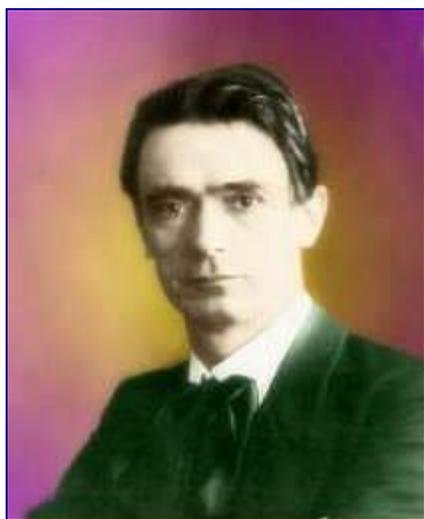


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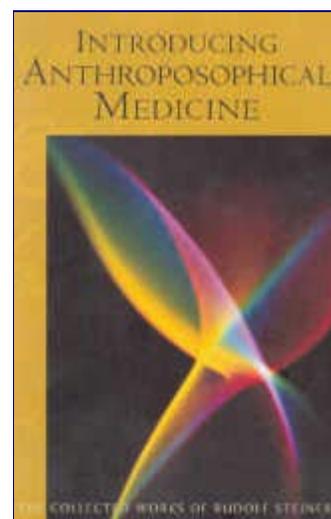
A READER'S JOURNAL

Introducing Anthroposophical Medicine, GA#312

Review Includes Lectures 3 to 7
Linked to other Lectures at Bottom
Given March 23 to 27, 1920 in Dornach
by
Rudolf Steiner

Introduction by Christopher Bamford
Foreword by Steven M. Johnson, M. D.
Translated by Catherine E. Creeger
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Chapter: Spiritual Science



In the first lecture Steiner focused on the structure and inner functions of the bones and muscular systems and in the second on the key role played by the heart in balancing the upper and lower regions of the body. In the third lecture, he looks at "the overall possibility and general character of healing."

[page 34, 35] If you think about the character of modern medical education, you will find, for the most part, that therapy is taught parallel to pathology without any clearly understandable connection between the two. Especially with regard to therapy, a merely empirical methodology is often the only approach and totally dominates the scene, and we find almost no rational principles that could form the basis for practical therapeutic work. We know that in the course of the nineteenth century, these deficits in medical thinking even led to the nihilistic school of medical thought, which emphasized diagnosis almost exclusively. Its practitioners were actually content to identify illnesses and generally took a very skeptical view of any rational basis for healing. If we were to make purely rational demands on the medical profession, we would actually have to say that an indication of a cure ought to be inherent in the diagnosis. A mere outer connection between therapy and pathology cannot be allowed to prevail. Our understanding of the nature of an illness must be able to lead to insight into the process of curing it.

This will no doubt sound strange to many of you, as it did to me when I first read it. Steiner is claiming that modern doctors know all about pathology, but have only an empirical approach to therapy and healing. I facetiously call medical doctors, "Wish Doctors", because of their well-known propensity for suggesting some course of drugs with the statement, "Let's see how this works," as if they were *wishing* for a positive outcome, but were otherwise unsure. This is the best indication that doctors are taking potshots at a cure, lacking a rational basis for the process of healing.

If doctors attempt to "pass the test of nature" as Paracelsus says is necessary, they will find that scientific methods of modern medicine will prevent them from even learning the test of nature, much less passing the test. (Page 35)

[page 35, 36] Current assumptions make it extremely difficult to go this route because — strange as it may seem — nineteenth-century materialistic tendencies have led to a complete misunderstanding of the functions of the nervous system, which is the next system I will discuss in addition to the skeletal, muscular, and cardiac systems.

In his book *Riddles of the Soul*, Steiner makes it clear that there are no motor nerves in the human body, only sensory nerves. He says that so-called a motor nerve is but "the bearer of nerve activity [and] it serves the inner perception of that metabolic process that underlies our willing." Willing is a soul activity and materialistic physiology which denies the existence of soul activity must create out of whole cloth "motor nerves"! In this next passage, he explains how motor nerves are a biological impossibility, and what are called motor nerves function to report muscle location and motion, i.e., proprioceptive information.

[page 36, 37] Everything I stated in *Riddles of the Soul* can definitely be confirmed by the relevant biological facts, whereas the opposing view that attributes psychological activity to the nervous system alone cannot be confirmed at all. It is possible for a so-called motor nerve to be severed and then allowed to grow back together into a single nerve. For once, I would like to see how healthy reason can connect this fact with the other assumption that there are nerves that serve both sensory and motor functions. Such nerves do not exist. What we call motor nerves are nothing other than sensory nerves, that perceive the movements of our limbs -- that is, they perceive what is going on in the metabolism of our limbs during an act of will. Thus, in reality, motor nerves are sensory nerves that perceive only what is going on inside us [proprioception], while what we ordinarily call sensory nerves perceive the outer world.

What this really means is that we cannot move a leg, e. g., if we cannot feel its presence with our proprioceptive nerves. The famous neurologist Oliver Sacks discovered for himself that if he could not feel his leg, he didn't even believe he had a leg! This belief is a soul condition and not one that can be explained by a medical science which does not allow for a soul. As I wrote in my review of Israel Rosenfield's book, *The Strange, Familiar, and Forgotten*, the loss of feeling in a leg "creates a paradoxical relationship to the leg that Sacks explains so cogently in his book [and it is] a neuropathologist with a damaged leg who is experiencing this directly rather than hearing it reported from a patient. In Sack's account of his recovery we follow his trials and dilemmas as his direct sense of self is minus a leg, but his conscious mind can see the leg which all his other senses tell him is not there."

If you feel it necessary to use the phrase "motor neurons" it is best to understand they are simply sensory neurons which report what is happening inside of our body as our will creates movement in our limbs, e.g.

[page 38] The soul aspect cannot be linked to the human organism as a whole, except possibly by inventing motor nerves that do not exist and then expecting motor nerve functions to influence circulation, and so forth, all of which is hypothetical in the extreme.

Our human soul aspects are drawn from the same forces which are responsible for the ability of lower animals and plants to regenerate themselves, such as a frog embryo will replace a leg which is cut off with a well-formed new leg. We know that will not happen to human beings, but what Steiner reveals is that the same forces exist in human beings but they operate at the level of thinking and feeling.

[page 43, 44] Whenever I think or feel, I think and feel with the same forces that are sculpturally active in the plant kingdom or in lower animals . . . [e. g.] Trains of thought that have escaped us can be finished with others, which we bring in from far away rather than from what is nearest at hand. This function is actually similar to the regrowth of necessary parts [of plants and lower animals].

What does all this mean? Rightly understood it means that this knowledge can lead us to a rational

approach to healing, something truly effective to replace the scattershot efforts of most physicians today, who understand pathology and diseases well, but lack an organized approach to healing human beings, up until now.

[page 48] Here you can already see the dawning of what can be described as a healing process. We call on the help of forces in nature that we ourselves, as normal human beings, do not possess. We use them when we need to make an inner part of us stronger than it is in a normal human being.

Suppose someone has a breathing problem, we have a process for finding a way in nature to create a rational healing process.

[page 48] If we take one of our organs — the lungs, perhaps — as an example, just so we can talk about this matter in concrete terms, we will find that we have withdrawn formative principles from organs such as this in order to have them available for our soul and spirit. Suppose we discover, somewhere in the plant kingdom, these same forces that we have withdrawn from our lungs. If we then administer them to a person with a pulmonary disorder, we are coming to the aid of that person's pulmonary functions. You see, the question now arises, which forces in outer nonhuman nature are similar to the forces that underlie our human organs but have been withdrawn to serve soul-spiritual functions? This route leads away from merely experimental methods toward a rational approach to therapy.

This next passage will be of interest to people who watch a lot medical shows or enjoy gossiping with friends about various medical problems. The mere act of talking about certain body organs will modify the way they operate.

[page 58] The moment you have thoughts about a particular organ — or, to put it better, thoughts that are connected with any particular organ — the organ itself becomes active in a certain way. Once again, this is a promising field for future doctoral dissertations. Simply study the connection between certain thoughts that appear in the human being and salivation, for example, or mucus secretion in the intestines or the secretion of milk, urine, or semen; study how specific thoughts appear, paralleling these organic activities.

Certain thoughts can, e. g., stop a gland from secreting and create an imbalance which if unchecked will lead to a disease. Our thoughts can either stop a gland's secretion or allow it to secrete. Often the one thing that happens when someone gets ill is that they shut themselves off from other people. That seclusion can have the salubrious effect of allowing the non-secreting gland to begin secreting normally again. Taking medication for diseases is sometimes superfluous as the disease will remedy itself with quiet bed rest away from people and the thoughts they carry with them. "Go home and get some rest" is often the last words of a doctor to a sick patient, age-old advice that has proven its worth for thousands of years.

[page 58] This is a clearly visible example of how formative activity leaves our organs and enters our thoughts. You might say that if you had not been thinking in that way, your gland would not have secreted anything. You withdrew a force from the gland and transferred it to your soul life, and then the gland began secreting.

Flying birds do not have intestinal disorders for the simple reason that they eliminate while flying. I have myself noticed this happening on occasion when driving home along a swampy area and had a Great Egret flying alongside me. It was possible to see the bird eliminating as it flew. Why is this so? Probably because they could not fly unless they shed all excess body weight such as the refuse from their eating and drinking. Otherwise it would be like expecting a jet airliner to store all the excess products of its engines combustion inside the plane — that is not possible for jets or for flying birds.

[page 63] They have no opportunity to retain or store the remains of their food; if they

were able to do so, they would immediately develop a fatal illness. . . . Birds do not need to become involved in mighty battles against their intestinal flora, because they do not have any. In contrast, this is necessary for higher animals and human beings.

In pages 61 through 63 Steiner discussed how certain flora cannot exist long in sunlight, such as the tubercular bacilli. We have an etheric system which converts light internally and if not enough light is present for conversion externally, such bacilli may flourish. This results in the age-old prescription of a move to a sunnier climate for a TB patient. What's important is that we humans are like birds in our conversion of light.

[page 62] We have a physical colon and a physical bladder, but with regard to our etheric body, we are birds as far as these organs are concerned. . . . We are dependent on immediately transforming the light we receive and eliminating the by-products. If any disturbance occurs in this process, it does not correspond to a specific organ and therefore cannot simply be tolerated without damaging our health.

Bird-brain is a phrase which builds from the tiny size of the brain of a bird, whose brain which matches the size of its almost non-existent colon. Human brains have grown in the course of evolution in locked step with the size of human bladders and colons. Let us see why this must be so.

[page 66] There is an intimate connection between the formation of intestines and the formation of the brain; if the colon and appendix had not appeared in the course of the evolution of animals, physical human beings who can think would also ultimately not have been able to appear, because humans have brains at the expense — at the very pronounced expense — of their intestinal organs.

I recall someone from an early Steiner discussion group joking about our brain being filled with manure because the product of our brain (thought) is like the product of our large intestine. Typical of jokes, an essential distinction was left out. In order to have time for thinking, we cannot be constantly on the move like flying birds and must have the storage capacity of a bladder and colon. Brain and colon are intimately connected like positive and negative electricity is connected (Steiner's analogy on Page 66) — you can't have one without the other, and even though they are drastically different, each grows as the other grows.

Allopathy refers to materialistic medical practices in which something is done to relieve directly the problem, e.g., if you cough, a cough suppressant is prescribed. Homeopathy, on the other hand, will prescribe something which in a minute quantity which stimulates the presenting problem which allows the body's defenses to overcome it. Contrary to the derision with which the term allopath is used by some people who push homeopathic procedures, Steiner says that, rightly understood, there are no true allopaths because homeopathic tendencies of the body are at work whatever medication is prescribed. Potentization simply refers to the process of homeopathic dilution mentioned in the passages from [pages 32 and 33](#).

[page 72] It becomes apparent to spiritual science that there really are no allopaths because even a substance prescribed as an allopathic medication undergoes a process of potentization within the organism, and healing occurs only through this process. Thus, all allopathic physicians find their procedures supported by the body's homeopathic tendency, which brings about a transformation allopaths neglect — namely, breaking down the cohesion of the remedy's individual particles.

In my studies over decades I found a relationship between planets of our Solar System and common metallic elements. As a physicist I bought into the *chronological snobbery*(1) of my generation, and this relationship seemed strange and without reason. In Lecture 6, Steiner explains the connections and how these relationships are important for understanding how the planets in our cosmos influence life on Earth. To understand his usage of "undisturbed" in the following passage, one has to imagine that refers to influence of one planet when no other planets are near it in the heavens.

[page 96] We cannot avoid bringing earthly substances into connection with the forces that work on the Earth from its surroundings. Especially the study of metals, if carried out in ways that I will describe in these lectures, brings us to very specific connections, such that we must attribute lead first and foremost to the undisturbed effects of Saturn, tin to the undisturbed effects of Jupiter, iron to Mars, copper to Venus, and what chemistry now calls mercury to the planet of the same name. This is why the ancients gave the name Mercury to both the planet and the metal. We must also recognize the relationship of everything that is like silver in character — I very deliberately said like silver — to the undisturbed effects of the Moon. It is really amusing to read in modern scientific literature that silver's relationship to the Moon was suggested by the Moon's silvery sheen and that people thought only in terms of this outer characteristic. Anyone who knows how carefully the ancient studies of individual metals were conducted, in their own way, will not succumb to this sort of error.

The inner planets of the heliocentric view of our cosmos are Moon, Venus, and Mercury. The elements associated with these planets are the telluric ones, i. e., the ones which directly affect the root portions of plants, the living half of plants that lies below the surface of Earth. The extra-telluric elements affect the living portion of plants that lies above the surface of the soil of Earth. Elements other than those listed above came about from the interactions from the various planets of the cosmos.

[page 96, 97] You will see that there is also ample opportunity for other substances to develop, because the ones that I listed — lead, tin, iron, copper, mercury, and silver — are only the most outstanding examples. The fact that other planetary influences competed with those just mentioned — for example, the lines of influence of Mars and Saturn could have intersected — made it possible for other substances to arise. This is how the less representative metals came about. In any case, we must see the Earth's metals as resulting from the influence of extra-telluric forces. At this point, however, what is expressed in the workings of metals merges with what we see in plant development, because if you take the active principles in lead, tin, or iron, these same principles must also be inherent in all aspects of the development of flowers and seeds, insofar as these processes take place outside the earthly element and above the surface of the Earth. Similarly, all aspects of plant root formation must be connected to everything that is coppery, mercurial, or silvery in character.

The Sun's element is gold and acts as the balance point between the inner and outer planets, between below and above the soil in plants, between gravity and light, between matter and spirit in our cosmos.

[page 97] At every point in the material element, even in the cosmos, the balance must be maintained between matter and the spirit. The nearest cosmic body that maintains this balance is the Sun itself. The Sun holds the balance between the spiritual and the material in the cosmos. For this reason the Sun, you might say, is a cosmic body that both maintains order in the solar system and brings order into the forces pervading our material system. Just as we can establish the connection of individual planets to the metals, as I described earlier, we can also establish that there is a connection between the Sun and gold. In this instance, too, the ancients valued gold for its connection to the balance between spirit and matter rather than for its ahrimanic value.

It might be said that our fondness for gold today is based on a spiritual value whose origin we have otherwise forgotten.

Our physical body fully develops from birth to age 7, the time during which baby teeth (developed while in one's mother's womb) are replaced by one's own teeth. The next body is the etheric body which fully develops during the next 7 year period which brings one to the onset of puberty. From 14 on, the next

body, the astral body develops and while it develops, diseases may appear due to the difficulty the astral body has in balancing the physical and etheric bodies.

[page 103] If they do no work together, the astral body is often obliged to strengthen its forces, and if these forces remain inadequate, the disease symptoms that then appear will require outside intervention. This is why it is common to find disease symptoms in childhood that are discharged on the physical level, as in Sydenham's chorea, for instance. All illnesses leading to such syndromes, in which nervous or psychological disturbances occur in addition to what is happening on the organic level, are related to the somewhat unaccustomed work the astral body is being called upon to perform to balance the elasticity of the physical and etheric bodies.

Childhood diseases flare up all the time and often are not diagnosed because they disappear quickly and are expected as a normal course of growing up. Similarly to the advice Steiner gives elsewhere that one not suppress coughing when it occurs, he also recommends that diseases like pneumonia and pleurisy in small children not be suppressed too quickly. (Page 107)

[page 107] All of these childhood symptoms have counterpart processes in later life; that is, they return later, but as their polar opposites. Many people would be able to understand all of the processes played out in endocarditis(2), for example (even acute endocarditis), if they merely investigated the course of disease symptoms earlier in life connected with pneumonia or pleurisy. This should help us to ensure that pneumonia and pleuritic symptoms are not suppressed prematurely or too quickly in children. Parents and teachers naturally want to get rid of such symptoms as quickly as possible, but in these disease states in particular it is really very important to allow them their own destiny. As a physician, you should intervene only to divert conditions that would otherwise cause damage. Aside from this, you should allow the disease process to run its course to the very end. It is never more important than with the symptoms related to childhood pneumonia or pleurisy — and certain others as well — to implement some kind of physical (or, as it is now called, "naturopathic") treatment. In other words, try to allow the disease process as much as possible to run its normal course without speeding it up or cutting it off prematurely. This is important, because such a disease process, if cut off too soon, leads relatively quickly to a predisposition to cardiac disease and related syndromes, and it leads especially to a predisposition to such conditions as polyarthritis(2). Consequently, it is particularly important to avoid disrupting the disease process in this realm. For many people, simply by not intervening in the intentions of pleurisy and pneumonia, we could eliminate predispositions to all kinds of illnesses that later manifest as cardiac irregularities. The cohesiveness of a person's entire course of development is evident here.

Young parents today seem to take their children to the doctor for all kinds of minor symptoms which we ourselves were never taken to the doctor for as children, nor did my wife and I take our eight children to the doctor for. Given the trend to provide very expensive *free* medical care for everyone, one can expect that we are creating adults who will remain sickly for much of their adult lives. Thus Steiner gives us a warning about too much curing.

[page 108] It can be very important to not do too much curing. There is nothing wrong with being cured, of course, but we must also consider the many individuals who, to their own way of thinking, have experienced all sorts of illness — those who have survived so many different medications and methods of treatment that when they are older (and they are always sick) it is difficult to find anything that reassures them. It would be better to help people understand that in most cases they are not as sick as they think they are. This approach, of course, also has its negative aspects, but it is certainly

proper to mention it in this context.

Much of Lectures 3 through 7 Steiner devoted to building up in the listener a basic understanding of how the telluric and extra-telluric forces are related to the planets of the cosmos and how these act upon the human body, particularly on its organs. The heart is the dividing point between the upper or extra-telluric organs of the body and the lower telluric organs. Our heart acts like the Sun in the cosmos which separates the inner planets of Venus, Mercury, and Moon from the outer planets of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Each planet has an associated element which is telluric like Copper, Mercury, and Silver or extra-telluric like Iron, Tin, and Lead. The grace of Steiner's medicine is learning how to recognize polarities, e. g. the polarity of ossification and sclerosis which allows one to combat arteriosclerosis with the forces active in lead. In the remaining lectures 8 through 20 Steiner gives many helpful guidelines for health, e. g., the value of after-meal naps, how the gentle internal massage of the spleen by the organs of digestion overcomes the toxic effect of strong ideational processes. We will learn to understand how the future of a person's health is present as a potential in the current challenges as perceived by the person. And with that insight we can form an intuition for a diagnosis.

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----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1. *Chronological snobbery* is an expression coined by C. S. Lewis to refer to our modern disdain for the knowledge of earlier cultures which we no longer understand and thereby deem baseless and ignorant, but which attitude is only an expression of our own ignorance, up until now.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 1.](#)

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**Footnote 2.** *Endocarditis* is an inflammation of the inside of the heart; *polyarthritis* is any type of arthritis involving five or more joints at one time.

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