

The Three Logoi

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H.P. Blavatsky (HPB), in *The Secret Doctrine* uses the term Logos throughout the text (with capital “L”, and without prior ordinal), usually indicating the so called Second Logos. In *The Secret Doctrine* each of the three logoi is attributed consistently to one of the three aspects, the hypostases, of what may be called the first cosmological triad of our system. Studying the three logoi in *The Secret Doctrine* can easily lead to confusion, not only because the subject matter itself is prone to confusion, but also because HPB’s style of writing can at times be very confusing.

In the oevres of Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater on the other hand, the three logoi are more clearly defined, but unfortunately they do not in every respect correspond to the logoi in *The Secret Doctrine*. In many later theosophical works, and also in many other modern works in the area of spirituality, the three logoi are often introduced without any attempt to definition, while implicitly referring to the relevant works of Besant and Leadbeater.

We could ask ourselves what is the origin of the Besant-Leadbeater interpretation, and how does it correspond to HPB’s version of the logoi? Can we explain the differences? Could we perhaps formulate new air-tight definitions for the three logoi?

1. Some Examples of Differences

There are some clear differences in interpretation, which we could discuss here, illustrated with examples from both Besant’s *The Ancient Wisdom* (AW) and HPB’s *The Secret Doctrine* (SD), before trying to go deeper into the foundations of the models.

Example 1: Mahat

In SD II, 468 we have:

[...] it is the Logos Demiurge (the second logos), or the first emanation from the mind (Mahat), [...]

Instead, in AW, p.112, we find:

[...] the Great Mind in the Kosmos. (Mahat, the Third LOGOS, or Divine Creative Intelligence, the Brahmā of the Hindus, the Mandjusri of the Northern Buddhists, the Holy Spirit of the Christians.)

HPB in the SD associates Mahat with the *Second* Logos, Divine Wisdom, the Brahmā of the Hindus, the Son-aspect of the Christians, instead of the Third.

Example 2: Mahat, the Demiurge and Avalokiteśvara

In SD I, 572 we have:

[...] universal Buddhi (the Maha-buddhi or Mahat in Hindu philosophies) the spiritual, omniscient and omnipotent root of divine intelligence, the highest anima mundi or the Logos.

The “Logos” here is the manifested or Second Logos. HPB in the SD identifies the Universal Mind (Mahat) with the *Second* Logos.

Further in SD I, 110 we have:

Simultaneously with the evolution of the Universal Mind, the concealed Wisdom of Adi-Buddha -- the One Supreme and eternal -- manifests itself as Avalokiteshwara (or manifested Iswara), which is the Osiris of the Egyptians, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Heavenly Man of the Hermetic philosopher, the Logos of the Platonists, and the Atman of the Vedantins. 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.*

The Logos of the (Neo-) Platonists is the Plotinic *Second* Logos. It is the Demiurge and Avalokiteśvara, and corresponds to Mahat. In SD I, 72n we have, to be sure that HPB does not mean the Third Logos:

But there are two Avalokiteshwaras in Esotericism; the first and the second Logos.

Instead, in AW p. 42 we find:

Then the Third LOGOS, the Universal Mind, [...]

Note that in the quotation from SD I, 110, the Anima Mundi (Second Logos), is not equivalent to the Anima Mundi, the World Soul, of the Neo-Platonists, which is the *third* aspect. This is, of course, to make things easier for us...

Example 3: Brahmā

In SD I, 381n we have:

In Indian Puranas it is Vishnu, the first, and Brahma, the second logos, or the ideal and practical creators, [...]

HPB in the SD identifies Brahmā with the *Second* Logos.

Instead, in AW p. 14-15 we find:

The LOGOS in His triple manifestation is : [..]the Third, Manjusri – “the representative of creative wisdom, corresponding to Brahmā.”

We could now take a closer look at the “definitions” of the three logoi in both these works.

2. The three logoi in *The Secret Doctrine*

What comes closest to a definition of the logoi in *The Secret Doctrine*, is a quote from the 1885 lecture of T. Subba Row, published under the title *Notes on the Bhagavad Gita*. In SD I, 429 we find:

Metaphysicians explain the root and germ of the latter, according to Mr. Subba Row, as the first manifestation of Parabrahmam, "the highest trinity that we are capable of understanding," which is Mulaprakriti (the veil), the Logos, and the conscious energy "of the latter," or its power and light; or -- "matter, force and the Ego, or the one root of self, of which every other kind of self is but a manifestation or a reflection."*

So we have as the triad, according to Subba Row (*Notes...*, TUP 2nd ed., p. 22):

1. Mulaprakriti,
2. Eswara or Logos,
3. conscious energy of the Logos, which is its power and light.

Subba Row describes Mūlaprakṛti as a “veil over parabrahman”. He identifies the third aspect with the concept of Daiviprakṛti as used in the *Bhagavad Gīta*, and notes that it “is called *fohat* in several Buddhist books”.

HPB and Subba Row’s interpretation seems to correspond to Plotinus, who is considered the main representative of the Neo-Platonic system. In this model the Nous is the *second* hypostasis:

1. To Hen (The One)
2. Ho Nous (Intellect, Spirit, Universal Mind)
3. Hē Psuchē (The World Soul)

Mead in his work on Plotinus (p. 26 and 28) also describes the Nous as the second principle. Proclus, in his *Metaphysical Elements*, follows Plotinus in this respect: *Proposition XX: The essence of soul [Hē Psuchē] is beyond all bodies [To Sōma], the intellectual nature [Ho Nous] is beyond all souls, and The One [To Hen] is beyond, all intellectual hypostases.*

In the Christian tradition, for example in Augustinus’ *De Trinitate*, we find the same triad:

1. Father, cp. To Hen
2. Son, the Christ, the Word, the Logos, cp. Ho Nous
3. Holy Ghost, cp. the Anima Mundi, World Soul, Hē Psuchē

Contrary to Plotinus however, who identified the Nous with the Demiurge, in the Christian tradition the Father-aspect is identified with the Creator God, as formulated in the first line of the Nicene Creed of 325 (tr. Philip Schaff):

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.

3. The three logoi in *The Ancient Wisdom*

The introduction to Besant's *The Ancient Wisdom* we find a clue as to the origin of the Besant-Leadbetter interpretation. On page 28, reference is made to *Orpheus*, a study by G.R.S. Mead of 1896 on the theogony of the Orphic religion. In *Orpheus* the creation of the universe begins with The One. The One Existence is called *thrice unknown darkness* in the Orphic system. From the darkness comes the primordial triad, with its three hypostases:

1. Universal Good (super-essential),
2. World Soul (self-motive essence),
3. Intellect (Mind).

These three hypostases “appear”, in AW p. 34-35, as the Christian Trinity where the First Logos is the Father, the “fount of all life”, the Second Logos the Son, and the Third Logos the Holy Ghost, the “creative Mind”. The creative Mind, the “noetic” aspect, is presented here as the *third* aspect.

From *Orpheus* (p. 93) we learn that the essential characteristics of the Orphic triads are defined by Plato as

1. Bound (hyparxis)
2. Infinite (power)
3. Mixed (noesis, fr. Nous)

In Plato's dialogue *Philebus*, these characteristics are summed up by Socrates in a different order: 1. infinite (apeiron), 2. finite (peras) and 3. mixed (meikton). In SD I, 426, HPB states that *Porphyry shows that the Monad and the Duad of Pythagoras are identical with Plato's infinite and finite in "Philebus" -- or what Plato calls the ἄπειρον and πέρρας*, confirming this order. The noetic, μεικτόν, is again in *third* position.

Mead in his turn in *Orpheus* refers to Neo-Platonist authors Proclus and Damascius. Damascius' *Difficulties and Solutions of First Principles* seems to be Mead's main source concerning the Orphic metaphysical system. Moreover, HPB has also read this work, and refers to it as “πρώτων ἀρχῶν“. In the *First Principles*, for example in the French translation of Edouard Chaignet of 1898, we find in § 55 that the third principle, which is the Nous, “is called mixed by Plato” and by “Philolaus and the pythagoreans”. The Three Universal Principles, the proenōma, are called

1. Father, Patēr
2. Power, Dunamis
3. Reason, Nous

We can see that Damascius' interpretation of the Primordial Triad goes back to Plato's *Philebus*. Even earlier, Anaxagoras (and later Aristotle) used the term Nous to denote purely the creative principle in the universe. As such, it could of course also be associated with the *third* principle.

4. Analysis

As we have seen, HPB associates Mahat, the Universal Mind or Intelligence, with the Second Logos. As Cosmic Ideation, we would associate it with the Nous and the world of Ideas of the Plotinic model, corresponding to the Second Logos. The Nous as the creative principle of the universe on the other hand, may be associated with the third aspect, not the second. In the Besant-Leadbearer interpretation the Nous is the creative Mind, corresponding to the Third Logos, Divine Activity. Therefore in this model the Demiurge is associated with the Third Logos, again because the third is the “creative aspect”. Notably, in both models the Dhyan Chohans are connected with the third aspect.

These different views, as we have seen, can be traced to the Plotinic interpretation of the three logoi by HPB, versus the interpretation of Damascius, and subsequently Mead in his *Orpheus*, and Besant and Leadbeater. Another source for Mead however, was *The Secret Doctrine*, as it was, naturally, for Besant and Leadbeater. Did Mead, Besant and Leadbeater make a conscious choice to deviate from HPB’s interpretation? We do not have an argumentation from any of them for doing so. Maybe they did not think they were so far removed from HPB’s interpretation? In SD I, 256 we find:

For MAHAT is the first product of Pradhana, or Akasa, and Mahat -- Universal intelligence "whose characteristic property is Buddhi" -- is no other than the Logos, for he is called "Eswara" Brahma, Bhava, etc. (See Linga Purana, sec. lxx. 12 et seq.; and Vayu Purana, but especially the former Purana -- prior, section viii., 67-74). He is, in short, the "Creator" or the divine mind in creative operation, "the cause of all things."

Pradhāna is associated with the First Logos, cp. Mūlaprakṛti. The first product of pradhāna is the Second Logos. Universal intelligence is the Logos, Īśvara, Brahmā, again the *Second* Logos, not the Third. In the next phrase the problem becomes apparent: he is the “Creator”, “the divine mind in creative operation”, which could easily be interpreted as the third aspect. It is, confusingly, about the *Second* Logos, the Divine Mind or Wisdom, and not about fohat, its force, i.e. the Third Logos.

We can see that the cause of misunderstanding here is, that the description of the Second and Third Logoi is not unambiguous. This quote from SD I, 256 is only one example, but this ambiguity occurs repeatedly through the whole text of the SD, making it difficult to reconstruct the model of the triad as it was intended.

5. Synthesis

When we combine the correspondences between the two interpretations, we might come to the following three “definitions”.

1. The First Logos is the **ever unmanifest Logos**, Divine Will.
2. The Second Logos is the **manifested Logos**, Divine Wisdom.
3. The Third Logos is described by HPB as the “**light of the Logos**”, Divine Activity.

I will summarize here, the model presented in *The Secret Doctrine*, suppleted with the terminology from *The Ancient Wisdom* and other correspondences found, leaving out the differences which are based on problems of interpretation, as we have been able to show, I hope convincingly, in this article.

1. First Logos, the One, the Ever Unmanifest, represented by Mūlaprakṛti, the Plotinic and Orphic Hen, Hyparxis, Universal Good, the Christian Father-aspect, Divine Will.
2. Second Logos, the manifested Logos, the Logos proper, the Verbum, the Plotinic Nous, the Demiurge, HPB’s Anima Mundi, Creative Intelligence, Mahat, Universal Mind, Universal Intelligence, Divine Mind, Divine Wisdom, the Son-aspect, the Christ, Brahmā, Īśvara, Avalokiteśvara (manifested).
3. Third Logos, the Light of the Logos, Fohat, Daiviprakṛti, the Plotinic Psuchē, Universal Soul (the Plotinic Anima Mundi), the Nous of Anaxagoras, Divine Activity, the Holy Ghost.