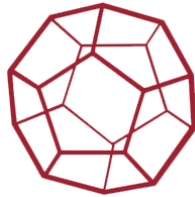


**The Origin of Suffering  
The Origin of Evil  
Illness and Death**

GA 55



**The Origin of Suffering  
The Origin of Evil  
Illness and Death**

GA 55

by

*Rudolf Steiner*

November–December 1906

Source: [Rudolf Steiner Archive](#)

# Table of Contents

## Introduction

1. The Origin of Suffering
2. The Origin of Evil
3. What Do We Understand by Illness and Death



Image on the cover of the original publication: William Blake, *The Book of Job* (So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown)

# Introduction

The highest elements in the consciousness of humanity are linked to suffering. There is a connection between pain and suffering, illness and death, and the highest a human being can attain: the fruit of pain is knowledge.

Translated from shorthand reports unrevised by the lecturer and at certain places, missing sentences and words, by M. Cotterell. (lectures 1–2) and V. E. Watkin (lecture 3).



# 1

## The Origin of Suffering

*8 November 1906, Berlin*

The next three lectures of this winter's cycle will have more of an inner connection than the others, that is: Today's upon the origin of suffering, the next upon the origin of evil, and the following: Illness and Death. Yet each of these three lectures will be complete and comprehensible in itself.

When man looks at the life around him, when he examines himself and tries to investigate the meaning and significance of life, he finds before life's door a remarkable figure — in part a warning figure, in part a completely enigmatic one: Suffering.

Suffering, so closely bound up with what we shall consider in the next lectures on evil, illness and death, seems to man sometimes to grip so deeply into life as to be connected with its very greatest problems. Hence the problem of suffering has occupied the human race since earliest times, and whenever there is an endeavour to estimate the value of life and to find its meaning, people have above all tried to recognize the role played by suffering and pain.

In the midst of a happy life suffering appears as a destroyer of peace, as a damper-down of the pleasure and hope of life. Those who see the value of life in pleasure and happiness are those who feel the most this peace-destroyer, suffering. How else would it be explicable that in a people so full of joy and happiness of life as the Greeks, such a dark spot in the starry heavens of the beauty of Greece could arise as the saying of the wise Silenus? Silenus in the train of Dionysos asks: What is the best for man? The best for man is not to be born, and if he is once born, then the second best is to die soon after birth. Perhaps you know that Friedrich Nietzsche in seeking to grasp the birth of tragedy out of the spirit of ancient Greece linked on to this saying in order to show how, on the basis of Greek wisdom and art, suffering and man's sadness over suffering and all connected with it play a role full of significance.

But now we find another, hardly much later, saying from ancient Greece. It is a short phrase which shows how a glimmering arises that the pain and sorrow of the world do not play merely an unhappy role. It is the expression which we find in one of the earliest Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, that out of suffering grows knowledge. Here are two things brought together, one of which no doubt a great part of mankind would like to blot out, whereas it looks on the other, knowledge, as one of the highest possessions of life.

People at all times have believed that they must recognise that life and suffering are deeply entwined — at least the life of modern man and of the higher creatures on our globe. Thus at the beginning of the Biblical story of Creation the knowledge of good and evil and suffering are intimately bound up with one another. Yet we also see on the other hand, in the midst of the Old Testament conception how, out of a dark view of sorrow, a bright light-filled one dawns. When we look around us in the Old Testament and study the Creation story in regard to this question it is clear that suffering and sin were brought together, that suffering was looked on as the consequence of sin. In the modern mode of thinking, where the materialistic concept of the world penetrates everywhere, it is no longer easy to grasp how the cause of suffering can be sought for in sin. But through spiritual research and the power to look back into earlier ages, it will be found to be not so meaningless to believe in such a connection. The next lecture will show us that it is possible to see a connection between evil and suffering. But for ancient Jewry it was impossible to explain the cause of suffering. We see in the centre of this view that brings suffering and sin into connection the remarkable figure of Job. It is a figure which shows us, or is meant to show us, how suffering and unspeakable pain can be connected with a completely guiltless life, how there can be unearned pain and suffering. We see dawning in the consciousness of this unique tragic personality, Job, yet another connection of pain and suffering, a connection with the ennobling of man. Suffering appears to us then as a testing, as the root of a climbing upwards, of a higher development. Suffering in the sense of this Job-tragedy need in no way have its origin in evil, it can itself be first cause, so that what proceeds from it represents a more perfect phase of human life. All of that lies somewhat remote from our modern thinking, and the generality of our modern educated public can find but little connection with it. You need only think back in your life, however, and you will see how perfection and suffering very often appeared together and how mankind

has always been aware of this connection. Such a consciousness will form a bridge to what we are to consider today in the light of spiritual investigation, namely, the connection between suffering and spirituality.

Remember how in some tragedy the tragic hero has stood before your eyes. The poet leads the hero again and again through suffering and conflicts full of suffering until he comes to the point where pain reaches its climax and finds relief in the end of the physical body. Then there lives in the soul of the spectator not alone sympathy with the tragic hero and sadness that such sufferings are possible, but it appears that from the sight of suffering man was exalted and built up, that he has seen the suffering submerged in death and that out of death has come the assurance that victory exists over pain. Yes, even over death. Through nothing in art can this highest victory of man, this victory of his highest forces and impulses, victory of the noblest impulses of his nature be brought so sublimely before the eyes as by a tragedy. When the experience of pain and suffering has preceded the consciousness of this victory, and, from the deeds that can again and again take place before the eyes of the spectator in the theatre, we look up to what is still felt by a great part of modern humanity as the highest fact of all historical evolution; when we look up to the Event which divides our chronology into two parts — to the Redemption through Christ Jesus — then it can strike us that one of the greatest upliftings, one of the greatest upbuildings and hopes of victory which has ever taken root in the heart of man has sprung from the world historic sight of suffering. The greatly significant feelings, cutting deep into the human heart, of the Christian world-conception, these feelings which for so many are the hope and strength of life, give the assurance that there is an eternity, a victory over death. All these supporting and uplifting feelings spring from the sight of a universal suffering, a suffering that befalls innocence, a suffering occasioned through no personal sin.

So we see here too that a highest element in the consciousness of humanity is linked to suffering. And when we see how these things, small and great, ever again rise to the surface, how they actually form the elemental part of the whole of human nature and consciousness, then it must indeed seem to us as if in some way suffering is connected with the highest in man.

This was only meant to point to a basic impulse of the human soul which continually asserts itself and which stands as a great consolation for the fact that there is suffering. If we now enter more intimately into human life we shall find phenomena which show us the significance of suffering. We



shall have to point here symptomatically to a phenomenon which perhaps seems hardly connected; but, if we nevertheless examine human nature more closely, we shall see that this phenomenon too points to the significance of certain aspects of suffering.

Think once more of a work of art, a tragedy. It can only arise if the poet's soul opens wide, goes out of itself and learns to feel another's pain, to lay the burden of a stranger's suffering upon his own soul. And now compare this feeling not perhaps just with a comedy — for then we should get no good comparison — but with something which in a certain way also belongs to art, with the mood which gives rise to caricature. This mood, perhaps with ridicule and derision, draws in caricature what goes on in the soul of the other and appears in external action. Let us try to put before us two men of whom the one conceives an event or a human being tragically, while the other grasps it as caricature. It is not a mere comparison, not a mere picture when we say that the soul of the tragic poet and artist appears as if it went out of itself and became wider and wider. What, however, is revealed to the soul through this expansion? The understanding of the other person. One understands the life of another through nothing so much as by taking upon one's own soul the burden of his pain. But what must one do if one wants to caricature? One must not go into what the other feels, one must set oneself above it, drive it away, and this driving from oneself is the basis of the caricature. No-one will deny that just as through tragic compassion the other personality becomes deeply comprehensible, what appears in the caricature is what lives in the personality of the caricaturist. We learn to know the superiority, the wit, the power of observation, the phantasy of the one caricaturing rather than the one caricatured.

If we have shown in some way that suffering is nevertheless connected with something deep in human nature then we may hope that through a grasp of the actual nature of man the origin of pain and suffering can also become clear to us.

The spiritual science which we represent here takes its starting point from the fact that all existence has its origin in the Spirit. A more materialistic view sees Spirit only as a crowning of perceptible creation, above all as a fruit of physical nature from which it proceeds.

In the last two lectures (11 and 25th October 1906. The former is not translated. The latter is "The Occult Significance of Blood".) it was shown how in the light of spiritual research we have to picture the whole man —

the physical or bodily, the man of soul and the spiritual man. What we can see with our eyes, perceive externally through the senses, what materialism considers the sole being of nature, is to spiritual research nothing but the first member of the human being — the physical body. We know that in respect of its substances and laws this is common to man with all the rest of the lifeless world. But we know too that this physical body is called to life through what we call the etheric or life-body. We know this because for spiritual research the life-body is not a speculation but a reality which can be seen when the higher senses slumbering in man have become open. We look upon the second part of the human being, the etheric body, as something which man has in common with the rest of the plant world. We regard the astral body as the third member of man's being; it is the bearer of sympathy and antipathy, of desire and passion which man has in common with the animal. And then we see that man's self-consciousness, the possibility of saying "I" to oneself, is the crown of human nature, which man has in common with no other being. We see that the "I" arises as the blossoming of the three bodies, physical, etheric and astral. So we see a connection of these four bodies to which spiritual research has always pointed. The Pythagorean "quadrature" is nothing else than the four-foldness, physical body, etheric body, astral body and I or ego. Those who have occupied themselves more deeply with spiritual science know that the I works out from itself what we call Spirit-Self or Manas, Life-Spirit or Budhi, and the actual Spirit-Man or Atma.

That is once more put before you so that we may orientate ourselves in the right way. Man therefore appears to the spiritual investigator as a four-membered being. Now comes the point where genuine spiritual research, which sees behind the beings with the eyes of the spirit and penetrates to the deeper laws of existence, differs profoundly from a purely external way of observing. It is true that as man stands before us we say too that chemical and physical laws must be the foundation of the body, of life, the foundation of sensation, consciousness, self-consciousness. But when we penetrate existence with spiritual science we see that things are just the reverse. Consciousness, which arises out of the physical body, which in the sense of phenomenon appears to be the last, is to us the original creative element. At the base of all things we perceive the conscious Spirit and therefore the spiritual researcher sees how senseless is the question: Where does the Spirit come from? — That can never be the question. It is only possible to ask: Where does matter come from? For spiritual research matter has sprung from Spirit, is nothing but densified Spirit.

As a comparison, picture a vessel with water in it. Think of one part of the water being cooled down until it turns to ice. Now what is the ice? It is water, water in another form, in a solid condition. This is the way that spiritual research looks at matter. As water is related to ice so is Spirit to matter. As ice is no more than a result of water, so is matter nothing else than a result of Spirit, and as ice can become water again, so can Spirit originate again out of matter, can proceed from matter, or, reversed, matter can again dissolve into Spirit.

Thus we see Spirit in an eternal circulation. We see the Spirit which flows through the whole universe, we see material beings arise out of it, densifying, and we see again on the other hand beings which cause the solid to evaporate again. In all that surrounds us today as matter is something into which Spirit has flowed and become rigid. In every material being we see rigidified Spirit. As we need only bring the necessary heat to the ice to turn it into water again, so we need only bring the necessary Spirit to the beings around us to renew the Spirit in them. We speak of a rebirth of the Spirit which has flowed into matter and is hardened there. Thus does the astral body — the bearer of likes and dislikes, of desires and passions — appear to us not as something which could originate from physical existence, but as the same element as lives in us as conscious Spirit, as what appears to us as the element flowing through the whole world and being dissolved again out of matter, through a process of human life. What appears as last is at the same time the first. It has produced the physical body and likewise the etheric body, and when both have reached a certain degree of development appears to be born out of them anew.

This is how spiritual research looks at things. Now these three members — we only use words for clarifying — appear to us under three distinct names. We perceive matter in a certain form, appearing to us in the outer world in a certain way. We speak of the Form, of the shape of matter and of the Life which appears in the Form and lastly of Consciousness which appears within the Life. So we speak as of three stages: physical body, etheric body, astral body, and also of three stages: Form, Life, Consciousness. Only from Consciousness does Self-consciousness arise. We shall not occupy ourselves with that today but only in our next lecture.

People at all times and particularly in our own day have pondered much over the actual meaning of life and its origin. Modern natural science has been able to give few clues to the meaning and nature of life. One thing, however, the more recent natural science has accepted for some time, something which has been expounded again and again as a fact by

spiritual science also. This is namely: Life within the physical world is fundamentally distinguished as to substance from the so-called lifeless only through the manifoldness and complexity of its formation. Life can be present only where a much more complicated structure is found than exists in the realm of the lifeless. You know, perhaps, that the basic substance of life is a kind of albuminous substance for which the expression "living albumen" would not be out of place. This living albumen differs essentially from dead lifeless albumen through one characteristic. Living albumen disintegrates directly it is forsaken by life. Dead albumen, that for instance of a dead hen's-egg, cannot be kept for any length of time in the same condition. It is the essential character of living substance that the moment when life has left it, it can no longer hold its parts together. Although we cannot go further into the nature of life today, yet one phenomenon can point to something that is deeply connected with life and characterises it. And what is this characteristic? It is just this peculiarity of living substance that it disintegrates when life has gone out of it. Think of a substance denuded of life — it decays, it has the peculiarity of dispersing. What then does life do? It sets itself again and again against disintegration; thus life preserves. That is the youth-giving element of life: it ever resists what would take place in its substance. Life in substance means: resistance to decay. Compare with life the external process of death and it will be clear that life does not show what characterises the process of death — the disintegration in itself. Far more does it ever and again rescue substance from decay, sets itself against decay. Thus, inasmuch as life ever renews the substance which is falling to pieces in itself, it is the foundation of physical existence and of consciousness.

This has not merely been a verbal explanation; it would have been one if what it signifies were not continuously carried on. You need, however, only observe a living substance and you will find that it continually takes up matter from outside, incorporates it into itself, inasmuch as portions of itself become destroyed: a process through which life perpetually works against destruction. We have, in fact, to do with a reality.

To throw off old material and form new again — that is life. But life is not yet sensation, not yet consciousness. It is a childish kind of imagination that makes many scientists have such a false idea of sensation. To the plants to which we must ascribe life, they also attribute sensation. If one says that because many plants close their leaves and flowers on an external stimulation, as if they felt it, then one could also say that blue litmus paper, which goes red through outer stimulus, has sensation. We could also ascribe sensation to chemical substances because they react to

certain influences. But that is not enough. To have sensation the stimulus must be reflected inwardly. Only then can we speak of the first element of consciousness, of sensation and feeling. And what is this first element of consciousness? When in further investigation of the world we raise ourselves to the next higher stage and try to comprehend the nature of consciousness, we shall not do so immediately, but shall nevertheless feel it dawn a little into the soul, just as we could explain a little the nature of life. Consciousness can arise only where there is life, can spring only from life. If life arises out of apparently lifeless matter, since the combination of the material is so complicated that it cannot preserve itself and must be seized upon by life in order to prevent continual decay, then consciousness appears to us within life as something higher. Whenever life is continually destroyed as life, where a being stands close to the threshold between life and death, where life threatens all the time to vanish again from the living substance, then consciousness arises. And as in the first place substance would have disintegrated if life did not permeate it, so now life seems to us to be dissipated if a new principle, consciousness, is not added to it. We can grasp consciousness only by saying: Just as life is there in order to renew certain processes, for lack of which matter would decay, so is consciousness there to renew again and again the life that would otherwise die.

Not every life can always renew itself inwardly in this way. It must have reached a higher stage, if it is to renew itself from itself. Only a life that is so strong in itself that it perpetually bears death within can awaken to consciousness. Or does no life exist which in every moment has death in itself? You need only look at the life of man and remember what was said in the last lecture: "Blood is a very special fluid". Human life renews itself continually out of the blood, and a clever German psychologist has said that man has a double (Doppelgänger) from whom he continually draws strength. But the blood, has another power as well: it continually creates death. When the blood has deposited the life-awakening substances on the bodily organs, then it carries the life-destroying forces up again to the heart and lungs. What flows back into the lungs is poisonous to life and makes life continually perish.

When a being works against disintegration and decay then it is a living being. If it is able to let death arise within it and to transform this death continually into life, then consciousness arises. Consciousness is the strongest of all forces that we encounter. Consciousness, or conscious spirit, is that force which out of death, which must be created in the midst of life, eternally makes life arise again. Life is a process which is concerned

with an outer world and an inner world. Consciousness, however, is a process which has to do only with an inner world. A substance which can die externally cannot become conscious. A substance can only become conscious that creates death in its own centre and overcomes it. Thus death — as a gifted German theosophist has said — is not only the root of life but also the root of consciousness.

When we have grasped this connection then we need only look at the phenomena with open eyes and pain will appear comprehensible. All that gives rise to consciousness is originally pain. When life manifests externally, when life, air, warmth, cold encounter a living being then these outer elements work upon it. But as long as they only work upon it, as long as they are taken up by the living being, as they are taken up by the plant as bearer of internal life-processes, so long does no consciousness arise. Consciousness first arises when these outer elements come into opposition with the inner life and a destruction takes place. Consciousness must result from destruction of life. Without partial death a ray of light is not able to penetrate a living being, the process can never be stimulated in the living being from which consciousness arises. But when light penetrates into the surface of life, produces a partial destruction, breaks down the inner substances and forces, then that mysterious process arises which takes place everywhere in the external world in a quite definite way. Picture to yourselves that the intelligent forces of the world had ascended up to a height where outer light and outer air were foreign to them. They remained in harmony with them only for a time, then they came to completion and an opposition arose. If you could follow this process with the eye of the spirit, then you could see how when a ray of light penetrates a simple being, the skin becomes somewhat transformed and a tiny eye appears. What is it therefore that first glimmers there in the substance? In what does this fine destruction (for it is destruction) manifest? In pain, which is nothing else than an expression for the destruction. Whenever life comes up against external nature destruction takes place, and when it becomes greater even produces death. Out of pain consciousness is born. The very process which has created your eye would have been a destructive process if it had gained the upper hand over the nature that had developed up to the human being. But it has seized upon only a small part with which out of the destruction and partial death it could create that mirroring of the external world which we call consciousness. Consciousness within matter is thus born out of suffering, out of pain.



When we realise this connection of suffering and pain with the conscious spirit that surrounds us, we shall well understand the words of a Christian initiate who knew such things fundamentally and intuitively, and saw pain at the basis of all conscious life. They are the words: In all Nature sighs every creature in pain, full of earnest expectation to attain the state of the child of God. — You find that in the eighth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans as a wonderful expression of this foundation of consciousness in pain. Thus one can also understand how thoughtful men have ascribed to pain such an all-important role. I should like to quote just one example. A great German philosopher says that when one looks at all Nature around one, then pain and suffering seem to be expressed everywhere on her countenance. Yes, when one observes the higher animals they show to those who look more deeply an expression full of suffering. And who would not admit that many an animal physiognomy looks like the manifestation of a deeply hidden pain?

If we look at the matter as we have just described it then we see the origin of consciousness out of pain, so that a being who builds consciousness out of destruction causes a higher element to arise from the decay of life, creates itself continuously out of death. If the living could not suffer, never could consciousness arise. If there were no death in the world never in the visible world could Spirit exist. That is the strength of the Spirit — that it remoulds destruction into something still higher than life, and so in the midst of life forms a higher state, consciousness. Ever further and further we see the various experiences of pain develop to the organs of consciousness. One sees it in the animals which for an external defence have only a reflex consciousness, just as man shuts the eye as protection against a danger to it. When the reflex movement is no longer enough to protect the inner life, when the stimulus becomes too strong, then the inner force of resistance rises up and gives birth to the senses, sensation, eye and ear. You know perhaps from many a disagreeable experience, or perhaps even instinctively, that this is so. You know indeed out of a higher state of your consciousness that what has been said is a truth. An example will make it still clearer. When do you feel certain interior organs of your organism? You go through life and do not feel your stomach or liver or lungs. You feel none of your organs as long as they are sound. You feel them only when they give you pain, and you really know that you have this or that organ only when it hurts you, when you feel that something is out of order there and that a destruction-process is beginning.

If we take this example and explanation then we see that conscious life is continually born from pain. If pain arises in life it gives birth to sensation and consciousness. This giving birth, this bringing forth of a higher element, is reflected again in consciousness as pleasure, and there would never be a pleasure unless there had been a previous pain. In the life below which just raises itself from physical material, there is as yet no pleasure. But when pain has produced consciousness and works further creatively as consciousness, then this creating is on a higher level and is expressed in the feeling of pleasure. Creation is based on desire and pleasure. Pleasure can only appear where inner or outer creation is possible. In some way creation lies at the base of every happiness, as every unhappiness is based on the necessity of creation.

Take something that expresses suffering on a lower level, the feeling of hunger, for instance, which can destroy life. You meet this with nourishment, and the food taken in becomes enjoyment because it is the means of enhancing, producing life. So you see that higher creation, pleasure, arises on the basis of pain. Thus before the pleasure there is suffering. The philosophy of Schopenhauer and Eduard von Hartmann can therefore say with justification that suffering is a common feeling of life. However, they do not go back far enough, to the origin of suffering, do not come to the point where suffering is to evolve to something higher. The origin of suffering is found where consciousness arises out of life, where spirit is born out of life.

And therefore we can also understand what dawns in man's soul of the connection of suffering and pain with knowledge and consciousness, and we could still show how a nobler, more perfect state is born out of pain.

Those who have heard my lectures fairly often will remember the allusion to the existence of a sort of initiation, whereby a higher consciousness enters and man raises himself from a mere sense-perception to the observation of a spiritual world. It was said that forces and faculties slumber in the human soul which can be drawn out of it, just as the power of sight can be produced through operation in someone born blind, so that a new man arises to whom the whole world seems transformed to a higher stage. As in the case of one born blind, so do things appear in a new light to the spiritually born. Yet this can come about only if the process which has just been described is recapitulated on a higher level, when what is united in the average man becomes separate and a kind of destruction-process enters the lower human nature. Then the higher consciousness, the beholding of the spiritual world, can enter.



There are three forces in human nature: thinking, feeling and willing. These three depend on the physical organisation of man. Certain acts of will appear after certain thought and feeling processes have taken place. The human organism must function in the right way if these three forces are to harmonise. If certain transmissions are interrupted, certain parts diseased, then no proper harmony exists between thinking, feeling and willing. If the organs of will are crippled a man is unable to transform his thoughts into will-impulses. He is weak as a man of action; he can doubtless think, but cannot resolve to put thoughts into reality. Another case is when a person is not in a position to let his feelings be guided rightly through thoughts, to bring his feelings into harmony with the thoughts behind them. Insanity is fundamentally nothing else than this.

A harmony between thinking, feeling and willing is to be found in the normally-constituted man of today as against a sufferer. This is right for certain stages of evolution, but it must be noted that this harmony exists in present-day man unconsciously. If he is to be initiated, however, if he is to see into the higher . worlds, then these three members, thinking, feeling, willing, must be separated from one another. The organs of will and feeling must suffer a division, and therefore the physical organism of an initiate is different from that of a non-initiate. Anatomy could not prove that, but the contact between thinking, feeling and willing is interrupted. The initiate would be able to see someone suffering deeply without being stirred by any feeling, he could remain quite calm and merely look on. Why is that so? In an initiate nothing must be inter-linked unconsciously; he is a compassionate man out of freedom and not because something external compels him to be. That is the difference between an initiate and a non-initiate. Such a higher consciousness creates, as it were, a higher substance and the human being falls apart into a feeling-man, a will-man and a thought-man. Ruling over these three there appears for the first time the higher, new-born man, and from the level of a higher consciousness the three are brought into accord. Here again must death, destruction, also intervene. Should this destruction arise without at the same time a new consciousness springing up, then insanity would appear. Insanity would therefore be nothing else than the condition in which the human entity was shattered without the creation of the higher, conscious authority.

So here too there is a double element: a kind of destroying process of the lower by the side of a creating process of the higher. As poison is created in the blood in the veins, and as in the normal man consciousness is created between the red and the blue blood, so in the initiated man the

higher consciousness is created inwardly in the co-operation of life and death. And the state of bliss arises from a higher pleasure, creation, that proceeds from death.

This is what man instinctively feels when he senses the mysterious connection between pain and suffering and the highest that man can attain. Hence the tragic poet, as his hero succumbs to suffering, lets this suffering give rise to the feeling of the victory of life, the consciousness of the victory of the eternal over the temporal. And so in the destruction of the earthly nature of Christ Jesus in pain and suffering, in anguish and misery, Christianity rightly sees the victory of eternal life over the temporal and transitory. So too our life becomes richer, more full of content, when we let it extend over what lies outside our own self, when we can enter into the life that is not our own.

Just as we create a higher consciousness out of the pain stimulated through an external ray of light and overcome by us as living being, so a creation in compassion is born when we transform the sufferings of others in our own greater consciousness-world. And so finally out of suffering arises love. For what else is love than spreading one's consciousness over other beings? When we deprive ourselves, give away, make ourselves poorer to the extent that we give to the other being, when we are able, just as the skin receives the ray of light and is able out of the pain to form a higher being, an eye; when we are able through the expansion of our life over other lives to absorb a higher life, then love, compassion with all creatures, is born in us out of that which we have given away to the other.

This also underlies the expression of the Greek poet: Out of life grew learning; out of learning, knowledge. Here again, as already mentioned in the previous lecture, a knowledge based on the most recent research of natural science touches the results of old spiritual investigation. The older spiritual research has always said that the highest knowledge can proceed solely from suffering. When we have a sick limb and it has given us pain, then we know this limb best of all. In the same way we know best of all what we have deposited in our own soul. Knowledge flows from our suffering as its fruit.

The same too underlies the Crucifixion of Christ Jesus which was soon followed, as Christianity teaches, by the outpouring into the world of the Holy Spirit. We now understand the coming forth of the Holy Spirit from the Crucifixion of Christ Jesus as a process indicated in the parable of the grain of corn. The new fruit must arise from destruction, and so too the

Holy Spirit, which poured itself out over the Apostles at the Feast of Pentecost, is born from the destruction, the pain endured on the Cross. That is clearly expressed in St. John's Gospel (7.39) where it is said that the Spirit was not yet there, for the Christ was not yet glorified. One who reads this Gospel more deeply will see for himself that significant things emerge from it.

One can hear many people say that they would have not missed pain, for it had brought them knowledge. Everyone who has died could teach you that what I have now said is true. Would people fight against the destruction going on in them up to actual death if pain had not stood continually beside them like a guardian of life? Pain makes us aware that we have to take precautions against the destruction of life. Out of pain we create new life. In the notes of a modern natural scientist on the expression of the thinker, we read that on the countenance of the thinker something lies like a repressed pain.

When there is the enhancement which flows from knowledge attained through pain, when it is therefore true that from suffering we learn, then it is not without justification — as we shall see in the next lecture — that the Biblical story of Creation brings the knowledge of good and evil into connection with pain and suffering. And so it has always been rightly emphasised by one who looks deeper how the origin of purification, the lifting up of human nature, lies in pain. When the spiritual-scientific world-conception with its great law of destiny, karma, points from a man's present suffering to what he did wrongly in earlier lives, then we understand such a connection only out of man's deeper nature. What we brought about in the external world in an earlier life is transformed from base forces into lofty ones. Sin is like a poison which becomes remedy when it is changed into substance of life. And so sin can contribute to the strengthening and raising of man; in the story of Job pain and suffering are shown to us as an enhancement of knowledge and of the Spirit.

This is meant to be only a sketch which is to point to the connection between earthly existence and pain and suffering. It is to show how we can realise the meaning of suffering and pain when we see how they harden, crystallize in physical things and organisms up to man, and how through a dissolution of what has hardened, the Spirit can be born in us again, when we see that the origin of suffering and pain is in the Spirit. The Spirit gives us beauty, strength, wisdom, the transformed picture of the original abode of pain. A brilliant man, Fabre d'Olivet, made a right comparison when he wished to show how the highest, noblest, purest in

human nature arises out of pain. He said that the arising of wisdom and beauty out of suffering is comparable to a process in nature, to the birth of the valuable and beautiful pearl. For the pearl is born from the sickness of the oyster, from the destruction inside the pearl-oyster. As the beauty of the pearl is born out of disease and suffering, so are knowledge, noble human nature and purified human feeling born out of suffering and pain.

So we may well say with the old Greek poet, Aeschylus: Out of suffering arises learning; out of learning, knowledge. And just as in respect of much else, we may say of pain that we have grasped it only when we know it not only in itself but in what proceeds from it. As so many other things, pain too is known only by its fruits.



## 2 The Origin of Evil

*22 November 1906, Berlin*

It is characteristic of the whole of modern literature that it speaks so little of evil; materialism simply does not concern itself with evil. A materialistic explanation can apparently be found for suffering, illness and death; but not for evil. In the case of the animal one speaks of cruelty, destructiveness, but one cannot call the animal evil. Evil is confined to the human kingdom. Modern science tries to grasp the human being out of the animal and eliminates all differences between man and beast. It must therefore also deny evil. In order to find evil one must enter fully into human qualities and acknowledge that man lays claim to a kingdom of his own. We will now consider this question from the standpoint of spiritual science.

There is an original human wisdom which penetrates to the actual nature of things lying behind the purely external appearance. In earlier ages this wisdom was preserved in narrow circles to which entry was vouchsafed only after strict tests. Before someone secured admission he must have proved to the guardian of the wisdom that he would use his knowledge only in the most selfless way. During the last decades the elementary part of this wisdom-science has for certain reasons been popularised. More and more of it will flow into daily life. We are standing only at the beginning of this development.

Now how is evil connected with actual human nature? It has often been sought to explain evil. People have said that there is no evil in the actual sense of the word — it is a diminished good, it is the worst good. For as there are different grades of existence in everything, so too in goodness. Or they say: As the good is an original power, so too is evil. In particular this view was expressed in the Persian Myth of Ormuzd and Ahriman. Occult science is the first to show how evil is to be understood out of the depths of human nature and the whole nature of the cosmos. If one denies it one can in no way grasp it. One must understand what task and mission evil has in the world. From the development of man in the future we see how men have grown out of the past and what evil is to signify in their path of evolution.

Spiritual science teaches of the existence of certain highly evolved men, the initiates, and it has been taught in the Mystery Schools of all times how man can bring himself to such a stage of evolution. Definite exercises were prescribed there which develop man in quite a natural way. They are exercises of meditation and concentration which are to give man another kind of sight which cannot be attained with the intellect and the five senses. Meditation in the first place leads away from the grasp of the senses. Through inner soul-work man becomes free of the senses. Something then takes place similar to the operation on a man born blind. There is a kind of operation which opens man's spiritual eyes and ears. It will be attained in the development of the whole human race in the course of a long period of time. But one must not disclaim the world when one wishes to rise higher; an ascetic fleeing from the world does not serve clairvoyance. Clairvoyance is the fruit of what the soul collects in the sense-world. Greek philosophy beautifully compared the human soul with a bee. The world of colour and light offers the soul honey which it brings with it into the higher world. The soul must spiritualise sense experience and carry it up into higher worlds.

Now what is the task of the soul which is free from the body? We touch here upon an important principle. Each being when it has developed to a higher stage becomes guide and leader of those beings and forms through which it has passed. When man has so spiritualised himself that he no longer needs the physical body he works on the world from outside as spiritual leader. Then the mission of this planet is fulfilled and it goes over to another embodiment. The Earth will then obtain a new planetary existence, and men will then be the gods of the new planet. The body of humanity which is forsaken by the Spirit will be a lower kingdom. We bear in us now a double nature: that which will rule on the next planet and that which will be the lower kingdom. Just as the Earth will incorporate itself afresh so has it also perfected itself out of earlier processes of evolution. Just as the human beings will be the gods of the next planet, so were the Beings who now lead us, men on the previous planet and they had as lower element what we are as men on Earth. In this way we see the connection of the Earth with processes which lie in the past and in the future. The present stage of man was once the stage of the Beings who are the creators and leaders of men today, the Elohim, who manifest as leaders of human evolution. And on the future planet men will have advanced so far that they themselves are leaders and guides.

But one must not think that there will be an exact recapitulation: the same is never repeated. Nothing happens in the world twice; there was never the earthly existence that there is now. Earth-existence signifies the Cosmos of Love; existence on the previous planet signifies the Cosmos of Wisdom. We are to evolve love from its most elementary stage to its highest. Wisdom rests hidden on the foundation of earth-existence. One should not speak therefore of the "lower" physical human nature, for it is really the most perfected form of man. One should look at the wisdom-filled structure of a bone, for instance the upper thigh bone. We see there solved in the most complete way the problem of how to carry the greatest possible mass of weight with the employment of the least material and force. One should look at the marvellous structure of the heart, of the brain, The astral body does not indeed stand higher. It is the "enjoyer" which makes continual attacks on the wisdom-filled heart. It will still take a long time to become as perfect and wise as the physical body. But it must become so, for that is the course of evolution. The physical body had to evolve too; what is wise in it had to develop out of unwisdom and error. Evolution of wisdom preceded the evolution of love; love is not yet perfected. It is to be found in the whole of nature, in plant, animal and man from the lowest sex-love to the highest spiritualised love. Immense numbers of beings which the love-urge brought forth are destroyed in the battle for existence. Conflict is active wherever love is, the entry of love brings conflict, necessary conflict. But love will also overcome it and change conflict into harmony.

Wisdom is the characteristic of physical nature and where this wisdom is permeated by love is the beginning of earthly evolution. Just as today there is conflict on the earth so was error to be found on the earlier planet. Remarkable fabulous beings wandered about — errors of nature which were not capable of evolution. Love grows out of the loveless and wisdom proceeds from unwisdom. Those who attain the goal of earthly evolution will bring love into the next planet as a force of nature, just as wisdom was once brought to Earth. The humanity of the Earth look up to the gods as to the bringers of wisdom. The men of the following planet will look up to the gods as to the bringers of love. Wisdom is granted to men as divine revelation from the men of the earlier planet. All the kingdoms of the world are connected with one another. If there were no plants then in a short time the breath of life would become tainted; for men and animals inhale oxygen and breathe out life-destroying carbonic-acid. Yet the plants inhale carbonic-acid and give out oxygen. Here then the higher depends on the lower for the breath of life.



And it is the same in all the kingdoms. As animal and man depend on the plants, so are the gods dependent on man. That was so beautifully expressed by Greek mythology where the gods receive nectar and ambrosia from the mortals. Both signify love; love is created within the human race. And the race of the gods breathes in love; it is the gods' nourishment. Love which is created by man is food to the gods. That is much more real than — say — electricity, however peculiar it seems at first, Love appears to begin with as sex-love and evolves up to the highest divine love. But all love, lower and higher, is breath of the gods. Now it might be said: If all that is true then there can be no evil. But wisdom underlies the world, love evolves. Wisdom is the guide of love. Just as all wisdom is born out of error, so does love struggle to the heights only out of conflict.

Not all the beings of the previous planet rose to the height of wisdom. Beings remained behind and they stand approximately between gods and men. They still need something from man, nor can they clothe themselves in a physical body. One calls them Luciferic beings, or groups them together under the name of their leader, Lucifer. How does Lucifer work upon man? Not as the gods do. The divine approaches the noblest in man; it cannot and must not approach the lower. Only at the end of evolution will wisdom and love celebrate their nuptials. But the Luciferic beings approach the lower, unevolved element of love. They form the bridge between wisdom and love. Thus does wisdom first mingle with love. That which applies only to the impersonal is thus entangled with personality. On the earlier planet wisdom was an instinct as love is today. A creative wisdom-instinct prevailed, as today a creative love-instinct. Wisdom led man instinctively; but through the fact that wisdom drew away and no longer guided, man became self-conscious and realised that he was an independent being.

In the animal wisdom is still instinctive and so the animal is not yet self-conscious. Wisdom, however, wished to lead and guide man from outside, unconnected with love. Then Lucifer came and implanted human wisdom into love. And human wisdom looks up to divine wisdom. In man wisdom became enthusiasm and love itself. Had only wisdom exercised its influence, man would have become only good; he would have used love solely for the building up of earthly consciousness. But Lucifer brought love into connection with the self, and self-love was added to self-consciousness. That was beautifully expressed in the Paradise story: "... and they saw that they were naked." That means that human beings saw themselves for the first time; previously they had seen only the



surrounding world. They had only an earthly consciousness, but not a self-consciousness. Now men could put wisdom into the service of the self; from then on there was selfless love for the surroundings and love for the self. And the self-love was bad and the selflessness was good. Man would never have obtained a warm self-consciousness without Lucifer. Thinking and wisdom now entered into the service of the self and there was a choice between good and evil. Love must turn to the self only in order to set the self in the service of the world. The rose may adorn herself only in order to adorn the garden. That must be inscribed deeply into the soul in a higher occult development. In order to be able to feel the good, man had also to be able to feel the evil. The gods gave him enthusiasm for the higher. But without evil there could be no self-feeling, no free choice of good, no freedom. Good could have been realised without Lucifer, but not freedom. In order to be able to choose good man must also have the bad before him; it must dwell within him as the force of self-love. But self-love must become love of all. Then evil will be overcome. Freedom and evil have the same original source. Lucifer makes man humanly enthusiastic for the divine. Lucifer is the bearer of light; the Elohim are light itself. If the light of wisdom has kindled wisdom in man, then Lucifer has brought light into man. But the black shadow of evil had to intermingle; Lucifer brings a shrunken, blemished wisdom but this can penetrate into man. Lucifer is the bearer of external human science which stands in the service of egotism. In pupils of occultism therefore selflessness as regards knowledge is demanded. What the leaven of the old dough means for the new bread: this, from the earlier planet, Lucifer means for us. Evil is good in its place; with us it is no longer good. Evil is good out of place. The absolute good of a planet always brings evil too in one of its parts to the new planet. Evil is a necessary course of evolution.

One must not say that the world is imperfect because it contains evil. Far rather is it perfect precisely on that account. When lovely figures of light are shown in a painting together with evil devils, the picture would be spoilt if one wanted to cut out the devil-figures. The creators of the world needed evil in order to bring the good to unfoldment. A good must first be broken on the rock of evil. The All-Love can only be brought to its highest blossoming through self-love. Goethe is therefore right when in "Faust" he makes Mephistopheles say he is "... part of that Power that ever would the Evil do, and ever does the Good."





### 3

## What Do We Understand by Illness and Death

*13 December 1906, Berlin*

Today our subject is one that undoubtedly concerns all human beings, for the words "illness" and "death" express something which enters in every life, often as an uninvited guest, often too in a vexing, frustrating, frightening guise, and death presents itself as the greatest riddle of existence; so that when anyone has solved the question of its nature he has also solved that other question — the nature of life. Frequently we hear it said that death is an unsolved riddle — a riddle which no-one will ever solve. People who speak thus have no idea how arrogant these words are; they have no idea that there does exist a solution to the riddle which, however, they do not happen to understand. Today, when we are to deal with such an all-embracing and important subject, I beg you particularly to bear in mind how impossible it is for us to do more than answer the above question: "What do we understand by illness and death?" Hence we cannot go into detail where such things as illness and health are concerned, but must confine ourselves to the essential question: How do we arrive at an understanding of these two important problems of our existence?

The most familiar answer to this question concerning the nature of death, one that has held good for centuries but today has little importance attached to it by the majority of educated people, is contained in St. Paul's words: "For the wages of sin is death". As we have said in previous lectures, for many centuries these words were in a way a solution of the riddle of death. Today those who think in modern terms will not be able to make anything of such an answer; they would be mystified by the idea that sin — something entirely moral and having to do only with human conduct — could be the cause of a physical fact or should be supposed to have anything to do with the nature of illness and death.

Perhaps it will be helpful if we refer to the present utter lack of understanding of the text "the wages of sin is death". For Paul and those who lived in his day did not attribute at all the same meaning to the word "sin" that is done by the philistine of today. Paul did not think of sin as being a fault in the ordinary sense nor one of a deeper kind; he understood sin to be anything proceeding from selfishness and egoism. Every action is

sin that has selfishness and egoism as its driving force — in contrast to what springs from positive, objective impulses — and the fact that the human being has become independent and conscious of self pre-supposes egoism and selfishness. This must be recognised when we make a deep study of the way in which a spirit such as that of Paul thinks.

Whoever is not content with a merely superficial understanding of both Old and New Testament records but penetrates really to their spirit, knows that a quite definite method of thinking — one might call it that of innate philosophy — forms the undercurrent of these records. The undercurrent is something of this kind: All living creatures in the world are directed towards a determined goal. We come across lower beings who have a perfectly neutral attitude towards pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow. We then find how life evolves, something being bound up with it. Let those who shudder at the word teleology realise that here we have no thought-out theory but a simple fact — the whole kingdom of living beings right up to man is moving towards a definite goal, a summit of the living being, which shows itself in the possibility of personal consciousness.

The initiates of the Old and New Testaments looked down to the animal kingdom; they saw the whole kingdom striving towards the advent of a free personality, which would then be able to act out of its own impulses. With the essential being of such a personality is connected all that makes for egoistic, selfish action. But a thinker like St. Paul would say: If a personality who is able to act egoistically lives in a body, then this body must be mortal. For in an immortal body there could never live a soul who had independence, consciousness, and consequently egoism. Hence a mortal body goes together with a soul having consciousness of personality and a one-sided development of the personality towards impulses to action. This the Bible calls "sin" and thus Paul defines death as the "wages of sin". Here indeed you see that we have to modify certain biblical sayings because in the course of centuries they have become inverted. And if we do modify them, not by altering their meaning but by making it clear that we change the present theological meaning back to its original one, we see that we often find a very profound understanding of the matter, not far removed from what today we are once again able to grasp. This is mentioned in order to make our position clear.

But the thinkers, the searchers after a world-conception, have in all ages been occupied with the question of death, which for thousands of years we may find answered in apparently the most diverse ways. We cannot embark upon an historical survey of these solutions; hence let us mention

here two thinkers only, that you may see how even present-day philosophers cannot contribute anything of consequence about the question. One of these thinkers is Schopenhauer.

You all know the pessimistic trend of his thinking, and whoever has met with the sentence: "Life is a precarious affair and I have decided to spend my life to ponder it", will understand how the only solution Schopenhauer could arrive at was that death consoles us for life, life for death; — that life is an unpleasant affair and would be unbearable were we not aware that death ends it. If we are afraid of death we need only convince ourselves that life is not any better than death and that nothing is determined by death. — This is the pessimistic way in which he thinks, which simply leads to what he makes the Earth-spirit say: "You wish that new life should always be arising; if that were so, I would need more room." Schopenhauer therefore is to a certain extent clear that for life to propagate, for it to go on bringing forth fresh life, it is necessary for the old to die to make room for the new. Further than this Schopenhauer has nothing of weight to bring forward, for the gist of anything else that he says is contained in those few words.

The other thinker is Eduard von Hartmann. Von Hartmann in his last book has dealt with the riddle of death, and says: When we look at the highest evolved being we find that, after one or two new generations, a man no longer understands the world. When he has become old he can no longer comprehend youth; hence it is necessary for the old to die and the new again to come to the fore. — In any case you will find no answer here that could bring us nearer to an understanding of the riddle of death.

We will therefore contribute to the present-day world-conceptions what spiritual science — or anthroposophy, as we call it today — has to say about the causes of death and illness. In so doing, however, one thing will have to be made clear — that spiritual science is not so fortunate as the other sciences as to be able to speak in a definite manner about every subject. The modern scientist would not understand that when speaking of illness and death a distinction has to be made between animal and man; and that if the question in our lecture today is to be understood we must limit ourselves to these phenomena in human beings. Since living beings have not only their abstract similarity to one another, but each one has his own nature and individuality, much that is said today will be applicable also to the animal kingdom, perhaps even to the plants. But in essentials we shall be speaking about men, and other things will be drawn upon merely by way of illustration.

If we want to understand death and illness in human beings we must above all consider how complicated human nature is in the sense of spiritual science; and we must understand its nature in accordance with the four members — first the outwardly visible physical body, secondly the etheric or life body, then the astral body, and fourthly the human ego, the central point of man's being. We must then be clear that in the physical body the same forces and substances are present which are in the physical world outside; in the etheric body there lies what calls these substances to life, and this etheric body man possesses in common with the whole plant-kingdom. The astral body which man has in common with the animals is the bearer of the whole life of feeling — of desire, pleasure and its opposite, of joy and pain. It is only man who has the ego and this makes him the crown of earthly creation.

In contemplating man as physical organism we must be aware that within this physical organism the other three members are working as formative principles and architects. But the formative principle of the physical organism works only in part in physical man, in another part is active essentially the etheric body, yet in another the astral body, again in a further part man's ego is active. To spiritual science men consist from the physical side of bones, muscles, those members that support man and give him a form sufficiently firm to move about on the earth. In the strictest sense of spiritual science these things alone are reckoned as belonging to the members which come into being through the physical principle. To them are added the actual sense-organs, where we have to do with physical contrivances — in the eye with a kind of camera obscura, in the ear with a very complicated musical instrument. It is a question here of what the organs are built from. They are built by the first principle. On the other hand all the organs connected with growth, propagation, digestion and so on, are not built simply in accordance with the physical principle, but with that of the etheric or life body, which permeates the physical organs as well. Only the structure built-up in accordance with physical law is in the care of the physical principle, the processes of digestion, propagation and growth, however, being an affair of the etheric principle. The astral body is creator of the whole nervous system, right up to the brain and the fibres which run to the brain in the form of sense-nerve fibres. Finally the ego is the architect of the circulatory system of the blood. If, therefore, in the true sense of spiritual science we have to do with a human organism, it is plain to us that even within the physical organism these four members are blended in a man like four distinct dissimilar beings who have been made to work together. These things

which jointly compose the human organism have quite different values, and we shall estimate their significance for men if we look into the way in which the development of the individual members is connected with the human being.

Today we shall speak more from the physiological standpoint of the work of the physical principle in the human organism. This work is accomplished in the period from birth to the change of teeth. At that time the physical principle works upon the physical body in the same way as, before the birth of a child, the forces and substances of the mother's organism work upon the embryo. In the physical body from the seventh year until puberty, the working of the etheric body is paramount, and, from puberty on, that of the forces anchored in the astral body. Thus we have the right conception of man's development when we think of the human being as enclosed within the mother's body up to the moment of birth; with birth he, as it were, pushes back the maternal body and his senses become free, so that it is then possible for the outer world to begin having its effect on the human organism. The human being thrusts a sheath away, and his development is understood only when we grasp that something that resembles a physical birth takes place in spiritual life at the changing of the teeth. At about the seventh year the human being is actually born a second time; that is to say, his etheric body is born to free activity just as his physical body is at the moment of physical birth. As before birth the mother's body works on the human embryo, up to the change of teeth spiritual forces of the cosmic ether in a similar way work upon the etheric body of the human being, and about the seventh year these forces are thrust back just as the maternal body is at the time of birth. Up to the seventh year the etheric body is as if latent in the physical body, and about the time the teeth are changed what happens to the etheric body can be compared to the igniting of a match. It is bound up with the physical body, but now comes to its own free, independent activity. The signal for this free activity of the etheric body is indeed the change of teeth. For anyone who has a deeper insight into nature this change of teeth holds a quite special place. In a human being up to his seventh year we have to do with the free working of the physical principle in the physical body; but united with it and not yet delivered from their spiritual sheaths are the etheric principle and astral principle.

If we study the human being up to his seventh year we find that he contains a great deal of what is founded on heredity, which he has not built up with his own principle but has inherited from his ancestors. To this belongs what are called the milk teeth. Only the teeth that come with the



change of teeth are the creation of the child's own principle, which physically has the task of forming firm supports. What is expressed in the teeth is working within up to the time they change; it comes, as it were, to a head and produce in the teeth the hardest part of those members that give support, because it still has bound up within it as bearer of growth the etheric or life body.

After the casting off of this principle, the etheric body gains its freedom and works upon the physical organs up to the time of puberty, when a sheath, the outer astral sheath, is thrust away as the maternal sheath is thrust away at birth. The human being at puberty has his third birth, this time in an astral sense. The forces that were working in connection with the etheric body now come to a culmination with their creative activity in man by bringing him his sex maturity, with its organs and capacity for propagation. As in the seventh year the physical principle comes to maturity in the teeth, creating in them the last hard organs, whereby the etheric body, the principle of growth, becomes free, in like manner the moment the astral principle is free it sets up the greatest concentration of impulses, desires, for the outer expressions of life, in so far as we have to do with physical nature. As we have the physical principle concentrated in the teeth, the principle of growth is thus concentrated in puberty. Then the astral body, the sheath of the ego, is free and the ego works upon the astral body.

The man of culture in Europe does not follow simply his impulses and desires; he has purified them and transformed them into moral perceptions and ethical ideals. Compare a savage to an average European, or perhaps to a Schiller or Francis of Assisi, and it may be said that the impulses of these men have been purified and transformed by their ego. Thus we can say that there are always two parts of this astral body, one arising out of original tendencies, and the other which the ego itself has brought forth. We understand the work of the ego only when we are clear that a man is subject of re-incarnation — to repeated lives on earth — that he brings with him through birth in four different bodies the outcome and the fruits of former earth-lives, which are the measure of his energy and forces for the coming life. One man — because earlier he has brought things to this point — is born with a great deal of energy in life, with forces strong to transform his astral body; another will soon grow weak. When we are able to investigate clairvoyantly how the ego begins to work freely on the astral body and to gain mastery over the desires, impulses and passions, then — if we are able to estimate the amount of energy brought by the ego — we might say: this amount suffices for the ego to work on the transformation



for such and such a time and no more. For every human being who has reached puberty possesses a certain amount of energy from which can be estimated when he will have transformed all that comes from his astral body, according to the forces that has been apportioned to him in his life. What man in his heart and mind (Gemüt) transformed and purified, maintains itself. So long as this amount lasts he lives at the cost of his self-maintaining astral body. Once this is exhausted he can summon-up no more courage to transform fresh impulses — in short he has no more energy to work upon himself. Then the thread of life is broken, and this must be broken in accordance with the measure apportioned to each human being. The time has then arrived when the astral body has to draw its forces from the principle of human life lying nearest to it, namely, from the etheric body, the time when the astral body lives at the expense of the force stored up in the etheric body. This comes to expression in the human being when his memory, his creative imaginative force, gradually disappears.

We have often heard here how the etheric body is the bearer of creative imagination, of memory and of all that we call hope and courage in life. When these feelings have acquired a lasting quality they cling to the etheric body. They are then drawn upon by the astral body, and after the astral body has lived in this way at the expense of the etheric body and has sucked up all it had to give, the creative forces of the physical body begin to be consumed by the astral body. When these are consumed, the life-force of the physical body disappears, the body hardens, the pulse becomes slow. The astral body finally feeds upon this physical body too, deprives it of its force; and when it has thus consumed it there is no longer any possibility for the physical body to be maintained by the physical principle.

If the astral body is to reach the point of being free, so that it becomes part of the life and work of the ego, it is then necessary that in the second half of life this emancipated astral body — once the measure of its work being exhausted — should consume its sheaths just as they were formed. In this way the individual life is created out of the ego.

The following is given as an illustration. Imagine you have a piece of wood and that you set it on fire; were the wood not constituted as it is you would be unable to do so. Flames leap out of the wood, at the same time consuming it. It is in the nature of a flame to get free of the wood and then to consume the mother-ground from which it springs. Now the astral body is born three times in this way, consuming its own foundations as the

flame consumes the wood. The possibility for individual life arises through the consuming of foundations. *The root of individual life is death, and were there no death there could not be any conscious individual life.* We understand death only by seeking to know its origin; and we form a concept of life by recognising its relation to death. In a similar way we learn to know the nature of illness, which throws still more light on the nature of death. Every illness is seen to be in some way a destroyer of life.

Now what is illness? Let us be clear what happens when a man as a living being confronts the rest of nature. With every breath, with every sound nourishment and light that he takes up into himself, a man enters into a mutual relation with the nature all around him. If you study the matter closely you will find, without being clairvoyant, that outside things actually form and build the physical organs. When certain animals migrate in dark caverns, in time their eyes atrophy. Where there is no light there can no longer be eyes susceptible to light; vice versa, eyes susceptible to light can be formed only where there is light. For this reason Goethe says that the eye is formed by the light for the light. Naturally the physical body is built in accordance with the ways of its inner architect. Man is a physical being and outer substances are the materials out of which — in harmony with the inner architect — the whole man is built. Then will the relation of individual forces and substances give us a very different picture. Those who have had the true mystic's deeper insight into these matters will have particularly much to tell us here. For Paracelsus the whole external world is one great explanation of the human organism, and a man is like an extract of the whole external world. When we see a plant, in accordance with Paracelsus we may say: In this plant is an organism conforming to law, and there is something in man which, in the healthy or the sick organism, corresponds to this plant. Hence Paracelsus calls a cholera patient, for example, an "arsenicus", and arsenic is to him the cure for cholera. Thus there exists a relation between each of man's organs and what is around him in nature; we need only take a natural substance, give it human form, and we have man. The single letters of an alphabet are set out in the whole of nature, and we have man if we put them together. Here you get a notion of how the whole of nature works upon man, and how he is called upon to piece his being together out of nature. Strictly speaking, everything in us is drawn from nature outside and taken up into the process of life. When we understand the secret of bringing the external forces and substance to life, we shall be able to form a concept of the nature of illness.

We touch here on ground where it is difficult for educated men of today to understand that there are many spheres in medicine which work in a nebulous way. What a suggestive effect it has in a present-day gathering when someone skilled in nature-healing mentions the word "poison". What is a poison and how does anything work unnaturally in the human organism? Whatever you introduce into the human organism works in accordance with the laws of nature, and it is a mystery how anyone can speak as if it could work in the body in any other way. Then what is a poison? Water is a strong poison if you consume it by the bucketful in a short time; and what today is poison could have the most beneficial effect if rightly administered. It depends always on the quantity, and under which circumstances, one takes a substance into oneself; in itself, there is no poison.

In Africa there is a tribe who employ a certain breed of dog for hunting. But there is a fly in those parts carrying a poison deadly to the dogs that they sting. Now these savages of the Zambesi river have found a way of dealing with this sting. They take the pregnant dogs to a district where there is an abundance of tsetse flies and let these animals be bitten, choosing the time when they are just going to whelp, with the result that the puppies are immune and can be used for hunting.

Something happens here which is very important for the understanding of life — a poison is taken up into a life process, where a descending line passes over in an ascending one, in such a way that the poison becomes a substance inherent in the organism. What is thus taken from external nature strengthens us and is of use to us.

Spiritual science shows us that in this way the whole human organism is built up — if we like to put it so, simply out of things that were originally poisons. The foods you enjoy today have been made edible by their harmful effects being overcome through a recurrent similar process. We are all the stronger for having thus taken such substances in us; and we make ourselves defenseless against outer nature by rejecting them. — In regions where medicine is founded on occultism, the doctor throws his whole personality into the process. There are cures, for example, for which the doctor administers to himself some kind of snake poison in order to use his saliva as a means to heal bites from that species of snake. He introduces the poison into his own life-process, thereby making himself the bearer of healing forces; he grows strong, and so strengthens others to resist the poison in question.

All that is most harmless in the organism has arisen in this way and the organism has need of the incorporation into it of the external world — of nature; but then it must also be possible for the matter to swing over to the other side like a pendulum. The possibility is always there when a man is exposed to such substances — and at all times he is so exposed — that the effects of the remedy are reversed. The organism is strengthened to resist the remedy the moment it is strong enough to absorb the substance. It is impossible to avoid illness if we wish for health. All possibility of strengthening ourselves against outside influences rests on our being able to have diseases, to become ill. Illness is the condition of health; this development is an absolute reality. It belongs to the very nature and condition of health that a man is obliged to acquire his strength. What survives the beat of the pendulum contains the fruit of immunity from sickness — even from death.

Whoever goes further into these things will indeed gain some kind of understanding of the nature of illness and of death. If we wish to be strong, if we wish for health, then as a preliminary condition we must accept illness into the bargain. If we want to be strong we must arm ourselves against weakness by taking the weakness into us and transforming it into strength. When we grasp this in a living way we shall find illness and death comprehensible. These concepts will be brought to mankind by spiritual science. Today this may well speak to the understanding of many people, but when the understanding has fully accepted the matter it will bring about in man a deep, harmonious mood of soul which will then become the wisdom of life.

Have you not heard that it is possible for anthroposophical truths derived from occultism to become dangerous? Haven't we countless opponents who assert that anthroposophy must be accepted for the strengthening of human beings — that it is not just a subject for discussion but something which proves itself in life to be a spiritual means of healing.

Spiritual science knows too that the physical is built up from the spiritual. If the spiritual forces work upon the etheric body, they work also health giving in the physical body. If our conceptions of the world and of life are sound, then these sound thoughts are most potent remedies, and the truths given out by anthroposophy work injuriously only on those natures who have grown weak through materialism and naturalism. These truths must be taken into the body to make it strong. Only when it produces strong human beings does anthroposophy fulfil its task.

Goethe has answered our questions about life and death in a most beautiful way when saying that everything in nature is life and that nature has only invented death to have more life. ("Life is here fairest invention, death but her artifice whereby to have much life." Hymn to Nature.) And we might say that besides death she has invented illness to produce greater health; therefore she has had to make of wisdom an apparently harmful remedy, in order that this wisdom may work upon mankind in a strengthening and healing way.

This is just the difference between the world movement of spiritual science and other movements — that it promotes strife and discussion when logical proof of it is demanded. Anthroposophy is not meant simply to be confirmed by logical argument; it is something to make human beings both spiritually and bodily sound. The more it shows its effect on life outside by so enhancing it that life's sorrows are transformed into the happiness of life, the more will anthroposophy prove itself in a really living way. However firmly people today believe they are able to bring forward logical objections to it, spiritual science is something which, appearing to be poison, is transformed into a means of healing, and then works in life in a fructifying way. It does not assert itself by mere logic. It is not to be merely demonstrated — it will prove itself in life.



Read & Write



[kennethmdouglass.com](http://kennethmdouglass.com)