

The Lectures of Rudolf Steiner

Evil and the Future of Man

GA 185

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Even within the limits in which it is permissible to speak to-day, we in the fifth Post-Atlantean period of civilisation this period of the Spiritual Soul [*Bewusstseinsseele*, sometimes translated also as Consciousness Soul.] in which we are living cannot refer without deep emotion to those things which concern the mystery of evil. For in so doing we touch upon one of the deepest secrets of this fifth Post-Atlantean period, and any discussion of it comes up against the immaturity of human faculties: the right powers of feeling for such things are as yet little developed in present-day mankind. It is true that in the past certain hints or indications of the mystery of evil, and of that other mystery which is connected with it — the mystery of death — were attempted again and again in picture form. But these pictorial, imaginative descriptions have been taken very little in earnest, especially during the last decades — since the last third of the nineteenth century. Or else they have been cultivated in the way of which I spoke here nearly two years ago, in relation to very important events of the present time. What I said then had also a deeper motive, for anyone who has knowledge will be well aware what untold depths of the human being must be sounded when one begins to speak of these things. Alas, many signs have shown how little real good-will there is even now for an understanding of such things. The will to understand will come in time, and we must see that it does come. In every possible way we must see that it does come.

In speaking of these matters, we cannot always avoid the appearance of wishing to pass criticism on the present time in one way or another. Even what I lately said about the configuration of philosophical strivings within the bourgeoisie or middle class, especially since the last third of the nineteenth century (though it also applies to a considerably longer time) — even this may be regarded as mere criticism by those who wish to take it superficially. Nevertheless, all that I bring forward here is intended not as mere criticism, but as a simple characterisation, so that human beings may see what kind of forces and impulses have been holding sway. From a certain point of view, they were after all inevitable. One could even prove that it was necessary for the middle classes of the civilised world to sleep through the period from the eighteen-forties to the end of the eighteen-seventies. This cultural sleep of the bourgeoisie could indeed be presented as a world-historic necessity. Nevertheless, a candid recognition of the fact should have some positive effect upon us, kindling certain impulses in knowledge and in will — true impulses towards the future.

Two mysteries (as I said, we can speak of these things only within certain limits) — two mysteries are of special importance for the evolution of mankind during the epoch of the Spiritual Soul, in which we have been living since the beginning of the fifteenth century. They are the mystery of death and the mystery of evil. For the present epoch, the mystery of death is closely connected, from a certain side, with the mystery of evil. Taking the mystery of death to begin with, we may ask this very significant question: How stands it with death altogether, in relation to the evolution of mankind?

As I said again only the other day, that which calls itself Science nowadays takes these things far too easily. Death, for the majority of scientists, is merely the cessation of life. Death is regarded merely from this standpoint, whether it be in plant or animal or man. Spiritual Science cannot take things so easily, treating all things in the same standardised way. After all, we might even conceive as death the stopping of a clock — the death of the clock. Death, for man, is, in effect, something altogether different from the so-called death of other creatures. But we can learn to know the phenomenon of death in its reality only when we see it against the background of the forces which are active in the great Universe, and which — inasmuch as they also take hold of man — bring him physical death. In the great Universe certain impulses hold sway. Man belongs to the Universe; these forces therefore permeate man, too, and inasmuch as they are active within man, they bring him death. But we must now ask ourselves: These forces which are active in the great Universe — what is their function, apart from the fact that they bring death to man? It would be altogether wrong to imagine that the forces which bring death to man exist in the Universe for that express purpose. In reality this is only a collateral effect — as it were a by-product of these forces.

After all, in speaking of the railway system it will occur to no-one to say that the purpose of the engine is to wear out the rails! Nevertheless, the engine will spoil the rails in course of time; indeed it cannot help doing so. But its purpose in the railway system is altogether different. And if a man defined it thus: An engine is a machine which has the task of wearing out the rails — he would of course be talking nonsense, though it cannot be disputed that the wearing out of the rails belongs to the essence of the railway engine. It would be just as wrong for anyone to say that those forces in the Universe which bring death to man are there for this express purpose. Their bringing of death to man is only a collateral effect — an effect they have alongside their proper task.

What then is the proper task of the forces that bring death to man? It is this: To endow man with the full faculty of the Spiritual Soul. You see, therefore, how intimately the mystery of death is connected with the fifth Post-Atlantean age, and how important it is that in this fifth Post-Atlantean age the mystery of death should be quite generally unveiled. For the proper function of the very forces which — as a by-product of their working — bring death to man, is this: To instill, to implant into his evolution the faculty for the Spiritual Soul. I say once more, the *faculty* for the Spiritual Soul — not the Spiritual Soul itself.

This will not only lead you towards an understanding of the mystery of death; it will also show you what it is to think exactly on these important matters. Our modern thinking — I say this once again not by way of criticism, but as a pure characterisation — our modern thinking is in many respects (if I may use the unpleasant term — it is an apt one) altogether slovenly. And this applies especially to what goes by the name of science and scholarship. It is often no better than saying: The object of the railway engine is to wear out the rails. The pronouncement of modern science on one subject or another are often just of this quality — and this quality simply will not do if we are to bring about a wholesome condition for humanity in future. And in the epoch of the Spiritual Soul this can be achieved only in full consciousness. Again and again I must emphasise this; it is a truth deeply significant for our time.

How often do we see men arising here or there, making this or that proposal for the social and economic life out of a specious wisdom, and always with the mistaken idea that it is still possible to make constructive proposals for the social life without calling in the aid of Spiritual Science. He alone thinks in accordance with the times who knows that every attempted proposal concerning the social configuration of mankind in future is the merest quackery unless it is founded on Spiritual Science. Only he who realises this, in all its implications, is thinking truly in accordance with the times. Those who still pay heed to all manner of professorial wisdom on social economics — arising on the basis of an unspiritual science — are passing through the present time *asleep*.

The forces which we must describe as the forces of death took hold of the bodily nature of man in a far distant epoch. How they did so, you may read in my book, *An Outline of Occult Science*.

Only now are they finding their way into his soul-nature. For the remainder of earthly evolution, man must receive these forces of death into his own being. In the course of the present age they will work in him in such a way that he brings to full manifestation in himself the faculty of the Spiritual Soul.

Having put the question thus, having spoken in this way about the mystery of death — that is, about the forces that are at work in the great Universe, and bring death to man — I may now also refer in a similar manner to the forces of evil. These, too, are not such that we can simply say: "They bring about evil actions within the human order." This again is only a collateral effect.

If the forces of death did not exist in the Universe, man would not be able to evolve the Spiritual Soul, he would not be able to receive, — as he must receive, in the further course of his earthly evolution — the forces of the Spirit-Self, Life-Spirit and Spirit-Man. Man must pass through the Spiritual Soul if he wishes to absorb *in his own way* the forces of Spirit-Self, Life-Spirit and Spirit-Man. To this end he must completely unite the forces of death with his own being during the course of the fifth Post-Atlantean age, that is to say, by the middle of the third millennium A.D. And he can do so. But he cannot unite the forces of evil with his being in the same way. I say again *not in the same way*. The forces of evil are so ordered in the great Universe in the Cosmos that man will be able to receive them into his evolution only during the Jupiter period, even as he now receives the forces of death.

We may say therefore: The forces of evil work upon man with a lesser intensity, taking hold only of a portion of his being. If we would penetrate into the essence of these forces, we must not look at their external consequences. We must look for the essence of evil where it is present in its own inherent being; that is to say, where it works in the way in which it *must* work, because the *forces* that figure in the Universe as "evil" enter also into man. Here we come to something of which I said just now that one can speak of it only with deep emotion and then only under one essential condition: that these things are received with the deepest, truest earnestness. If we would seek out the evil in man, we must seek for it not in the evil actions that are done in human society, but in the evil *inclinations* — in the tendencies to evil. We must, in the first place, altogether abstract our attention from the consequences of these inclinations — consequences which appear in any individual man to a greater or lesser extent. We must direct our gaze to the evil inclinations. If we do so, then we may put this question: In what men do these evil inclinations work during our own fifth post-Atlantean period — those inclinations which, when they come to expression in their side-effects, are so plainly visible in evil actions? Who are the men concerned?

My dear friends, we receive an answer to this question when we try to pass the so-called Guardian of the Threshold and learn truly to know the human being. Then we receive the answer, and it is this: Since the beginning of the fifth post-Atlantean period, evil inclinations — tendencies to evil — are subconsciously present in *all* men. Nay, the very entry of man into the fifth Post-Atlantean age — which is the age of modern civilisation — consists in his receiving into himself the tendencies to evil. Radically, but none the less truly, spoken, this may be stated: He who crosses the threshold into the spiritual world will undergo the following experience: There is no crime in all the world, but that every single human being, inasmuch as he belongs to the fifth Post-Atlantean age, has in his subconsciousness the inclination towards it — I say again, the inclination. Whether in one case or another the inclination to evil leads to an external evil action depends on quite other circumstances than on the inclination itself. You see, my dear friends, if one is obliged in our time to tell humanity the plain unvarnished truth, the truths one has to tell are by no means comfortable.

What, then, is the real purpose of these forces which bring about the evil inclinations in man? What do they seek to achieve in the Universe, when to begin with they instil themselves into the nature of man? Of a truth, they are not present in the Universe for the express purpose of bringing about evil actions in human society. They do bring them about, for reasons which we still have to consider. But just as little as the forces of death are there in the Universe in order to make man die, so, too, the forces of evil are not there in the Universe in order to entice him into criminal actions. They are there in the Universe for a very different purpose: when man is summoned to develop the conscious Spiritual Soul, their function is to call forth in him the inclination to receive the *spiritual life*. In the great Universe these forces of Evil hold sway. Man must receive them, and in receiving them he implants in himself the seed, the tendency to experience the *spiritual life* through the conscious Spiritual Soul. These forces, therefore, which are perverted in the human social order, do not exist in order to call forth evil actions. On the contrary, they exist in order that man, when he reaches the stage of the Spiritual Soul, may break through into the spiritual life. If man did not receive into himself those inclinations to evil of which I have just spoken, he would never come to the point where, out of his own Spiritual Soul, he has the impulse to receive from the Universe, the Spirit: which from henceforward must fertilise all cultural life, unless indeed this is to die away.

We shall do best if, to begin with, we turn our attention to what is intended to *become* of those forces whose caricature you see in the evil actions of man. We shall do best to ask ourselves: What is intended to take place in the future evolution of mankind under the influence of these very forces which are at the same time the forces responsible for the evil inclinations of man?

You see, when we think of these things we come very near the central nerve of the evolution of humanity. At the same time, all these things are connected with the disasters which have overtaken mankind to-day. All the disasters that have come upon us at the present time, and are destined to come in the near future, are like the signs of an approaching storm. They are merely the signs of quite other things that are about to come over humanity — signs which at the present stage often show the very reverse of what is coming. These things are said, *not* to encourage pessimism, but as a call to awakening, an impulse to strong actions.

Perhaps the best way of attaining our present purpose is to start from something concrete. I recently said: An essential impulse in human evolution during the age of the Spiritual Soul must be the growth of interest between man and man. The interest which one man takes in another must become ever greater and greater. This interest must grow for the remainder of earthly evolution — and especially in four domains. The first is this: Man as he evolves towards the future will behold and

see his fellow-men in new and ever changing ways. To-day, although he has passed through rather more than a fifth of the age of the Spiritual Soul, man is little inclined as yet to see his fellow-man as he must learn to see him in the course of this epoch, which as you know, will continue into the third millennium. To-day men see one another in such a way that they overlook what is most important; they have no real vision of their fellow-men. In this respect men have yet to make full use of all that has been instilled into their souls, through various incarnations, by the influence of Art. Much can be learned from the evolution of Art; I have often given indications as to the lessons we can learn from it.

It can scarcely be denied — if we cultivate the symptomatic understanding of history which I have called for in recent lectures — that artistic creation and enjoyment are declining in almost all domains of Art. All that has been attempted in Art during the last few decades reveals very clearly, to anyone who has true feeling, that Art as such is in a period of decay. The most important element of the artistic life which must pass into the evolution of humanity in future is the education which human beings can receive from it for certain ways of understanding which will be necessary for the future.

Needless to say, every branch of culture has many different branches and concomitant effects. We may say, however, that all Art contains an element tending towards a deeper and more real knowledge of man. Anyone who truly enters, for instance, into the artistic forms created in painting or sculpture, or into the essence of the inner movements pulsating through music and poetry — anyone who experiences Art in a truly inward way (which artists themselves often fail to do nowadays) will imbue himself with something that enables him to comprehend man from a certain point of view — I mean, to comprehend him pictorially. This must come to humanity in the present age of the Spiritual Soul: the faculty to perceive men pictorially. You have already heard the elements of this. Look at the human being — behold his head: it points you back into the past. Even as a dream is understood as a reminiscence of outer physical life and thence receives its signature, so for one who sees things in their reality, all physical things are as pictures — images of something spiritual. We must learn to see through the picture-nature of man to his spiritual archetype. And this will happen as we go on into the future; man will, as it were, become transparent to his fellow-man. The way his head is formed, the way he walks: all this will be seen with an inner insight and sympathy altogether different from what the men of today are as yet inclined to evolve. For the only way to learn to know the human being in his Ego is to cultivate this understanding of his picture-nature, and thus to approach him with the underlying feeling that everything outer physical eyes can see of him is related to the true super-sensible reality of man, as a picture painted on canvas is to the reality it represents.

This underlying feeling must be gradually developed; this must be learned. Man will meet man not so as to perceive in him merely the organisation of bone, muscle, blood and so forth. No, he will learn to feel in the other man the image of his eternal and spiritual being. Behold, the human being passes by us, and we shall not imagine that we can understand him unless this that passes by us awakens in us the deeper vision of what he is as an eternal and spiritual man.

In this way we shall learn to *see* the human being. And we shall really be able to see him thus. For everything we see when we perceive human forms, human movements, and all that goes with them as a picture of the eternal, will make us either warm or cold. It will have to fill us either with inner warmth or with inner cold. We shall go through the world learning to know men in a very deep and tender way. One man will make us warm, another will make us cold. Worst of all will be those who make us neither warm nor cold. Thus we shall have an inner experience in the warmth-ether which penetrates our etheric body. This will be the reflex of the heightened interest which must be evolved as between man and man.

The second thing to which I must now refer will call forth still stranger feelings in the man of to-day, who has indeed no inclination at all to receive such things as these. (Although, in a none too distant future, this very antipathy may change into sympathy for these things). The second is this: men will *understand* one another quite differently. In the two thousand years which still have to pass until the end of the fifth Post-Atlantean age, this, above all, will happen — it is true the two thousand years will not entirely suffice; what I now refer to will continue into the sixth Post-Atlantean age — but during the present age the following development will occur: Besides the recognition of the Ego, of which I have just spoken, there will arise a faculty to feel and apprehend in man, even as we meet him, his relationship to the third Hierarchy — the Angels, Archangels and Archai. This will come about through a growing recognition of the quite different way in which men are now related to speech and language, compared with how it was in earlier times.

The evolution of language has already passed its zenith. Language has indeed become an abstract thing; and all the efforts that are being made to classify societies in accordance with the languages of peoples represent merely a wave of deepest untruthfulness now passing over the earth. For men no longer have that relationship to language which *sees through* the language to the human being — to the inner being of man.

On various occasions, as a first step towards an understanding of this matter, I have cited an example. I repeated it recently during a public lecture in Zürich, for the time has come to bring these things before a wider public. In Dornach, too, I have drawn attention to the same point — how surprising it is to compare the essays on Historic Method by Hermann Grimm, who stood so fully within the German mid-European culture of the nineteenth century, with essays on the same subject by Woodrow Wilson. I have carried out the experiment with great care: it is possible to take over certain sentences from Woodrow Wilson and insert them bodily in Hermann Grimm's essays, for they are almost word-for-word identical with sentences in Hermann Grimm. Again, whole sentences on Historic Method by Hermann Grimm can be transplanted into the lectures subsequently published by Woodrow Wilson. And yet there is a radical difference between the two — a difference which we notice as we read. Not indeed a difference in content: literal content will be of far less importance for mankind as we evolve towards the future. The difference is this: in Hermann Grimm, everything — even passages with which one cannot agree — has been struggled for, it has been conquered step by step, sentence by sentence. In Woodrow Wilson, on the other hand, it is as though his own inner demon, by which he is possessed in his subconsciousness, had instilled it all into his consciousness. On the one hand the things spring forth directly, at the surface of consciousness; on the other, they are "inspirations" imparted by a demon out of the subconscious into the conscious life. Indeed, we must say that what comes from Woodrow Wilson's side derives from a certain state of possession.

I give this example to show that word-for-word agreement is no longer the important thing today. I always feel it with intense pain when friends of our cause bring me quotations from this or that person, or this or that professor, saying, "Look, this is quite anthroposophical — I beg you to see how anthroposophical it is." In our period of civilisation it is even possible for a Professor, dabbling in politics; to write on an important matter something that agrees word-for-word with that which springs from a knowledge of realities; but the word-for-word agreement is not the point. What matters is *the region of the human soul* from which things spring. We must look *through* the words of speech to the region whence things derive.

All that is said here is said not merely in order to formulate certain statements. The important thing is that the *way* of saying it is permeated by that inner force which proceeds directly from the Spirit. Anyone who discovers word-for-word agreements without feeling how the things here said proceed from the fountain-head of the Spirit, and are permeated by it inasmuch as they are placed

into the whole context of the Anthroposophical world-conception — anyone who cannot detect the *how* of what is said — has utterly failed to recognise what is here intended, even if he notes a word-for-word agreement with some choice pronouncement of external wisdom.

It is of course not very comfortable to have to point to such examples, for the inclinations of mankind to-day frequently go in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, it is a duty and responsibility laid upon one to-day, if one is speaking in all earnestness and does not want merely to call forth a kind of torpor, making the lectures a pleasant soporific. One must not shrink from choosing such examples as are unpleasant to many people. Surely there should be willingness to listen to a serious warning of what it will really mean for the world if people fail to notice that the world is about to have its order drawn up for it by a weak-minded American Professor! It is indeed uncomfortable to speak of actualities to-day. Many people find the very opposite convenient and pleasant. In any case, one speaks of actualities only in those domains of life where it is absolutely necessary, and where it concerns men closely — or should do so any rate — to listen to these things.

To see *through* the veils of language: this must come over humanity in future. Men must acquire the faculty to perceive the inner gesture in speech. This age will not come to an end — certainly the last stages of it will go on into the following epoch — but the third millennium will not pass by till men have come to this: they will no longer listen to another man who speaks to them as they listen to him nowadays. They will find expressed in speech and language the human being's dependence on the third Hierarchy — on the Angels, Archangels and Archai. In speech they will find an expression of that whereby a man penetrates into the spiritual — into the super-sensible. Then they will hear through speech into the soul of man. Needless to say, we shall have an altogether different social life when men can hear through speech the inner soul of man. Much indeed of the force of so-called evil will have to be transmuted in this way, by man becoming able to hearken to the things another man is saying and to hear, through his speech, his soul. Then, when the soul is heard *through* speech, there will come over man a wonderful feeling of colour, and through this feeling of colour in speech men will learn to understand one another internationally. Quite as a matter of course one sound will call forth the same feeling as the sight of a blue colour, and another sound the same feeling as the sight of a red colour. Thus, what will only be felt as warmth when one *sees* the human being, will grow as it were into colour when one listens to his speech. One will have to enter with intimate sympathy into the sound of the speech which is borne from human lips to human ear. That is the second thing which is approaching.

The third thing is this: Men will experience very intimately in themselves the expressions of and configurations of feeling in other men. Much of this will be brought about through speech, but not through speech alone. When one man meets another, he will experience the state of feeling of the other in himself, in his own breathing. As we approach the future of earthly evolution, in the time to which I now refer, our breathing will attune itself to the life of feeling of the other man. One man will cause us to breathe more quickly, another man more slowly; and according as we breathe more quickly or more slowly we shall feel what kind of a man we are meeting. Think how the social community of men will live and grow together; think how intimate the social life of man will tend to become! Certainly it will take still longer for this kind of breathing to become a part of the soul of man — the whole of the sixth epoch of civilisation and part of the seventh. And in the seventh epoch a little will be achieved of the *fourth thing*, to which I will now refer.

In so far as men belong to a human community by their own act of will, then in the realm of will they will have — forgive the hard saying — to digest one another. Inasmuch as we shall have to will, or will to will, one thing or another in association with this man or that, we shall have inner experiences similar to those we now have, still a very primitive form, when we consume one food-stuff or another. In the sphere of *willing*, men will have to digest one another. In the sphere of *feeling*, they will have to breathe one another. In the sphere of *understanding through speech*, they will have to feel one another in living colours. Lastly, as they learn really to see one another, they will learn to know one another as Ego-beings.

All these forces, however, will reside more in the inner realm of the soul; for their *full* development, the Jupiter, Venus and Vulcan periods of evolution will have to follow. Nevertheless, Earth-evolution will require of mankind the first suggestions of these things — suggestions in the soul and spirit. And the present time, with all its strange catastrophes, is but an inner rebellion of mankind against what is to accompany the things I have now mentioned. In future, all the tendencies making for social separation have to be overcome, and mankind to-day, rising in rebellion against this need, is flinging out over the world the cheap catch-word that men should group themselves in nations. It is an instinctive rebellion against the Divinely-willed course of human evolution; a distorting of things into the very opposite of what will none the less ensue. We must see through these things if we would gain a foundation for understanding the so-called mystery of evil. For evil is in many ways a collateral effect of what has to enter into the evolution of mankind. An engine making a long journey will smash the rails if it comes to a place where they are badly laid, and for the moment its own progress will be delayed. Humanity *is* in course of evolution towards such goals as I have now described. It is the mission of the age of the Spiritual Soul to recognise these goals, so that humanity may strive towards them consciously. But for the moment the permanent way is badly laid, and a fairly long time will pass before it gets better, for many people are setting to work just now to replace the faulty rails — and not by any means with better ones.

Yet, as you see, Spiritual Science tends to no kind of pessimism. Its aim is to enable Man to recognise the path of evolution on which he really is. It does, however, require, at least for certain special occasions, that one should lay aside some of the habitual inclinations of to-day. Alas, almost at once, everyone falls back into the old ruts, and that is what makes it so very difficult to speak of such things without reserve. For in doing so — and this lies in the very nature of our time — we touch upon public issues in respect of which mankind is bent on hurling itself into the abyss, and we must continually utter this warning, this call to awakening.

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