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### *A READER'S JOURNAL*

**Human and Cosmic Thought, GA# 151**

by

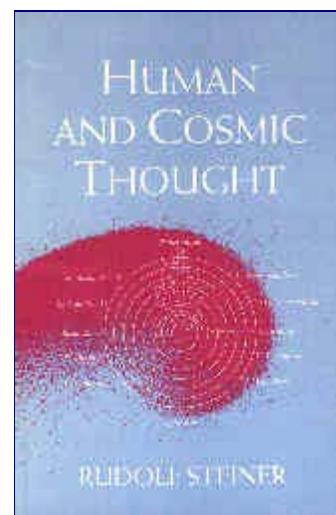
**Rudolf Steiner**

**Four Lectures, Berlin, January, 1914**

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"I think my thoughts" and "I am a thought

which is thought by the Hierarchies of the cosmos." Rudolf Steiner closes the fourth lecture suggesting that we meditate sometimes on these ideas. Let us flashback on the contents of these four lectures during which he prepares us to be able to comprehend these two ideas.

If we ask scientists when human thought first began, they will tell us many thousands or hundreds of thousands of years ago. Ask Steiner and you get the following answer, about 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Century, B. C.

**[page 11] . . . I have tried to show how thought as we know it really appeared first in a certain specific period. One might say that it first appeared in the sixth or eighth century B. C. Before then the human soul did not at all experience what can be called "thought" in the true sense of the word. What did human souls experience previously? They experienced pictures; all their experiences of the external world took the form of pictures. I have often spoken of this from certain points of view. This picture-experience is the last phase of the old clairvoyant experience. After that, for the human soul, the "picture" passes over into "thought".**

In Steiner's day at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, there were still shoemakers who made shoes by hand. They began with a mold for the shoe called a *last* over which they stretched and shaped the leather and sewed the pieces together into a finished shoe. What if a shoemaker were to attempt to apply his shoemaking method to create a model of how the world is constructed? Here's Steiner wonderful metaphor for how this process might go - let's listen in on the shoemaker-philosopher talking:

**[page 25] "I will suppose that there is a great last at the foundation of the world. Over this last the world-leather was once stretched; then the world-nails were added, and by means of them the world-sole was fastened to the world-upper. Then boot-blackening was brought into play, and the whole world-shoe was polished. In this way I can quite clearly explain to myself how in the morning it is bright, for then the shoe-polish of the world is shining, but in the evening it is soiled with all sorts of things; it shines no longer. Hence I imagine that every night someone has the duty of repolishing the world-boot. And thus arises the difference between day and night."**

Sounds humorous, doesn't it? Steiner admitted that it did. What on earth did he mean by this silly metaphor? you may think. Surely no one would take seriously the extrapolations of a lowly maker of shoes into a serious cosmic conception of the world, you might be thinking. Well, what does happen is so similar as to frighten one a bit when one realizes it. It seems that physicists and chemists shape their world conceptions over their *lasts* which are nothing but the laws that they have deduced solely from their

experience and experiments with the material world. And from those material-based laws learned in physics, chemistry, and physiology and they each create a *last* over which the leather of their world construction is stretched and shaped. And they proudly state to all who will listen that this method is the *only* one acceptable for the job.

**[page 25, 26] They say: When a person wants to work out for himself a conception of the world, then he takes the laws that are learnt in chemistry, in physics, or in physiology - no others are admissible - and out of these he builds a conception of the world for himself. These people proceed exactly as the hypothetical shoemaker would have done if he had constructed the world-boot, only they do not notice that their world-conceptions come into existence by the very same method that produced the hypothetical world-boot. . . . It is an immense presumption on the part of the physicist, the chemist, the physiologist, or the biologist, who do not wish to be anything else than physicist, chemist, physiologist, biologist, and yet want to have an opinion about the whole world.**

Steiner goes on to tell us (on page 30) that, "Anyone, therefore, who intends to occupy himself seriously with the paths that lead to a conception of the world must recognise that the first essential is to avoid one-sidedness." In the famous Sufi story of the five blind men and the elephant we find five men whose scientific one-sidedness lead them to form the following definitive opinions of the thing they are inspecting. The one holding the tail of the elephant states emphatically, "This is a snake." The one feeling around a leg states, "This is a tree." The one feeling the ear says, "This is a large leaf." And so on. Five scientific and foolhardy answers to no effect or use in the real world that exists outside their limited purview.

"Are you telling me, Bobby, that the physicist, chemist, physiologist, and biologist represent four different views of the world?" No, in fact, they all represent different forms of one world conception, a world-boot formed on the same *last*, that of *Materialism*. As such they will advance proofs that their view is the correct one for everyone to have. They are like the blind man who claimed the elephant was a snake based on inspection of its tail only.

**[page 30] We need not regard as foolish the arguments they advance as a defence or proof of Materialism, for an immense amount of ingenious writing has been devoted to the subject, and it holds good in the first place for material life, for the material world and its laws.**

Steiner never chose to take sides in an issue, but rather chose to describe all the sides of the issue. If the object at issue were the elephant, he would insist on taking the positions of all of the five blind men before declaring what the object was they were inspecting. Just so we can expect him to give us all the sides of the subject of world conception. But what does the average person or philosophy or scientist do instead of looking at all sides? Fichte said it best:

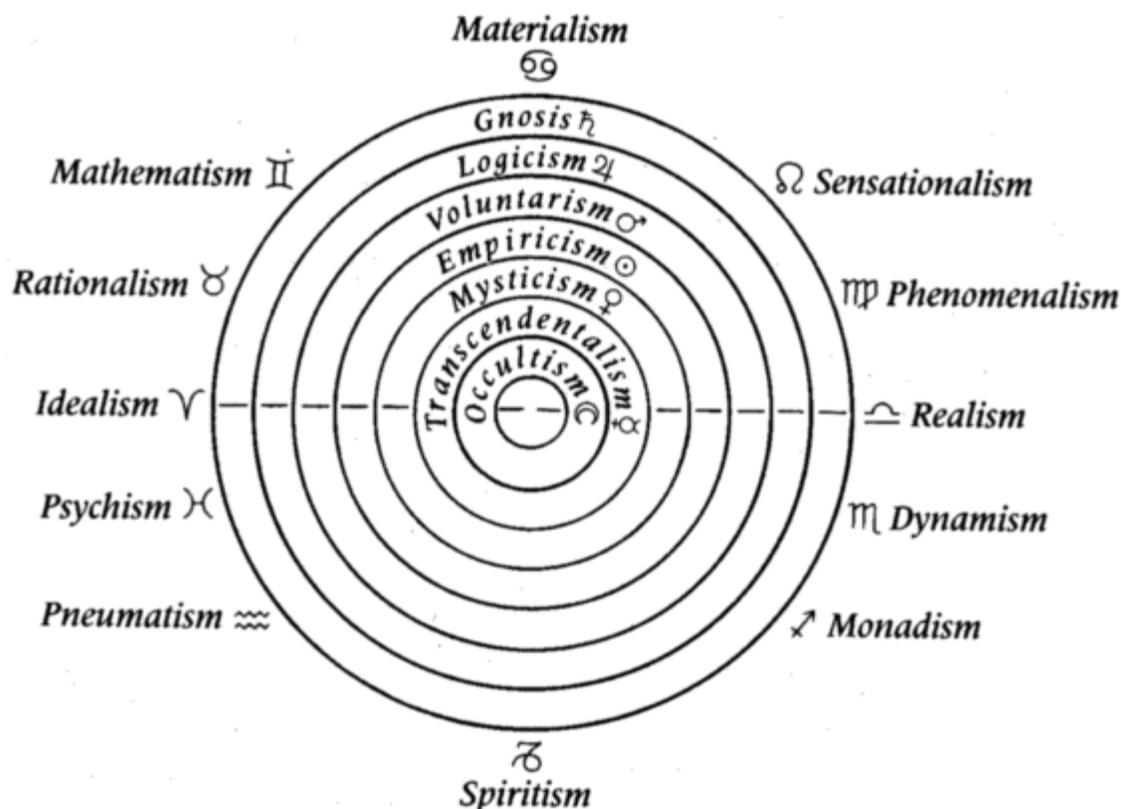
**[page 32] "Our world is the sensualised material of our duty."**

Fichte, as Steiner describes him, was under the influence of *Idealism*. As Steiner wends his way through Lecture Two, he creates a clockface of twelve points of view that one might take towards a world conception. The primary four at 12, 3, 6, and 9 are respectively, Materialism, Realism, Spiritism, and Idealism. In between each of these quadrant markers are two intermediary moods or conception to fill out a full set of twelve conceptions that one might hold of the world.

**[page 39] There is not merely one conception of the world that can be defended, or justified, but there are twelve. And one must admit that just as many good reasons can be adduced for each and all of them as for any particular one. The world cannot be rightly considered from the one-sided standpoint of one single conception, one single mode of thought; the world discloses itself only to someone who knows that one must look at it from all sides.**

As if this were not complex enough, Steiner then introduces us to the seven moods or ways of viewing the world from each of the twelve perspectives. These moods are like the planets that move through the twelve astrological signs. They are Gnosis, Logicism, Voluntarism, Empiricism, Mysticism, Transcendentalism, and Occultism.

[page 44] One can be a Gnostic in connection with all twelve world-outlook signs. Hence, if we want to put Gnosis in its right place, we must draw a circle, and the whole circle signifies that the Gnosis can move round through all twelve world-outlook signs.



To help put a face on some of these moods speaking through the twelve world-outlooks, he gives us Hegel's Logicism looking through Idealism, Schopenhauer's Voluntarism in the mental constellation of Psychism, and Meister Eckhardt's Idealism in his world-view of Mysticism. In the chart on page 50, Steiner adds the signs of the zodiac to the twelve world-outlooks and the signs of the planets to the seven moods that move through the mental constellations or individual [world-views](#). That gives us 12 + 7 or 19 world conceptions. He adds the three [soul-tones](#) of Theism, Intuitionism, and Naturalism and finishes up with the special unitary case that affects all humans, [Anthropomorphism](#). That brings the grand total of cosmic conceptions to 23.

When one looks in a mirror, is it better to say that mirror makes the face that appears in it or that the mirror only reflects what appears in front of it? In other words, is the reflected face inside the mirror or outside the mirror? Even the most hardened materialist would have to admit that the reflected face is outside the mirror and the mirror only casts an illusion that the face is inside the mirror, an illusion that may only fool pets and naive children with its simulation of reality. When we read of materialistic scientists who aver that the brain is the sole and necessary organ of thought, let us remember that this feature of thought may also be an illusion that can fool those naive to the reality of the spiritual world. Scientists make few errors when they stick to their materialistic instruments, but when they make proclamations that are not supportable by their instruments but rather by their meta-physics, they are likely

to be fraught with serious error.

A present day equivalent to the mirror metaphor would be to say that when an email arrives on my computer screen, it comes from a person residing inside of my computer. These are real thoughts generated by another person, so must not that person be inside of my computer? A scientist might react to such a question thus, "Silly fool! Those thoughts are transmitted by wires into your computer from another person sitting in front of their computer!" And I would be thinking of this thought by Jane Roberts, "Where is the tree from which the fruit drops into mind's basket?"

In my review of [Karmic Relationships](#), Volume 3, I wrote as follows:

**What do these people of today think when they read the beginning lines of the *Iliad* where Homer writes "Sing, oh Muse, the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus."? I imagine that they think Homer was speaking metaphorically, *as if* a Muse were speaking to him. These people would certainly not think that (page 15) "In the Ether which reaches up to the Moon, there are the thoughts. We perceive the thoughts, receive them into ourselves." And yet that is what Homer thought in his time, what led him to open his books in such a fashion.**

People in the time of Homer perceived their thoughts as falling into them, as apples into their "mind's basket" and today we perceive our thoughts as being created by the wetware of the cells of our physical brain. Has reality changed or merely our perception of reality? Were the Homerians right and the materialist scientists of today wrong? Or have we lost certain clairvoyant abilities over time due to the fall into materialism that blinds us to reality and leads us to make conclusions based on a materialistic metaphysics?

**[ page 61] The uncompromising materialist of our day finds it suits his purpose to say that the brain forms the thought -- more exactly, that the central nervous system forms the thought. For anyone who sees through things, this is about as true as to say when one looks into a mirror that the mirror has "made" the face. In fact, the face is outside the mirror; the mirror only reflects the face, throws it back. The experience a man has of this thoughts is quite similar. The experience of real, active thinking no more arises from the brain that the image of a face is created by the mirror. . . . When someone thinks, he really perceives only the last phases of his thinking-activity, of his thinking experience.**

Everyone is aware of the process by which one is puzzled by something unexplainable, can't figure it out, and finally gives up on the puzzle, only later to find *out of the blue* the answer appearing in one's mind. It's as though the brain did not have the answer, but had to await its arrival from somewhere else in order to be able to reflect it. This may sound a bit foolish to the more scientific minded of my readers, but I beg their indulgence to read on. Perhaps when something appears foolish to their minds, it is only a reflection of a foolishness within their own minds whose correction they have shunned successfully, up until now.

**[page 61] For example, if you want to perceive the thought "lion", your thinking activity first sets in motion certain parts of the brain, deep within it, so that they become the "mirror" for the perception of the thought "lion". And the agent who thus makes the brain into a mirror is you yourself. What you finally perceive as thoughts are the reflections, the mirror-pictures; what you first have to prepare so that the right reflection may appear is some part or other of the brain. You, with your soul-activity, are the very thing that gives the brain the form and capacity for reflecting your thinking as thoughts. If you want to go back to the activity on which the thought is based, then it is the activity which, from out of the soul, takes hold of the brain and gets to work there. And when from out of your soul you set up a certain activity in your brain, this brings about a reflection such that you perceive the thought "lion".**

Is this not similar to the process of tuning an FM radio to a station, say, 90.7, which one knows is devoted

to playing jazz? One turns the dial, and jazz music emerges from the radio's speakers. When we do this, we do not claim that the radio is manufacturing the jazz music within itself, do we? We distinguish the tuning process as the preparation for the reception of the jazz music from its arrival from outside the radio. One step is tuning and the second step is listening.

**[page 62] A person who makes a little progress in occult perception can separate the two phases of his soul-activity. He can trace how it is that when he wants to think something or other, he has first not simply to grasp the thought, but to prepare his brain for it.**

Okay, one of you may be thinking, where's the transmitting station for those thought-signals that are arriving in our FM-brain? and that would be an appropriate question to ask. And in the answer we catch a glimpse of the value of the diagram in Figure 1.

**[page 63] Our brain could not be worked upon by our daily life if our whole organism were not so prepared that it provides a basis for this daily work. And this work of preparation comes from the cosmos. Thus as we work daily at the "engraving" of the brain, which makes it into a mirror-apparatus for our daily thoughts, so, in so far as we cannot ourselves do this engraving, this giving form, form has to be given to us from the cosmos.**

"Form given to us from the cosmos" sounds a lot like jazz music sent to us from a distant FM radio station to me. Look back at Figure 1. and you will see what may be thought of as twelve different FM radio stations transmitting different formats or forms of music. One sends classical music, another popular, another golden oldies, another jazz, and so on. What is it that inclines us to listen to a given music?

**[page 63] For example, that which appears to us finally in the sign of Idealism is present in the spiritual cosmos as the activity producing Idealism, and it can so work upon a man that it prepares his whole organism so that he inclines to Idealism. In like manner are the other varieties of moods and signs worked in upon men from out of the spiritual cosmos.**

"We humans are built up according to the thoughts of the cosmos." Steiner says on page 63. Does this seem strange to you? What if he had said, "We humans are created in the likeness of God?" Can you so form your brain such that those two ideas can be perceived as expressing the same thought in two slightly different ways? If further, we understand that when say the word God, we are talking about the cosmic Hierarchies, does it now seem acceptable to think the thought that when the Hierarchies think, they think us?

**[page 64] As our little brain-processes mirror our little thoughts, so do we mirror the thoughts of the cosmos which are engraved upon the world. When the Hierarchies of the cosmos "think", they "think", for example, men. As our little thoughts emerge from our little brain-processes, so do the thoughts of the Hierarchies arise from their work, to which we ourselves belong. As parts of our brain are for us the reflecting-apparatus which we first work up for our thoughts, so are we, we little beings, the substance which the Hierarchies of the cosmos prepare for their thoughts. Thus we might say, in a certain sense, that we can feel ourselves with regard to the cosmos as a little portion of our brain might feel with regard to ourselves.**

"But, but, but," your pre-engraved brain may be feeding up to you its pre-prepared thoughts, "I am an individual, not part of imaginary angelic hierarchy!" And you would be right.

**[page 65] But as little as we, in our soul-spiritual nature, are our brains, so little are the Beings of the Hierarchies "we". Hence we have an independent status in relation to the Beings of the Hierarchies. And we can say that while in a certain manner we serve them so that they may be able to think through us, yet at the same time we are independent**

**beings with identities of our own, as indeed, in a certain way, the particles of our brain have their own life.**

As you, dear Reader, read this review, your eyes roam over the letters that I splash across the page. In your brain these scattered letters form into words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs of meaning. The higher hierarchies, to extend Steiner's metaphor in the passage below, scan each of us as a single letter, groups of us as words, folk groups as sentences, and countries as paragraphs of meaning as they read the book of the world at any one instant in time.

**[page 66] We learn to understand - if I may express myself figuratively - that the eyes of the Beings of the higher Hierarchies roam over the single individualities among men, and that the individualities are to them what the individual letters of a book are to us when we are reading. This we may look upon only with holy awe: we are overhearing the thought-activity of the cosmos.**

Steiner says that grasping our relationship to the cosmos through Spiritual Science helps us "to understand our one-sided predispositions as much as it enlarges our all-around knowledge." It helps us to foster peace between these various world-outlooks and to pinpoint those who exceed the limits of their constellation (Figure 1.).

**[page 67] These persons do great harm by hypnotising the world with opinions that get by without any attention being paid to the constellation behind them. All forms of one-sidedness that try to claim universal validity must be strongly repulsed. The world does not admit of being explained by a person who has special predilections for this or that. And when he wants to explain it on his own and so to found a philosophy, then this philosophy works harmfully, and Spiritual Science has the task of rejecting the arrogance of this pretentious claim to universality.**

"As Above, so Below" -- that great thought of Hermes Tri-Magestus expresses well the form of the thought of Rudolf Steiner when he says in his closing thoughts of Lecture Four, " We feel ourselves as souls embedded in cosmic thought, just as we feel our thoughts, the little thoughts we think, embedded in our soul-life." Thus do we return to the first words of this review, after we have prepared our brain for the engraving of the thoughts expressed there:

**[page 70] "I think my thoughts" and "I am a thought which is thought by the Hierarchies of the cosmos."**

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