

THE OBJECTS AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE THEOSOPHICAL LIFE

By John Algeo

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

The first Object is often understood as an affirmation of "brotherly" behavior. 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 center 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 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

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 rather than the first only.

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.

On the other hand, there *is* a Divine Wisdom or Theosophy, and it is what the Theosophical society is named for. Therefore, the study and teaching of Theosophy must be of central concern to us. Although not mentioned explicitly, Theosophy is implicit in the second Object, for it is the Secret Doctrine or the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy.

The Third Object

The present-day third Object is a development of the 1875 statement, "The objects of the society are, to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe." The laws which govern the universe also govern us and our latent powers, so that the first statement of objects in 1875 can be seen as equivalent to the current third Object. The third Object is then chronologically the first one the Society enunciated, although not necessarily the first in the minds of the inner founders, who always emphasized the centrality of brotherhood in the Society's mission.

The third Object is often understood as applying to clairvoyance and psychic powers of various kinds. Such abilities are certainly not excluded by it. But what most people think of as clairvoyance and psychic powers are what *The Voice of the Silence* speaks of as the lower *iddhis* or *siddhis*, and warns students against as possessing dangers for the ignorant. Similarly, the Master M. warned that Sinnett should "also try to break thro' that great *maya* against which occult students, the world over, have always been warned by their teachers—the hankering after phenomena" (*Mahatma Letters*, 3rd edition, p. 258). The lower *siddhis*, or psychic phenomena, cannot be the subject of the

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third Object.

In addition to the lower *siddhis*, however, there are also higher *siddhis*, the powers awakened by the realization of our unity with all life, that is, by enlightenment. The third Object thus calls us to find out about the laws of Nature not explained by science and the highest spiritual powers within ourselves.

In an inner sense, the third Object is about understanding the great mysteries of the universe and developing ourselves accordingly. It is a call to the practice of a spiritual discipline that leads to such understanding and development. It is about yoga, the process of unitive transformation.

The Integrated Meaning of the Objects

Considered outwardly the three Objects of the society are about rather different and seemingly unrelated things: forming a nucleus of brotherhood; encouraging the study of intellectual disciplines; and investigating unexplained laws around us and the latent powers within us. Those are good things to do. They are the corporate purposes of the Society.

Considered inwardly, however, the three Objects are about something more personal, and all three are about very much the same thing. In their inner sense, the Objects are calling us to join the band of servers by seeking to assist in transmitting the Divine Wisdom of Theosophy to the world by understanding its mysteries and by transforming ourselves. In that inner sense, the Objects are not about different activities, but rather about three aspects of one activity: acting out the bodhisattva vow or living altruistically.

Not all members of the Theosophical Society will or should look past the outer sense of the Objects to find an inner one. The outer Objects are good and useful. But for those who hear the call of an inner reality, the inner meaning of the Objects awaits their exploration. Those who look to the inner sense will not all find the same meaning, or at least will not articulate it in the same way. The inner sense is highly personal. Each Theosophist will perceive it in a unique way that is individually applicable.

Yet, however it is perceived and however it is articulated, the inner meaning of the three Objects is a call to live the theosophical life. The Objects are not just about forming groups, encouraging the study of human learning, and investigating the unexplained. They are about *doing* Theosophy. That is their enduring relevance.