

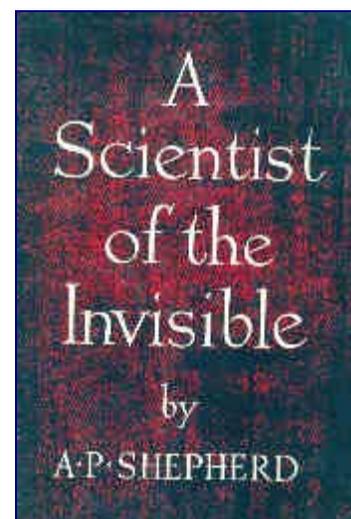
Site Map: [MAIN / A Reader's Journal, Vol. 2 This Page](#)



A READER'S JOURNAL
A Scientist of the Invisible
by
A. P. Shepherd

Published by Hodder and Stoughton, UK, in
1954

A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1999



This book is an excellent overview of Rudolf Steiner's life work by a careful and thoughtful student. Shepherd found Steiner in 1941 and

finished this book about 1954, so there was time for an intense fourteen year study of Steiner. I acquired this book thinking that I was going to read a biography of Steiner's life and was surprised to find that it had only scant biographical material, but consisted of a comprehensive overview of Steiner's work. As such, this is a valuable book, both for beginners and old hands alike. Beginners can "learn all about Steiner's work before they start" reading Steiner, an excellent learning strategy that I recommend to all. Old hands can learn whether they have covered all the bases of Steiner's work, and in the process discover if there are some lacunae in their Steiner readings to be filled in. Thus, this fine synopsis of Shepherd's may be taken as a comprehensive syllabus to a life-time course in Rudolf Steiner's works.

Shepherd is a master of concise statement, and in this review, I'd like to share some of those carefully crafted sentences that illuminate the words of Rudolf Steiner.

[page 21] Perhaps the most challenging item of this new knowledge is the definite assertion that man — and the physical world — had a spiritual, not a material origin, and that both have a spiritual destiny.

Steiner was always a true scientist, never disputing the claims of the materialistic scientist, nor even casting aspersions on their value. Rather he expanded on the range covered by the materialistic scientist by bringing to bear his own abilities to experience the spiritual world directly. From early on in my studies of his work, I realized that Steiner was like a scientist using some "high-technology" equipment in his laboratory, like a mass spectrometer or oscilloscope, to gather data about a "super-sensible" world of isotopes and high-frequency waves and reporting on his findings to us, who, outside of his lab, have no access to such high-tech equipment. There are such scientists all over the world today who report such findings in journals and their findings are accepted as accurate representations of this otherwise invisible world in which we all live. The difference is that these materialistic scientists use instruments that were created by human beings to research aspects of the physical world. There is no finer instrument than that provided by the human being for viewing the super-sensible realities of the spiritual world, and Rudolf Steiner, from early childhood, possessed such an instrument, and used it for expanding his and our understanding of how we live in a world that is both physical and spiritual.

In his exploration of the super-sensible aspects of evolution, for example, Steiner does not seek to dispute the findings of the Darwinians, but to engender a re-thinking that infuses the theory with new life.

[page 21, 22] He sets out his own point of view with a wealth of description and fact. Some of it is

derived from supersensible perception, and as such cannot be directly tested, but all of it is related to observable phenomena, in such a way that it is capable of just as sound confirmation from these phenomena, as that which Science can produce in favour of the generally accepted theory of evolution.

Whereas the evolutionist and historian seem to be concerned about different time scales — evolution occurring over aeons of time, and history over recent times — Steiner makes no such distinction between the jobs of the two. He sees the two merged into one grand evolution of consciousness.

[page 23] History is primarily the story of the evolution of the consciousness of Humanity towards self-conscious freedom of being, the attainment of which by man is the whole purpose of the existence of the material world. With such a clue to the understanding of history, the sequence of civilisations, the diversity of races, the emergence and variety of nationalities, and our present international problems and difficulties fall into a unity of spiritual evolution. Moreover history becomes not only an interpretation of the past, but, what it never yet has been, a clear pointer for the future.

A true researcher in any field has the ability to accumulate data without prejudice, and to suspend coming to premature conclusions. This requires holding unanswered questions in one's mind, so that this powerful instrument of thought may be continually working in the background to produce the sought-for goal of understanding. Unless one allows for the possibility of supersensible realities, one can never achieve a full understanding of the world in which one lives. Materialist scientists are like ostriches, who keep their heads stuck underground and see a world made of sand. Steiner sees a world made of sand *and* spirit and asks that we consider carefully what he reports, and that we evaluate his findings in the light of our own understanding.

[page 26] Furthermore, in considering his teaching he [meaning Steiner] especially warns his readers against credulous acceptance of what he reveals by supersensible perception. He urges them rather to consider with clear logical judgment the explanations and conclusions which the application of these supersensible revelations to material facts and phenomena produces, and to make these a test of the reliability of the supersensible revelations. Further, he declares that if these supersensible facts themselves be allowed to live in our minds — as, at least, experimental hypotheses, without either immediate acceptance or rejections — they will, of themselves and by the light they throw on other perceptible phenomena, bear witness to their own truth. At the lowest level they can be accepted as hypotheses in the normal method of science, and proved or rejected by their consequences and application.

I present this as a concise exposition of my own experience of reading Steiner's works and lectures. Allowing the supersensible facts of Steiner's books and lectures to "live in our minds" seems to be a very good exercise and one to whose efficacy I can attest from my own experience. But isn't all this mystical talk of "supersensible facts" just subjective foolishness and pathological fantasy?

[page 47] Steiner knew that, without the corrective of clear thinking, inward experience can easily be subjective or pathological. Moreover, by denying the applicability of thought to spirit-reality, the mystics played into the hands of the materialists. For they limited the range of knowledge to sense-phenomena, and left the direct experience and understanding of spiritual reality to temperamental subjectivity. So opposed was this to Steiner's whole attitude to thought, that he determined that he would never employ the language of mysticism to describe spirit-reality and experience, but would find forms of expressions that were parallel to those used in regard to natural-scientific reality.

Steiner describes the three stages of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition that one goes through in developing supersensible perception. Shepherd does an excellent job of summarizing these stages:

[page 63] The first stage gives knowledge of the spiritual background of our physical life and of the world in which we live. The second stage opens the way into the purely supersensible world, giving understanding of its conditions and of the beings who inhabit it, and of their relation to the physical world. The third stage is one in which a man is able to act himself as an inhabitant of the spiritual world, and to have intercourse with those to be found in it.

These three stages correspond to the three spiritual [non-physical] bodies of the human being: etheric, astral, and ego body.

[page 91] That which gives life and the powers of growth to the material element of his body is provided by a "body" of formative-forces, the etheric body; that which imposes controlling form on the life-forces of his etheric body, and which gives him consciousness and the capacity for feeling, is provided by a body of sentient forces, his astral body; while at the centre of all is the immortal core of his being, his ego, whose home is in the eternal spirit-world.

Steiner was the editor of the Goethe archives and was greatly influenced by Goethe's writings, especially on the subject of plant metamorphosis. In the following passage Shepherd uses a plant metaphor to describe the process of reincarnation into successive Earth-lives.

[page 114] The evolution of the individual is based upon the same principle that we have seen in the evolution of the human race and of the Earth itself; namely, a descent from a spirit-condition into a physical condition, which develops up to a certain point, after which the physical condition is dissolved, while the spirit-fruit of it returns to a spirit-condition. In this it receives the possibilities and powers for a further evolutionary development, after which it returns once more to a new earthly existence.

In Steiner's view of human life, we are each an artist operating in the media we know as space and time. Even though the ego takes possession of its "model" shortly before birth, and "works into it that pattern of life which it has brought with it from the spirit-world":

[page 123] That work does not commence at once, for the ego does not really enter actively into the bodily life of the child until the third or fourth year, while the pre-earthly etheric and astral bodies remain, enclosed, as it were in an embryonic sheath in the child, and do not emerge to function independently until the seventh and fourteenth years respectively.

One does not need to an educator to realize that the understanding of the four bodies of a human being and how they emerge over time is essential to the design of an appropriate pedagogy for our school systems. In his design of the Waldorf School system, Steiner incorporated his supersensible insights to provide quality education for the full human being, an education that is appropriately designed for the stage of unfolding the child is going through at each age.

Lastly, in the field of morality, Steiner unfolds a world little suspected by the masses in our time, a time that is filled with moral relativity.

[page 163] While to man's earthly consciousness moral law may be a matter opinion or belief, in the realm of spirit it is a matter of direct perception and inevitable experience. The importance of this fact can best be expressed in words used some years ago by Dr. J. H. Oldham, in the *Christian News Letter*. "If men's minds were seized with the conviction that there is a natural and moral order in the universe which they can disregard only at the cost of unending frustration and suffering, there would take place a revolution in Western civilisation more fundamental than those of Communism and National Socialism."

In my studies of Dr. Andrew Joseph Galambos's life work [See ARJ: [Sic Itur Ad Astra](#)], I came to the conclusion that his ideas, rightly understood, can directly promote such an understanding, such a "seizure of conviction" where it affects people the most — in their pocketbooks. If that thought seems gauche and un-spiritual to you, I recommend that you bring to mind the story of the third temptation of Christ in the desert. [See ARJ: [The Fifth Gospel](#).] Newly arrived in the body of Jesus after the baptism in the Jordan by John, Christ wandered into the desert and was beset by three temptations, the third of which was a challenge to convert "stones into bread." Christ rightly replied that "Not by bread alone will man live, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." However, the point was made that human beings are physical beings and as such require bread to survive. And to acquire that bread will require "stones" or coins to exchange for their bread of survival. In his work, Galambos has provided humans a way of understanding the natural moral order with a conviction that will lead to an end of the untold frustrations and sufferings that human beings have foisted on one another for aeons. It was with this understanding of the parallels of Steiner's work with Galambos's that I began my review of Galambos's first book with a series of quotations from Rudolf Steiner.

With all the talk of the need for a Threefold Society as urged by Steiner as a requisite for the next step for humanity, one cannot keep one's head in the sand and callously overlook any resource as a possible font of vitality for the creation of the salvation of humanity in our time.

