

Artificial Intelligence

A Theosophical Approach

In this meeting, we will try and explore what A.I. is, the fast rise of this technology, with some of its attractive benefits and some of the causes for concern and see why it is important as a society to carry out a work of self reflection. One of the objective of the meeting could be providing food for thought regarding our relationship to technology. Our societies and the acceleration of the technological boom are characteristic of the Kali Yuga we are going through. An age of darkness, where we witness an acceleration of events, a reversal of the right order of things, but which can also be seen as a great opportunity to learn, if only we adopt the right state of mind. We will see how without an emphasis on right Ethics, as can be found in the Theosophy of old, selfishness will prevail over altruism. If unchecked, these powers will lead to pain and destruction so as in the old adage with great power comes great responsibility, we would do well to go back to the cultivation of the right Ethics as can be found at the heart of all religious and philosophical traditions.

“A man who will wield a two-edged sword, must be a thorough master of the blunt weapon, if he would not injure himself — or what is worse — others, at the first attempt.” (from H. P. Blavatsky, her article *Practical Occultism*)

What is A.I.?

Wikipedia defines A.I. as such: “In computer science, artificial intelligence (AI), sometimes called machine intelligence, is intelligence demonstrated by machines, in contrast to the natural intelligence displayed by humans. Colloquially, the term "artificial intelligence" is often used to describe machines (or computers) that mimic "cognitive" functions that humans associate with the human mind, such as "learning" and "problem solving".”

As for all tools, there can be benefits of applications of AI, that can help the progress and collective good of humanity if used wisely. For eg, smart meters for our heating can help us collectively manage our energy more efficiently, therefore leading to less waste and positive environmental benefits. Or automated transport that can potentially reduce traffic and reduce loss of lives due to accidents. But there are also concerns associated with AI, such as privacy and security, information it has access to, what it can and can't do etc.. or replacing more human labour than it can create, therefore leading to increased unemployment. Some of these are discussed in the following video.

On Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: <https://youtu.be/HY1t0tj45Fk>

But this use of technology should not fall into a dependence. Theosophy emphasises the cultivation of self reliance, which implies not becoming slaves to technology but to use it as a tool, ethically,

intelligently and with self-restraint. For eg the use of e-maps, can be useful but we should still learn to navigate a map so as not to be too dependent on it and rely solely on the instructions of the machine, retaining critical thinking and our capacity to discern.

HPB writes about the discoveries that can have terrible consequences on mankind:

“A PREMATURE DISCOVERY. If the question is asked why Mr. Keely was not allowed to pass a certain limit, the answer is easy; because that which he has unconsciously discovered, is the terrible sidereal Force, known to, and named by the Atlanteans MASH-MAK, and by the Aryan Rishis in their Ashtar Vidya by a name that we do not like to give. It is the vril of Bulwer Lytton's "Coming Race," and of the coming races of our mankind. The name vril may be a fiction; the Force itself is a fact doubted as little in India as the existence itself of their Rishis, since it is mentioned in all the secret works. It is this vibratory Force, which, when aimed at an army from an Agni Rath fixed on a flying vessel, a balloon, according to the instructions found in Ashtar Vidya, reduced to ashes 100,000 men and elephants, as easily as it would a dead rat. It is allegorised in the Vishnu Purâna, in the Râmâyana and other works, in the fable about the sage Kapila whose glance made a mountain of ashes of King Sagara's 60,000 sons, and which is explained in the esoteric works, and referred to as the Kapilaksha—"Kapila's Eye." And is it this Satanic Force that our generations were to be allowed to add to their stock of Anarchist's baby-toys, known as melenite, dynamite clock-works, explosive oranges, "flower baskets," and such other innocent names? Is it this destructive agency, which, once in the hands of some modern Attila, e.g., a blood-thirsty anarchist, would reduce Europe in a few days to its primitive chaotic state with no man left alive to tell the tale—is this force to become the common property of all men alike? What Mr. Keely has already done is grand and wonderful in the extreme; there is enough work before him in the demonstration of his new system to "humble the pride of those scientists who are materialistic, by revealing those mysteries which lie behind the world of matter," without revealing it nolens volens to all. For surely Psychists and Spiritualists—of whom there are a good number in the European armies—would be the first to experience personally the fruits of such mysteries revealed. Thousands of them would find themselves (and perhaps with the populations of whole countries to keep them company) in blue Ether very soon, were such a Force to be even entirely discovered, let alone made publicly known. The discovery in its completeness is by several thousand—or shall we say hundred thousand?—years too premature. It will be at its appointed place and time only when the great roaring flood of starvation, misery, and underpaid labour ebbs back again—as it will when happily at last the just demands of the many are attended to; when the proletariat exists but in name, and the pitiful cry for bread, that rings throughout the world unheeded, has died away. This may be hastened by the spread of learning, and by new openings for work and emigration, with better prospects than exist now, and on some new continent that may appear. Then only will "Keely's Motor and Force," as originally contemplated by himself and friends, be in demand, because it will be more needed by the poor than by the wealthy. Meanwhile the force discovered by him will work through wires, and this, if he succeeds, will be quite sufficient in the present generation to make of him the greatest discoverer of this age.”

(from *The Secret Doctrine* 1p563)

With the discovery of the atomic bomb and our increased capacity to destroy, mankind is more than ever in a position where it requires ethics to guide its actions to avoid the path of self destruction.

“Thus a force whose secret powers were thoroughly familiar to the ancient theurgists, is denied by modern skeptics. The antediluvian children — who perhaps played with it, using it as the boys in Bulwer-Lytton's *Coming Race*, use the tremendous "vril" — called it the "Water of Phtha"; their descendants named it the *Anima Mundi*, the soul of the universe; and still later the mediæval hermetists termed it "sidereal light," or the "Milk of the Celestial Virgin," the "Magnes," and many other names. But our modern learned men will neither accept nor recognize it under such appellations; for it pertains to magic, and magic is, in their conception, a disgraceful superstition.” (from *Isis Unveiled* 1p64)

In the passage above, HPB refers to the following novel:

“**The Coming Race**” is a novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, published anonymously in 1871. It has also been published as *Vril, the Power of the Coming Race*.

Plot summary from Wikipedia

The novel centres on a young, independent, unnamed, wealthy traveller (the narrator), who visits a friend, a mining engineer. They explore a natural chasm in a mine which has been exposed by an exploratory shaft. The narrator reaches the bottom of the chasm safely, but the rope breaks and his friend is killed. The narrator finds his way into a subterranean world occupied by beings who seem to resemble angels. He befriends the first being he meets, who guides him around a city that is reminiscent of ancient Egyptian architecture. The explorer meets his host's wife, two sons and daughter who learn to speak English by way of a makeshift dictionary during which the narrator unconsciously teaches them the language. His guide comes towards him, and he and his daughter, Zee, explain who they are and how they function.

The hero discovers that these beings, who call themselves Vril-ya, have great telepathic and other parapsychological abilities, such as being able to transmit information, get rid of pain, and put others to sleep. The narrator is offended by the idea that the Vril-ya are better adapted to learn about him than he is to learn about them. Nevertheless, the guide (who turns out to be a magistrate) and his son Tae behave kindly towards him.

The narrator soon discovers that the Vril-ya are descendants of an antediluvian civilization called the Ana, who live in networks of subterranean caverns linked by tunnels. Originally surface dwellers, they fled underground thousands of years ago to escape a massive flood and gained greater power by facing and dominating the harsh conditions of the Earth. The place where the narrator descended houses 12,000 families, one of the largest groups. Their society is a technologically supported Utopia, chief among their tools being an "all-permeating fluid" called "Vril", a latent source of energy that the spiritually elevated hosts are able to master through training of their will, to a degree that depends on their hereditary constitution. This mastery gives them access to an extraordinary force that can be controlled at will. It is this fluid that the Vril-ya employ to communicate with the narrator. The powers of the Vril includes the ability to heal, change, and destroy beings and things; the destructive powers in particular are immense, allowing a few young Vril-ya children to destroy entire cities if necessary. (...)

Their religion posits the existence of a superior being but does not dwell on his nature. The Vrilya believe in the permanence of life, which according to them is not destroyed but merely changes form.

The narrator adopts the attire of his hosts and begins also to adopt their customs. Zee falls in love with him and tells her father, who orders Tae to kill him with his staff. Eventually both Tae and Zee conspire against such a command, and Zee leads the narrator through the same chasm which he first descended. Returning to the surface, he warns that in time the Vrilya will run out of habitable space underground and will claim the surface of the Earth, destroying mankind in the process, if necessary.”

On what the **Vril** might symbolise, HPB writes in *Isis Unveiled*:

“THERE has been an infinite confusion of names to express one and the same thing. The chaos of the ancients; the Zoroastrian sacred fire, or the *Antusbyrum* of the Parsees; the Hermes-fire; the Elmes-fire of the ancient Germans; the lightning of Cybelè; the burning torch of Apollo; the flame on the altar of Pan; the inextinguishable fire in the temple on the Acropolis, and in that of Vesta; the fire-flame of Pluto's helm; the brilliant sparks on the hats of the Dioscuri, on the Gorgon head, the helm of Pallas, and the staff of Mercury; the πυρ ασβεστον [inextinguishable fire]; the Egyptian Phtha, or Ra; the Grecian *Zeus Cataibates* (the descending); the pentecostal fire-tongues; the burning bush of Moses; the pillar of fire of the *Exodus*, and the "burning lamp" of Abram; the eternal fire of the "bottomless pit"; the Delphic oracular vapors; the Sidereal light of the Rosicrucians; the AKASA of the Hindu adepts; the Astral light of Eliphas Levi; the nerve-aura and the fluid of the magnetists; the *od* of Reichenbach; the fire-globe, or meteor-*cat* of Babinet; the *Psychod* and ectenic force of Thury; the psychic force of Sergeant Cox and Mr. Crookes; the atmospheric magnetism of some naturalists; galvanism; and finally, electricity, are but various names for many different manifestations, or effects of the same mysterious, all-pervading cause — the Greek *Archeus*, or Αρχαιος." (from *Isis Unveiled* 1p125)

Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton, in his *The Coming Race*, describes it as the VRIL, used by the subterranean populations, and allowed his readers to take it for a fiction. "These people," he says, "consider that in the vril they had arrived at the unity in natural energetic agencies"; and proceeds to show that Faraday intimated them "under the more cautious term of correlation," thus: "I have long held an opinion, almost amounting to a conviction, in common, I believe, with many other lovers of natural knowledge, that the various forms under which the forces of matter are made manifest, HAVE ONE COMMON ORIGIN; or, in other words, are so directly related and naturally dependent, that they are convertible, as it were, into one another, and possess equivalents of power in their action."

This novel explores the moral responsibility that comes from accessing immense powers, as an analogy for the latent powers in man which he will develop in the future, through the conquering of his lower nature.

Living in a society where technology is revered requires vigilance, and the cultivation of the Ethics and self-discipline taught by Buddha in his *Dhammapada*:

The Dhammapada, Chapter Two “Vigilance”

1. Vigilance is the path to Life Eternal. Thoughtlessness is the path to death. The reflecting vigilant die not. The heedless are already dead. (21)
2. The wise distinctly understand this. Therefore they delight in wakeful watching. They graze in the pastures of the Aryas, the Noble Ones. (22)
3. Meditative, persevering, ever strenuous in endeavour, the tranquil ones attain Nirvana, the highest freedom and happiness. (23)
4. Continually grows the glory of that man who is wakeful and mindful, whose deeds are pure, whose acts are deliberate, who is self-controlled and who lives according to Law. (24)
5. By endeavour, by vigilance, by discipline and self-control, let the wise man make for himself an island which no flood can overwhelm. (25)
6. Fools and witless persons give themselves to sloth. The wise value vigilance as their best treasure. (26)
7. Be not a sluggard. Have no dalliance with lust and sense delights. He who meditates with earnestness attains great joy. (27)
8. When the prudent man overcomes sloth by vigilance he ascends to the terrace of wisdom. Sorrowless he surveys the sorrowful crowd. This wise man regards the foolish as the mountaineer from his high peak looks at those who are dwelling on the plains. (28)
9. Vigilant among the heedless, awake among the sleepy, the wise one forges ahead even as a charger outdistances a weak horse. (29)
10. By vigilance did Indra rise to the lordship of the gods. Vigilance is always praised, heedlessness ever deprecated. (30)
11. A Bhikkhu who delights in vigilance, who sees the danger of heedlessness, advances like a lire consuming fetters, small or large. (31)
12. A Bhikkhu who delights in vigilance, who sees the danger of heedlessness, will not fall; he is close upon Nirvana. (32)

Right thinking, based on a knowledge of the laws of Nature (Karma, law of cycles, law of unity..) will lead to harmony, and what is outside is a reflection of the inside. Therefore humans should focus inwardly as Theosophy teaches, for the light and wisdom of our Higher Self and the rest will naturally fall into place.

In HPB’s words, we should focus on the following ideal: “leaning towards the metaphysical; of pure, unselfish life, who finds more joy in helping his neighbour than in receiving help himself; one who is every ready to sacrifice his own pleasures for the sake of other people; and who loves Truth, Goodness and Wisdom for their own sake, not for the benefit they may confer — is a Theosophist.”

The United Lodge of Theosophists, London UK

<https://www.theosophy-ult.org.uk/events/>