

Helena Blavatsky's Self-Criticism

Or How Classical Authors Like Confucius And Cicero Can Help the Theosophical Movement



A statue of Confucius in Junan, China, and Marcus Tullius Cicero

Students of esoteric philosophy might consider studying Confucius.

Though not easy for the general public to have access to its details, the fact is well-documented that H. P. Blavatsky made a severe self-criticism, not long before her death in 1891.

Writing to friends in 1889-1890, she said that she had underestimated human weakness in matters of Ethics. She had taught too much “Occultism” and given out sensitive information about the Path in a civilization whose ethical foundations were more fragile than she could anticipate. She tried to correct that in her later writings.

If present generations of theosophists want to make use of that sour lesson learned by H.P.B. as she neared the end of her 19th century mission, their task may include putting theosophy on a firmer and most lasting ethical basis. Numbers and appearances do not matter: it is the Few who make the difference.

It has been said that Ethics is the art of sowing good karma. Knowledge is worse than useless without a noble intention, as J-J. Rousseau brilliantly demonstrated in the 18th century. A natural result of such a view will be to look around and see what are - regarding ethics - some of the best resources and guidance available in the universal literature of the last 3,000 years.

Among the best teachings on the topic one can see works like “On Duty”, by Cicero; “Protagoras” and “Sophist”, by Plato; the texts coming from Epictetus; the books by Seneca; “Meditations”, by Marcus Aurelius; and the works of Confucius. In the second part of 20th century, Erich Fromm made a great contribution. There are others.

The ethical question is a sensitive issue for the esoteric movement. Lack of ethics and discernment is related to the root-causes from which emerged phenomena like pseudo-theosophy, disloyalty towards the founders of the movement, adoption of false rituals, pursuit of UFOs and widespread fake clairvoyance.

[To a Chela]

So then, you really imagined when you were allowed to call yourself my chela - that the black memories of your past offences were either hidden from my notice or that I *knew* and still *forgave*?

Did you fancy that I connived with them? Foolish . . . ! thrice foolish! It was to help you from your viler Self, to arouse in you better aspirations; to cause the voice of your offended "soul" to be heard; to give you the stimulus to make *some* reparation . . . for these *only* your prayer to become my chela was granted.

We are the agents of Justice, not the unfeeling lictors [2] of a cruel god. Base as you have been, vilely as you have misused your talents . . . blind as you have been to the claims of gratitude, virtue and equity, you have still in you the qualities of a good man - (*dormant* indeed, so far!) and a useful chela. But how long your relations with us will continue - depends alone upon yourself. You may struggle up out of the mire, or glide back into depths of vice and misery now that you stand before your Atma, which is your judge, and which no smiles, nor falsehoods, nor sophistries can deceive.

Hitherto you had but bits of *chits* [3] from me and - *knew me not*; now you know me better, for it is I who accuse you before your awakened conscience. You need make no lip-promises to *It* or me, no half-way confessions. Though . . . you shed oceans of tears and grovel in the dust, this will not move a hair's breadth the balance of Justice. If you would recover the lost ground do two things: make the amplest, most complete reparation . . . and to the good of mankind devote your energies . . . Try to fill each day's measure with pure thoughts, wise words, kindly deeds. I shall neither order, nor mesmerize, nor sway you. But unseen and when you perhaps come - like so many others - to disbelieve in my existence, I shall watch your career and sympathise in your struggles.

If you come out victorious at the end of your probation I shall be the readiest to welcome you. And now - there run two paths before you, *choose!* When you have chosen you may consult your visible official superior - H.S. Olcott, and I will instruct him thro' his Guru to guide and send you on

You aspire to be a missionary of theosophy; be one - if you can be one in *fact*. But rather than go about preaching with a heart and a life that belie your professions - *conjure the lightning to strike you dead*, for every word will become your future accuser. Go and consult with Col. Olcott - confess your faults before *that good man* - and seek his advice.

K. H.

NOTES:

[1] "The Dhammapada", Theosophy Co., Los Angeles, 139 pp., Chapter 6, p. 17.

[2] Lictors; the lictors were ancient Roman officers who accompanied the chief magistrates in public appearances.

[3] Chits; short notes and hints.

A Photo From the 1880s

The History of the Theosophical Movement, in One Image



The above photo was taken at Adyar, India, in the 1880s, and shows several leading pioneers of the theosophical movement.

Sitting in the center one sees Helena Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott. Mr. Alfred P. Sinnett, the British journalist to whom most of the Mahatma Letters were sent, is standing in the center, between Blavatsky and Olcott.

Mr. S. Ramaswamier, whose narrative about his meeting with a Master is published as Appendix A in “**Letters From the Masters of the Wisdom**”, First Series (TPH, 1973), is sitting next to H. P. Blavatsky, in her right side, or left side from the point of view of the reader.

Damodar Mavalankar is on the ground, at the feet of Helena Blavatsky, on her right side (or left side from the point of view of the reader).

Mr. Mohini Chatterjee, who made important contributions to the Cause before abandoning the movement, is sitting on the ground, near Olcott.

Mr. Norendro Nath Senn, who had contacts with Masters (see Letter 59, Second Series, in “Letters From the Masters of the Wisdom”) is sitting in a chair. He is the second after Olcott, if one goes from left to right, from the point of view of the reader.

This amounts to saying that the ancient hierogrammatists and priests, who were the inventors of all the allegories which served as veils to the many truths taught at the Initiations, did not possess a clue to the sacred texts composed or written by themselves. But this is on a par with that other illusion of some Sanskritists, who, though they have never even been in India, claim to know Sanskrit accent and pronunciation, as also the meaning of the Vedic allegories, far better than the most learned among the greatest Brahmanical pundits and Sanskrit scholars of India.

After this who can wonder that the jargon and blinds of our medieval alchemists and Kabalists are also read literally by the modern student; that the Greek and even the ideas of Aeschylus are *corrected* and improved upon by the Cambridge and Oxford Greek scholars, and that the veiled parables of Plato are attributed to his “ignorance”. Yet if the students of the dead languages know anything, they ought to know that the method of extreme necessitarianism was practiced in ancient as well as in modern philosophy; that from the first ages of man, the fundamental truths of all that we are permitted to know on earth were in the safe keeping of the Adepts of the sanctuary; that the difference in creeds and religious practice was only external; and that those guardians of the primitive divine revelation, who had solved every problem that is within the grasp of human intellect, were bound together by a universal freemasonry of science and philosophy, which formed one unbroken chain around the globe.

It is for philology and the Orientalists to endeavour to find the end of the thread. But if they will persist in seeking it in one direction only, and that the wrong one, truth and fact will never be discovered. It thus remains the duty of psychology and Theosophy to help the world to arrive at them. Study the Eastern religions by the light of Eastern - not Western - philosophy, and if you happen to relax correctly one single loop of the old religious systems, the chain of mystery may be disentangled.

But to achieve this, one must not agree with those who teach that it is unphilosophical to enquire into first causes, and that all that we can do is to consider their physical effects. The field of scientific investigation is bounded by physical nature on every side; hence, once the limits of matter are reached, enquiry must stop and work be re-commenced. As the Theosophist has no desire to play at being a squirrel upon its revolving wheel, he must refuse to follow the lead of the materialists.

He, at any rate, knows that the revolutions of the physical world are, according to the ancient doctrine, attended by like revolutions in the world of intellect, for the spiritual evolution in the universe proceeds in cycles, like the physical one. Do we not see in history a regular alternation of ebb and flow in the tide of human progress? Do we not see in history, and even find this within our own experience, that the great kingdoms of the world, after reaching the culmination of their greatness, descend again, in accordance with the same law by which they ascended? till, having reached the lowest point, humanity reasserts itself and mounts up once more, the height of its attainment being, by this law of ascending progression by cycles, somewhat higher than the point from which it had before descended. Kingdoms and empires are under the same cyclic laws as plants, races and everything else in Kosmos.

The division of the history of mankind into what the Hindus call the Sattva, Tretya, Dvapara and Kali Yugas, and what the Greeks referred to as “the Golden, Silver, Copper, and Iron Ages” is not a fiction. We see the same thing in the literature of peoples. An age of great inspiration and unconscious productiveness is invariably followed by an age of criticism and consciousness. The one affords material for the analyzing and critical intellect of the other.

“The moment is more opportune than ever for the review of old philosophies. Archeologists, philologists, astronomers, chemists and physicists are getting nearer and nearer to the point where they will be forced to consider them. Physical science has already reached its limits of exploration; dogmatic theology sees the springs of its inspiration dry. The day is approaching when the world will receive the proofs that only ancient religions were in harmony with nature, and ancient science embraced all that can be known.” [2]

Once more the prophecy already made in *Isis Unveiled* twenty-two years ago [3] is reiterated.

“Secrets long kept may be revealed; books long forgotten and arts long time lost may be brought out to light again; papyri and parchments of inestimable importance will turn up in the hands of men who pretend to have unrolled them from mummies, or stumbled upon them in buried crypts; tablets and pillars, whose sculptured revelations will stagger theologians and confound scientists, may yet be excavated and interpreted. Who knows the possibilities of the future? An era of disenchantment and rebuilding will soon begin - nay, has already begun. The cycle has almost run its course; a new one is about to begin, and the future pages of history may contain full evidence, and convey full proof of the above.” [4]

Since the day that this was written much of it has come to pass, the discovery of the Assyrian clay tiles and their records alone having forced the interpreters of the cuneiform inscriptions - both Christians and Freethinkers - to alter the very age of the world. [5]

The chronology of the Hindu Puranas, reproduced in *The Secret Doctrine*, is now derided, but the time may come when it will be universally accepted. This may be regarded as simply an assumption, but it will be so only for the present. It is in truth but a question of time. The whole issue of the quarrel between the defenders of ancient wisdom and its detractors - lay and clerical - rests (a) on the incorrect comprehension of the old philosophies, for the lack of the keys the Assyriologists boast of having discovered; and (b) on the materialistic and anthropomorphic tendencies of the age. This in no wise prevents the Darwinists and materialistic philosophers from digging into the intellectual mines of the ancients and helping themselves to the wealth of ideas they find in them; nor the divines from discovering Christian dogmas in Plato's philosophy and calling them “presentiments”, as in Dr. Lundy's *Monumental Christianity*, and other like modern works.

Of such “presentiments” the whole literature - or what remains of this sacerdotal literature - of India, Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, Greece and even of Guatemala (*Popol Vuh*), is full. Based on the same foundation-stone - the ancient Mysteries - the primitive religions, all without one exception, reflect the most important of the once universal beliefs, such, for instance, as an impersonal and universal divine Principle, absolute in its nature, and unknowable to the “brain” intellect, or the conditioned and limited cognition of man. To imagine any witness to it in the manifested universe, other than as Universal Mind, the Soul of the universe - is impossible. That which alone stands as an undying and ceaseless evidence and proof of the existence of that One Principle, is the presence of an undeniable design in kosmic mechanism, the birth, growth, death and transformation of everything in the universe, from the silent and unreachable stars down to the humble lichen, from man to the invisible lives now called microbes. Hence the universal acceptance of “Thought Divine”, the Anima Mundi of all antiquity. This idea of Mahat (the great) Akasha or Brahma's aura of transformation with the Hindus, of Alaya, “the divine Soul of thought and compassion” of the trans-Himalayan mystics; of Plato's “perpetually reasoning Divinity”, is the oldest of all the doctrines now

known to, and believed in, by man. Therefore they cannot be said to have originated with Plato, nor with Pythagoras, nor with any of the philosophers within the historical period. Say the *Chaldean Oracles*: “The works of nature co-exist with the intellectual, spiritual Light of the Father. For it is the Soul which adorned the great heaven, and which adorns it after the Father”.

“The incorporeal world then was already completed, having its seat in the Divine Reason”, says Philo, who is erroneously accused of deriving his philosophy from Plato.

In the Theogony of Mochus, we find Ether first, and then the air; the two principles from which Ulom, the *intelligible* God (the visible universe of matter) is born.

In the Orphic hymns, the Eros-Phanes evolves from the Spiritual Egg, which the ethereal winds impregnate, wind being “the Spirit of God”, who is said to move in ether, “brooding over the Chaos” - the Divine “Idea”. In the hindu *Kathopanishad*, Purusha, the Divine Spirit, stands before the original Matter; from their union springs the great Soul of the World, “Maha-Atma, Brahm, the Spirit of Life”; these latter appellations are identical with the Universal Soul, or Anima Mundi, and the Astral Light of the Theurgists and Kabalists.

Pythagoras brought his doctrines from the eastern sanctuaries, and Plato compiled them into a form more intelligible than the mysterious numerals of the Sage - whose doctrines he had fully embraced - to the uninitiated mind. Thus, the Kosmos is “the Son” with Plato, having for his father and mother the Divine Thought and Matter. The “Primal Being” (*Beings*, with the Theosophists, as they are the collective aggregation of the divine Rays), is an emanation of the Demiurgic or Universal Mind which contains from eternity the idea of the “to be created world” within itself, which idea the unmanifested LOGOS produces of Itself. The first Idea “born in darkness before the creation of the world” remains in the unmanifested Mind; the second is this Idea going out as a reflection from the Mind (now the manifested LOGOS), becoming clothed with matter, and assuming an objective existence.

[The above article was first published in “Lucifer” magazine, London, September, 1896. The word “Lucifer” means “Light-Bringer” and is the ancient name of the planet Venus, the “morning star”. Since the Middle Ages, however, the term has been distorted by a number of ill-advised priests.]

NOTES:

[1] **Note by H.P. Blavatsky:** See the *Hibbert Lectures* for 1887, pages 14-17, on the origin and growth of the religion of the ancient Babylonians, where Prof. A. H. Sayce says that though “many of the sacred texts were so written as to be intelligible *only to the initiated* [italics mine] provided with keys and glosses”, nevertheless, as many of the latter, he adds, “are in our hands”, they (the Orientalists) have “a clue to the interpretation of these documents *which even the initiated priests did not possess*”. (p. 17.) This “clue” is the modern craze, so dear to Mr. Gladstone, and so stale in its monotony to most, which consists in perceiving in every symbol of the religions of old a solar myth, dragged down, whenever opportunity requires, to a sexual or phallic emblem. Hence the statement that while “Gisdhubar was but a champion and conqueror of old times”, for the Orientalists, who “can penetrate beneath the myths” he is but a solar hero, who was himself but the transformed descendant of a humbler God of Fire (*loc. cit.* p. 17).

[2] **Note by the Editor of “The Aquarian”:** The above quotation is from “Isis Unveiled”, original edition, volume I, p. 38. (C. C. A.)

[3] **Note by the Editor of “The Aquarian”:** The expression “22 years ago” must be a misreading of the HPB originals and handwriting. The present article was first published in September 1896, five years after HPB’s death. Since according to the present transcription H.P.B. says that “Isis” was published “22 years ago”, and considering that “Isis” was published in 1877, then “The Mind in Nature” would have to be written by HPB in 1899, that is, 3 years AFTER its publication in 1896. The transcriber must have mistaken “twelve” for “twenty-two” in H.P.B.’s handwriting, or else the mistake was made by HPB herself and not duly corrected or signalled by the 1896 London editors. If the true information is “twelve years ago”, the present article must have been written in 1889. (C. C. A.)

[4] **Note by the Editor of “The Aquarian”:** This quotation is still from “Isis”, volume I, p. 38.

[5] **Note by H. P. Blavatsky:** Sargon, the first “Semitic” monarch of Babylonia, the prototype and original of Moses, is now placed 3,750 years B.C. (p. 21), and the Third Dynasty of Egypt “some 6,000 years ago”, hence some years before the world was created, agreeably to Biblical chronology. (*Vide Hibbert Lectures on Babylonia*, by A. H. Sayce, 1887, pp. 21 and 33.)

The Beauty of Abstract Truth British Philosopher F. Hutcheson Had A Sense for Buddhic or Moral Perception



Francis Hutcheson (1694-1744)

Is impersonal truth beautiful? And - can there really be a moral and abstract beauty?

Modern esoteric philosophy says that Life unfolds in seven main “levels” of reality. Being part of a septenary Life, human perceptions of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness must be septenary, too. In theosophy, therefore, it can be said that there is beauty at the moral and ethical levels of life, and British philosopher Francis Hutcheson had a similar view of things.

Hutcheson lived more than one century before Helena Blavatsky. According to both authors, human beings have more than five senses. They are endowed with an inner sense for ethics which allows them to “see” moral beauty in a number of situations, as in universal ideas, altruistic feelings, sincere words and noble actions. They can “sense” moral ugliness, too.

Hutcheson’s viewpoint corresponds in Theosophy to a buddhic sense of what is right and wrong. Seen from an occult perspective, goodness, truth, and beauty are three words to describe the same fact. Even when it reveals ugly situations, truth in itself and respect for

