

Solbadets Buddha

Buddhism och teosofi i Ellen Keys Livstro

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Abstract

The Buddha of the Sunbath. Buddhism and Theosophy in Ellen Key's Life Faith.

The thesis analyzes the spiritual teaching developed by Ellen Key, which she called Life Faith (Swedish: Livstro), situating it in the broader history of religions and concerns characteristic of Key's time. Specifically, it investigates Key's interest in Buddhism and Theosophy by drawing on recent scholarship on alternative and esoteric spiritual movements in the late 1800s to contextualize her ideas, demonstrating how Key's Life Faith was nourished by German idealism, Romanticism, and the so-called Oriental Renaissance.

These dimensions – especially the esoteric influences – have previously remained largely unexplored in Ellen Key scholarship, and the thesis moreover employs hitherto unexamined primary sources. The thesis attempts to clarify what function the legacy of ideas and terminology from so-called "Eastern" teachings – in Key's case Buddhist and Theosophical – could fill in the construction of a turn-of-the-century spiritual movement like the Life Faith. This entails a discussion of the role of religion in Key's contemporary society, the importance of "Eastern" traditions to the process of religious change in Sweden, as well as Key's own explicit positioning within this field. Additionally, the thesis situates Key's Life Faith in recent theoretical discussions of Weber's concept of "disenchantment" that have taken place in the history of religions as well as other disciplines.

The three main research questions are: What did Key's notion of Buddhism and Theosophy look like? In what context was Key's notion of Buddhism and Theosophy shaped? What was the function of Buddhism and Theosophy in Key's process of designing her Life Faith? These three questions are answered firstly via a broad contextualization of the reception of Buddhism and Theosophy in the West (and Sweden in particular), secondly through an overview of Key's ideological and spiritual context, thirdly by a description of the literary and personal contacts that influenced her religious development. Finally, a close examination is undertaken of what Key specifically said about Buddhism and Theosophy in her own published and unpublished texts and which function her understanding of these traditions had in her Life Faith. The thesis is concluded with a summary and final discussion of her positioning in the contemporary spiritual environment, the function of Buddhism and Theosophy in her Life Faith as well as her message regarding a potentially "enchanted" world.

The analysis shows that Ellen Key drew systematically on her knowledge of Buddhism and Theosophy (topics she had been drawn to through her interest in the Oriental Renaissance and a developmental view connected with the so-called romantic spiral) when engaging in polemics and to convey her message of a new religion, the Life Faith. Furthermore, this choice related to the specific notions of Buddhism and Theosophy that flourished in the contemporary world. Through these means, Key came to formulate a vision of the future attempting to combine modernist ideals with an affirmation of the world as "enchanted". Her Life Faith was thus placed in relation to what was classed by contemporaries as "Eastern" thoughts, represented by Buddhism and Theosophy, and more generally to debates about spirituality, colonialism, militarism, patriarchal society, feminism, materialism and science, and, by extension, to the problems that came to be included under the concept of "disenchantment".

Keywords: *Ellen Key, Life Faith, Buddhism, Theosophy, Spirituality, Esotericism, 18th-century religion, Enchantment.*

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