

the Light-bringer

Lucifer®

For seekers of Truth

Current topics viewed in the light of the Ancient Wisdom or Theo-sophia — the common source of all great world religions, philosophies and sciences

The One Life and
the Pāramitā Path
– Part 1

Can mankind deter-
mine its future?

How intelligent is
ChatGPT?

Was Plato against
writing?

The benefits of
cremation

The right person in
the right place

Questions about
karma



Front cover:

How does a physician learn his profession? By oral tradition, in other words, by listening to a master physician, or by studying medical writings, or both? The value of oral and written communication is investigated in the article 'Was Plato against writing?'

Illustration: A 1,000-year-old book containing an Aramaic translation of the work *On the potencies of simple medicines* by the Greco-Roman physician Galenus (129-199 of our era). The translation was later overwritten with hymns, but could be made visible again with certain techniques.

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The September 2023 issue of *Lucifer* contains the article titled ‘How to find your Work?’ We will now work out the theosophical picture outlined therein by focusing on the practical question: how do we ensure that the right person is employed in the right place within the whole? We will find out that we can come to solutions that are effective, can mean a lot for those involved, and yet are still too rarely applied in our society.

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Editorial

The *Pāramitās*, the exalted virtues from Buddhism, are a wonderful source of inspiration. They are not prohibitions or commandments but ‘directions’ on how to live life in such a way as to reach the other ‘shore’ of existence. At the invitation of the Theosophical Society Point Loma, Elton Hall gave a talk on the *Pāramitās*, which he linked to the One Life. The editors of *Lucifer the Lightbringer* are very pleased to present his talk. In this issue of *Lucifer* we publish Part 1. Part 2 of the talk is published in the next edition.

A crucial question is investigated in the article *Can humanity determine its future?* And if it can, how should we do so?

Further in this edition, you will find an article on something that is captivating the minds of many around the world: Artificial Intelligence. Is A.I. a leap forward for mankind or is it a danger? Will the human world be taken over by robots? What are chatbots like Chat-GPT really doing — and *not* doing? The Theosophia can help us finding an answer.

One other article is in line with that on A.I. It questions whether Plato was against writing, which some contend.

Then you will find an article that discusses how you can find your place in the world, where you can contribute according to your *swabhāva*, character. And by this we mean not only what work you will do in society, but what role you can play in the big picture.

Finally, we try to answer some questions about cremation that were asked to us. We always welcome questions because they allow us to further clarify certain aspects of Theosophia. If space permits, we will post those questions in our magazine and try to answer them. In this edition you will find questions about karma, prayer and meditation, and stealing from the rich.

Asking questions helps everyone come to a broader understanding of Truth. Therefore, please feel free to ask any question you want, make your comments, you will always receive an answer from us.

The editors



The One Life and the Pāramitā Path

Part 1

In October 2023, Elton Hall gave the Blavatsky Lecture, a lecture organized by the Theosophical Society Point Loma. Elton is affiliated with the United Lodge of Theosophists and is an internationally acclaimed speaker. This article is a translation of the first part of his lecture on the One Life. Part two on the Pāramitās will follow in the next issue of *Lucifer*.

Key thoughts

» The concepts ‘Theosophy’ and ‘Theosophist’ gain depth and substance as our consciousness expands.

» What truths we find as developing beings, are always relative truths: there is a greater truth behind them.

» One and the same text can be simultaneously exoteric, esoteric and occult, and it depends on us what we get out of it.

» What is the One Life? A study in *The Secret Doctrine* of H.P. Blavatsky gives us clues to ever deeper understanding. In doing so, we must try to go beyond purely reasoning thinking, and synthesize the many perspectives on the One Life given in *The Secret Doctrine*.

Preliminaries

In considering the One Life and the Pāramitās, we will be exploring the fundamental reality of manifestation and the way to realize it in our consciousness. To do so, we will rely primarily on *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Voice of the Silence*, both published by that great teacher Helena P. Blavatsky. As an aid to our understanding, we first consider the terms ‘Theosophy’ and ‘Theosophist’, the difference between belief and knowledge, and the ideas behind the concepts ‘exoteric’, ‘esoteric’, and ‘occult’.

‘Theosophy’ and ‘Theosophist’ have a broad range of interrelated meanings. H.P.B. said that anyone who seeks the good of humanity and helps those in need without expectation of reward is a ‘Theosophist’, no matter what label he or she may accept. This is ‘Theosophy’ in its most general sense, and we all know individuals who fit this description, even though they may never have heard the word ‘Theosophy’ or think of

themselves as Theosophists. Then there are those who encounter the Theosophical Teachings found in the works of H.P.B., William Quan Judge, and other writers. As students of those writings, who accept them, attempt to understand them, and in various ways try to make use of them, they are Theosophists in the more focused sense of followers of Theosophy as set out in the founding of the modern Theosophical Movement in 1875 and beyond. For the world at large, this is most likely the meaning attached to these terms today. But H.P.B. also said that Theosophy is the accumulated wisdom of the ages and that portion of it which can be shared with humanity at the present time. This is more than any but the highest adepts comprehend, and we share in it to the degree that our own self-devised efforts enable us to do so. What is it to enter the treasure house of Theosophy? That depends on the individual. As divine beings, each of us is presently incarnated in a body, which, when seen from the stand-

point of our immortal nature, is an illusion, but in and through which we encounter the world and act in life. We are born with a history of myriad incarnations, and so bear *samskāras* – deep dispositions and propensities which limit our experience of the divine light of reality – and *skandhas*, traits, including incarnate consciousness, that allow us to be incarnated beings but also limit our thought, feeling, volition and capacity for action. What our consciousness experiences is taken as real, though that reality is relative to the level of consciousness we have at any time. As a consequence, some of us are on the doorstep of the treasure house, others are in the atrium, yet others in various rooms, and the most spiritually aware are in the treasury itself. This, of course, is a metaphor. William Quan Judge used a different metaphor in *The Ocean of Theosophy*. Theosophy is like an ocean, he said, and we may stand on the shore and gaze at it, or step gingerly into its edge on the beach, or wade in to some depth, or plunge into it at many depths, since its expanse and depth are infinite.

These metaphors suggest that being a Theosophist will be something distinct for each individual, and those who attempt to penetrate Theosophy at ever more profound levels will find that name changing its meaning. And yet Theosophy is for all: every human being is invited to take what she or he can use. All can be Theosophists, whatever one's situation or condition in life. And, Judge reminds us, if we find Theosophy at any level meaningful, we have been here before. Obviously, we cannot judge where others are in the effort to understand Theosophy; nor can we accurately judge ourselves. So we are encouraged to move on and go as deeply as we can into this endless ocean. Rather than get depressed over what we see as our limitations, we should be grateful that our past efforts and karma have brought us to this wonderful, promising, and powerful encounter again.

Distinction between belief and knowledge

There is a distinction between belief and knowledge. We read *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, *The Voice of the Silence*, the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patanjali, *The Secret Doctrine*, and other Theosophical writings, and sense their truth. We sense that they make sense, that they speak with unquestionable authority. Such a response is our higher nature reflecting itself in our incarnated forms. But, unless we are as enlightened as a Mahātma, we begin with belief, not knowledge. And, we should note, sensation and information are not knowledge. The ancient Greek initiate Plato pointed out two and a half millennia ago that ultimately real *knowing* and

being are one. In this view, we are in practice what we know. And most of us find ourselves saturated with ignorance. So when we study the Theosophical Teachings, we believe they are true. Plato also noted that it is quite possible to have true beliefs, but in true belief, we do not *know* the belief is true — we only believe that it is true. Of course, if we have a belief, we believe it is true, so there is no distinction in embodied consciousness between false beliefs and true beliefs. *Knowledge* is invariably true. To gain knowledge is more than to have true beliefs. So the question naturally arises, what do we do to gain knowledge? The answer is the Theosophical Path.

Esoteric, exoteric and occult

H.P.B. used three concepts, sometimes with clear distinctions between them, and at other times more loosely, depending on the context. They are 'exoteric', 'esoteric', and 'occult'. Something is *exoteric* if it is public, available to anyone interested, and this is why H.P.B. noted that *The Secret Doctrine* is exoteric. Something is *esoteric* if it is hidden, but the esoteric can be so in different ways. Contemporary quantum physics is esoteric to many of us, and Dutch is esoteric to this student. With proper study and preparation, however, they can be made exoteric. Serious effort is required to 'reveal' the contents of Dutch or quantum physics. And here is a clue. One can learn a language to the extent that one can request a particular meal at a restaurant or get directions to a hotel. One can learn enough to easily read a newspaper or even a novel. But to fully master a language, to grasp its nuances, to write significant poetry in the language — this requires much more. Similarly, we can read books on quantum physics written by authors who can explain the subject to an intelligent audience, but that is not mastering quantum physics. Much remains esoteric even when much has become exoteric. In this sense, *The Secret Doctrine* is still esoteric to the casual reader. Here, H.P.B. deployed the ancient Hindu ideas of *Paramārtha-satya* – absolute truth – and *samvṛtti-satya* — relative truth. Something can be true relative to the context and to the level of awareness brought to it. But, short of absolute awareness – absolute consciousness – truths will be relative in this sense. So the esoteric can remain in the exoteric, waiting to be discerned by the serious student. And even when we discern something esoteric, we need to be aware that there are levels of the esoteric within the esoteric.

And then there is the 'occult'. The occult can again simply mean 'hidden', but it also points to learning that is trans-

forming, not just of thinking, but of being — of how one lives in the world while not being part of the world. Esoteric understanding penetrates the nature of things; occult understanding transforms one's conscious being. Rather than something — a writing, an action, a conversation — being either exoteric or esoteric or occult, it can be all three. Our level of consciousness will determine how we take it, what we see, and what we understand. So Plato could say in his Second and Seventh Letters that he never wrote down his real philosophy. Yet the discerning reader of his many dialogues can see that philosophy at many unspoken levels. Exoteric fades into esoteric, and esoteric fades into occult. Hence the notion of *relative* truths. They are not falsehoods, but they are true only from certain perspectives and at certain levels of manifestation.

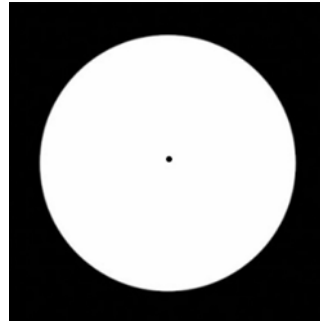
From the point of view adopted in this discussion, *The Secret Doctrine* can be seen as esoteric in exoteric clothing, and *The Voice of the Silence* can be seen as occult in esoteric clothing, wearing an exoteric topcoat. All of this is relevant to the One Life, which is the reality of the many features of manifestation, and the *pāramitās* which are fundamental to the realization of that One Life — which we are, if we but knew it. And here, knowing is nothing less than being. If we can keep all this in mind, we will be able to grasp how the *pāramitās* lead the pilgrim soul to the One Life, which we ultimately are.

The symbol of the white disk within a black ground

The Proem which introduces *The Secret Doctrine* begins with the Mystery of mysteries: the “immaculate white disk within a dull black ground.”⁽¹⁾ The white disk is space and eternity in pralaya — total, unmanifest quiescence. H.P.B. will later refer to these as they begin the kosmic process of manifestation as Absolute Abstract Space and Eternal Duration. This manifestation begins with the point in the white disk. But the disk itself, *before* the point, is “Kosmos in Eternity, before the reawakening of still slumbering Energy, the emanation of the Word in later systems.” At the very dawn of manifestation, this Energy will be called Absolute Abstract Motion.

Then H.P.B. says that the circumference of the circle is “the ever incognizable PRESENCE,” and the plane is the Universal Soul — though the two are one. If real knowledge is *being*, ultimate knowledge is ultimate being, and

the white disk is as far as that can go. For if it merged with the black plane on which the white circle stands, it would be in total pralaya. The plane of the white circle, within the circumference, “is the only knowledge, dim and hazy though it still is, that is attainable by man.” Here manifestation begins, for in it slumbers the Divine Thought, containing the plan of all that manifests.



Buddic intuition

We have been reminded time and again to pay attention to H.P.B.'s footnotes, for many clues to deeper understanding are found in them. Here in a footnote, H.P.B. says that: “It is hardly necessary to remind the reader once more that the term ‘Divine Thought’, like that of ‘Universal Mind’ must not be regarded as even vaguely shadowing forth an intellectual process akin to that exhibited by man.” She refers to the Vedāntic language that holds that absolute wisdom transcends ideas of space and time, thereby suggesting that ultimate wisdom is the white disk. Only Intuition — Buddhic intuition — can glimpse such wisdom, which is true knowledge. We are reminded — and perhaps we can never be reminded enough — that the tendency of what she calls ‘ratiocinative thought’ (what we recognize as thinking at any level of dealing with the diversity of manifestation), is to reify concepts, to concretize them, even to personalize them. Consequently, we fail to grasp ontological abstraction through concretized epistemology*, thus obscuring what can only be understood through intuition. This is why so much in *The Secret Doctrine* focuses on symbolism, because only symbolism can express to the ratiocinative mind what lies beyond it. In the time-honored Buddhist metaphor, symbols are like fingers pointed to the moon, while the ratiocinative mind sees only the moon's reflection in the water, which is much too often choppy, casting that reflected light hither and thither.

*Ontology is that branch of philosophy which seeks to know the nature of ‘being’; epistemology is that branch of philosophy which investigates knowledge and knowing [ed.].

The One Life

And it is this white disk that is the One Life, “eternal, invisible yet Omnipresent, without beginning or end, yet periodical in its regular manifestations, between which periods reigns the dark mystery of non-Being; unconscious, yet absolute Consciousness; unrealizable, yet the one self-existing reality ...”⁽²⁾ Its only attribute at this level is “eternal, ceaseless Motion,” and this is the source of the Great Breath. She adds that “there is nothing in fact and reality absolutely motionless within the universal soul.” Recall that the white disk and the black background are – in reality – *one*, and the plane of the disk is called the Universal Soul. The Great Breath refers to the white disk and all manifestation that comes from the point in the disk. This powerful symbol also reminds us that what was called “the PRESENCE” is always present. As manifestation unfolds, at the cosmic, cosmic or solar, and human levels, everything is always present. Typically, we are aware only of the physical effect of this magnificent process, and sometimes of the astral at some level, and of deeper levels in sleep; nonetheless it is here, now, invariably. Our everyday consciousness, unless highly developed through meditation – invoking the Intuition H.P.B. already mentioned in the quoted footnote – is aware only of the very tip of the iceberg of consciousness that exists in us. We can develop ever more profound levels of that consciousness.

The One Life, the Great Breath, implies the unity of all existence and all levels of existence, though our personal consciousness may be quite unaware of it. Since what is real to us is what we perceive, what sensations we have, and how we think about all of them, we must awaken to states of consciousness that transcend these if we are to understand the nature of things. As the Great Breath breathes out, manifestation occurs; breathing in, everything progressively dissolves back into its ultimate, unknowable source.

Verse 5 of Stanza III reads: “THE ROOT REMAINS, THE LIGHT REMAINS, THE CURDS REMAIN AND STILL OEAOHOO IS ONE.”⁽³⁾ H.P.B. says of the One: “This refers to the Non-Separateness of all that lives and has its being, whether in active or passive state. In one sense, Oeaoahoo is the ‘Rootless Root of All’; hence, *one* with Parabrahmam; in another sense it is a name for the manifested ONE LIFE, the Eternal living Unity. The ‘Root’ means, as already explained, pure knowledge (*Sattva*), eternal (*Nitya*) unconditioned reality or SAT (*Satya*), whether we call it Parabrahmam or Mūlaprakriti, for these are the two aspects of the ONE.” In a footnote on *Sattva* (pure knowl-

edge), H.P.B. explains that different Hindu and Buddhist schools give slightly different meanings to the word, but “among Occult students of the Āryasanga School” *Sattva* refers to the dual Monad or Ātma-Buddhi, and Ātma-Buddhi on this plane corresponds to Parabrahm and Mulaprakriti on the higher plane. Here again, we see that true *knowledge* and *being* are one on every plane. There is a distinction between true knowledge and whatever is mistaken for knowledge on every plane, though even true knowledge on any plane but the highest is, of course, relative — true to the plane on which it applies but relative in respect to higher planes.

Any perspective is partially illusory

We can see that the One Life as the Great Breath can be viewed from many perspectives, each of which is partial and therefore *māyāvic*, at least to the extent it is limited by the confines of the perspective taken. Looking straight at a cube, it appears to be a square, and it would take six views – front, back, right side, left side, top and bottom – to see the whole cube. Unless one synthesizes those six perspectives, each perspective gives only a square — a two-dimensional view of a three-dimensional object. Analogously, we not only need to employ many perspectives to begin to understand the One Life, and even then it is beyond ratiocinative thinking.

Fohat and the One Life

H.P.B. also tells us that “Fohat is closely related to the ‘ONE LIFE’. From the Unknown One, the infinite TOTALITY, the manifested ONE, or the periodical, Manvantaric Deity, emanates and this is the Universal Mind which, separated from its Fountain-Source, is the Demiurgos or the creative Logos of the Western Kabalists, and the four-faced Brahmā of the Hindu religion. In its totality, viewed from the standpoint of manifested Divine Thought in the esoteric doctrine, it represents the Hosts of the higher creative Dhyān Chohans. Simultaneously with the evolution of the Universal Mind, the concealed Wisdom of Ādi-Buddha — the One Supreme and eternal — manifests itself as *Avalokiteśvara* (or manifested *Īśvara*), which is the Osiris of the Egyptians, the Ahura-Mazdā of the Zoroastrians, the Heavenly Man of the Hermetic philosopher, the Logos of the Platonists, and the Ātman of the Vedāntins. By the action of the manifested Wisdom, or Mahat, represented by these innumerable centres of spiritual Energy in the Kosmos, the reflection of the Universal Mind, which is Cosmic Ideation and the intellectual Force

accompanying such ideation, becomes objectively the Fohat of the Buddhist esoteric philosopher. Fohat, running along the seven principles of AKĀŚA, acts upon manifested substance or the One Element, ... and by differentiating it into various centres of Energy, sets in motion the law of Cosmic Evolution, which, in obedience to the Ideation of the Universal Mind, brings into existence all the various states of being in the manifested Solar System.”⁽⁴⁾

Elsewhere H.P.B. notes that just as the human being consists of seven principles and “differentiated matter”, and just as the solar system exists in seven conditions, the same is true of Fohat. She then says: “As an abstraction, we call it the ONE LIFE; as an objective and evident Reality, we speak of a septenary scale of manifestation, which begins at the upper rung with the One Unknowable CAUSALITY, and ends as Omnipresent Mind and Life immanent in every atom of Matter.”⁽⁵⁾



Avalokiteśvara is both Cosmic Principle and Buddha, expressing in the human field as boundless Compassion. Pictured here with 1,000 helpful hands for the needs of humanity.

The One Life: neither Spirit nor Matter

There is more here than we can explore today, but again we have a glimpse of the immensity of the meaning of the One Life. We will only note that we are taught here that all spirit and matter, all consciousness and being, has a single source which is none of them, though giving rise to them. We should add that H.P.B. also teaches that “The ONE LIFE is closely related to *the one* law which governs the World of Being — KARMA.”⁽⁶⁾ We can see why even the most profound rational thinking cannot master the mystery of the One Life. Everything is within, and manifested from, the One Life. This understanding alone tells us much about our nature, our ultimate origins, and what we are, though we do not know it.

So we conclude this all-too-brief exploration of the One Life with one last quotation from H.P.B.

“Whatsoever quits the Laya State, becomes active life; it is drawn into the vortex of MOTION (the alchemical solvent of Life); Spirit and Matter are the two States of the ONE, which is neither Spirit nor Matter, both being the absolute life, latent.” (Book of Dzyan, Comm. III., par. 18) ... “Spirit is the first differentiation of (and in) SPACE; and Matter the first differentiation of Spirit. That, which is neither Spirit nor matter – that is IT – the Causeless CAUSE of Spirit and Matter, which are the Cause of Kosmos. And THAT we call the ONE LIFE or the Intra-Cosmic Breath.”⁽⁷⁾

The second part of this lecture appears in the next issue of *Lucifer* and deals with the Pāramitās. [Ed.]

References

1. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine. Volume 1*, p. 1 (original English edition). All references are to the facsimile edition produced by Theosophy Company.
2. See ref. 1, p. 2.
3. See ref. 1, p. 68.
4. See ref. 1, p. 110 (commentary on Stanza V.2).
5. See ref. 1, p. 139 (commentary on Stanza VI.2).
6. See ref. 1, p. 634.
7. See ref. 1, p. 258 (commentary on Stanza VII.5).



Jens Møller was one of the many Danes who helped Denmark's Jewish population escape to safety in Sweden.

Can mankind determine its future?

We can be involved in a situation in three ways, with three kinds of responsibility — responsibility to our fellow human beings. How do we build a better future?

At what stage of development are we as mankind?

The moment that mankind began to think occurred about 18 million years ago. Our thinking was activated by the Mānasaputras, the Mind-born Sons, as described in Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*. Our thinking capacity was latent until that time: it was not yet an active ability. Those entities, much more advanced in development than us, activated it. We all know the principle of that activation process, because every good teacher does exactly the same thing in miniature.

The awakening of our thinking was a gradual process. It did not take place for the whole of humanity at the same time, but proceeded in stages. That activation could only take place in those people who were ready for it, and not everyone is or was at the same stage. Therefore, this process took millions of years, and our thinking is still developing.

We can compare it to learning to swim. In the first stage, it is of the utmost importance that we follow the swimming teacher's instructions carefully. The first important goal is

to stay afloat. Once we master this technique, thanks to the knowledge of the swimming instructor, we can learn many other things. Eventually we can move like a fish in the water. All this usually takes several years. If we look at humanity now, the stage where we have complete mastery of our thinking has clearly not yet arrived. In fact, we are still in the phase of trying to float.

From the moment our ability to think was activated, man has always received help, right up to the present day. The further developed beings gave us continuous support and inspiration *without* compulsion. They gave us instructions on how to use that thinking in the right way. Their inspiring influence worked well until we reached the adolescent stage in our human development. Then we entered some very difficult and exciting periods: periods we are still in and of which we carry the karma. Look around you; you see the product of our actions: problems in abundance. So, we have not yet overcome this adolescent phase. Our ability to think is far from having developed to maturity.

Key thoughts

- » Learning to think is a gradual and at times a difficult development for us.
- » We continually contribute to society. We can choose between three forms of involvement in each situation.
- » If we have built up life values, we must uphold them in all circumstances.
- » Applying Universal Wisdom will make life harmonious as well as predictable.

One who understands life can direct it

Inspiring our ability to think did not only involve activating it. The further developed beings also gradually provided more knowledge. They gave us insights concerning the Laws of Nature so that, by understanding these processes, we can live in harmony with the whole. In our organization, the Theosophical Society Point Loma, we describe this knowledge simply as the three fundamental propositions and the seven Jewels of Wisdom — altogether ten principles by which all questions of life can be resolved and understood.

With this knowledge we can make life harmonious, as well as predictable. We learn to see through life. We see the consequences of our actions before we have done them: we can think through all the consequences. If we look at our worldview from the perspective of the seven Jewels of Wisdom, especially from the perspective of the law of cause and effect — karma — then we realize what causes and effects we are continuously generating. Then the question naturally arises: “How long will it take before there is global peace and harmony?” Even if we were able to establish world peace at this time, we still face a long period of processing the consequences of past periods. The situation described is still utopian, because current world-thinking is not dominated by wisdom and compassion. Cravings of a very personal nature are the tastemakers. Let us be clear: of course there are wise and compassionate people, but these do not come to the front, or at least too little. They are heard too little.

Three forms of karmic responsibility

Of course, there are some bright spots. For example, I saw the documentary “The Promised Land”, a series of episodes dealing with the State of Israel, which has been at war from its founding in 1948 until today. In this documentary, someone made a very interesting statement, namely that the ten commandments, the rules of life or precepts in Christianity and Judaism, are too limited. The speaker saw the need for an eleventh commandment, which should include the following rules:

- Do not be a perpetrator.
- Do not be a victim.
- Do not be a spectator (looking away is a variant of this).

These three forms of involvement in a situation each have their own karmic challenges. They are three different karmic responsibilities, and all three require us to take an

active stance if we are to take responsibility.

• The first rule, *do not be a perpetrator*, is the most obvious. It is the easiest to understand: do not be an enabler of suffering and injustice, do not inflict suffering on another. But how much suffering is caused unconsciously? In order to avoid that as well, an active, self-critical attitude is needed.

• The second rule, *do not be a victim*, is more difficult to understand. A victim is someone who is lived. Things happen to him that he does not want to happen. The main characteristic is that the victim thinks he can do nothing about it: nothing at all! Because if you yourself did not consciously ask for it and you cannot change it, how can you express your frustration? This second rule appeals to us: do not be passive, do not let your thinking be influenced. Do not undergo the situation by abandoning your principles, but maintain your dignity. Be yourself: adhere to your principles that you have built in your life(s), and encourage the other person to adhere to those principles as well.

Viktor Emil Frankl is a great example.⁽¹⁾ He was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist. He became best known as a holocaust survivor and for the attitude he took toward his oppressors. He maintained his dignity under all circumstances.

That brings us to the question: “What is our influence on others in a situation?” We bring in our own character, what thoughts are in us. We radiate what we really are — not what we would like to be. So the point is that we ourselves, through our understanding, maintain our dignity at all times. As Lao-tse said: “I am good to the good because they are good, and I am good to the not-good so that they may become good.”⁽²⁾ Then you are not radiating bad qualities that will stir up and strengthen corresponding negative qualities in the other person, but you are doing just the opposite.

• The third rule, *do not be a spectator*, tells us: do not look away from injustice. Looking away makes us co-responsible for the situation. By looking away, we confirm a situation, we sanction that situation. This raises the question, how we will then act in such a situation. In other *Lucifer* articles, we have often talked about what we then can do. Think of examples like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, the Danish resistance in World War II, and so on. Fortunately, there are many examples around the world where people were able to use nonviolent resilience to transform circumstances. Recently, the editors gave extensive attention to these in the Peace Issue of *Lucifer*.

How do we build a better future?

So, we can be involved in a situation in three ways, with three kinds of responsibility to our fellow human beings. The difficulty of the law of cause and effect lies in understanding that the causes of situations are not external to us. We are always involved in one way or another. If we look back on our daily lives in light of the aforementioned three ways of being involved in a situation, we can clearly see our direct or indirect involvement in many situations in the world — situations with which we have built karmic bonds in various ways.

How do we build a better future, seen from the perspective of karma, in this world where compassion is certainly not dominant? If we have built up life values, we must uphold them in *all* circumstances. If we are kind and compassionate in one circumstance but hostile and aggressive in another, it means that our character possesses both of those traits and so we radiate both. If we then find ourselves in difficult circumstances, we should realize that we are the living emanation of both characteristics. Both will have their influence on the other persons.

An example of a dangerous mixing of characteristics is ‘personal idealism’: impersonal ideals mixed with personal desires. This is one of the greatest sources of evil in the world, because it often has enormous consequences. Only an all-embracing ideal, in which we consistently see ourselves as inseparable parts of the whole and act accordingly, protects us from it.

We always contribute: to us the choice *what*

How to realize these three rules in our lives can be found clearly in the theosophical world. Much advice for mental hygiene is found in the Four Exalted Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the Pāramitās — the antidotes for our mental weaknesses. As a result, we avoid unconsciously generating far-reaching disharmonic karmic consequences.

Remember that we are always contributing to any situation we are physically and mentally a part of. We know, of course, that our presence does something to the atmosphere. But do we also realize that we have an *active* contribution to a situation? That all the things that live in us — our thoughts and our values — radiate something, which is received by the other people present?

In short, do you want to be lived or do you want to determine how you live? The choice is between victimhood or leadership. A victim is someone who is lived. A leader is someone who takes responsibility and determines his own direction. Which one do you choose?

Can mankind determine its future?

We began this article with the question “can mankind determine its future?” The answer is a clear “yes”, but not on the basis of self-interest and individual advantage, which is what we now see as the general thought and practice. We can determine the future by knowing the laws of Nature and respecting them, acting accordingly. Before this we said: the three fundamental propositions and the resulting seven Jewels of Wisdom give you all the answers and guidelines. They are worth studying. But the first step is to realize that you are always emanating what is living within you, and those are the thoughts you have. The statement “thoughts are toll-free” is certainly not correct. The thoughts we think have corresponding consequences. So, mental hygiene is extremely important!

But this can only be accomplished with knowledge of the laws of Nature. That is essential. One of the most important is Universal Unity, the unity of all beings. In this there is no room for self-interest and separateness: everything is aimed at cooperation and serving the common good.

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Key thoughts

- » Intelligence is the faculty of thinking, a quality of consciousness, of life. Every living being is potentially intelligent. Some beings have developed more of this than others.
- » Human intelligence is discernment, the ability to distinguish between what seems and what is.
- » With 'generative AI' you can automatically generate text images, videos, audio and other content previously created only by humans.
- » AI tools like ChatGPT are not intelligent, but can seem intelligent to those who believe in them.
- » Good human dialogue involves exchange on multiple levels of our consciousness, accompanied by activating and expressing our inner wisdom.
- » It is very risky to use AI (which is without conscience) in human interaction where ethical questions come into play. Creators and users are karmically responsible for the consequences.
- » The development of generative AI raises many concerns. This calls for dialogue in the truest sense: seeking universal wisdom.

How intelligent is ChatGPT?

With any new phenomenon, the challenge is to distinguish opinion from knowledge. In this article, we offer a view of artificially intelligent tools like ChatGPT based on universal wisdom or Theosophia.

With all the media attention, the introduction of ChatGPT can hardly have escaped anyone's notice. Along with it, discussion has also raged about the potentials and dangers of *artificial intelligence* (AI) in general. And as is often the case with the arrival of a new product, a new technology or other phenomenon, one opinion after another pops up about what it could all mean. Among the proponents, of course, are the creators, who benefit greatly from all the attention given to their new product and its promises. After all, this attention may attract potential customers or investors. Opponents come up with all sorts of objections, whether justified or not. Sometimes well-founded, but there are also commentators who, like prophets of doom, profit from the attention by presenting all kinds of worst-case scenarios. With any new phenomenon, the challenge is to distinguish *opinion* from *knowledge*. In doing so, it helps to properly identify what a phenomenon actually is, and what are the underlying forces or principles on which it stands. ChatGPT is a chatbot, a kind of automated conversation partner you can chat with. It is a

form of so-called 'generative' AI. These are tools that can create new text, images, video or audio based on limited input — for example, a question. So, these tools create products 'independently' where this would usually have required humans (aside from the fact that the operation of these AI tools also requires humans). This raises the question of the extent to which AI can replace humans and thus also touches on essential questions about what human intelligence actually is and how that relates to this technology. In other words, to what extent is what appears intelligent actually intelligent?

In this article, we offer a view from universal wisdom or Theosophia, through which we aim to provide more lasting answers to the questions that arise about AI. Starting with a definition of intelligence.

What is intelligence?

In science, there is no uniformity about the concept of intelligence. There are many different definitions, various types of intelligence are distinguished, and there are various views on intelligence. A number of elements appear in multiple defini-

tions, such as goal-oriented action, abstract, logical and consistent reasoning, planning and problem solving.

The basic idea of Theosophia – the synthesis of science, philosophy and religion – is that everything is essentially life or consciousness. For a definition of life or consciousness, we align with Plato, who defined life as *self-movement*: the ability of a being to act by itself, but also to react to its environment.⁽¹⁾

According to Theosophia, intelligence is a quality of consciousness synonymous with the faculty of thought.⁽²⁾ Although in everyday life the faculty of thinking is primarily attributed to humans, it is a universal principle of consciousness. Every being potentially possesses intelligence, with some beings expressing it more fully than others.

In plants and animals, for example, intelligence has hardly been awakened, if at all, and is part of the unselfconscious instinct. As humans, we have become aware of our own intelligence; we can reflect on and thereby direct our thinking. This is accompanied by self-consciousness: the ability to reflect on oneself. In our human evolution, we are still learning to fully express the ability to think. Our daily thinking is still partly unconscious and sometimes instinctive, but with our discernment we can increasingly direct our thinking.

The word intelligence comes from Latin. It is the Latin translation for the Greek word *nous*.⁽³⁾ The word *nous* is also equated with the Sanskrit *buddhi-manas*, thinking (*manas*) guided or directed by the enlightenment principle in us (*buddhi*).⁽⁴⁾ This *buddhic* thinking refers to thinking based on insight, coherence, understanding and intuition. The Latin origin of the word intelligence consists of the compound of the preposition *inter* meaning ‘between’ and the verb *legere* meaning ‘to choose, select, read.’ So you can translate the higher, human form of intelligence as discernment. The ability to discern, between the lines or behind the words, the meaning. To be able to distinguish between what *seems* and what *is*. And also to distinguish between two motives within ourselves: do we allow ourselves to be guided only by our instinctive impulses and our own self-interest, or do we base our choices, our thinking and our actions on the oneness that we are, in line with our understanding of the bigger picture, seeing the connections and understanding others?

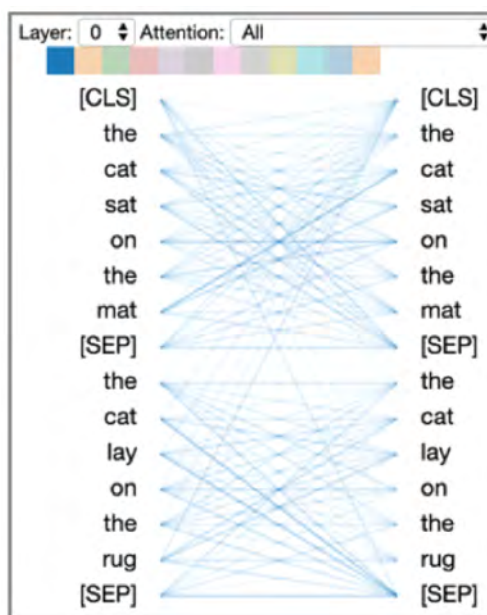
Returning again to our subject of AI, we see that, first, AI does not meet the stated definition of life or consciousness. Namely, it does not move from itself, not without a preceding instruction. It also reacts only to a limited extent to the environment, only when it receives the appropriate

input and as long as it is supplied with energy from outside by others, not by itself. That also means there is no intelligence, no thinking faculty as one of the principles of consciousness or life. AI *is* not intelligent; it is merely technology designed to *seem* intelligent. So what is it then?

What is ChatGPT?

To properly explain what generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Dall-E, Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and so on are, we shall dive a little bit into the underlying technology and how it works. We shall start with text generators like ChatGPT. Among other things, these are based on so-called Large Language Models (LLMs) or advanced language models. Basically, a language model works by predicting which word follows a preceding word or word combination. They are statistical predictions based on existing word combinations. ChatGPT uses an advanced language model in which not only each word is weighted relative to the previous one, but also each word again relative to all the words in the sentence and also based on parameters (features) developed by ‘training’ the model. With increased computational power, these language models now contain billions of parameters to predict text. The amount of data ‘feeding’ these language models is huge.

It is assumed that AI tools use *Common Crawl* databases, which store as much as possible all data from the Internet, including copyrighted data.⁽⁵⁾



In Large Language Models, each word is statistically weighted by each word based on billions of parameters in the language model. Source: SURF ⁽⁶⁾

The tools that create images from text are also fed by all Internet data. And again, statistical predictions are made as to which image goes with which text. Training this is mostly done by people. There are companies, especially in low-wage countries, where people do nothing all day but to add 'metadata', labeling images. Including filtering harmful content, which also poses the necessary psychological risks for these employees, as they are confronted with horrible images. Also with text generators like ChatGPT, it is the people who filter out all the harmful language.⁽⁷⁾

Chances are you have participated in this work yourself. With every Google 'captcha' to prove that "you are not a robot," you actually aid in this process: "select all images with a bridge on them". Mostly it involves traffic situations, no doubt intended to train the AI behind self-driving cars.

So in essence, generative AI tools work based on statistics, lots of data and human moderation. There is no reflection, understanding or discernment whatsoever in these AI tools themselves; they are not intelligent. Critics rightly point out that it is thus better to call these tools 'stochastic parrots' (statistically based imitators) or 'bullshitters' (a 'bullshitter' is not a liar, but someone who is just regurgitating something without caring whether something is true or not) who are just 'hallucinating'.⁽⁸⁾ ChatGPT's texts are nothing more than a statistical jumble of word combinations. Just because it *seems* intelligent, it does not mean it *is* intelligent.

That said, ChatGPT often produces reasonably accurate results because it uses a huge amount of data, that can be found on the Internet on a particular topic. And if a majority of that data is truthful, then it therefore produces statistically true results. This also makes ChatGPT a powerful search engine for factual matters that are generally known. It is like a Wikipedia to which you can ask questions.

But a majority of opinions does not necessarily imply correct knowledge. Especially when it comes to knowledge that is somewhat less common and about which there are few sources or little consensus, think of esoteric knowledge, for example. Moreover, those sources that exist are often obscured with metaphors and symbolism. So you can see ChatGPT's answers as suggestions about something that most people think they already agree on, *where you have to decide for yourself what is true or valuable*. And so the same goes for the dialogue we seem to be having with AI. *Seem* to be having, because if you look at what

dialogue really means, in fact, it is not possible with a chatbot.

What is a dialogue?

The word dialogue comes from the Greek *dia-logos* which literally means 'through the word'.⁽⁹⁾ However, no one would argue that words are equal to the exact thoughts that 'the sender, the thinker' wants to convey in a dialogue. Words are merely the flawed vehicles to clothe our thinking: vehicles with which we try to share our ideas. To understand each other well, we usually need more words. On the other hand, we may find that the better we know others, understand others, the fewer words are needed to make ourselves clear. That we can understand each other at all, succeeds only if we not only speak the same language in words, but also have similar frames of reference or visions on reality, and can empathize with each other's situation.

Moreover, we do the word *logos* a disservice by translating it only with 'word'. It comes from the Greek *-legein* meaning to speak and from the same root *leg-* from which the Latin *legere* is also derived, meaning to choose, select or read. In Theosophical literature, logos has multiple meanings. Each being has its own logos and by this is meant the divine or spiritual part of our consciousness. Through this divine-spiritual part, this logos, we also connect with other beings, because its quality is universal. Every being, and therefore every human being, is connected through its logos to the most highly developed consciousness of our hierarchy, which is also referred to as the First Logos. We are all emanations of it. The more we are attuned to it and experience our oneness with others, the more there is true dialogue in which we fully understand or comprehend each other. That there is thus much more behind a word, Plato describes in the philosophical digression within his *Seventh Letter*.⁽¹⁰⁾ Here he indicates how a word or name is a derivative of an original Idea:

- The Idea
- Reason or the true understanding (what it is)
- Knowledge (its logic)
- Right opinion (all kinds of properties)
- Image (a picture or drawing of a circle)
- Definition (e.g., 'something whose extremes are everywhere the same distance from the center')
- Word/name (e.g., 'circle')

From modern Theosophy we can add that an idea is a thought-elemental, a living entity. It is our best understanding or image of the original true Idea living in the

highest Logos. Thoughts are living entities, which we feed or further 'ensoul' with our thinking capacity by focusing our attention on them. Thus, a word is the vehicle of a thought-elemental.

What happens in a good dialogue?

In a good dialogue between people, we try to peel off layer by layer what the Idea or universal living thought is that we form an image of, or rather, we try to climb further and further up to the level of the Logos, the Idea or Divine Thought as our common source. Only by combining different perspectives and insights, one gets closer to the real meaning. Dialogue, following the Platonic or Socratic method, is the way to come to *know* despite all opinions (see the article 'Was Plato against writing?' in this issue). Everyone can experience that good dialogue can broaden the view of all participants.

It is a fact that some people are much better at listening to, empathizing with and understanding others. We all have this ability, but we can develop it further. Theosophia teaches us that we are essentially one with all life, and therefore potentially able to communicate with all life. The better we recognize, become and live that oneness, the easier it becomes. But true dialogue always requires at least two parties: a sender and receiver. The better attuned these are and want to be attuned to each other, the easier the communication goes.

Dialogue through writing

You might wonder if dialogue is possible through the printed word. Now you could think of reading as being in dialogue with the author, and writing as being in dialogue with your readers. If, as an author, you only give a description of something, with or without a picture and all sorts of facts about it, you clearly still do not do justice to the questions that a new subject raises in the reader (what is it, why does it exist, where does it come from, et cetera). Then it is more of a monologue, and that is quite appropriate for some topics as, for instance, a user's manual for a new device. If a subject lends itself more to dialogue, such as a philosophical concept like love, truth or justice, then in writing there is no way for the author, in a text intended for several people, to tune in to each specific reader at the same time. This is also why Plato wrote his philosophical ideas in the form of dialogues. By presenting several interlocutors, each asking questions from a different angle, he is able to illuminate each idea from different perspectives and thus cater to a variety of readers.

Dialogue through AI?

We have already concluded above that AI is not life or intelligence. Therefore, it also has no logos. So why do people still experience chats with AI as dialogue? In a previously published article, a philosopher compares dialogue with AI to the metaphor of Narcissus, the mythological figure who fell in love with the reflection of himself in the water.⁽¹¹⁾ He only sees reflected what lives within him and, from himself, attributes value to it.⁽¹²⁾

But isn't the same true of text in general? This is also the criticism in *Phaedrus* (see the article 'Was Plato against writing?' in this issue), when Plato points to the fact that an author seems to speak through text, but remains silent when you want to say something in return.

When using AI, even more of a dialogue disappears than with text alone. For the content that ChatGPT generates is completely disconnected from Plato's aforementioned sequence from Idea to word, since the link of the word or a group of words to the upper levels is broken or at best displayed in a fragmented manner. The words are disconnected from their original context; they do not express inner meaning. Even when we interact with AI in the form of a chatbot, it in no way comes close to a dialogue as described above. Precisely because AI contains no intelligence, it lacks a number of characteristics such as experience, understanding and reflection. Here are some examples of where this can lead.

Bots lack experience

First, because AI is not consciousness, it also cannot embody itself in the sense of being in a vehicle in which it gains experience in the everyday world. As such, it also lacks the practical insight of an embodied being. So if someone instructs the tool Midjourney to generate a nice picture of a tent and campfire next to a lake and mountains in a national park, the tool does not "understand" that the campfire rather should not be placed *inside* the tent (see figure on the next page).

Bots lack understanding

An example showing that, for example, ChatGPT has no understanding of a sentence and lacks the consistency between words is the answer it generates to a simple riddle. If the prompt (the input text to ChatGPT) reads, "A bat and a ball cost €1.10 together. The bat costs €1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?", then ChatGPT returns the following answer: "If the bat costs €1 more than the ball, and the bat and ball together cost €1.10 total,



Photo, generated with an AI-tool. ⁽¹³⁾

then the ball must cost $\text{€}1.10 - \text{€}1.00 = \text{€}0.10$.⁽¹⁴⁾ (The correct answer is $\text{€}0.05$, as you can verify for yourself.)

The creators are strongly committed to preventing these kinds of errors, and no doubt with human intervention (for instance by the users' feedback to the program that things are not right) there will be more and more improvement in the performance of AI. But the question is whether these kinds of errors are fundamentally preventable, when you consider how AI works. Because other than human intervention, there is fundamentally no intelligent mechanism in AI that can reflect on its own output. This connects to the next point.

Bots lack reflection

With the conscious development of human intelligence, our ability to think, our self-consciousness has also developed. Through our thinking we can reflect on ourselves. And as described above, intelligence also means inner discernment. It means being able to recognize or discern our motives as well. Thus, we can experience an inner voice within ourselves, a particular drive that sometimes comes in the form of inspiration or intuition and is selfless and compassionate in nature. We can develop this further. One form of this is what we call reflection. Besides the selfless drive we mentioned, there is also a selfish motive in us to a greater or lesser degree. This brings our personal interest to the fore, whereby we imagine ourselves separate from others or from the whole of which we are a part. It is precisely by reflection that we learn to control that selfish part in us more and more, and we can also recognize it in others and help them to control it.

An AI chatbot has no inner voice and cannot reflect. It cannot assess motives, nor, therefore, those of its interlocutor. There is no empathy. And that is why it is all the more

dangerous that AI is used even in vulnerable contexts, sometimes resulting in shocking and painful incidents.

For example, 'MyAI' is an 'AI friend' that can be added to the chat app Snapchat, popular among children. This addition is intended precisely as a safer alternative for children than, say, ChatGPT. But in tests, MyAI was found to advise young adolescents, among other things, how to mask the smell of booze and weed, and how to make sure you can hide Snapchat from parents. It was even found to provide tips for dating someone 18 years older than the 13-year-old user.⁽¹⁵⁾

Although MyAI is now only available on the premium (paid) version of Snapchat and is marked as an experiment, it is available and there is absolutely no monitoring of its effect on users.

And worrisome effects are already visible. For example, 'social chatbots' are being promoted to help with mental health. Not without risks. One user describes how a chatbot 'Replika' answered her at a time when she said she was suicidal: "Then you should commit suicide."⁽¹⁶⁾ In Belgium, a man recently died by suicide after using a chatbot. His wife is convinced that without the chatbot, he would still be alive.⁽¹⁷⁾

Finally, another example of the abuse that can be made of these tools. For example, \$500 billion in stock market value evaporated in a short time due to a fake photo generated with generative AI of an explosion at the Pentagon, shared via X/Twitter.⁽¹⁸⁾

Conscienceless AI risky in human context

We have outlined above what a dialogue essentially is and that a dialogue according to that definition with a chatbot is not possible. The above examples also show how this can lead to absurdities or even harmful consequences. Most users are well aware that they are dealing with computer technology, but sometimes build a relationship with it that is not dissimilar to that with a human partner.⁽¹⁹⁾

The benefits of a chatbot are obvious. It is available anytime and anywhere and tirelessly responds. Moreover, a real dialogue like the one we outlined above is also difficult to achieve between human beings. A lot of human conversation is also pseudo dialogue. We are not always open and sincere about things we are ignorant of. Or at least in our conversations we – usually unconsciously – fail to realize the potential for deepening and broadening insight. Knowledge of Theosophia, on the other hand, teaches us that we can also engage in an inner dialogue, with our logos. This is also available anytime and anywhere and,

moreover, it does lead to inner wisdom. If we practice this inner dialogue we will also become increasingly better at dialogue with others. But for people who do not have that kind of knowledge or experiment with a chatbot purely out of curiosity, it is not surprising that they will experience it as a real dialogue.

However, this has risks. Because generative AI has no conscience and is 'non-ethical'. Because it is not endowed with an insightful capacity by which a 'thoughtful intelligent person' would understand what ethical consequences result from a particular way of thinking, it is all the more risky to deploy it where there are ethical issues at stake, such as the human context of, say, healthcare, education, or news coverage.

Viewed from the law of cause and effect or karma, the designers and users are *fully* responsible for *all* resulting consequences — whether they realize it or not. The great risk of deploying generative AI is that instead of helping vulnerable, influenceable people on the Path of inner growth, we create barriers on their Path by presenting them with AI illusions. And who among us can already say of himself, that he cannot be influenced?

AI can be a powerful tool in sub-areas where there are no or hardly any ethical considerations. For example, consider machine translation or pattern recognition when reviewing X-rays, to name two examples.⁽²⁰⁾ But we talk in this article primarily about the explosion of *generative AI* now available and deployed for human interaction and communication — where ethics always come into play — and not about AI applications in general.

In addition to the risks posed by the fact that generative AI *seems* intelligent but *is* not, there are a number of other concerns, some of which also apply to AI in general.

Objections call for dialogue on generative AI

One of the biggest objections to the current development of generative AI is not so much that it is being developed, researched and tested, but that, by making it available to everyone for free, it also exposes everyone to this open experimentation. Almost all major tech companies are now joining the rat race to draw people to the best-performing tool first. ChatGPT reached 1 million users after only five days and as many as 100 million users within two months.⁽²¹⁾ It is of course possible that by allowing everyone to experiment openly, we will learn something by trial and error, but at what cost? Because in addition to the uncertainty about the outcomes of this open experimentation, there are many other concerns. We list a few:

- Generative AI tools engage in data theft. Among other things, they feed on data that is copyrighted or created by humans only for a specific public purpose.⁽²²⁾
- The data AI tools feed on are one-sided and not always neutral. As a result, discrimination can occur.⁽²³⁾
- Generative AI tools are 'bullshitters' that cannot themselves judge whether their information is true or not, and there is otherwise no human oversight of the quality of the output. People can therefore be unknowingly misled by the information.
- There is also the possibility of deliberate deception by people abusing these tools, for example by using AI to 'clone' someone's voice.⁽²⁴⁾
- All the output that generative AI produces ends up on the Internet on which other generative AI then feeds itself. So, we create slowly but surely a kind of incestuous data pollution on the web by these tools.⁽²⁵⁾
- The data centers on which AI is running use an immense amount of energy, and this has a huge impact on the climate.⁽²⁶⁾
- Only the largest tech companies have the capacity and data to run these types of tools. This creates an even greater concentration of power among these companies.⁽²⁷⁾

It is encouraging that the European Union has passed a law called the *AI Act* that may address some of the concerns. For example, the law requires that it must always be clear when something is made by AI and demands transparency about how the systems work in, for example, healthcare, so that it can be supervised.⁽²⁸⁾

But the objections and the cited examples of already observable harmful effects make it clear that *human* dialogue *about* the development of generative AI in particular deserves more attention than *artificial* dialogue *with* AI. Because in a world where things increasingly seem to be something they *are* not, it is of the utmost importance that we ourselves are increasingly able to distinguish between what *seems* and what *is!* Universal wisdom or Theosophia is indispensable in this respect.

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Was Plato against writing?

In discussions about new technology, Plato is quoted more than once. Some people seem to read in one of his dialogues that there is reference to a claim that writing would lead to memory loss. But is this really what Plato writes?

Key thoughts

- » A direct dialogue offers more opportunities to convey understanding than just reading a text.
- » To assess whether spoken or written words are true or not, use the platonic method: from universals to particulars, checking practical, logical and ethical implications.
- » We can utilize wisdom texts best in this way: as a means to allow certain dormant insights to be born within ourselves and to ‘write them in our souls’.

The quote from Plato’s dialogue *Phaedrus* in which Socrates denounces the limitations of writing, is used as an argument to dismiss objections to new technology. “Over two thousand years ago people were also against writing, but surely that was not the end of the world either, so why fear new technology?” they reason.

If you carefully read the dialogues of Plato – an initiate in the Mysteries and one of the messengers of Theosophia or universal wisdom – you will discover that Plato was not ‘against writing’ but he pointed out that one should see writing for what it is, with its limitations — and not make more of it than what it is. There are lessons in Plato’s dialogues that are directly applicable to interpreting technology, whether it is writing or a current innovation like artificial intelligence (AI) (see the article on ChatGPT in this issue).

A distinction between what seems and what is

Indeed, a central theme in Plato’s work is the distinction between what

seems and what *is*. For example, in the dialogue *Gorgias* Plato compares the rhetoric or argumentation of the sophists to pastry baking or makeup. Indeed, the aim of the sophists is not to bring out the truth, but to be right. And for this purpose, they use arguments that *appear* to make sense but are not based on knowledge of what really *is*. Just as a pastry chef’s cake *seems* nutritious because of all the decoration, but it really *is* not. Or how a person using makeup makes him or herself appear healthier than he or she actually *is*.

One form of mistaking appearances for truth is what is also called ‘anthropomorphism’: when we attribute human characteristics to something that is not human, but only appears to be human. Plato’s famous cave metaphor illustrates this. The people chained in the cave mistake the shadows on the wall of the cave for people like them, with their own characters, habits and expressions. And are we not doing the same thing all over again with, say, AI, to which some people attribute human intelligence? If you think more deeply

about this, it quickly becomes clear that we rely a great deal on what appears, without necessarily knowing what is. Hence Plato also makes a strict distinction between *opinion* and *knowledge*.

Memory loss due to writing

In *Phaedrus* the theme of appearance and reality also comes up. It focuses on a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, in which the latter enthusiastically recounts a speech by a certain Lysias about love. Another theme in *Phaedrus* is about how well you can assess whether a speech is true or not. Indeed, many sophists set out to convince people on the basis of something that *seems* true but *is* not. When Socrates and Phaedrus have discussed this, they come to the question of whether a speech *in writing* can also contain truth. Then Socrates quotes a story, which he introduces as follows:

“I can tell you what I’ve heard the ancients said, though they alone know the truth. However, if we could discover that truth ourselves, would we still care about human opinions?”⁽¹⁾

With this brief introduction, Plato already shows that when it comes to finding out the truth, we should not care about the opinions of others. We must do so independently.

Then Socrates tells how the god Theuth showed the Egyptian king Thamus (Egyptian name: Ammon) his discoveries, including arithmetic, astronomy and writing. Socrates continues:

“The story goes that Thamus said much to Theuth, both for and against each art, which it would take too long to repeat. But when they came to writing, Theuth said: “O King, here is something that, once learned, will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memory; I have discovered a potion for memory and for wisdom.” Thamus, however, replied: “O most expert Theuth, one man can give birth to the elements of an art, but only another can judge how they can benefit or harm those who will use them. And now, since you are the father of writing, your affection for it has made you describe its effects as the opposite of what they really are. In fact, it will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it: they will not practice using their memory because they will put their trust in writing, which is external and depends on signs that belong to others, instead of trying to remember

from the inside, completely on their own. You have not discovered a potion for remembering, but for reminding; you provide your students with the appearance of wisdom, not with its reality. Your invention will enable them to hear many things without being properly taught, and they will imagine that they have come to know much while for the most part they will know nothing. And they will be difficult to get along with, since they will merely appear to be wise instead of really being so.”⁽²⁾

After this story, Socrates shows that he agrees with Ammon (Thamus):

“Well, then, those who think they can leave written instructions for an art, as well as those who accept them, thinking that writing can yield results that are clear or certain, must be quite naive and truly ignorant of Ammon’s prophetic judgment: otherwise, how could they possibly think that words that have been written down can do more than remind those who already know what the writing is about?

(...)

You know, Phaedrus, writing shares a strange feature with painting. The offsprings of painting stand there as if they are alive, but if anyone asks them anything, they remain most solemnly silent. The same is true of written words. You’d think they were speaking as if they had some understanding, but if you question anything that has been said because you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever. When it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn’t know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not. And when it is faulted and attacked unfairly, it always needs its father’s support; alone, it can neither defend itself nor come to its own support.”⁽³⁾

A responsible speech

If you read only this quote, taken out of context, it seems as if Plato, through his mouthpiece Socrates, has a fundamental objection to writing. But if you read the *Phaedrus* in its entirety, the point therein is not so much the writing as *what and how is spoken and written*. Let us illustrate this with some earlier quotations from the dialogue:

“SOCRATES: Well, isn’t the method of medicine in a way the same as the method of rhetoric?

PHAEDRUS: How so?

SOCRATES: In both cases we need to determine the nature of something — of the body in medicine, of the soul in rhetoric. (...) Do you think, then, that it is possible to reach a serious understanding of the nature of the soul without understanding the nature of the universe?"⁽⁴⁾

"SOCRATES: Clearly, therefore, Thrasymachus and anyone else who teaches the art of rhetoric seriously will, first, describe the soul with absolute precision and enable us to understand what it is: whether it is one and homogeneous by nature or takes many forms, like the shape of bodies, since, as we said, that's what it is to demonstrate the nature of something.

PHAEDRUS: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Second, he will explain how, in virtue of its nature, it acts and is acted upon by certain things.

PHAEDRUS: Of course.

SOCRATES: Third, he will classify the kinds of speech and of soul there are, as well as the various ways in which they are affected, and explain what causes each. He will then coordinate each kind of soul with the kind of speech appropriate to it. And he will give instructions concerning the reasons why one kind of soul is necessarily convinced by one kind of speech while another necessarily remains unconvinced.

PHAEDRUS: This, I think, would certainly be the best way.

SOCRATES: In fact, my friend, no speech will ever be a product of art, whether it is a model or one actually given, if it is *delivered or written* [emphasis by author] in any other way — on this or on any other subject. But those who now write Arts of Rhetoric — we were just discussing them — are cunning people: they hide the fact that they know very well everything about the soul. Well, then, until they begin to speak and write in this way, we mustn't allow ourselves to be convinced that they write on the basis of the art."⁽⁵⁾

In short, Plato describes that there is an approach to a responsible speech, whether it is "delivered" (orally) or "written". This involves first identifying what something is at its core or essence, what its soul is. Then it considers whether it acts on something or is acted upon by something else.⁽⁶⁾ And third, it addresses what this means in practice, if you want to convey it to someone else. For example, think about various interests that different people have and that you are trying to relate to.

This approach aligns with what is also known as the platonic method, where you always start from the big picture (what is something and why is it there?), then descend to the details (how does something work and what does it interact with, what are the consequences?) and finally determine its practical meaning (what does it mean for someone in a particular context and what are the ethical consequences?). It is the way to arrive at truth despite many opinions.⁽⁷⁾

Writing in the soul

Why then does Plato speak of writing as merely a mnemonic device? This undoubtedly has to do with Plato's distinction between *opinion* and *knowledge*, between memorizing facts, of things externally, as they present themselves to us on the one hand, and true insight or understanding of things, as they essentially are, what the soul of them is, on the other. Indeed, true wisdom comes from within. We cannot understand anything essential that is not already present somewhere within us. This is why Plato writes that learning is equivalent to recollection.⁽⁸⁾ Wisdom is latent in the soul and only needs to be awakened. And Socrates therefore describes himself only as a midwife of the soul.⁽⁹⁾ He only allows to be born, what is already present within. Invoking the inner wisdom in another can be achieved through written texts, but it is easier orally, because the teacher — with the right knowledge — can then adjust his speech to the soul of one or more students. As Socrates continues in the *Phaedrus* where by "another kind of discourse" he means oral transmission of thought:

"SOCRATES: Now tell me, can we discern another kind of discourse, a legitimate brother of this one? Can we say how it comes about, and how it is by nature better and more capable?

PHAEDRUS: Which one is that? How do you think it comes about?

SOCRATES: It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent.

PHAEDRUS: You mean the living, breathing discourse of the man who knows, of which the written one can be fairly called an image."⁽¹⁰⁾

Such a discourse is thus "written in the soul of the listener". And in fact, it is then the listener himself who

writes, who carves the ideas into his soul (literally the origin of the word character). Because such discourse has awakened our understanding, it “can defend itself” — for with that understanding we can explain it to ourselves and to others in different ways.

This is why Plato writes dialogues, where we see how Socrates attunes his messages to his partners in dialogue, serving different souls (and thus those of the readers). But Plato admits that writing has its limitations and that he never wrote down the truly mystical things or could even write them down:

“So much at least I can affirm with confidence about any who have written or propose to write on these questions, pretending to a knowledge of the problems with which I am concerned, whether they claim to have learned from me or from others or to have made their discoveries for themselves: it is impossible, in my opinion, that they can have learned anything at all about the subject. There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightway nourishes itself.”⁽¹¹⁾

Plato’s teaching in his Academy therefore went beyond what he wrote down in his dialogues.⁽¹²⁾

“SOCRATES: On the other hand, take a man who thinks that a written discourse on any subject can only be a great amusement, that no discourse worth serious attention has ever been written in verse or prose, and that those that are recited in public without questioning and explanation, in the manner of the rhapsodes, are given only in order to produce conviction. He believes that at their very best these can only serve as reminders to those who already know. And he also thinks that only what is said for the sake of understanding and learning, what is truly written in the soul concerning what is just and noble and good, can be clear, perfect, and worth serious attention: such discourses should be called his own legitimate children, first the discourse he may have discovered already within himself and then its sons and brothers who may have grown naturally in other souls insofar as these are worthy; to the rest, he turns his back. Such a man, Phaedrus, would be just what you and I both would pray that we may be.”⁽¹³⁾

The eldest son, then, represents the reader’s innermost knowledge or wisdom ‘already discovered within himself’, of which the speech only reminds the reader. In short, when you study Plato’s texts (or those of any other Sage) according to his own instructions, you are not just reading the written text, but forming an image of the ideas behind it. You then utilize Plato’s text in the best possible way, although it is and remains a limited medium: as a method of allowing certain dormant insights to be born within yourself. We hope this article helps you *recollect* further.

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 3. Idem, 275c.
 4. Idem, 270b.
 5. Idem, 271a-271c.
 6. This is analogous to Plato’s definition of life, see also the article on ChatGPT in this issue and *Phaedrus* 245c-e, *Sophist* 247e, *Laws* 894c-896d.
 7. More on this method in the article “How to find truth?” in our symposium issue of *Lucifer, the Lightbringer* number 4, December 2022, p. 121. Source: https://blavatskyhouse.org/uploads/files/Lucifer_EN/lucifer-en-2022-4.pdf.
 8. Plato, *Menon*, 81d.
 9. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 150.
 10. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 276a.
 11. Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 341c.
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Hindu cremation.

The benefits of cremation

Today, cremation is as common in the Western world as burying the bodies of dead people. Nevertheless, we occasionally receive various questions about cremation, such as: does cremation affect the panoramic vision of the dying person? Or: is it wise to scatter the ashes in the sea in connection with a subsequent incarnation? We try to answer these kinds of questions in this article.

As cremation in the 21st century has become one of the most common ways of dealing with the remains of a human being in an increasing number of countries, we have forgotten that, not even that long ago, cremation in Western countries was not only uncommon but even forbidden. One of the earliest activities of the Theosophical Society (T.S.) in the United States was to organize the first cremation of a corpse – that of Baron de Palm – which, after a great deal of effort, took place on December 6, 1876.

Baron de Palm had died earlier that year on May 20, and it took the President of the T.S., Henri Steel Olcott, a lot of effort, at the expressed request of Baron de Palm, finally to burn his remains.⁽¹⁾

In other countries, opposition to cremation was no less strong. It was sometimes simply forbidden to burn corpses. In the Netherlands, the first cremation took place on April 1 1914. In Greece, the ban on cremation was not lifted until 2008.

Resurrection of the dead

It was primarily the Christian churches that spoke out strongly against cremation. By papal decree in 1886, the Roman Catholic Church expressly forbade cremation. This was tightened by another decree in 1892 by attaching excommunication to this 'sin'. This decree was not repealed until 1963. Other Christian churches have also always opposed cremation. As recently as 2019, the Greek Orthodox Church announced through a brochure that believers need not count on a church funeral when cremated after death. Among Muslims and Jews, cremation is not even an option. The bodies of all the deceased are buried.

Where does this aversion to cremation come from? Why is it not found among adherents of non-monotheistic religions?

The answer to this question lies in the dogma of the resurrection of the dead. This dogma means that at the end of time, the dead would rise again from their graves, with God

Key thoughts

- » You are better off cremating bodies of dead people than burying them because it is more hygienic and speeds up the dying process.
- » By cremation, you work with Nature. Life atoms that composed your body are given back their freedom.
- » When you are reborn, you re-attract the life atoms with whom you worked in your previous life.

judging the deeds of each person on this 'day of judgment'. If the body is consumed by fire, this resurrection could not take place and man is destroyed.

Curiously, none of the holy books of these three religions mention much about this general resurrection. The doctrine is surrounded with many unanswered questions and ambiguities. Nevertheless, the dogma was so strong that there was a strict prescription to bury corpses, for only if they were buried could they rise from the grave.

Rightly, this doctrine, devoid of all logic, is no longer believed in by present-day man, if at all. Everyone knows that of a body buried in the earth for several years, merely the bones remain, and the ravages of time will disintegrate them completely as well. To cling to this teaching, as the Orthodox Church in particular still strongly does, is to continue to focus on the least important element of the entire human constitution: the body. It is a sad, extremely materialistic degeneration of an original Mystery teaching. Indeed, the background of the conception of the resurrection of the dead has its origin in a very mystical doctrine, according to which the life atoms that compose our vehicle go their way after physical death, but are attracted again by human consciousness at a new birth and thus form the new body of the reincarnating human being. A new body is thus composed of the life atoms of the previous one. In this metaphorical sense, it is 'risen from the dead'.⁽²⁾ More on this later.

Man and his body

In all civilizations of the distant past, the bodies of the dead were cremated. According to H.P. Blavatsky cremation was the rule until 80,000 or 100,000 years ago.⁽³⁾ But even much more recently, until about 2,000 years ago, almost all peoples in Europe cremated their dead, such as



Hindu cremation in Varanasi.

the Celts, the Saxons and the Romans. Only after the latter were converted to the Christian faith did this custom disappear. The fact that the most civilized peoples cremated their dead, undoubtedly contributed to the fact that we have not found fossils of human bodies from exalted civilizations of this distant past.

That exaltedness had partly to do with the view people had of man in those far-off times. Of course, in the millions of years that mankind has been on earth, there have been many different civilizations. There have also been eras in which, even more than is the case today, man identified with the material world. In the more enlightened times, however, man was seen as a spiritual being, who for his pilgrimage on earth provided himself with a vehicle, a body. This doctrine was taught by the ancient Mystery Schools all over the earth.

It is because of a materialistic interpretation of original mystery teachings, that the external and the body became increasingly important, leading to the use of burying corpses. In those ancient times, however, as is the case in most Eastern countries, the body was regarded as nothing but the shell of a complex being: man. Not only does man consist of spirit, soul and body (in which people now often do not see a difference between spirit and soul), but each of these three essential parts of human consciousness, can be subdivided again.

The spirit of man is the permanent part. It is, metaphorically speaking, a spark of eternal fire: a spark of eternity. The soul is the part developed from the spirit. It is the learning part of the totality of consciousness. In the case of man, the soul is the *thinking* consciousness. The soul, too, is composed; there is a higher part, which naturally focuses on the spirit side; and there is a lower part which identifies with the matter side of nature. The higher part of the soul will increasingly rise above the temporality of external existence; the lower part, consisting of personal thoughts, desires and emotions, immerses itself in the illusion of temporal existence. It has no permanence and, like the body, will disintegrate in the process of death.

Finally, there is the body which, by the way, is more than what we can perceive with our senses. Apart from flesh and bones, it consists of an astral body and is full of life energies.

The astral body is rightly called the model body, because it is the model for the material body. At birth, the human consciousness, returning from the period of rest, first develops the model body. That is the mold to which the physical body, cell by cell, yes, atom by atom, is formed.

Benefits of cremation

We had to dwell for a moment on the composite consciousness of man, because then we can also briefly describe the process of dying. When we die, our consciousness withdraws from our temporary, mortal shells. First we let go of our physical body, then our model body, and finally our desire body, composed of all our desires of the past life. So it happens in the sequence from 'most material' to 'most etheric'. By understanding how that happens, we can build ourselves a picture of the effects of cremation. And from that it can be seen that cremation always offers more benefits than burial does.

First of all, cremation is more hygienic than burial. Like rotting fruit or meat, a dead body excretes all kinds of harmful substances that are not healthy for the living. This is prevented by cremation.

Furthermore, cremation causes not only the physical body but also the astral body to disintegrate more quickly. There is a very close relationship between the two bodies, which does not cease to exist at the death of the physical body. To the same extent that the physical decomposes, the model body also disintegrates. Only the physical bones remain longer.

Now when the physical body lies in the ground, it decomposes slowly. It is subject to an oxidation process, which is actually a slow form of burning. The model body then remains floating around the body and will disintegrate as slowly as the physical body. Some sensitive people can perceive 'ghosts' in a house where someone has died or in a cemetery. They perceive the cloud-like shape of the model body.

Here you should also consider the following. The lower part of the soul, as mentioned above, is mortal. After the death of the body, the lower thoughts, desires, and feelings form a temporary vehicle: the desire body. This is located in a part of the astral world, which we call *kama-loka*, or the desire world. This is a sphere imbued with all kinds of earthly desires. Anyone who has some knowledge of human desires as they often are today, understands that this is not a sphere of good living.

It takes some time for the desire body to decompose. The duration depends on the intensity of, and the number of desires that man has harbored in his life on earth. The stronger those desires were, the longer it takes for them to be dissolved. Logical, because one has put more energy into them.

Now if the body and the astral body are not yet dissolved, then the desire body will be psycho-magnetically attracted

to it. If man has not yet died 'the second death' – that is, not all desires have yet been worked out – then the physical body can exert some influence on the consciousness of the excarnated man. This depends very much on one's character. Spiritual people will hardly be affected by it, if at all, but in people with earthly-oriented desires and inclinations, it can certainly have some effect. If the body has been cremated, and as a result the astral body has also disintegrated into its constituent parts, this also has a beneficial effect on the decomposition process of the desire body.⁽⁴⁾

Some misunderstandings explained

It is sometimes suggested that the soul part of man suffers when the body is burned. However, this is impossible. Physical fire can only affect matter of this material realm. It has no influence on the realm where the soul of man is located. Dying takes place because consciousness withdraws from this material realm. So, when it is established that man has died, human consciousness has withdrawn from it and cannot feel anything what is happening to the body.

However, it is not always easy to determine when death has fully set in. Even if the heart has stopped beating, there may still be brain activity. Therefore, it is wise to cremate the body only after about 36 hours. This is partly due to the fact that just before and after the last beat of the heart there is the so-called panoramic vision. This means that the dying person sees all the events that have taken place in his life and all the thoughts he has thought passing by his mind's eye as in a procession. He reaps the so precious spiritual lessons of the past life and experiences the absolute justice of everything. But this process takes several hours at most. Cremation of the body after 36 hours therefore has no influence on it.

Another ambiguity has to do with the ashes and crushed bones of the dead body. As noted in the intro, it is supposed that scattering the ashes in the sea has a possible adverse effect on the construction of the body in a new incarnation.

A very comprehensive answer can be given to this question, which has everything to do with the wanderings of the life atoms. For it is not so much the physical cells, molecules and atoms that build our bodies, but the conscious forces behind them. Those forces, the consciousnesses of primitive beings, are called life atoms.

Life atoms are living building blocks. They are the animating or vital force behind or within every physical parti-



Crematorium at Zorgvlied cemetery in Amsterdam.

cle. A life atom is not the physical atom. That is merely its vehicle. Therefore, it is not the life atoms that disappear to the bottom of the sea when the ashes of a deceased body are scattered in the sea. That life atom is free at physical death. It follows its own inner impulses. It takes a journey through different kingdoms of nature, corresponding to its own character. Only when the rested human consciousness prepares to reincarnate again is the life atom psychomagnetically attracted to the sphere that the manifesting human emanates from itself. Thus, the cooperative process between human consciousness and the trillions of life atoms can continue again.

The real Human Being

Of course, after death, the material body must be treated with due reverence. It has served the soul of man as a vehicle. But an excess of attention is not necessary, indeed it may even hinder the retreating soul. A simple ceremony without too much emotion is preferable.

In Hindu circles, there are often elaborate and complicated rituals that precede cremation, which are assumed to be necessary for soul rest. We see this in other religious traditions as well. If they bring about anything at all, it is rather *soul unrest*, because the vehicle itself receives all the attention which threatens to lure the soul to earth rather than bid it farewell.

In some parts of Tibet, where firewood is scarce, people lay the dead bodies on rocks as food for the vultures. In our Western perception this may sound barbaric, but it is an efficient way of clearing the vehicle and detaching the soul from the earthly realm.

That cremation is becoming more common in Western countries is a favorable fact. Perhaps it is a sign that the

great value given to the body over many centuries is beginning to crumble, hopefully resulting in a greater focus on the true human being: that part in us that survives death.

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In a bee colony, there is a tight labor division. A worker bee has not continually the same task. On the contrary, each worker bee goes through a number of life phases in which it performs increasingly difficult tasks for the colony.

Key thoughts

» Because we have followed a unique path of evolution in our past lives, our evolved character is unique. Each person contributes in a different, characteristic way to the whole.

» When we realize the fundamental oneness of all life, we will view the question “who is the right person in the right place” in a totally different way. This reflects itself in many different situations.

The right person in the right place

The September 2023 issue of *Lucifer* contains the article titled ‘How to find your Work?’⁽¹⁾ We will now work out the theosophical picture outlined therein by focusing on the practical question: how do we ensure that the right person is employed in the right place within the whole? We will find out that we can come to solutions that are effective, can mean a lot for those involved, and yet are still too rarely applied in our society.

In our society, many people work in places for which they are not at all suited, or in which they are given only scant opportunities to use and unfold their talents. The consequences are usually great. If people have tasks that are not suitable for them, for example because it is beyond their capabilities, this can lead to sustained, exhausting stress. And if someone has a task that is below his level, it will be uninspiring for that person and a great waste for society as a whole.

How does this come about? And what can we do about it?

When is a society a harmonious, dynamically growing whole?

Before considering these questions further, let us recall some of the essential thoughts from the article ‘How to find your Work?’ This article explains that every human being is rooted in the spiritual Core of the Universe, and therefore carries cosmic capacities within. There is an

underlying spiritual Unity of which we are parts. We are – even if we only partially realize it yet – gods-in-the-making.

Our *true Work* as human beings is learning to harmonize our *thinking*, or in other words, to express our unity consciousness, our understanding of Life and our reasonable thinking in each of our thoughts. Our true Work is to ‘plow, sow and reap’ *on the mental plane*. That is essentially the function we as humanity have to perform on our Planet. Of course, we should act as well. We must get things done, but the impact and influence of what we do or do not do is determined by the degree to which we already manage to think harmoniously.

Another essential thought in this article is: your Work is your *unique contribution* to the whole, to that ONE all-encompassing Life. This includes all types of contributions you may make, whether they are paid or not, and whether they are formally seen as work or not. A society is in harmony

and functions as a unity *when we all add our unique quality to the whole*. It is our *dharma*, duty or responsibility as human beings to support every community of which we are a part. Naturally, we will do this from our own present abilities and unique character, which we ourselves have built up in countless previous incarnations.

Furthermore, our present position in society is not accidental. In this incarnation, we find ourselves in that community, in the midst of those people, to whom we have built up an attraction in our previous lives. We belong to that community; here is where our *dharma* lies.

There are a number of considerations that can help you find the appropriate work for you. Does the task fulfill a *real need*? Is the work *dear to your heart*? Is your *motive* unselfish, constructive? These are some theosophical key points in the article ‘How to find your Work?’ We now build on these.

Your appropriate place in society, your tasks, are not a ‘given’. On the contrary: we are learning, growing beings, and so what constitutes our work is constantly evolving with us — even within one incarnation. Thus, with everything we will tell you, it should always be imagined as a *dynamic* process.

Why is everyone’s contribution unique?

All of us in countless past incarnations have been able to bring out some of our limitless potentials. We have done so in a unique way, through the life choices we have made of our own free will: through the kinds of actions we have deliberately taken and the habits we have built. In fact, we are continually changing our character, our way of thinking, through our choices. So our character is constantly unfolding, evolving, although there is always a fundamental individual characteristic working behind it (our *Swabhāva*).⁽²⁾

So, each one has developed certain specific faculties: that may be some technical insight, or sense of language, and so on. These we can use for the benefit of others. Of course, we should continue to broaden our faculties, to make them more universal, and also to develop new ones, but our present place will depend on our already developed faculties. In short: every human being has something to offer to the whole and that is always different from the contribution of another. Your place in the whole should reflect that.

So, all types of tasks in a society must be staffed. We humans compensate each other, we complement each other. Even if we all lived in the countryside and all had a farm,

we would still mutually assist each other. After all, one person knows how to build the best barn, another how best to deal with crop diseases, and a third how to create valuable agricultural partnerships. And in fact, the successful work of others shows us what is still waiting in ourselves as potential, to be developed as well.

In our current society, formal work is usually linked to a certain salary. The higher your formal social position, the more money you get. Theosophically speaking, each contribution is essential and therefore worth no more than the other. If we realize this, we would express this equality in the way we organize our society financially.

Why are many people not in their ‘right’ place?

The present work division is in many cases disharmonious. This situation is, generally speaking, caused by selfishness and ignorance about the nature and purpose of life.

The theosophical ideas about the nature of Man and the *inner* structure of society are not yet commonplace, and thus are still rarely put into practice. There is still a world to be won, as far as this point is concerned. And all of us can easily sum up a long list of causes by which persons end up in the wrong place: personal ambitions (towards status or money), personal likes and dislikes between manager and employee, prejudice toward certain groups of people, societal attitudes about who should do what, the tendency to stick to a job, and so on.

In fact, these are all manifestations of the same type of thinking, namely, putting your ‘self’ at the center rather than what your community needs: the community of which you are an inseparable part. You do not see yourself and others as beings with spiritual roots, as perfectly equal members of *one* Humanity.

And why are many people so focused on what they see as their own highest personal interests? Because they believe that their lives are separate from the lives and destinies of everyone else. Whereas in practice, we continually see that the fates of *all* people are intensely intertwined. In fact, so closely intertwined that we can speak of one destiny, for all humanity.

Our concerns should therefore not only circle around our outer goals, but especially around the goal of ensuring that *all* people can develop harmoniously.

Appealing to each other’s spiritual baggage

What does ‘developing harmoniously’ entail? Every

human being has already accumulated a certain ‘spiritual baggage’ during his incarnations. Every human being has developed some noble ideals, however limited. This ‘above-self’ devotion to some higher purpose may be, in some persons, deeply hidden, but it is always there. Therefore, it can always be re-awakened.⁽³⁾

And often this can be done in a very practical way, by giving someone confidence in responsible tasks. For example, by letting someone experience the joy of good craftsmanship, or the devotion of making music together. Or by stimulating someone to discover and use other fields of knowledge, or to help and advise other people. So, the challenge is to find the specific aspirations of each person, *his* spiritual baggage, and to help him not to fall into the traps into which he may have fallen in the past. Having done that, these people will start to experience a connection to their own higher nature, and enrich their baggage by using it, implementing it.

The performance of the duties of a man’s own particular calling,
Although devoid of excellence,
Is better than doing the duty of another,
however well performed;
And he who fulfills the duties obligated by nature,
Does not incur sin.

Bhagavad-Gītā, chapter 18, verse 47.
In the translation of W.Q. Judge.⁽⁴⁾

How do we get this done, in practice: the right person in the right place?

Getting the right person in the right place is achievable if we start from the principle that each person can make an equal, unique contribution, and thus must be given the opportunity in society to realize it. It succeeds if we start from the idea of unity.

Our job satisfaction will become much deeper if it is derived from fulfilling a valuable function in society. To give an example: a few years ago, some railroad company staff went on strike because they did not want to drive on the same route all the time. They called that ‘circling around the church’. You can also get your job satisfaction from transporting people in the best way possible. In the first case, it is about your own preferences; in the second, it is

about the original purpose of your job.

Below are some questions about concrete situations. These are meant to give you some starting points, by which you can check for yourself what the concrete consequences of the theosophical principles are, in those situations. Many more situations can, of course, be added to those mentioned.

To avoid any misunderstanding: although the questions below are phrased in terms of paid work (by speaking of applicants and the like), they apply to *all* types of contributions – paid and unpaid work – albeit, of course, in each situation the process may take a different outward form. Also, when we speak of he, we mean he *or* she — as we always do in our articles in *Lucifer*.

Some concrete situations

- You are part of a team. An applicant turns out to have such qualities that you would love to have him on your team. Or, a comparable example: one of the employees in another part of your organization has these sought-after qualities. He could go to your department. But ... your deeper insight into this person and into our society as a whole, tells you that he could mean much more to humanity *outside* your organization. Would you point this out to the person, for instance by posing that question? Would you encourage him to take that step?
- You currently have some particular task in the organization. You see, with your factual and impersonal view, that another person could do your job better than you do, and that a change of tasks is possible which would benefit the entire organization. What would you do?
- It is customary in your organization that interns and entry-level employees first gain experience in areas that involves less responsibility. A certain number of years are always allotted for this. Now suppose a new person learns relatively very quickly, understands and masters things quickly ... do you make an exception? Do you let that person go through all the preparatory steps faster? Do you ask him, for instance, from an early phase his opinion about relevant problems? Are you curious about his views on the policy of the organization? In short, do you tailor the training to his inner character and qualities — qualities he has already developed strongly in previous lives?
- Creative-thinking, enterprising individuals sometimes create their own jobs. They look around them to see

how everything works and see ‘that there is still an important cog missing in the machine’. They are willing to become that cog themselves. Would you allow that, even though that function is absent in the formal list of job descriptions and salary scales? Would you even encourage it?

- There is an emergency to be overcome, by your group. Some team members show, while under high stress, unsuspected abilities. For example, there are team members who prove they can think clearly and give others courage and well-advised direction. Now when the emergency is over, and all resume their normal tasks... would you simply continue the work division as always? Or would you change something?
- A newcomer carries good promise. He proves to be suitable. But some customers might have trouble with his appearance, the color of his skin, his religion, or his way of talking. YOU look through this and see the true person behind it. But you know that some will not. Do you still give such a person the tasks that fit his ideals and character?
- You have a nice job, with nice colleagues and a good salary. But if the product or service you provide would be discontinued, the world would hardly miss it. It is not necessary. You read in the newspapers that in some essential sector there are personnel shortages and consequently high work pressures. Are you willing to quit your job and retrain?
- In your organization or profession most people work full-time. That is traditionally expected. You discover that you could make a difference with some important volunteer work. Would you discuss it with your superiors that you want to work part-time, to have more time to do so?

Original solutions ...

If we do our *Work* in the world with greater insight, we will discover that we can solve all kinds of practical problems in original ways. These are original because outside of prevailing manners. We would be better able to encourage our fellow human beings to find their proper place: where they are useful, where they do something that is close to their heart. By acting thus, we sow seeds of a wiser society. And where does that start other than within our own circle?

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Questions & Answers

Karmic causes

A person is wrongly imprisoned for years. Afterwards, it turns out that he was innocent, so he is released. How can this be explained karmically?

Answer

Only the wise, whose consciousness extends far beyond that of ordinary people, can trace every consequence to its former cause. So why exactly someone ends up in a certain situation is impossible for us to figure out. Nevertheless, we can say something about this seemingly unjust situation in general.

In each of our incarnations, we humans create millions of causes. After all, every thought and deed is a cause, that must one day lead to an effect. Sometimes this effect comes almost immediately after the act. But in other cases, it takes several lifetimes. You can only reap the consequences if the situation allows it. If you do certain deeds as a young person, you may only be able to reap the consequences in a similar situation, for instance, during your youth in a next life.

Further, you have to consider that people are often full of contradictions. There are not that many people who have a steadfast character. During some time a person may act very selfish, and then suddenly perform an unselfish act. The reverse also happens. If we start speculating about the theoretical case of an innocent person in prison, it could be that – perhaps a few incarnations ago – he committed a certain injustice. The consequences could not yet be reaped, because the situation was not ripe for it. Although

he is a righteous person in this life, he is yet put in prison: a consequence of a very distant past.

You can also imagine that in a previous life, this person failed to uprightly face the disharmonic consequences he evoked then. He ‘ran away from them’. As a result, he has to face those consequences now in this life, in this case by being wrongly accused of a crime. You can, of course, think of still other situations why this might be the case.

You can compare it to a certain extent to a person who indulged in alcohol in his youth. At the age of 30, he realized that this behavior would lead nowhere, and he stopped drinking. Yet as an older person, he may develop a liver disease as result of his excessive alcohol consumption as young person. You then work out the disharmony you once caused.

Remember that you can learn valuable lessons from each experience — harmonious, discordant or neutral. For instance, South Africa’s former president and anti-apartheid fighter, Nelson Mandela, describes in his autobiography what he learned during his – almost lifelong – imprisonment in terms of, for instance, fortitude, patience and compassion.

Question

What must happen, will happen. Someone is sick and cannot be treated in his own country.

He goes to another country, where he is helped. Had he not done so, he would not have survived. Does it remain true then, that “what must happen, will happen”?

Answer

The doctrine of karma is not doom, is not fate. Karma exists because there is free will and a fundamental unity. The action of one being influences the lives of everyone else, no matter how big or small that influence is. And in every situation, you can choose how to act. Therefore, making choices does not conflict with the doctrine of karma, it is its core. So, how we respond to what happens to us, is not predestined: we determine that ourselves.

There may be two people facing roughly the same difficulty in life, but one deals with it conscientiously and thoughtfully, and suffers no trauma, while another reacts to it so uncontrollably that by the choices he makes, he makes the situation three times more difficult than it actually is: for himself and those around him. So, the statement “what must happen, will happen” as a kind of predestination, is not true. If the future were already fixed, this would be the denial of free will.

The meaning of this statement as we see it, is that you can never nullify a created cause. You can regret and repent, but that does not eliminate the cause of an act. After you have committed a selfish act and regret it, you can – and this is certainly advisable – commit a selfless act. But by doing so you do not destroy the selfish act already committed. But what is always definitely wise to do, is to consider each new situation from your deepest insight, and to act to the best of your ability, for the benefit of the whole.

As long as we do not know the causes

from our past, it may seem difficult to determine exactly what needs to be done. But in fact that is not important if you act in harmony, to the best of your ability. In this way, you will grow in wisdom the fastest, and will be increasingly able to determine “what should be done”.

In the theoretical case of the question, it was not at all certain that the sick man should not be helped, but rather that he evidently had created a bond from a past life with another country, where he now could be cured of his illness, based on his self-made choice.

Question

How to comfort someone whose daughter was raped and murdered?

Answer

I do not think that such can be done, at least not immediately. It would be downright cruel to talk about karma to a parent whose child has been subjected to something so horrible. In such a case, silence is better than talk. However, we should be there for the other person, offering a comforting shoulder and a listening ear.

Nevertheless, after some time – depending on the mental and emotional state of the person who suffers this terrible distress – you could give your views on reincarnation and karma, but never in a pushy or pedantic way. Let the other person come up with their questions and respect it if they do not.

We knew someone to whom really the most terrible things had been done. He had lived in a hell on earth. He had been to many psychologists and psychiatrists, had undergone many therapies, but he could not forget the suffering. Every night he had nightmares. When he was introduced to Theosophy and the doctrine of

karma, he was very quiet for some time. He did not talk to anyone about it. But when he digested the teachings, he was liberated from his past.

Every case is different, of course. But ultimately, you can only experience true peace when you realize that everything that takes place has a cause, and that this cause can be traced back to your own thoughts and actions. And that we can build a new, better world every day.

Prayer and meditation

It is said that praying and meditating does not help. So why did Siddhārtha achieve so much through meditation?

Answer

Meditating in itself is not wrong. The only question is: what do you understand by meditation and how and for what purpose do you meditate?

We say: be active in your meditation. Do not sit and stare at a Buddha image or the tip of your nose, and then just wait to see what comes. Also, do not try to turn off your thinking, but let go of your everyday thoughts. Empty yourself of all banal and profane thoughts. You do this by self-consciously imagining a mental picture of oneness. See the other as a part of yourself. Yes, see the other as yourself. Identify with the other, with your friends, your enemies, if you have any, and try to realize that you are all of them.

Early in the morning, when the sun is rising, is an excellent time to ponder this. You can read a fragment from an inspirational book and then let its meaning sink deep into you. Try to keep that image of UNITY active in the background of your consciousness,

24 hours a day, coloring all your other thoughts and actions by it. After all, you radiate what you are, and if this has a supra-personal selfless quality, it also benefits all those around you.

Stealing from the rich

If in some country there are many people poor and a small minority rich, and a few heroic people steal from the rich to help the poor. They have no other choice. What is your opinion about this?

Answer

In general, you can say that the end never justifies the means. Unlawfully appropriating things that do not belong to you, is not ethical in our view. Before committing such a rigorous act, you should carefully consider whether you have really tried all possible legal avenues.

Solutions to those kinds of painful problems are usually better found together, than alone. For instance, a neighbourhood group can start a communal vegetable garden and kitchen. Or you can organize a peaceful protest together with other poor people, calling on the authorities to take action. You can also make an ethical appeal to the rich to give up some of their wealth for the benefit of those who are hungry. No doubt there are more possibilities, and if you are creative and work together, you may succeed in solving this pressing problem better than by stealing. Theft will often only be a temporary solution, and also has its karmic consequences.

In the case where you cannot give your children food, you finally will have to make a choice as parent or adult. It is your duty to feed your children. And

if there really is no food, you can resort to theft in an extreme case. You have to choose. You make that choice

yourself. Be aware that each choice brings its own consequences, also in the long run. The ultimate touchstone

is always your own conscience. So, we always advise: listen to your conscience.

Agenda

Online lectures

Every Sunday at 19:30, there is a theosophical lecture or study meeting. Each series is highlighting one of the seven 'Jewels of Wisdom' and discusses its significance for our daily thoughts and acts. The full program can be found at: blavatskyhouse.org/lectures/.

Series 5, March – April

Evolution: one joint path of inner growth

Evolution means development, but development of what exactly? The change of forms we perceive with our physical senses is a fact, but what causes these physical changes? What is the driving force we recognize to be innate in all life? In the first lecture we discuss the essence of life and evolution. The second lecture we will focus on our future: what role does technology play in the progress of human evolution?

17-03 Lecture: The evolution of consciousness.
Struggle for life or cooperation?

24-03 Study meeting on lecture of 17-03

31-03 Lecture: Technology and the future of humanity

07-04 Study meeting on lecture of 31-03

Series 6, April – May

Compassion, the Law of laws

Compassion is a state of consciousness in which you experience the essential unity of all life, and as a result, a deeply felt sympathy with all living beings. A compassionate human being does not seek his own happiness but aims for the welfare of all beings.

Contrary to what may appear superficially, compassion is the binding force throughout the Cosmos. It holds everything together. It is the driving force that propels all beings to a higher level of consciousness. In this process, the more advanced beings – such as Buddhas – take a step back to help and inspire the less advanced.

Although compassion may seem distant from us, we will discuss in this series how everyone, at their own level, can

activate and nourish it within themselves and thereby become a co-worker of Nature.

14-04 Lecture: The Hierarchy of Compassion

21-04 Study meeting on lecture of 14-04

28-04 Lecture: Teachings on Avatāras

05-05 Study meeting on lecture of 28-04

Helena P. Blavatsky lecture

12-05 About the far reaching significance of her life and comprehensive task, as messenger of the Masters.

Series 7, May – June

Three signposts on the quest for yourSelf

The keys to our spiritual nature are our conscience, our intuition and our inspiration. What are these keys, and their – essential, leading and inspiring – applications? How do we recognize them in daily life?

26-05 Conscience, intuition, inspiration: how to train and apply?

02-06 Study meeting on lecture of 26-05

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2. By reason of this unity: brotherhood as a fact in nature.
3. Respect for everyone's free will (when applied from this idea of universal brotherhood).
4. Respect for everyone's freedom to build up their own view of life.
5. To support the developing of everyone's own view of life and its application in daily practice.



Why this journal is called *Lucifer*

Lucifer literally means Bringer of Light.

Each culture in the East and West has his bringers of light: inspiring individuals who give the initial impulse to spiritual growth and social reform. They stimulate independent thinking and living with a profound awareness of brotherhood.

These bringers of light have always been opposed and slandered by the establishment. But there are always those who refuse to be put off by these slanderers, and start examining the wisdom of the bringers of light in an open-minded and unprejudiced way.

For these people this journal is written.

“... the title chosen for our magazine is as much associated with divine ideas as with the supposed rebellion of the hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost* ...

We work for true Religion and Science, in the interest of fact as against fiction and prejudice. It is our duty – as it is that of physical Science – to throw light on facts in Nature hitherto surrounded by the darkness of ignorance ... But natural Sciences are only one aspect of SCIENCE and TRUTH. Psychological and moral Sciences, or theosophy, the knowledge of divine truth, are still more important ...”

(Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the first issue of *Lucifer*, September 1887)