279 (also on Isis speaking).

“oriental renaissance” from the heyday of Romanticism.²¹ Thus Freemason and antiquarian Godfrey Higgins, for example, had taken Hermes, Enoch, Abraham to be the same as Brahma and as the one font of all Truth, developing the macrohistorical argument that all religions derived from a “universal” one in India, and that all mythologies and ethnocentric narrations have simply corrupted the pristine original, even though lineaments of it reached the West (by ‘Hermes’ to Egypt, and as far as Britain with the earliest Druids).²² Hargrave Jennings, who made much of his own Rosicrucian views as a “Theosophy” and as tapping into mysteriously ancient emanationism, was caught between the Eastern and Middle Eastern *fontes* of wisdom. If in 1858 he considered the Buddhism of India to be primordial among the religions, in later decades the “Hermetic mystery” of Egypt attracted him and he supposed that all the answers to questions about an original wisdom (the “Kabala”) had been borne in Noah’s ark.²³ French civil servant in India, Louis Jacolliot, whose researches in all directions anticipated Blavatsky’s diffusiveness and from whom she quietly plagiarized at least fifty-nine passages, was insistent that all *les sciences occultes* were Indian in origin. It was the Aryans, Jacolliot deduced, indeed the first Brahmins, who initiated “most things sacred to the West, including Christianity and Kabbalah,” even if both perverted the teaching of the Pitris, a celestial ‘ancestral’ Brotherhood of “natural directors.”²⁴ Blavatsky came to hold that she could “trace every or nearly every

²¹ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘The Mystic East’* (London: Routledge, 1999), esp. chapters 5-7; cf. John Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997).

²² Godfrey Higgins, *Anacalypsis: An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis or, An Inquiry into the Origins of Languages, Nations and Religions* (London: Longman, Rees, 1836) (influencing Blavatsky’s own title); and see ‘Letters’, 57, 59 (pp. 197, 205); cf. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 32-33, 347.

²³ Hargrave Jennings, *The Indian Religions, or, Results of the Mysterious Buddhism* (London: George Redway, 1958 [1890]), and *The Rosicrucians: Their Rites and Mysteries* (London: Nimmo, 1887 [1870]), vol. 1, chapter 25, p. 277; vol. 2, p. 199, and chapters 17, 23; cf. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 35, 258, 423.

²⁴ Louis Jacolliot, *Occult Science in India and Among the Ancients*, trans. Willard Felt (New York: John Lovell, 1884[1875]), p. 128; cf. Henry Steel Olcott, *Old Diary Leaves: The True Story of the Theosophical Society* (New York: G.P. Putman’s Sons, 1895), p. 207 (on Blavatsky’s “great use” of Jacolliot’s “twenty-seven volumes”); James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1976), p. 306 (plagiarism); cf. *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. xvii; vol. 2, pp. 38-39, 106-107, 308, n. [1], etc.), and see below with ns. 58, 85.

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ancient religion to India,²⁵ so that her central paradigm of ‘creation,’ cosmic process and of all human history was going to have an obvious Indian derivation – in the form of *kalpa* theory. This was a theory useful to her for circumventing traditional Biblical authority and trumping secular evolutionism at the same time, since her paradigm was more cyclical than progressive. Indian cosmogony conveyed a sense of immense time-depth against which not only a ‘recent’ six-day creationism looked utterly simplistic, but the Darwinians’ reckoning of the “palaeolithic” period as “240,000 years” back also rather tame.²⁶ And if, along with other marginal ‘spiritualizing groups,’ her model was always meant to convey eternal spiritual truth (stemming “the loss of religion” within “the gulf of materialism,” as Jennings had put it, where “men’s thoughts ... are all too much of this world”), she insisted that the Rosicrucians, Masons, Swedenborgians and Spiritualists before her were too limited in their outlooks to encompass the true Magic and arcane Wisdom as a “science” of Nature.²⁷ When the Theosophical Society’s headquarters were later transferred to Adyar, India in 1883, the move showed a collective desire for closeness to the final Source of her expanded cosmic vision.

In Blavatsky’s first great work *Isis Unveiled* (1877), Indian *kalpa* theory stands as a mere preface. For its fulsome form, with the enormous *kalpa* of 4,320 million years, divided into *manvantaras* and further into *yugas*, Blavatsky was reliant on Higgins and mythologist Charles Coleman,²⁸ but she was content to say that the present *kali yuga* (age of Kali) in which we suffer is not even halfway along “the time allotted to the world,” and that both the Aegypto-Hermetic great “secret period” of *nero* and the Chaldaean astrological *sar* derived from Indian *kalpa*. Of greater interest to her, it appears, were ancient notions (again mediated by Higgins) that the earth shifts its axis and

²⁵ *Letters*, no. 71 (1876) (p. 266); thus in *Isis Unveiled* Luxor now becomes ‘Looksur’, Baluchistan (vol. 2, p. 308 and n. [1]) and Chaldaean Kabbalism now derives from *Manu* (in Jacolliot, vol. 2, 266ff.).

²⁶ Sir John Lubbock, *Pre-Historic Times* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1890 [1865]), p. 412.

²⁷ Jennings, *Indian Religions*, p. 99; Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, pp. 587-588; cf. vol. 1, pp. 57, 83, 258-261, 306; vol. 2, 375-380.

²⁸ Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 31-32, and p. 32, n [2], 586; Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, pp. 175-180; Charles Coleman, *The Mythology of the Hindus* (London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1832), pp. 384, 388. *Yuga* theory (*krta* to *kali*) was early popularized in the West by Friedrich Majer, who also claimed Hermes and Plato drew on India; esp. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Discovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, trans. Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 58.

destroys civilizations; and in affirming that the “division of the history of mankind into Golden, Silver, Copper and Iron Ages, is not a fiction,” without suggesting how these ages might relate to the *yugas*.²⁹ In fact at this early point in *Isis*, Blavatsky provides us with one of the more impressive statements of historical recurrence in Western thought; that

[t]he revolution of the physical world, according to ancient doctrine, is attended by a like revolution in the world of intellect – the spiritual evolution of the world proceeding in cycles, like the physical one ... Thus we see in history a regular alternation of ebb and flow in the tide of human progress. The great kingdoms of the world, after reaching the culmination of their greatness, descend again, in accordance with the same law by which they ascended; till, having reached the lowest point, humanity reasserts itself, and mounts up ... by this law of ascending progression by cycles.³⁰

Apart from conveying the correspondence between greater/higher and lesser/lower processes (or macrocosm and microcosm), however, it is precisely *not* this general picture of history that Blavatsky designs to fill out with factual details (like a Hegel or Ernst von Lasaulx). Despite her occasional references to great dynasts and past influential figures, her overwhelming concentration is on the paths of religions and how the history of them is not what it has normally been made out to be. First, the chronology of religious figures and spiritual developments are not the normally accepted ones, and Blavatsky is at constant war against those who get the interpretations wrong. The Indian origin of Truth always has to be defended, to the point that true “Christism” is found way in advance (as in the Buddha); and a ‘neo-Euhemeristic hermeneutics’ is applied whereby various ancient gods and mythic figures turn out to be wise (and later divinized) teachers who had access to pristine gnosis in former ages. The destiny of the world is apparently in the hands of esoteric societies – members of Pythagorean, Eleusinian, Bacchic and Isean mysteries, the Essenes, Gnostics, Magi, Kabbalists, theurgic Neo-Platonists, Druzes, Lamaists, Hermetic Brothers of Egypt, the Brotherhood of Luxor, let alone Brahman Hindus (“from whom they were all derived”) – whose initiations imparted tightly held ancient secrets, whose “memory is still preserved in India,” and who all make up a “Secret Association” that “is still alive and

²⁹ *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 30-35 (using Censorinus and Seneca as named sources; and using Higgins, *Anacalypsis*, p. 183 without acknowledgement). cf. ‘Ancient Doctrines Vindicated by Modern Prophecy’, *Theosophist* (May 1881), in *Ancient Science, Doctrines and Beliefs* (*Theosophy Suppl.*) (Los Angeles: Theosophical Co., n.d.), p. 46.

³⁰ *Isis Unveiled*, p. 34; cf. p. 294.

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active as ever ... throughout the world” to preserve the very wisdom Theosophy now imparts.³¹ So it is that, for Blavatsky,

[a]ll the giants in the history of mankind, like Buddha-Siddârtha, and Jesus, in the realm of the spiritual, and Alexander the Macedonian and Napoleon the Great, in the realm of physical conquests, were but reflexed images of human types which had existed ten thousand years ago... reproduced by the mysterious powers controlling the destinies of our world... [from] antediluvian ages.³²

When it comes to the external changes of history, expectedly, it is the general framework of cyclicity that appeals to Blavatsky; hence the alacrity with which she reviewed the thesis by the German statistician Ernst Sasse (in 1880) that there were historical waves passing from parts of the East to the West every thousand years from 1750 BCE to 1250 CE, and modern wars in the West every thirty years. That both bespoke astrological influences in our more recent stage of history, and long-term cosmic patterns.³³ One of her fundamental (Platonic and contradictory-looking) tenets, though, was that whatever is oldest is best, and must come from some far-distant, higher source, so that all the astounding knowledge of mathematical and architectural principles (as with the pyramids), of sympathetic relationships within the cosmos (in Vedic and Chaldaean teaching, and so on) signposted a wonderful time past when “science went hand in hand with religion.”³⁴ This meant that, up to our own time at least, a general psychic deterioration had been going on

³¹ E.g., *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, chapter 15 (India); vol. 2, p. 32 (Christism), vol. 1, pp. 24, 280; vol. 2, p. 278 (god-humans [note Adam = Pimander = Prometheus at vol. 1, p. 298]); pp. 532-533; vol. 2, pp. 306-311 (fraternities [with pp. 99-100 for major quotations]). For background to Euhemeristic methods, Frank Manuel, *The Eighteenth Century Confronts the Gods* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959).

³² *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 34-35

³³ ‘The Theory of Cycles’ (*Theosophist*, July 1880) in *Ancient Science*, pp. 39-45; cf. *Isis Unveiled*, esp. vol. 1, pp. 258-259, and chapter 9; cf. Sasse, *Zahlengesetz in der Völkerreizbarkeit: Eine Anregung zur mathematischen Behandlung der Weltgeschichte* (Brandenburg: Michaelis, 1877), vol. 1. Later, on sunspots, see Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888) (hereafter *Secret Doctrine*), vol. 1, pp. 104-105, 124, using economist William Jevons; cf. John La Nauze, *Political Economy in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939) pp. 38-44.

³⁴ *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 266-267, cf. pp. 534, 541, etc.; cf. Bernhard Knauss, *Staat und Mensch in Hellas* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967 reprod.), pp. 39-45; Trompf, *Recurrence*, vol. 1, p. 11 (Plato).

through the ages. Such regress could be illustrated from the history of religions by Christianity, or at least “Churchianity” (a usage apparently inherited from the Spiritualists), which was a later-coming phenomenon that brought general spiritual debasement, or progress only in “objects and things.” Any alternate Spiritualist “philosophy of history,” that we circle in “a spiral” progressively through known history, for instance, from an “intense individualism” of savages, through “Churchianity,” to “the individualism of the intellect,” was rejected for not understanding the relativities of “civilization and barbarism.”³⁵ In contrast, a scholarly Indophile such as Max Müller could be enlisted to play up the extraordinary insights of the Vedas and the spread of Aryan groups; and even Hegel later invoked as the philosopher of “the WORLD SPIRIT” finally “coming to itself” through “a higher power” that “governed history” and of which peoples of the earth “know nothing.”³⁶ Hegel thereby becomes a prophet of modern Theosophy, not revamped established religion.

In *Isis*, however, teaching about prior and etheric ‘Root Races,’ for which the Theosophical movement becomes famous, has hardly been formulated, and it is more antediluvian (decidedly pre-Noachian) “esoteric knowledge” that she stresses. She knew of the *pitris* as humanity’s lunar ancestors through Jacolliot’s translation of *Manu*, and stresses belief in pre-Adamites and the former existence of Atlantis (America deriving its name *inter alia* from the Indian cosmic mount Meru); but 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.³⁷ Certainly Blavatsky has

³⁵ ‘Progress and Culture’ (*Lucifer* August, 1890), in *Ancient Survivals and Modern Errors* (Theosophy, Suppl.), pp. 36, 41; cf. Hudson Tuttle, *Arcana of Spiritualism: A Manual of Spiritual Science and Philosophy* (London: James Burns, 1876), pp. 412-413, 422-425 (the Spiritualist quoted). Many of Blavatsky’s attitudes to Christianity as debasement are in Louis Jacolliot, *La Bible dans l’Inde: Vie de Jeuzus Christna* (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1873 [1869]), pp. 1-4; but she avoided condemning Russian Orthodoxy. See Richard Hutch, ‘Biography Individuality and the Study of Religion’, *Religious Studies*, vol. 23 (1987): p. 514; cf. Hutch, ‘Types of Women Religious Founders’, *Religion*, vol. 14 (1984), pp. 155-172. That Theosophy’s U-curve could be re-thought as a spiral, see Curuppumillage Jinarajadasa, ‘What Theosophists Believe’, in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, ed. Swami Avinashananda (Calcutta: Sr Ramakrishna Centenary Committee, 1938), vol. 2, p. 430.

³⁶ For example: *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 4, 559; *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. 640-641 (quotation); vol. 2, pp. 425.

³⁷ *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 295, 551, 591; vol. 2, p. 107; cf. Louis Jacolliot, *Les législateurs religieux: Manou-Moïse-Mahomet* (Paris: Lacroix et Cie, 1876) on

already acquired a vision of serried ‘fore-worlds’ in (macro-)history, although it is not from mystical records (later to be called *Akâsa*) that she receives her inspiration, but from the Central American (to her mind ‘Atlantean’) myth of the Guatemalan Quiché Indians, whose treatise *Popol Vuh* alludes to different kinds of peoples before the present ones (I,2-5; III,2; IV,5-6). This was enough to corroborate Indian, Hermetic, Chaldaeo-Kabbalistic evidence for ‘Man’ prior to our ‘earthly Adamic’ state, and made all the more questionable that “our cycle began in ages comparatively recent.”³⁸ Very importantly, furthermore, there is no discussion of ‘the Masters’ in *Isis*; the ‘occult access’ to a brotherhood of guiding Masters that is arguably the hallmark or maturity of the Theosophical Society as a new religious force has not made its literary foray.³⁹

Now, it is well known that Blavatsky’s second major work, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), is cast as a Commentary on “the oldest MSS in the world,” the Akashic Record of the so-called Book of Dzyan, the fount of all wisdom, which is now in geographical terms connected with Tibet (she called herself a “Thibetian Buddhist” as early as 1876).⁴⁰ This Record is accessed through “the Himalayan Brothers,” or “the Masters” and made known to the Esoteric

extracts of *Manu*, dated to 13,000 BCE (!); and Louis Jacolliot, *Histoire des Vierges: Les peuples et les continents disparus* (Paris: Saint-Germain, 1874) on the lost continent of Rutas in the Pacific.

³⁸ *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 1-2, 6, 593; cf. *Popol vuh: Le livre sacré et les mythes de l’antiquité américaine, etc.*, trans. Abbé Charles-Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1861); *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, p. 548 on possible sub-continental Indic influences on the Maya anyway, cf. Alexander von Humboldt, *Vues des Cordilleras, et momumens des peuples indigenes de l’Amérique* (Paris: F. Schoell, 1810), vol. 1, p. 148 (Buddha = Votán). For Blavatsky’s allusion to Tibetan (and Siamese) *akasha* as early as 1876, however, see *Letters*, no. 267, cf. also *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 113, 125, 139, 144, cf. vol. 2, p. 214, but there it is a ‘force’ for producing wonders, and equated with Edward Bulmer-Lytton’s *Vril* in vol. 1, pp. 64, 125 (see below, n. 52); as it became again in Blavatsky’s yogic teaching; cf. Henk Spiereburg *The Inner Group Teachings of H.P. Blavatsky to her Personal Pupils 1890-91: A Reconstruction of the Teachings* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, 1995 [1985]), pp. 22, 180.

³⁹ Brendan French, ‘The Theosophical Masters: An Investigation into the Conceptual Domains of H.P. Blavatsky and C.W. Leadbeater’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2000), vol. 2, p. 472.

⁴⁰ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. 1-25; *Letters*, 71 (p. 268), cf. 59 (p. 207); *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, pp. 27-29 (esoteric use of “Budhist”). On other “Commentaries”, e.g., *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 177.

Section of the Theosophical Society,⁴¹ and allowed for an expansive account of the “Root-Races” set within a vast cosmo-history of the *kalpas*, a cycling of great ages that hold within their eternal motions descents of spirits towards the physical conditions as found in our world and the challenge of (re)ascent back to the One behind the All.⁴² Here we come to the awkward issue of addressing the noticeable differences between Blavatsky’s two great works, with the former presenting as a scholarly (albeit highly meandering and tendentious) exercise in comparative religion and occult science, while the latter expounds the mysteries of something tantamount to a revealed text. The former considers an impressive variety of religious texts for what they confirm about Blavatsky’s framing of esoteric truth; the latter introduces cosmogonic and both cosmo- and macro-historical materials so often radically departing from prevailing scientific positions or standard histories that most will find them fanciful (even though Blavatsky appeals to known scriptures to elucidate the mysterious ‘Akashic’ records). Before considering how one might pass judgement on these divergences, however, one has to face another difficulty: the fact that the most systematic and ‘scientized’ account of the Theosophists’ cosmology is not first found in Blavatsky at all, but in a series of transcribed messages (dated 1880-4) purporting to be from two Masters (Morya and Koot Hoomi, the latter being Blavatsky’s own ‘Christ’ Master) to Alfred Sinnett, her very new acquaintance in India.⁴³ Command of this material would eventually bring Sinnett Presidency of the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, but also a serious split within the Theosophical Society, first before and then after Blavatsky’s death in 1891, because various of the Mahatma messages put her down as “the Old Lady,” deceitful, over-zealous and with a mind of “habitual disorder” and “incoherence”!⁴⁴ From the mid-1880s onward, therefore, macrohistory becomes a highly political issue reflecting contested ‘revelations,’ and its specifics become marks of identity and authority for different Theosophical camps.

⁴¹ Founded coincidentally in 1888, Josephine Ransom, *A Short History of The Theosophical Society, 1875-1937* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1938), pp. 251-254. Blavatsky dated her first encounter of a Master to 1851: ‘The Theosophical Mahatmas’, *The Path* (1886) (*Theosophy* Suppl.), p. 23.

⁴² See Garry W. Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner and Guénon’, in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, eds Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), pp. 280-286.

⁴³ Alfred Barker (comp.), *The Mahatma Letters to A.P. Sinnett from the Mahatmas M. & K.H.* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923).

⁴⁴ *Mahatma Letters*, eds Christmas Humphreys and Elsie Benjamin (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1962), e.g., pp. 1, 12, 15, 201, 239, 307.

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The so-called *Mahatma Letters* to Sinnett accept an Indic approach to cosmohistory, presenting “a Mahajug” or great “*Kuklos*” as “unthinkably long,” because in it “must be accomplished the whole order of development, or the descent of the Spirit into matter and its return to the re-emergence” in an eternal recurring through time. Seven *manvantaras* make up this huge cycle, and each *mantavara* called a “world” is responsible for “seven cycles” or “world rings” within it, all constituting a vast “chain of beads” until the last one collapses into chaos (“the *Pralaya*”), the Night of Brahmâ’s repose. This is presented as the basic law of nature, and the ‘monadological’ compositions in each world ring, requiring “globes” (literal planets or “stations”) to be processed, must pass through seven phases or “rounds” – tied in turn to the mineral, vegetal and animal states, with Man in the middle (whose spiritual descent has to be tied into these conditions until he takes his present post-animal, post-ape form), and then the round curls upwards to animal soul, potentiality and indivisible Spirit or Life. The propulsion into each *manvantara* or “new regeneration” requires an ethereal injection of primordial “entities,” often fallen *devas* or “Dhyani Chohas” (would be ascenders from previous world rings) to start processes towards humanization. The *races* of Man (as distinct from the Monads or pre-egoic souls seeking manhood) belong to the middle of a world ring, when, and only when, the full physicality is experienced. Humans, as microcosms, contain within themselves seven principles, and are challenged to return to the Unknowable Source in this fourth and middle stage, when, and only when, and only in its *central ages* of development on this distinct “world,” they are “fully responsible.”⁴⁵ On this model, there is an “evolution” of nature, or better “a spiral” going upwards from mineral to spiritualization on each world and in a broader sense through all of them, but it is the U-curve journey of ‘the human’ that is special and variable, for we can have the possibility of leaving the system. Human identities or “lives” reincarnate throughout the whole course of things, mind you, deaths and rebirths not being outcomes specific to any particular deeds because spiritual conditions are worked out over huge spaces time according to the “Law of [karmic] Retribution.” If most lives remain in this ‘samsaric-looking’ wheel, an increasing number attain heaven or *Devachan* (in their “personal egos”) for huge time-spaces, and a large enough “mass” (who lose “objective existence”) will pass “into the mystery of Nirvana” before “the

⁴⁵ *Mahatma Letters*, esp. pp. 46, 66-68, 73-76, 82, 85-86, 101, 135; cf. p. 101 (note touches of Leibniz and Spencer).

sevenfold round” of the whole *mahayuga* dissolves. In the course of one separate “world” the average number of reincarnations will be 777.⁴⁶

The penchant for seven is already an identity marker: the classic four *yugas* were absorbed into a succession or “rings” of seven races in the course of each world; but, defying contradiction, it is the fourth *yuga* that has to mark a perfection of spiritual/physical integration, before a slow ascent, there not being any striking return to a golden time (or *krta yuga*) after the ‘low’ point.⁴⁷ The best textual evidence for the four *yuga* model was apparently not yet available, and in any case the Buddhist great cycle (conceived as an ongoing ‘sine-curve’ rather than a serried declination from “golden’ to ‘dark’ ages) seems here confused with the Hindu one.⁴⁸ When it came to the races, the *Mahatma Letters* labour the sevenfold principle, with seven “root races” and 49 races in all in one world. The courses of root races, as on our planet, are virtually cut off from others, each also rent in two by the cataclysms of water and fire *Isis* had associated with axial shifts, and “far greater civilizations than our own have risen and decayed,” and the continents holding these past glories have and will go down and come up again. The majority of current humanity (especially ‘Mongolic Asiatics’) were “degraded semblances” of prior highly civilized nations” of the last sub-race of the fourth (Atlantean) root race. The Masters’ messages about this not only had the *Popol Vuh* confirming the memory of our great forebears, but the publication of former USA Congressman’s Ignatius Donnelly’s *Destruction of Atlantis* (1882), and the truth was now made clear that two great lost civilizations, those of Lemuria and Atlantis, sank in successive catastrophes (each, according to the Masters, as

⁴⁶ *Mahatma Letters*, pp. 72, 74-75, 67, 92-96, 98 cf. 128 (note touches of Flammarion). The terms *pralaya* and *devachan*, even *karma*, have no significant place in Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled*, cf., vol. 2, p. 424.

⁴⁷ *Mahatma Letters*, p. 117, cf. p. 26 (showing no use of published texts or translations of relevant materials in the *Bhagavata Purāna*, esp. XI [1840-1847, 1866] or *Mahābhārata*, trans. Hippolyte Fauche, 1863-1870). For septenary patterns already in Blavatsky (Bible, astrology, pyramids, etc.), *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, pp. 296-297, 300-301, 461, 552.

⁴⁸ For guidance see: Grace Cairns, *Philosophies of History: Meeting East and West in Cycle-Pattern Theories of History* (Westport: Greenwood, 1971 [1962]), chapters 3-5. Neither Sinnett nor Blavatsky know anything of Makkhali Goshala, the ancient founder of karma-and-cycle theory; cf. Arthur Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvakas* (Delhi: Motilal Barnasidass, 2002).

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many as 700,000 years apart, and with Atlantis's last island disappearing "11,446 years ago".⁴⁹ Of leaders in our time,

[t]he highest people now on earth (spiritually) belong to the first sub-race of the fifth *root* Race, and those are the Aryan Asiatics: the highest race (physical intellectuality) is the last sub-race of the fifth – yourselves the white conquerors.

The Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans become incidental; and whether purer remnants from prior civilizations or from making entrances by reincarnation, the Aryans are the vanguard of a truer human (re-) spiritualization, and are guided by Masters (who have already experienced the future, but stay back – like Bodhisattvas to help those with promise). The fourth and fifth root races face "the same struggle" (they are *both* made to sit near the centre of the sevenfold cycle), but the fifth root race lives near the dawn of a spiritualizing ascent. On this reading ordinary history is off the point: it "is entirely at sea."⁵⁰

With this material already circulating within an organization of contending power-brokers, Blavatsky was left on the 'back-foot;' her intellectual power to match this orderliness of presentation and her spiritual leadership as accessory to occult wisdom were under threat. And by 1883 Sinnett had capitalized on his confident access to the Masters by publishing his *Esoteric Buddhism*.⁵¹ Madame had to play a trump card; and the poetic revelations of an arcane Akashic document, with the inspiration to pen a commentary on the "stanzas" of this Book of Dzyan in her massive *Secret Doctrine*, enabled her both to supersede Sinnett's systemizations and claim much behind the *Mahatma Letters* as her own teaching. Cunning tactics to re-secure her authority, in fact, allowed her (by 1882) to charge that Sinnett had had the indecency to play with *her* Master and to interpret "letters" that, as she

⁴⁹ *Mahatma Letters*, pp. 147-152 (including use of *Isis Unveiled*), cf. p. 84; Ignatius Donnelly, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1882) and *Ragnarök: The Age of Fire and Gravel* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1883); and see *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 266n. Geologist Philip Sclater had coined the name Lemuria in 1864 to explain the Madagascar-Malay relationship; Blavatsky vaguely connected it with the Indian, Pacific and even the Atlantic Oceans. For *Popol-Vuh* on M'oo or Mu (though not clearly distinguishable from Atlantis), Augustus Le Plongeon, *Sacred Mysteries Among the Mayas and the Quiches, 11,500 Years Ago: Free Masonry in Times Anterior to the Temple of Solomon* (New York: Macoy, 1886); cf. *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 267, vol. 2, pp. 34, 333.

⁵⁰ *Mahatma Letters*, p. 151 (long quotation), cf. pp. 87, 116, 149.

⁵¹ Alfred Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism* (London: Trübner, 1883).

put it, “have a *meaning for me*, for me no one else” (and on matters she knew “even before *Isis Unveiled* was published”), and thus right from the start in her *magnum opus* she seized the right to correct Sinnett’s *Esoteric Buddhism*.⁵² Since she had been the leading light in contacting the Masters and investigating the “psychical powers of Man,” well before actually founding “the Esoteric Section” of the Theosophical Society in 1888, she felt undoubtedly justified in upholding her ‘matriarchate’ and delivered ‘the final word.’ On her own account, she was the first to contact the “Ascended Masters” Morya and Koot Hoomi in the 1850s, even being led by them to Tibet and eventually to found the Theosophical Society.⁵³

Upon inspecting *The Secret Doctrine*, much of the discourse on *kalpas*, *manvantaras*, “rounds” (the equivalent of *yugas*) and “globes” or “planets” (not so much worlds) remains, but form more of a mysterious body of material from which to make further sense of the ancient cosmologies she introduced in *Isis*.⁵⁴ Her contribution to reflect on the biggest processes is not lost: she portrays the “Gods,” for instance, as those previous attainers of Nirvana (Dhyani Chohans or “great Pitris”) “who had enjoyed their rest from, previous re-incarnations in previous Kalpas for incalculable Aeons,” and “in the present Manvantara” play a now more distinctly positive role to initiate the process of humanization and “complete the *divine* man.” The Dhyani Chohans, indeed, become more distinctly guiding forces of cosmic change, as creative “planetary spirits” with “divine powers” behind world affairs and the work of the Masters.⁵⁵ In the second half of *The Secret Doctrine*, however, details of the

⁵² *Mahatma Letters*, p. 474 (cf. p. 472 on rewriting *Isis Unveiled* by dictation!); *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, esp. pp. xviii-xix, 161; cf. French, ‘Masters’, vol. 1, chapters 10-12 (detailed background).

⁵³ See Constance Wachtmeister, *Reminiscences of H.P. Blavatsky and the Secret Doctrine* (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1976[1893]), pp. 56-57 (and in time *Isis Unveiled* was ascribed to her dealings with the “Masters of the East”). cf. Jinarâjadâsa, *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1923-1925) (further in-house, posthumous justification). The quotation about “psychic powers” derives from the 1885-18886 stated “Objects” of the Theosophical Society. That she visited Tibet is legend and that “Blavatsky never stepped on Tibetan soil” is discussed by Harry Oldmeadow, *Journeys East: 20th Century Western Encounters with Eastern Traditions* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), pp. 130-135.

⁵⁴ *Secret Doctrine*, esp. vol. 1, bk. 1, pt. 1; and for her detailing of cosmic chronology still using Hindu *kalpas* a basis, vol. 2, pp. 68-70.

⁵⁵ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. 10, 16, 22, 38, 42, 51, 278, 635, etc.; vol. 2, pp. 232-233, n. [3]; cf. *Mahatma Letters*, pp. 54-55, 71, 86, 455-456, etc. (more ambiguity)

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“Root-Races” receive a fuller treatment than any given before or after, and whereas the *Mahatmas Letters* only mentioned Lemuria and Atlantis, the Solar-*Pitris* or Lunar Ancestors of the first root race and the Hyperboreans of the second now enter the picture. If we may cut through details, Blavatsky posited a ‘cousin-like’ relationship between “Pilgrim *Monads*” (“seed-souls” deriving from etheric realm that were “destined to animate future Races”) and the overall upward thrust of nature through metal, plant and animal life. Spiritual *involution* proceeds in ponderously long phases parallel with evolution, until there arises a perfect meld in Man. For Blavatsky, interestingly ‘proto-humans’ seem far less locked into the impress of prior stages in the physical world than we find in the *Mahatma Letters* (and any one monad may have undergone preparation on a different “globe” than ours!)⁵⁶ Whatever the complexities, Blavatsky remains stubborn that humanity “properly originated from prior and *supra*-mundane orders,” thus resolutely “*precluding* the ‘completely human’ from evolving out of apes,” so that the primary, pre-mammalian humans descend in bodies “tenuously composed of ‘astral’ and ‘etheric’ elements, with [degrees of] pre-mental consciousness.”⁵⁷ Here, however, we are still more within what is better called cosmo- than macro-history, especially when we learn of the *pitris* as remnants of the “lunar” world prior to ours “seeking material bodies” (and arriving long before any animal life appears), or of Hypoboreans as sexually undifferentiated, wearing loose-knit “watery bodies” while needing to be given consciousness (by Manasa-Dhyani beings), and with no known narrations of these Races being provided.⁵⁸

The overlapping between super-terrestrial and terrestrial events, common to Gnostic and emanationist systems, was never raised as a separate issue by Blavatsky. It might have been, considering her closeness to George Mead, a man who specialized in Mandaeism and thus an ancient Gnostic system (honouring John the Baptist) that possessed both stories of aeonic descents and human affairs; but evidently Mead came to be her secretary too late for her to make much of “Nazarenes” and “Nazarean Gnostics” (as she called them) to

⁵⁶ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 180, cf. vol. 1, pp. 16, 162-163 (Pilgrim Monads do not move between *literal* planets as in *Mahatma*). Interestingly, ex-Theosophist Rudolf Steiner conforms more to Sinnett’s rendering than Blavatsky. See: Rudolf Steiner, *An Esoteric Cosmology* (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2008 [1906]), lect. 4, cf. 3; cf. French, ‘Masters’, vol. 2, p. 722.

⁵⁷ Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky,’ p. 282.

⁵⁸ Following Robert Elwood, *Theosophy: A Modern Expression of the Wisdom of the Ages* (London: Quest Books, 1986), pp. 78-81, on *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. 160, 202, vol. 2, pp. 156-157, 688-689 (diagram); cf., p. 167.

corroborate ‘the secret doctrine.’⁵⁹ In any case, with the pressure of competing world-pictures affecting her views, Blavatsky often looks contradictory as to how macro-historical paradigms apply to the sequencing of Root Races as a whole and the significance of our time in particular. In terms of the long passage ‘from stones to humans’ there is progress, but this is also true of the “*principles*” governing all the changes” in the mental, psychic, spiritual constitution of man ... evolving on an ever ascending scale” from the first to seventh “rounds” of our globe, so that in the fifth round to come the average person would be as advanced as Confucius and Plato had been in ours (these two being ‘fifth rounders’ ahead of their time, and Buddha and Shankara even further up the scale).⁶⁰ On the other hand, the great U-curve of descent towards the point when “Spirit and Matter are [necessarily] equilibrated in Man” (perfectly so in “our” globe’s time of “the Fourth Round”) and of ascent when “Spirit is slowly re-asserting itself,” could not be forgotten.⁶¹ Even if she worked rather independently of the four-*yuga* framework, Blavatsky tries to match the descent with the Indic four *yuga* framework, because the periods of the first five root races reduce in length and apparently in virtue.⁶² She was at pains trying to accommodate myths of the Golden Age with modern anthropological constructions of the primitive: each root race has to undergo four declinatory metal ages, and, despite difficulties of a numerical matching, the four *yugas* also have to play out through the great human (U-curving, seven-round) journey until a returning *krta* or golden age is fully enjoyed at the Seventh Round. The great eternal alternating of the *mahayugas* and *pralayas*, however, was designed to take away any sense of teleology in history and to put priority on the mystic quest of souls – souls that reticulate through the “Circle of Necessity,” building up karmic patterns for themselves, experiencing the false bliss of *Devachan*, yet allowed help from the Masters in a journey of potential escape to Nirvana.⁶³

⁵⁹ Brikha Nasoraia and Garry W. Trompf, ‘Mandaean Macrohistory’, *ARAM*, vol. 23 (2010-2011), pp. 395-401; and see George Mead, *John the Gnostic Baptizer: Selections from the Mandaean John-Book* (London: John M. Watkins, 1924). See: *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 580; vol. 2, pp. 132-133, 382; *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 96, n. [1]. p. 150; cf. H. J. Spierenberg, *H.P. Blavatsky, on the Gnostics* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, 1994).

⁶⁰ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, p. 16.

⁶¹ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, pp. 180, 192.

⁶² Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky’, pp. 282-283

⁶³ Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky’, p. 286; cf., *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. xix, 39, 221; vol. 2, pp. 198, 483; ‘Our Cycle and the Next’, *Lucifer* (1888) in *Cycles*

Of the problems Blavatsky believed could be solved through root-race theory, two stand out. In the Lemurian age, when humans first talked and became sexually distinguishable, angelic beings who had successfully completed an early *manvantara* were ‘chosen’ to remain in the system and accelerate humanity’s spiritual evolution. At this point humans divided between a special portion who took on more definite physical human bodies (though not as perfected as ours) and the great majority who were proceeding more slowly and “not ready” for true human form (such as the “inferior Races” of “Australians” and “some African and Oceanic tribes” whom Blavatsky thought were leftovers from this time, which in terms of organic evolution was coeval with the first hominids yet in spiritual terms witnessed an unthinking monotheism).⁶⁴ The issue addressed here was the ostensibly huge discrepancy between civilized and uncivilized peoples, the latter being classed as “lowest” by social scientists in her time; and just as Erich von Däniken has tried to show more recently, it required a super-terrestrial fiat to explain why humanity somehow jumped out of its prevailing rut, and myths of intermingling between gods and mortals – including miscegenation from unions between heaven and earth in Genesis (6:4) – required a proper accounting.⁶⁵

Blavatsky also needed to address the issue of ‘the Fall’. Before our time of the fifth root race, there had already been deserved collapses. She leaves her readers without illusions not only about the fate of previous, if remarkably great civilizations, but about ours as well. Despite the presence of elect adept groups among them, the Lemurians and Atlanteans come *deservedly* to grief, because of the (mis)use of sorcery among the spiritually powerful. In each case only a fraction of their continental holdings survived, Easter Island statues testifying to Lemuria and the Egyptian records (via Plato) to Atlantis, with only righteous remnants escaping to maintain continuity (these being “seeds” of the Aryans). In her envisioning, after the continents of Lemuria and Atlantis go down, most of Asia, and both Africa and Europe rise from the sea through axial shift, and the biblical story of the Flood is an allegory of many “Noahs” surviving the massive cataclysms involved and bringing with them even third

and Human Destiny (Theosophy, Suppl.), pp. 20, 25; ‘Theories about Reincarnation and Spirits’, *The Path*, vol. 8 (November 1886), pp. 234-235.

⁶⁴ For details from *Secret Doctrine* (esp. vol. 2, p. 162) see Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky’, pp. 282-284. For the argument that Blavatsky’s root-race theory was not “racist in intent,” see James Santucci, ‘The Notion of Race in Theosophy’, *Nova Religio*, vol. 11, no. 3 (2008), pp. 37-63.

⁶⁵ Garry W. Trompf, *In Search of Origins: The Beginnings of Religion in Western Theory and Archaeological Practice* (Slough: New Dawn Press, 2005), pp. 41-49 (evolutionism vs. primal monotheism), 149-154.

root race wisdom (associated with Enoch [cf. Gen. 5:24], the crucial link to the Hermetic tradition).⁶⁶ In this, our own Aryan age, spiritual engagement in dense matter is at its extremity, and the dark side and heavy weight of the cosmic processes at their most intense points. Nothing illustrated it better than “depraved” wealth-loving, alcoholic, cow-killing “barbarians” taking over India (the British!), as the *Vishnu Purâna* foretold. As for the biblical Fall, it is an allegory of bad supra-mundane influences, and the false retributive god of Genesis has to be foiled by agents of gnosis, and super-terrestrially by Lucifer the Enlightened One, or the Serpent who conveys true wisdom (paradoxically concomitant with the message of the true Christ), and who has dominion over “thrones and empires, ... the fall of nations, the birth of churches.” If this last understanding was openly sourced to French occultist Eliphas Lévi and others, the revelation of the Akashic record clinched all, and by implication now makes possible both the best *Weltbild* of what occurs through cosmic time and an extraordinary spiritual progress for a mankind awaiting new races in its sixth and seventh rounds.⁶⁷ And Blavatsky liked to believe that her work kept up with recent research findings: in *The Secret Doctrine*, for examples, the newly translated Book of (I) Enoch is read as a surviving pre-diluvian, even second-root-race text (*inter alia* foretelling the axial shift that destroys Atlantis), while old Iranian (Mazdean and Zoroastrian) insights were put on a par with Indian and Egyptian wisdom, older than the Chaldaean, and she seemed to chortle that archaeologists, such as Henry Sayce, found it hard to sort out deep Mesopotamian chronology (unaware, as everyone was until the 1930s, that Sumer had priority as ‘the first great civilization’).⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Trompf, ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky’, pp. 285-286; cf. *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, e.g., pp. 138-141, 368, 401, 483; and see *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, p. 443 (Noah opens the iron age).

⁶⁷ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, pp. 192-193, 377; vol. 2, pp. 233, 509-512 (cf. pp. 484, 638 on *avatars*); *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, p. 574; *The Fall of Ideals* (from *Lucifer* 1889 [ULT Pamphlet, 27], Bombay: Theosophical Co., 1933), pp. 3-7; noting the very name of the Theosophical Society journal *Lucifer*. Cf. Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (London: Rider, 1972); cf. also Edward Bulmer-Lytton, *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race* (Bauvelt, NY: R. Steiner, 1972 [1870]), behind *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 1, p. 296 and related to the Fall.

⁶⁸ *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, pp. 482-483, 531-534, using Richard Laurence, trans., *The Book of Enoch the Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1838), s.v. 79:1-80:1; cf. *Secret Doctrine*, p. 371 (for background in Athanasius Kircher, who placed an Enoch fragment he sighted before the Flood). Also, *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1, p. 10; vol. 2, pp. 92, 693; Annie Besant, *Zoroastrianism* (Madras: Theosophical

The abstruse manner in which Blavatsky presented her ‘revelatory’ materials, and the very complexity of her cosmo-history and root-race theory, made it virtually inevitable that there would be endless debates about details, and politics over control of ‘Truth’ and the Masters’ intentions (and Sinnett’s orderly presentation of matters was always going to be needed to clarify controversial points). Once *The Secret Doctrine* was published, she was bound to face in-house questioning about its meanings and to uphold her authority under the intellectual pressure and threat of calumny, particularly in Great Britain, generated by the Mahatma Letters. How interesting it is that, in recorded London meetings from January to June 1889, recently made available (through the labours of Michael Gomes on a long unpublished manuscript), Blavatsky is shown facing a thorough scrutiny of her newly disclosed systematic occultism.⁶⁹ If readers are likely to find themselves confused over all the technical discussions, it will make sense if one appreciates that subtle differences between Sinnett’s and Blavatsky’s cosmohistories are under investigation, considering for example the latter’s more positive approach to Dhyanis-Chohans and more flexibility over proto-human life *vis-à-vis* rounds connected to “the elemental kingdom.”⁷⁰ Apropos macrohistory, questions of difference and continuity between *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine* naturally popped up; Blavatsky settled on “12,500 or 12,600 years” for the periodic careening of the earth’s axis; and perhaps under pressure contended that Atlantis was “twice as populated as China is now,” and that (Sri) Lanka was once part of Atlantis, with legends placing this “most mysterious race” to “something like 22 thousand years” ago,⁷¹ spontaneous points not made by her elsewhere. She confirmed the importance of “the Fourth Round” as the phase when “regular men, as we know them, begin” (in adjustments that bring “matter and spirit into equilibrium,” but was more outright in conversation in saying many members of “the fourth race” are not fully human, and that present “savages are not ... the same as we are,” “the direct ones,” as she put it, “such as the flat-headed Australians,” were “all dying out,” even if future

Publishing House, 1963 [1897]), pp. 6-7; cf. Samuel Kramer, *The Sumerians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 28.

⁶⁹ See Michael Gomes (transcr. and annot.), *The Secret Doctrine Commentaries: The Unpublished 1889 Instructions* (The Hague: ISIS Foundation, 2010). This and the paragraph it followed appear in a slightly different version in a review of these *Commentaries* in *Aries*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2011) [forthcoming].

⁷⁰ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, esp., pp. 01-02, 174-175, 574-575; cf. also Blavatsky’s unusual defence of animal intelligence, pp. 16-19.

⁷¹ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, pp. 530-531 (axis), 464 (population), 467-468 (Lanka).

“savages will be more intelligent in the Sixth Race.”⁷² The general absence of detailed discussions about Hyperborean, Lemurian and Atlantean ways of life show the chief interests of the participants: they wanted to unravel the mysteries of cosmogenesis and the basic framework of cosmic processes, and, being more scientific than historical in their interests, most vocal attendees at the meetings seem to have been quietly deciding between Blavatsky and Sinnett on such matters, and in this respect she sensed they were “all dangerous fellows.”⁷³

Blavatsky was highly skilled at answering awkward questions and fending off challenges. As a ‘fall-back’ position she could present herself as a recipient of Truth, not as ‘know-all.’ “I am not all learned, I have never studied [natural science]; what I know is simply what I had to read in relation to the book that I *had* to write,” and she admitted the need of help as a commentator from a metaphysician (Edward Fawcett).⁷⁴ When it came to a direct challenge, with the implication that Sinnett’s views were grounded in more respected science, she retorted that “Sinnett wants to bring all under the sway of science,” and the “the Master said” Sinnett’s source (the French astronomer Camille Flammarion) was “correct in some things, ... but not correct in other things.”⁷⁵ Sinnett came to one meeting, but let others do the talking; while on other occasions Blavatsky stooped to conquer by politely correcting, clarifying or deferring to his views, and at one stage pointedly recalled how she had explained matters about energy to “Mr Sinnett seven years ago” (when the Mahatma Letters were being transcribed).⁷⁶ By mid-1889, she had weathered the storm in Britain: she had been in isolation in Germany and Belgium working on *The Secret Doctrine*, and crossed the Channel in mid-1887. By July 1890 she put in an extraordinary bid to secure complete power and “Presidential authority for the whole of Europe.” The ageing Colonel Olcott, co-Founder with her of the Theosophical Society, was holding the world body together through much administrative work and travel, and it was Madame’s desire that he remain “President-Founder of the Theosophical Society *the world over*.” Olcott, reading her claim to such authority as “revolutionary” and threatened to resign, but no one, including Blavatsky and “the Master” himself, would have it so and he relented. Before long, however, she was under an embarrassingly public attack as a lying “Muscovite Mesmerist” – by a Theosophical defector the American Elliott

⁷² *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, pp. 460-462.

⁷³ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, p. 304.

⁷⁴ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, p. 35 (on Fawcett), p. 365 (my emphasis).

⁷⁵ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, pp. 294-295.

⁷⁶ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, chapter 15, cf. pp. 432, 482, 494, 574-575.

Coues. In the midst of ensuing outcry she passed away (on 8 May, 1891), and the next five years witnessed stormy politics over control of the organization.⁷⁷

What are we to make of these developments, and of the propulsion into modern religious and intellectual history of Blavatsky's esoterico-secret doctrines? Certainly, within Theosophical Society circles, her two great texts became 'surrogate Bibles,' amounting to a rebirth of occultism as the "accumulated wisdom of the ages," even if the cosmo- and macrohistorical contents of her books had to be made usable and palatable by commentary, summary or abridgement.⁷⁸ In William Kingsland's estimation, as participant in the 1889 meetings and President of Britain Blavatsky Lodge, it would be understandable if many a "superficial reader... would be lost in the vast pantheon of *The Secret Doctrine*, and should fly for comparative intellectual safety to the orthodox doctrine of the trinity." But certainly the work was no body of "Biblical fairy tales," and Blavatsky had escaped the worrying inductive "generalizations of science" by "an opposite method" of deduction, from super-terrestrial stanzas that swell "into a harmony that seems the very source of our being."⁷⁹ Blavatsky herself considered she was doing something that superseded ordinary science; for her "the Darwinians truly have dreamed dreams, and "their founder" made up his version of the evolutionary path "in his own imagination."⁸⁰ Even if she sensed – as it shows throughout the 1889 meetings – that words were often inadequate to convey true reality, she held

⁷⁷ Ransom, *Short History*, p. 269 (the bid), 271-273 (resignation issue), 273-281 (Coues affair and death), 286-315 (aftermath). In the *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, Blavatsky does not think Olcott wrote "occult" works, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁸ See Blavatsky's editor Boris de Zirkoff, *Rebirth of the Occult Tradition: How the Secret Doctrine Was Written* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1977), passim; with Geoffrey Barboka, *The Divine Plan: Written in the Form of a Commentary on H.P. Blavatsky's Secret Doctrine* (Adyar: Theosophical Society Publishing House, 1964); along with abridgements by Michael Gomes, Lydia Ross, Charles Ryan, and so on, and summaries, whether single, e.g., Gertrude Van Pelt, *Archaic History of the Human Race in "The Secret Doctrine"* (Covina: Theosophical University Press, 1944) and Gottfried de Purucker, *Studies in Occult Philosophy* (Covina: Theosophical University Press, 1945), pp. 32-47; or collective, e.g., Virginia Hanson (ed.), *H.P. Blavatsky and The Secret Doctrine* (Wheaton: Quest, 1988), chapters 14-15.

⁷⁹ Kingsland, "The Secret Doctrine," *Lucifer* vol. 4, no. 23 (July 1889): pp. 417-418, 420 (also reproduced in Gomes, *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, pp. 660-661, 663).

⁸⁰ *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, p. 461.

she had accessed Truth.⁸¹ She meant nothing in *The Secret Doctrine* to be comparable to her own Russian tales of the weird;⁸² and for her to have developed any theory of the imaginal would have been to cast aspersions of mummery on the Theosophical Society's Esoteric Section. She keeps demanding to be taken at face value as a transmitter of wisdom from 'beyond the normal arena of reality.' But the vast majority of outsiders, whether interested readers or picking up titbits of a complex array of messages, will feel nonplussed as to how the mighty Blavatskyan edifice might be properly broached.

Scholars are well aware now of perils in trying to comprehend "other minds" and human existences. "At any time," insisted philosopher Francis Herbert Bradley, "all that we suffer, do and are forms one psychic totality ... experienced all together as a coexisting mass, not perceived as parted and joined," and any act of trenchant thought to dissect and reduce it does verbal and conceptual injustice. Poets like Alfred Edward Houseman and Thomas Stearns Eliot, in Bradley's wake, knew all too well that what one experiences is made up of self-evident components that are no longer original when neatness and symmetry are imposed upon them.⁸³ Without presuming to enter into Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's psyche, even to postulate her greater adeptship to enter the Unconscious or contact etheric spiritual beings, let alone speak negatively about any "pathology of the imagination" or downright trickery, I will conclude by noting that she was not alone in a nineteenth century literary world where fantasy was a powerful force to subvert establishment thinking and 'shift consciousness.'⁸⁴ She was also part of a wider impetus to reconstruct

⁸¹ See *Secret Doctrine Commentaries*, pp. 122, 165-166.

⁸² For example, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *Nightmare Tales* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892); though it may differ with regard to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *From the Caves and Jungles of Hindostan* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1892).

⁸³ Herbert Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1897), chapter 9; cf. George Stout, 'Mr Bradley's Theory of Judgment', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 3 (1902-1903), p. 16; Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 44-45; Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Hutchinson, 1949).

⁸⁴ See, for example, Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981). Also, Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (New York: Citadel, 1966), pp. 213-231 (quotation concerning pathology); Bruce Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 57 (claiming that it was Blavatsky herself who secreted the Mahatma Letters to Sinnett).

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lost continents, civilizations and spiritually interesting cultures (after all, she herself appropriated to her cause such vivid imaginers as Le Plongeon, Jaccoliot, Donnelly and Bulmer Lytton). She admitted her complete individuality: it is intriguing how, when finishing *Isis Unveiled*, and giving us the only strong clue of continuity between her two enormous works, she wrote of the lunar *pitris* as “the one primitive source” of all humanity and thus all civilizations. In her inimitable mystico-philosophical vein, she mused that

[t]he worship of the Vedic *pitris* is fast becoming the worship of the spiritual portion of mankind. It but needs the right perception of things objective to discover that the only world of reality is *subjective*.⁸⁵

Like Nietzsche, she could defend her version of things through the ultimacy of authorial “*perspective*” and the right to “wrench oneself from anonymity and insignificance.”⁸⁶ And yet when we consider, looking behind *The Secret Doctrine* to Sinnett’s Mahatma Letters, that she was responding to a challenge of authority, we would not be wrongheaded in deducing that the former was a book “she had to write” for more than one reason: she needed to systematize her occult insights, not just ‘let it all out,’ or achieve fame by glorious ingenuity, or outwit “dangerous fellows” challenging her. With regard to macrohistory, as I have argued elsewhere,⁸⁷ Blavatsky possessed prior materials, but she combined what she knew from researching *Isis* and what challenged her from the Mahatma Letters to place the lost worlds Hyperborea, Lemuria, Atlantis and all current civilizations in *a drawn-out chronological order*, prefaced by the round of the ancestral lunar *pitris* as the beginning of a downward spiral similar the declining Indian *yugas* and Greek metal ages. Lemuria was above all her special ‘production,’ rendered “vaguely huge and disparate” and full of new detail and appeal.⁸⁸ These moves, together with her intimations of better conditions to come under new root races, were of seminal importance in generating speculative macrohistories during the next century both from directly within the Theosophical trajectory and from the outskirts of it. In this sense Madame was mother of a so-called “hyper-tradition,” a way of imaging the broadest scope of history, looking at long-vanished achievements

⁸⁵ *Isis Unveiled*, vol. 2, p. 639 (my italics).

⁸⁶ See Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, in *Postmodern History Reader*, p. 126 (perspective); Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Champ intellectuel et projet créateur’, *Les temps moderne*, vol. 246 (1966), p. 882 (long quotation).

⁸⁷ Trompf and Bernauer, ‘Producing Lost Civilizations’, [forthcoming]

⁸⁸ See again *Secret Doctrine*, vol. 2, p. 333. Her favourite French source Jaccoliot had conjectured *various* “continental disappearances” in his *Histoire des Vierges*, the book most anticipatory in imaging a *series* of lost civilizations.

quite beyond the ken of standard (and by implication inferior) interpreters of the past.⁸⁹ We have to acknowledge them in themselves for their ideological influence before passing further judgement.⁹⁰ In modern times, we also need to appreciate the role of rewriting of history for the construction of new religious developments.⁹¹ Once apprehending the attractiveness of recasting time and the potential cultural force unleashed for doing so, we are left to deal with a considerable body of critical scholarship and of candid opinions by those in and out of the Theosophical Society who muse over Blavatsky's meanderings, confusion, constant allusiveness. Were the Masters used to bolster personal authority, one may rightly ask, and how does this affect such writings as *The Secret Doctrine*?⁹² Did she believe ordinary history "was a fiction anyway," or that history was lifeless without the constant inflow of poetic evocations?⁹³ Some of us will ponder the effects of "evidentiary narrative" in the modern world, such that enough display of apparent erudition and persuasive aura of authority, will make "people believe the strangest things."⁹⁴ Whatever conclusions may be forthcoming, the opus of Madame Blavatsky will doubtless remain a source of continuing fascination and heated debate.

⁸⁹ Using Raphaël Liogier, *Souci de soi, conscience du monde* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

⁹⁰ Thus Martha Augoustinos, "Social Representations and Ideology: Towards a Study of Ideological Representation" in *The Psychology of the Social*, ed. Uwe Flick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 156-169.

⁹¹ Trompf, 'History and the End-Times' in *Cambridge Companion to New Religious Movements*, eds Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) [forthcoming]; cf. James Crossley and Christian Kamer, "Writing History, Constructing Religion", in *Writing History, Constructing Religion*, eds James G. Crossley and Christian Karner (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 3-8.

⁹² For important researchers on these issues, see Gregory Tillett, *The Elder Brother: A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); John Cooper, 'The Theosophical Crisis in Australia' (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Sydney, 1986); French, 'Masters;' and Al Boag, 'From Being God to Being Human: Biblical Influences in the Teachings of J. Krishnamurti' (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Sydney, 2010).

⁹³ Consider here various positions from Malcolm Bradbury, *The History Man* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. v (quotation) to Ronald Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁹⁴ David Altheide, 'The Evidentiary Narrative: Notes towards a Symbolic Interactionist Perspective about Evidence', in *Qualitative Enquiry and the Politics of Evidence*, eds Norman Denzin and Michael Giardina (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2008), pp. 137-161.