

THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY OBJECTS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THEOSOPHICAL LIFE

John Algeo



1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
3. To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

The Objects of the Theosophical Society, like all great statements, can be understood in more than one way. Moreover, they become the richer as we understand them more fully in various ways.

The Outer and Inner Sense of the Objects

The Objects have their literal, surface, outer meaning, which is perfectly valid. Indeed, the outer sense of the Objects is the organizational foundation of the Society, the basis of our corporate unity. However, just as H. P. Blavatsky distinguished between members of the Theosophical Society and Theosophists, without in any way disparaging or belittling either group, so we may distinguish between the outer sense of the Objects, which applies to the corporate organization, and their inner sense, which is a way Theosophists may understand them and live them.

In speaking of the Objects' inner sense, we need not (and indeed must not) suppose that there is either some secret interpretation not available to all members or a single underlying meaning to be substituted for the outer sense. In the first place, the inner sense of the Objects is an "open secret" available to all. It is simply how the objects apply to one's personal theosophical life, as distinct from the corporate functions of the Theosophical Society.

In the second place, the inner does not replace the outer sense, nor is there a single inner sense. Rather the Objects' inner sense is what we as Theosophists make of them as we live Theosophy.

Consequently the inner sense will vary to some extent with each Theosophist. The exploration of inner meaning that follows is thus only one person's ruminations about how the Objects seem to apply to the theosophical life, and nothing more.

The First Object

"To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour."

This is often understood as an affirmation of "brotherly" behaviour. That is, it is seen as affirming the value of treating all human beings as members of the same family and as equals within that family. It is such an affirmation, and we are such members. However, the Object actually says something different, even on the literal, outer level. It assumes that we are by nature siblings in the same human family; but specifically, it proposes that we form a nucleus within humanity – something that does not already exist naturally.

The nucleus referred to in the first Object can be seen in several ways. In one view, it is "the cornerstone, the foundation of the future religions of humanity," of which the Mahachohan* spoke. It is the core or centre around which other elements form. We are all members of one human family, but one aim of the Society is to bring that theoretical fact into actual practice.

Another way of seeing the first Object is in the light of the "band of servers" that second-generation Theosophists were very conscious of. Those wise elders forming the guardian wall of humanity, whom we call "the Masters," need humble co-workers to help carry out their purposes. Such co-workers are comparable

* Mahachohan: the Great Lord', 'Keeper of the Cosmic Flame', 'Universal Love-Wisdom'; head of the spiritual hierarchy.

to the teaching and research assistants who do some of the grunt work for a research professor at a university. The work they do is not romantic, but it is necessary, and it frees the elders for the sort of work that only the elders can do.

Theosophists can be thought of as those who have accepted the call to become part of the band of servers. That band is the nucleus spoken of in the first Object, understood in an inner sense. It is not an exclusive body, but one whose membership is available to all who are willing to dedicate themselves to it. It has no dues. It has no membership cards. It is an inner reality. **But it is a reality.**

The Second Object

“To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.”

The second Object speaks of studying religion, philosophy, and science. That is what many of our lectures, discussions, books, and articles are concerned with doing. But the actual wording of the Object is worth observing. It does not say that we will study those subjects, but rather that we will “encourage” study. The Society is not, after all, a college that carries on scholarship as its mission. It is, however, a body that encourages its members and others to study.

The thing studied is also worth considering. There are two possible groupings (or grammatical parsings) of the words in the second Object. They may be understood as “the study of (comparative religion), (philosophy) and (science),” “comparative religion” being a study that looks at how various religions are alike and different. Or the words may be understood as “study of [comparative (religion) (philosophy) and (science)],” in which case “comparative” goes with all three following nouns [*religion, philosophy and science*] rather than the first only [*religion*].

Grammatically, the second Object can be parsed either way. When it has been translated into languages other than the nineteenth-century British English in which the Objects were expressed in 1896, it has sometimes been rendered as “the comparative study of religion, philosophy, and science,” which is clearly the second way of understanding its literal meaning. That second understanding is strongly supported by the subtitle of H. P. Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine*: “**The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy.**”

That second understanding of the grammar of the second Object also leads to a view of the Object’s inner meaning. One of our aims as Theosophists is to encourage the comparative study or the synthesis of religion, philosophy, and science, which are the major forms of human understanding of ourselves, the universe, and our grounding in Reality. That synthesis is the Secret Doctrine or Theosophy.

Theosophy as such is not mentioned in the three Objects, doubtless for the very good reason that, if it were, the Society would have to define Theosophy. How does one define the Divine Wisdom? Better not try, because defining it outwardly and officially could only lead to the sort of narrow sectarianism that HPB and her teachers repeatedly warned us against.

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