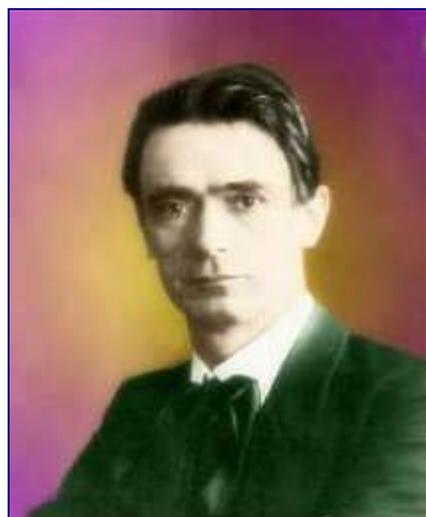


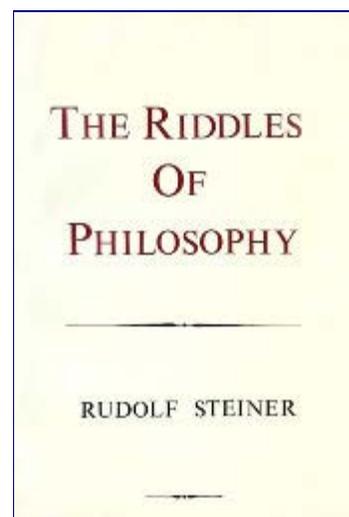
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*A READER'S JOURNAL*

**The Riddles of Philosophy, GA#18**  
by  
**Rudolf Steiner**

Introduction by Fritz C. A. Koelln  
A 1914 Book last published by The  
Anthroposophical Press in 1973  
Review Version Printed by Good Mountain  
Press in 2003  
A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2006



This book has been a long trek for me. Over five hundred pages of dense philosophical discussions during which Steiner reviews every major facet of philosophy and every key philosopher from Aristotle to Einstein. He basically unravels the riddles of philosophy as he leads up to the dénouement, a presentation of how his spiritual science or *anthroposophy* resolves the key problems in most of the philosophical fields he covers.

In the Introduction (1973), Fritz C. A. Koelln writes:

**[page 11 (1)] As Aristotle's statement (Metaph. XII, 7) that *the actuality of thinking is life in this way (2)* becomes a real experience of the thinker, human freedom is born. Man becomes free in his actions in the external world, developing the moral imagination necessary for the situation in which he finds himself. At the same time his spirit frees itself from the bodily encasement in which thoughts had appeared as unreal shadows. The process of his real spiritual development has begun.**

**In this way the *Riddles of Philosophy* may be considered as a bridge that can lead from Steiner's early philosophical works into the study of anthroposophy.**

How to review a book which is itself a review of many books and authors — a book which I plodded through for almost three years — this is the conundrum I face and, lacking any idea of how to do it, I will simply proceed and allow you and me to read the results as they unfold.

What does Steiner say is the theme of this book? In the 1923 Preface, he writes:

**[page 12] When, on the occasion of its second edition in 1914, I enlarged my book, *World and Life Conceptions of the Nineteenth Century*, the result was the present volume, *The Riddles of Philosophy*. In this book I intend to show those elements of world conceptions that appear historically and that move the contemporary observer of these riddles to experiences of greater depth of consciousness as he encounters the feelings with which they were experienced by the thinkers of the past.**

He clearly states that we are to expand our consciousness by encountering feelings. This is a mighty challenge to him: to present material in such a way that we can feel as those philosophical writers of the past two centuries felt and from that move our consciousness to a new level. If you, dear Reader, do not feel up to this challenge, stop reading now. But if you do, I hope you will be rewarded with enough of an overview that you will endeavor to read the entire book.

Each of us has a Hegel and a Haeckel inside of us — a part of us that like Hegel lives in the thought element and a part of us that like Haeckel lives in the sensory element. Which is correct? Steiner says they are both correct in the sense that we must learn the positive aspects of both extremes of philosophy. What seems contradictory at one level becomes two useful ways of viewing the world when one rises to a higher level.

**[page 14] I do not mean to conceal the contradictions in the history of philosophy, but I intend to show what remains valid in spite of the contradictions. That Hegel and Haeckel are treated in this book to reveal what is positive and not negative in both of them can, in my opinion, be criticized as erroneous only by somebody who is incapable of seeing how fruitful such a treatment of the positive is.**

Steiner turns the question "Which one is correct?" into "How is each one useful?" and provides us with answers to his reframed question.

**[page 14] Whoever is able to enter into both modes of thinking will find in Hegel's philosophy the possibility to strengthen his power of spontaneous, active thinking. In Haeckel's mode of thought he will find the possibility to become aware of relations between distant formations of nature that tend to raise significant questions in the mind of man. Placed side by side and measured against one another in this fashion, Hegel and Haeckel will no longer lead us into oppressive scepticism but will enable us to recognize how the striving shoots and sprouts of life are sent out from very different corners of the universe.**

One must become as materialistic as Haeckel to understand him and as idealistic as Hegel to understand him.

**[page 15] One must be capable of thinking idealistically with the idealist and materialistically with the materialist. For only thus will the faculty of the soul be awakened that can become active in spiritual intuition.**

It is to Rudolf Steiner's great credit that he does not degrade materialism, but rather recognizes its validity as long as it stays within its limits. Staying within those limits is something for which modern day materialists have lost their compass, and the historical presentation of this book provides one a comprehensive way of recovering that compass.

**[page 15, 16] It cannot be the task of an historical presentation to fight materialism or to distort it into a caricature, for within its limits it is justified. It is right to represent materialistically those processes of the world that have a material cause. We only go astray when we do not arrive at the insight that comes when, in pursuing the material processes, we are finally led to the conception of the spirit. To maintain that the brain is not a necessary condition of our thinking insofar as it is related to sense perception is an error. It is also an error to assume that the spirit is not the creator of the brain through which it reveals itself in the physical world through the production and formation of thought.**

To hold the view that the one way we think today is the best way to think is *not* the best way to think. Such a view will not help us to understand the philosophical evolution of humankind in which each following age contradicts the preceding one. Philosophers of the twenty-first century will oppose Steiner's

presentation of the early twentieth century, but as Steiner shows, they do so metaphysically all the while purporting the non-existence of metaphysical realities! (page 19)

**[page 19, 20] Opposition to my presentation will be based on the superstitious denial of the existence of forces in human history that manifest themselves in certain specific ages, and dominate effectively the development of human thought in a meaningful and necessary way. I had to accept such forces because the observation of this development had proved their existence to me, and because this observation made apparent to me the fact that the history of philosophy will only become a science if one does not shrink back from recognizing forces of this kind.**

[R. G. Collingwood](#), a famous middle-twentieth-century philosopher of history, claimed that "all history is the history of thought," that one can only understand history properly if one understands how the way of thinking today grew out of the way of thinking in past ages. To understand history properly, one must understand the *evolution of consciousness*, which, rightly understood, comprises the transformations our way of thinking undergo over spans of time.

**[page 20] In the history of thought, more than in any other branch of historical reflection, it is necessary to let the present grow out of the past. For in the comprehension of those ideas that satisfy the demand of the present, we have the foundation for the insight that spreads the right light over the past. The thinker who is incapable of obtaining a philosophical viewpoint that is adequate to the dominating impulses of his own age will also be unable to discover the significance of the intellectual life of the past.**

The results of the evolution of consciousness of one person may be called inconsistent by those who do not consider such evolution of their own thinking possible. The evolution of consciousness has a consistency which can be missed by those who insist on a consistency of thought. In his Preface to the 1914 Edition (the first one), Steiner makes a pre-emptive strike against those who would accuse him of an inconsistency of thought.

**[page 23] There will, however, always be people who like to construe contradictions among the successive writings of a person, because they either cannot or else do not wish to consider the certainly admissible extension of such a person's thought development. The fact that in such an extension much is expressed differently in later years certainly cannot constitute a contradiction if one does not mean by consistency that the latter expression should be a mere copy of the earlier one, but is ready to observe a consistent development of a person.**

As I read the above passage on November 17, 2003, I scribbled in the margin this poetic thought which called to my mind the [famous quote](#) of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines."

**A foolish consistency of thought may appear  
To one who does not hold a consistency of development dear.**

It has seemed to me in recent years as I entered the sunny side of sixty years old that the two maxims over the Temple to Apollo at Delphi have risen from quaint sayings to prominence in my life:

**I. Know thyself.  
II. Nothing in excess.**

Abraham Maslow postulates a hierarchy of needs in the human being which progresses from the physiological up through the need for self-actualization. Rudolf Steiner had earlier expressed a similar idea focusing on the two ends of the hierarchy as being two forms of hunger: one physiologically for

body-food and the other psychologically as soul-food.

**[page 24] The nature of the human soul at a certain stage of its development causes a similar necessity. It is manifest in the need to gain from life a certain spiritual return that, just as food satisfies hunger, satisfies the soul's challenge, "Know Thyself". This feeling can lay hold on the human soul so powerfully that it can be forced to think, "Only then am I *fully human* in the true sense of the word when I develop within myself a relation to the world that expresses its fundamental character in the challenge, 'Know Thyself'." The soul can reach the point where it considers this feeling as an *awakening out of the dream of life that it dreamt before this particular experience.***

In learning something new, it's best to know all about it before you start is one of my [basic rules](#). Steiner does this by pointing out four distinct stages in humankind's learning to "Know Itself" that he came to recognize. One cannot understand Steiner rightly unless one understands the objective existence of spiritual forces is on a par with the objective existence of physical forces. One is then able to understand why he calls his work spiritual science and establishes it on as firm a philosophical basis as that of physical science. [Note that he writes about himself as author of this book in the third person in this next passage.]

**[page 26] Four distinctly discernible epochs in the evolution of the philosophical struggle of mankind presented themselves to his view. He had to recognize the difference of these epochs as distinct as the difference of the species of a realm of nature. This observation led him to acknowledge in the realm of the history of man's philosophical development the existence of objective spiritual impulses following a definite law of evolution of their own, independent of the individual men in whom they are observed. The achievements of these men as philosophers thus appear as the manifestation of these impulses that direct the courses of events under the surface of external history. The conviction is then suggested that such results arise from the *unprejudiced* observation of the historical facts, much as a natural law rests on the observation of facts of nature. The author of this book believes that he has not been misled by preconceptions to present an arbitrary construction of the historical process, but that the facts force the acknowledgment of results of the kind indicated.**

The four stages of thought began with the ancient Greeks [-800 to 0] for whom thought was a mode of perception. One can read this in the first words of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in which Homer writes to his Muse, "Speak to me of the wrath of Achilles" [the *Iliad*] — he had perceived what to write by listening to the voice of his Muse and recording what he heard. Thoughts *painted* Homer and the centuries of Greeks who followed him up to the Current Era [year 0] like colors painted vases of their day. Thoughts painted Greek minds as if the world were the artist dabbing colors and designs on them.

The next stage was the Christian epoch [0-800 A. D.] during which thoughts filled Christian minds as if their minds were palettes of colors and they were the artist in front of the canvas of the world. One can readily note the difference in the way writers began their work leading up to the Christian epoch, as in Virgil's *Aeneid*, which begins, "Of arms, I sing, and of the man who first from the Trojan shores beneath the ban of fate to Italy and coasts Lavinian came..." Although Virgil wrote in the *Aeneid* of the same Trojan War as did Homer, the span of years from Homer to Virgil marked an evolution from the Greek mind to the Christian mind, as evinced in the very first sentence of the texts of each man's works. Homer is the recipient of words about Achilles — he is the vase painted by colors. Some eight plus centuries later, Virgil is the author of words about Aeneas — the painter spreading the colors from his palette upon a canvas depicting "arms and the man."

If thought as perception characterized ancient Greek thought, thought blends into self-knowledge during the early Christian period from (0 to 800 A. D.). This was followed by the period from (800 to 1600 A. D.) when thought comes to be understood as being — in the words of Descartes, *cogito ergo sum*, "I think,

therefore I am."

**[page 30] As a mark of this stage of development, there shines like a brilliant star in the firmament of the spirit, the words, "I think, therefore I am," which were spoken by Descartes (1596 - 1650). One feels the soul flowing in thought life, and in the awareness of this stream one believes one experiences the true nature of the soul itself. The representative of that time feels himself so secure within this existence recognized in thought life that he arrives at the conviction that true knowledge could only be a knowledge that is experienced in the same way as the soul experiences thought life resting on its own foundation. This becomes the viewpoint of Spinoza (1632 - 1677).**

For the next period (1600 to 2400 A. D.), we reach a stage of development during which the self is viewed for the first time as consciousness. The first or Greek period could be considered as a period of the Sentient Soul development, the next two periods as the Intellectual Soul development, and our period as that of Consciousness Soul development. We have developed a materialistic view of nature in which our own human nature seems to have no place. Physicians dissect dead bodies and cannot find the meaning of life anywhere in them.

**[page 32] In the fourth period a picture of nature emerges that has detached itself in turn from the inner soul life. The tendency arises to think of nature in such a way that nothing is allowed to be mixed into its conception that has been derived from the soul and not exclusively from nature itself. Thus, the soul is, in this period, expelled from nature, and with its inner experiences confined to its subjective world. The soul is not about to be forced to admit that everything it can gain as knowledge by itself can have a significance only for itself. It cannot find in itself anything to point to a world in which this soul could have its roots with its true being. For in the picture of nature it cannot find any trace of itself.**

But as Steiner discussed above, an impulse reappears for the soul to unite itself with the materialistic picture of nature.

**[page 32, 33] The self-conscious soul, confronted with this nature picture, feels as its fundamental question, "How do I gain a world picture in which both the inner world with its true essence and the external nature are securely rooted at the same time?". The impulse caused by this question dominates the philosophical evolution from the beginning of the fourth period; the philosophers themselves may be more or less aware of that fact. This is also the most important impulse of the philosophical life of the present age.**

And this is the impulse to which Steiner provides us an answer in the course of this book. He starts with the world-conception of the Greek Thinkers in Chapter II. To understand the ancient Greek thinkers, one must get a handle on the stories they tell which we call myths. Consider this analogy. What would you tell a person who reviewed the movie films from the beginning of the industry and then claimed that the world was obviously all black and white until the 1930s when Technicolor movies first appeared? You would undoubtedly explain to that person that our technology could only produce black and white movies before that time, and the world itself existed in full color before then even though all we have are black and white movies of it. Likewise, those who claim that the ancient Greeks created from their own imagination the spiritual beings (gods) who inhabited their myths and stories make the same mistake. They err as egregiously as those who would claim the world was black and white before Technicolor was invented! They mistake their flattened black & white map of the world of the ancient Greeks for the vibrant living color world the Greeks actually lived in. Unable to grasp that world in its fullness, they shrink it to fit their own limitations.

In this book, Steiner provides such thinkers with the tools to break out of the box of their limitations, if

they will only pick up the tools and go to work. An Iron Curtain has descended over materialistic thinkers every bit as impenetrable as the concrete wall that separated East and West Germany for almost fifty years. To paraphrase what Ronald Reagan told Mikhail Gorbachev, "Mr. Thinker, Tear down this wall!"

If we tear down this wall, we have a chance to grasp the world in living color in which Pherekydes of Syros lived and wrote. His three principal concepts about his world were of Zeus, Chronos, and Chthon.

**[page 38, 39] Chronos is not time as we think of it today. Chronos is a being that in contemporary language can be called "spiritual" if one keeps in mind that one does not thereby exhaust its meaning. Chronos is alive and its activity is the devouring, the consumption of the life of another being, Chthon. Chronos rules in nature; Chronos rules in man; in nature and man Chronos consumes Chthon. It is of no importance whether one considers the consumption of Chthon through Chronos as inwardly experienced or as external events, for in both realms the same process goes on. Zeus is connected with these two beings. In the meaning of Pherekydes one must no more think of Zeus as a deity in the sense of our present day conception of mythology, than as of mere "space" in its present sense, although he is the being through whom the events that go on between Chronos and Chthon are transformed into spatial, extended form.**

**The co-operation of Chronos, Chthon and Zeus is felt directly as a picture content in the sense of Pherekydes, just as much as one is aware of the idea that one is eating, but it is also experienced as something in the external world, like the conception of the colours blue or red. This experience can be imagined in the following way. We turn our attention to fire as it consumes its fuel. Chronos lives in the activity of fire, of warmth. Whoever regards fire in its *activity* and keeps himself under the effect, not of independent thought but of image content, looks at Chronos. In the activity of fire, not in the sensually perceived fire, he experiences *time* simultaneously. Another conception of time does not exist before the birth of thought. What is called "time" in our present age is an idea that has been developed only in the age of intellectual world conception.**

One of the ideas of Pherekydes which he passed along to his student Pythagoras was that of the development of human beings through repeated earthly lives.

**[page 45] The idea of reincarnation is present in Pythagoras, but it would be erroneous to believe that he — along with Pherekydes, who is mentioned as his teacher in antiquity — had yielded to this idea because he had by means of a logical conclusion arrived at the thought that the path of development indicated above could only be reached in repeated earthly lives.**

As we look at the early Greek philosophers of Thales, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus, we can see in what they each considered to be the fundamental origin of things, three of the temperaments.

**[page 47] Thus the statement is made that the fundamental and original being of all things was to be found in "water," according to Thales; . . . in "air," according to Anaximenes; in "fire," in the opinion of Heraclitus.**

In our period of the intellectual world conception, the idea of the temperaments to this day preserves the points of view of those early Greek philosophers.

**[page 48, 49] One called the melancholic temperament, the earthy; the phlegmatic, the watery; the sanguine, the airy; the choleric, the fiery. These are not merely allegorical expressions. One did not feel a completely separated soul element, but experienced in oneself a soul-body entity as a unity. In this unity was felt the stream of forces that go, for instance, through a phlegmatic soul, to be like the forces in external nature that are experienced in the effects of water. One saw these external water effects to be the same as what the soul experienced in a phlegmatic mood. The thought habits of today must**

**attempt an empathy with the old modes of conception if they want to penetrate into the soul life of earlier times.**

In Heraclitus, who is best known for saying, "You can't step in the same river twice," one can also discern the origins or rationale for reincarnation as a process.

**[page 50] The world soul pulsates in his own human soul and communicates to it of its own life as long as the human soul knows itself as living in it. Out of such a feeling of union with the world soul, the thought originates in Heraclitus: "Whatever lives has death in itself through the stream of becoming that is running through everything, but death again has life in itself. Life and death are in our living and dying. Everything has everything else in itself; only thus can eternal becoming flow through everything".**

I recall a facetious story from college when a professor asked the class, "If there were a shapely redheaded young lady standing against this blackboard, and you started from the back wall walking towards her, going half the distance in the first minute, half the remaining distance in the next minute, would you ever reach her?" A mathematician put his hand up immediately and said, "Professor, by Zeno's Paradox, there would always be half the distance remaining and I would never reach her." Another hand popped up, this time an engineer, who said, "Professor, I think I would get close enough to her for all practical purposes."

**[page 52] Through such contradictions Zeno intimates how a conceptual imagination that leans on the external world is caught in self-contradiction. He points to the difficulty such thought meets when it attempts to find the truth.**

Another great thinker of that time, Democritus, is known for coming up with the first "atomic" theory by which all things were made not of the "living germs" of Anaxagoras, but instead of "dead indivisible particles of matter."

**[page 55] With Democritus, the homoiomerics of Anaxagoras have become, to a considerable degree, more material. In Anaxagoras, one can still compare the entities of the basic parts with living germs. With Democritus, they become dead indivisible particles of matter, which in their different combinations make up the things of the outer world. They mix freely as they move to and fro; thus, the events of nature come to pass. The world reason (*nous*) of Anaxagoras, which has the world processes grow out of the combined action of the homoiomerics like a spiritual (incorporeal) consciousness, with Democritus, turns into the unconscious law of nature (*ananke*). The soul is ready to recognize only what it can grasp as the result of simple thought combinations. Nature is now completely deprived of life and soul; thought has faded as a soul experience into the inner shadow of inanimate nature. In this way, with Democritus, the intellectual *prototype* of all more or less materialistically coloured world conceptions of later times has made its appearance.**

The atomistic world of Democritus converts the thoughts experienced in the soul into mere shadow experiences creating an "emaciation of the soul" as humans lost their inner security. Along comes the Sophist Protagoras of Abdera (-480 to -410) with his view that, "Man is the measure of all things." Protagoras strives for thinking to depend solely on its own power. This worked counter to the maxim of Apollo to "Know Thyself" and led the Greek spirit to the edge of an abyss. It was left to Socrates to restore Greek spirit by convincing those around him that "truth is revealed in the human soul through thinking if, as was the case with Socrates, this soul is grounded in its own substance." (Page 59)

**[page 60] With the birth of thought man was directed toward his "soul". The question now arises as to what this soul says when it begins to speak, expressing what the world forces have laid into it. Through the attitude Plato takes with respect to Socrates, the resulting answer is that in the human soul the reason of the world speaks what it intends**

**to reveal to man. The foundation is laid with this step for the *confidence* expressed in the revelations of the human soul insofar as it develops *thought* in itself. The figure of Socrates appears in the sign of this confidence.**

Socrates saw that it was no longer necessary to go to the Temple at Delphi to ask questions of an priestly oracle because the individual thinker has the power of an oracle within.

**[page 60, 61] World reason shines into thought life without especially established institutions. Socrates felt that the force lives in the thinking soul that used to be sought in the oracles. He experienced the "daimonion" in himself, the spiritual force that leads the soul. Thought has brought the soul to the consciousness of itself. With his conception of the daimonion speaking in him that, always leading him, told him what to do, Socrates meant to say, "The soul that has found its way to the thought life is justified to feel as if it communicated in itself with the world reason. It is an expression of the high valuation of what the soul possesses in its thought experience."**

Plato follows Socrates and records for us the thoughts of Socrates as they shine through his own. Plato is convinced that "nothing that man knows through the senses or otherwise has any value as long as the soul has not exposed it to the light of thought."

**[page 62] Philosophy becomes for Plato the science of ideas as the world of true being, and the idea is the manifestation of the world spirit through the revelation of thought. The light of the world spirit shines into the soul of man and reveals itself there in the form of ideas; the human soul, in seizing the idea, unites itself with the force of the world spirit. The world that is spread in space and time is like the mass of the ocean water in which the stars are reflected, but what is real is only reflected as idea.**

What is reflected in the ocean is the world substance, and what is reflected in the human being is the world spirit appearing as ideas through thoughts. Plato's disciple, Aristotle (-384 to -321), used ideas to understand the things and events of the world. Plato presumed the pre-existence of the soul before birth, but Aristotle did not. When Christianity arrived, it was Aristotle's views which held sway and do so today in conventional church theology.

**[page 65, 67] Plato, like Aristotle, lets his conception of the soul shed its light on his entire world conception. In both thinkers we describe the fundamental constitution of their philosophy as a whole if we succeed in determining the basic characteristics of their soul conceptions. . . . With Aristotle's focus on a spiritual soul the perspective toward a spiritual world in general is naturally given. . . . The spiritual soul of man belongs to this world sphere; before it is united with a body-soul entity, it does not exist as an individual being but only as a part of the world spirit. Through this connection it acquires its individual existence separated from the world spirit and continues to live after the separation from the body as a spiritual being. Thus, the individual soul entity has its beginning with the human earthly life and then lives on as immortal. A pre-existence of the soul before-earth life is assumed by Plato but not by Aristotle. The denial of the soul's pre-existence is as natural to Aristotle, who has the idea exist in the thing, as the opposite view is natural to Plato, who conceives of the idea as hovering over the thing. Aristotle finds the idea in the thing, and the soul acquires in its body what it is to be in the spirit world as an individuality.**

One cannot ignore the contribution of Epicurus (-324 to -270) whose name is immortalized in word "epicurean" which means a person devoted to the pleasures of the senses, a gourmet, etc.

**[page 69] The fact that events can produce pain in man but cannot do so in the external world, however, drives the soul to the recognition of its own special nature. A doctrine of virtues, which, like the one of Epicurus, endeavours to live in harmony with world**

**reason, can, as may easily be conceived, appreciate an ideal of life that leads to the avoidance of pain and displeasure. Thus, everything that does away with displeasure becomes the highest Epicurean life value.**

As we enter the Christian age, Gnosticism is one of the strong currents remaining from the ancient Greek thought life, but its independence from the church dogma led it to be called a heresy at various times thereafter.

**[page 75] We can see Platonic and older philosophies engaged on European soil in the endeavour to comprehend or to contradict what the religions spread as their doctrines. Important thinkers attempt to present the revelations of religion as fully justified before the forum of the old world conceptions.**

What is historically known as *Gnosticism* develops in this way in a more Christian or a more pagan colouring. Personalities of significance of this movement are *Valentinus*, *Basilides* and *Marcion*. Their thought creation is a comprehensive conception of world evolution. Cognition, gnosis, when it rises from the intellectual to the trans-intellectual realm, leads into the conception of a higher world-creative entity. This being is infinitely superior to everything seen as the world by man, and so are the other lofty beings it produces out of itself — the aeons.

**[page 76] The Gnostics who were inclined toward Christianity saw in Christ Jesus the perfect aeon, which has united with the terrestrial world.**

With advent of Clemens of Alexandria and Origen (both ca 200 A. D.) Greek thought is bent to serve Christian dogma. Dionysius the Areopagite (ca. 533 A. D.) and Scotus Erigena (ninth century A. D.) add their twists to religious thought.

**[page 76, 77] When the soul liberates itself from everything that it can perceive and think as *being*, when it also transcends beyond what it is capable of thinking as *non-being*, then it can spiritually divine the realm of the *over-being*, the hidden Godhead. In this entity, primordial being is united with primordial goodness and primordial beauty. Starting from this primeval trinity, the soul witnesses a descending order of beings that lead down to man in hierarchical array. . . . In the world conceptions of the Gnostics, Dionysius and Scotus Erigena, the human soul feels its roots in a world ground on which it does not base its support through the forces of thought, but from which it wants to receive the world of thought as a gift.**

Along the way St. Augustine (354 to 430 A. D.) and Thomas Aquinas (1227 to 1274) add their contributions to religious thought.

**[page 80] In St. Augustine, the new element appears as if it were a reminiscence of Greek thought life. He looks into the external world and into himself, and comes to the conclusion: May everything else the world reveals contain nothing but uncertainty and deception, one thing cannot be doubted, that is, the certainty of the soul's experience itself. I do not owe this inner experience to a perception that could deceive me; I am in it myself; it is, for I am present when its being is attributed to it.**

**[page 81] Man is, according to Thomas Aquinas, rooted with his soul life in the reality of the world, but this soul life cannot know this reality in its full extent through itself alone. Man could not know how his own being stands in the course of the world if the spirit being, to which his knowledge does not penetrate, did not deign to reveal to him what must remain concealed to a knowledge relying on its own power alone. Thomas Aquinas constructs his world picture on this presupposition. It has two parts, one of which consists of the truths that are yielded to man's own thought experience about the natural**

**course of things. This leads to a second part that contains what has come to the soul of man through the Bible and religious revelation. Something that the soul cannot reach by itself, if it is to feel itself in its full essence, must therefore penetrate into the soul.**

In the phase of human thinking during the Middle Ages, we find the concept of ego emerging as the name of the being who exists in the human's soul life. Steiner says, "If one calls this *entity* the *ego*, one can say that in modern times the consciousness of the *ego* is stirred up in man's soul life in a way similar to that in which *thought* was born in the philosophical life of the Greeks." (Page 82)

**[page 82] One could say that the *Riddle of the Ego* appears in a great variety of masks. At times it lives in the philosophy of the thinkers in such a concealed way that the statement that this riddle is at the bottom of some view or other might appear as an arbitrary or forced opinion. In the nineteenth century this struggle over the riddle of the ego comes to its most intensive manifestation, and the world conceptions of the present time are still profoundly engaged in this struggle.**

The world conceptions are those of *realism* and *nominalism*. Curiously the word *realism* refers to the "reality of ideas" — but *nominalism* is straightforwardly the theme that ideas are merely "names" that the mind uses to designate things and only the things themselves are real. The nominalist position would have seemed very strange to the Greeks, for whom thought came as a perception, as we mentioned earlier. Steiner says that thought came as a perception to them, "It arose in the soul as the red color appears when a man looks at a rose." (Page 83)

Here he describes how human beings moved away from the direct perception of thought, and the riddles of Realism and Nominalism could come to be debated. Steiner says in several places in other texts that "discussion begins when knowledge ends(3)" — one can see that process at work in the movement from Greek thought to modern thought.

**[page 84, 85] In the period between the ancient current of philosophical life and that of modern philosophy, the source of Greek thought life is gradually exhausted. Under the surface, however, the human soul experiences the approaching ego-consciousness *as a fact*. Since the end of the first half of the Middle Ages, man is confronted with this process as an accomplished fact, and under the influence of this confrontation, new *riddles of life* emerge. Realism and Nominalism are symptoms of the fact that man realizes the situation. The manner in which both Realists and Nominalists speak about thought shows that — compared to its existence in the Greek soul — it has faded out, has been dampened as much as had been the old picture consciousness in the soul of the Greek thinker.**

The major thinkers during this transition are: Meister Eckhardt (died 1327), Johannes Tauler (died 1361), Heinrich Suso (died 1366), Angelus Silesius (1624 - 1677), Nicolaus Cusanus (Nicolaus Chrypffs, born at Kues on the Moselle, 1401, died 1464), Paracelsus (1493 - 1541), and Jakob Boehme (1575 - 1624). This period was followed by the rise of natural science and the major thinkers were Copernicus (1473 - 1543), Kepler (1571 - 1630), Galileo (1564 - 1642), Giordano Bruno (1548 - 1600), and Francis Bacon of Verulam (1561 - 1626). It was Bacon who brought the idea of unbiased observation of sensory data combined with his inductive method to create the basis for modern science.

Bacon lays waste to the then current building of science, and later Galileo rebuilds it. To help us to understand the impact that Bacon and Galileo had on science, Steiner shares with us Goethe's words from his theory of color.

**[page 90, 91, Goethe] Bacon is like a man who is well-aware of the irregularity, insufficiency and dilapidated condition of an old building, and knows how to make this clear to the inhabitants. He advises them to abandon it, to give up the land, the materials**

**and all appurtenances, to look for another plot, and to erect a new building. He is an excellent and persuasive speaker. He shakes a few walls. They break down and some of the inhabitants are forced to move out. He points out new building grounds; people begin to level it off, and yet it is everywhere too narrow. He submits new plans; they are not clear, not inviting. Mainly, he speaks of new unknown materials and now the world seems to be well-served. The crowd disperses in all directions and brings back an infinite variety of single items while at home, new plans, new activities and settlements occupy the citizens and absorb their attention.**

**If through Verulam's method of dispersion, natural science seemed to be forever broken up into fragments, it was soon brought to unity again by Galileo. He led natural philosophy back into the human being. When he developed the law of the pendulum and of falling bodies from the observation of swinging church lamps, he showed even in his early youth that, for the genius, one case stands for a thousand cases. In science, everything depends on what is called, *an apercu*, that is, on the ability of becoming aware of what is really fundamental in the world of phenomena. The development of such an awareness is infinitely fruitful.**

Bacon, Steiner says, pointed to the materials for the construction of a new world conception.

**[page 92] Contrary to Bacon of Verulam, who pointed toward the bricks of the building, *Descartes* (Cartesius) and *Spinoza* turned their attention toward its plan.**

George Berkeley (1685 to 1753) came along with a new plan in which we can only know what appears in our mind.

**[page 103] Berkeley finds that the impressions that the things and events of the world appear to produce on the human soul take place in reality *within this soul* itself. When I see "red," I must bring this "redness" into being within myself; when I feel "warm," the "warmth" lives within me. Thus it is with all things that I apparently receive from without. Except for those elements I produce within myself, I know nothing whatsoever about the external things. Thus, it is senseless to speak about things that consist of material substance, for I know only what appears in my mind as something spiritual. What I call a rose, for instance, is wholly spiritual, that is to say, a conception (an idea) experienced by my mind. There is, therefore, according to Berkeley, nothing to be perceived except what is spiritual, and when I notice that something is effected in me from without, then this effect can only be caused by spiritual entities, for obviously bodies cannot cause spiritual effects and my perceptions are entirely spiritual. There are, therefore, only spirits in the world that influence each other. This is Berkeley's view. It turns the conceptions of Locke into their contrary by construing everything as spiritual reality that had been considered as impression of the material things. Thus, Berkeley believes he recognizes himself with his self-consciousness immediately in a spiritual world.**

With Herder (1744 to 1803) humankind "comes close to what one can call the mysterious experience of the soul with thought."

**[page 115] A world conception must express itself in thoughts, but thought only then endows the soul with the power for which it searches by means of a world conception in the modern age, when it experiences this thought in its process of its birth in the soul. When thought is born, when it has turned into a philosophical system, it has already lost its magical power over the soul. For this reason, the power of thought and the philosophical world picture are so often underestimated. This is done by all those who know only the thought that is suggested to them from without, a thought that they are supposed to believe, to which they are supposed to pledge allegiance. The real power of**

**thought is known only to one who *experiences* it in the process of its formation.**

About Immanuel Kant, someone wrote to a friend, "Kant is not a light of the world but a complete radiating solar system all at once." And another friend, Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote, "he brought about a reform that has no equal in the whole history of human thought." Kant was puzzled over this paradox, "How is it possible that man is in possession of true and certain knowledge and that he is, nevertheless, incapable of knowing anything of the reality of the world in itself?" Steiner says that Kant found an answer, but the cost was dear. His answer "saved the truth and certainty of human knowledge by sacrificing human insight into the grounds of the world." This next passage may help to clarify how Kant did this.

**[page 128] "Reason does not derive its laws *from* nature but prescribes them *to* nature." Kant sums up his conviction in this sentence, but the mind does not produce its inner world without an impetus or impression from without. When I perceive the color red, the perception, "red," is, to be sure, a state, a process within me, but it is necessary for me to have an occasion to perceive "red." There are, therefore, "things in themselves," but we know nothing about them but the fact that they exist. Everything we observe belongs to the appearances within us. Therefore, in order to save the certainty of the mathematical and natural scientific truths, Kant has taken the whole world of observation in the human mind. In doing so, however, he has raised insurmountable barriers to the faculty of knowledge, for everything that we can know refers merely to processes within ourselves, to *appearances or phenomena*, not to things in themselves, as Kant expresses it.**

Steiner cannot accept Kant's approach because it requires that one relinquish all insight into a supersensible world. In Goethe Steiner found the anodyne for what bothered him about Kant.

**[page 137, 138] The evolution of modern world conception thus urges man on to the step: To find the thought in the self-conscious ego that is felt to be alive. *This step Kant did not take; Goethe did.* \* \* \* In all essential points, Goethe arrived at the opposite to Kant's conception of the world. Approximately at the same time that Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Goethe laid down his creed in his prose hymn, *Nature*, in which he placed man completely into nature and in which he presented nature as bearing absolute sway, independent of man: Her own and man's law-giver as well. Kant drew all nature into the human mind. Goethe considered everything as belonging to this nature; he fitted the human spirit into the natural world order: Nature!**

Rudolf Steiner waxes lyrically here as he sings Nature alive once more, calling it to arise from the ashes of Kant's desiccated ideas. One is reminded of Walt Whitman or Kahlil Gibran in this lush prose.

**[page 138] Nature! We are surrounded and enveloped by her, incapable of leaving her domain, incapable of penetrating deeper into her. She draws us into the rounds of her dance, neither asking nor warning, and whirls away with us until we fall exhausted from her arms.... All men are in her and she is in them.... Even the most unnatural is Nature; even the clumsiest pedantry has something of her genius. .... We obey her laws even when we resist them; we are working *with* her even when we mean to work *against* her.... Nature is everything.... She rewards and punishes, delights and tortures herself.... She has placed me into life, she will also lead me out of it. I trust myself into her care. She may hold sway over me. She will not hate her work. It was not I who spoke of her. Nay, it was Nature who spoke it all, true and false. Nature is the blame for all things; hers is the merit.**

After spending many years reading and studying Carl Jung, one day this thought occurred to my Kant-programmed, scientific brain: *the psyche is real*. It is a real being inside of me! This thought caused me to

shutter as a duck might when it shakes the accumulation of dead dust from its feathers. In this next passage Steiner explains that Goethe knew the "self-conscious ego can appear as a real being" — which is another way of saying the psyche is real.

**[page 145] Goethe shows that he is about to find not merely the perceptible idea, the idea that is thought, in the self-conscious ego, but the *living idea*. The self-conscious ego *experiences* a realm in itself that manifests itself as both self-contained and at the same time appertaining to the external world, because the forms of the latter prove to be molded after the models of the creative powers. With this step the self-conscious ego can appear as a real being. Goethe has developed a conception through which the self-conscious ego can feel itself enlivened because it feels itself *in union* with the creative entities of nature. The world conception of modern times attempted to master the riddle of the self-conscious ego; Goethe plants the *living idea* into this ego, and with this force of life pulsating in it, it proves to be a life-saturated reality.**

For Goethe nature and reason are a unity, something one must keep in mind when one reads Goethe, such as in this next passage:

**[page 168] "Poetry points at the mysteries of nature and attempts to solve them through the picture. *Philosophy* points at the mysteries of reason and attempts to solve them through the word."**

Goethe's way of thinking about nature and reason (science) is best illustrated in his theory of color<sup>(4)</sup>. Goethe explains the blueness of the sky thus: darkness, seen through a light-filled space, appears blue. In his exact words: "Light through dark — yellow; dark through light — blue."

**[page 168] The blueness of the sky reveals the fundamental law of color phenomena to us. "One should not search for anything behind the phenomena; they, themselves, are the message." The psychologist, Heinroth, in his *Anthology*, called the mode of thinking through which Goethe arrived at his insights into the natural formation of plants and animals, an "object-related thinking" (*Gegenstaendliches Denken*). What he means is that this mode of thinking does not detach itself from its objects, but that the objects of observation are intimately permeated with this thinking, that Goethe's mode of thinking is at the same time a form of observation, and his mode of observation a form of thinking.**

Our ability to imagine is one of the capabilities of the human being which we cannot incorporate into an artificial instrument.

**[page 170] Imagination uses the one case in order to produce a content-saturated picture of what is essential in the appearances; the intellect that operates by means of abstractions can, through combination, comparison and calculation of the appearances, gain no more than a general rule of their course. This belief in the possible cognitive function of an imagination that rises into a conscious participation in the creative world process is supported by Goethe's entire world conception. Whoever, like him, sees nature's activity in everything, can also see in the spiritual content of the human imagination nothing but higher products of nature. The pictures of fantasy are products of nature and, as they represent nature, they can only contain truth, for otherwise nature would lie to herself in these after-images that she creates of herself. Only men with imagination can attain to the highest stages of knowledge. Goethe calls these men the "comprehensive" and the "contemplative" in contrast to the merely "intellectual-inquisitive," who have remained on a lower stage of cognitive life. The intellectual inquisitive need a calm, unselfish power of observation, the excitement of curiosity, a clear intellect... ; they only digest scientifically what they find ready-made.**

As a physicist I was taught to trust my instruments and to distrust my own sensory discrimination. Goethe turned that way of thinking upside down for me in this way: he taught that the human being was the most sensitive instrument and that artificial instruments, the products of our minds and hands, would never reach the level of discrimination of our natural abilities as a human being. Goethe adds an amazing flourish to Pythagoras' insight that "Man is the measure of all things." Artificial instruments can tear apart and analyze nature, while the human being can perceive unity and process and evolution in nature. Our artificial instruments may extend our abilities in some areas, as a microscope extends our ability to see things in the small, but our artificial instruments are incapable of reaching or exceeding our abilities. To make an artificial instrument to match our abilities is beyond our abilities because we can never know what our highest abilities are enough to create an artificial instrument to duplicate them. We cannot, for example, create life from dead matter, even though we unconsciously produce life within our bodies every moment we are alive.

**[page 171] For "man in himself, insofar as he uses his healthy senses, is the greatest and most exact apparatus of physics that is possible. Yet, that the experiments separated, as it were, from man, and that one wants to know nature only according to the indications of artificial instruments, even intending to limit and prove in this way what nature is capable of, is the greatest misfortune of modern physics." Man, however, "stands so high that in him is represented what cannot be represented otherwise. What is the string and all mechanical division of it compared to the ear of the musician? One can even say, 'What are all elementary phenomena of nature themselves compared to man who must master and modify them all in order to be able to assimilate them to himself to a tolerable degree.' " Concerning his world picture, Goethe speaks neither of a mere knowledge of intellectual concepts nor of belief; he speaks of a *contemplative perception in the spirit*.**

Two of the highest abilities of the human being are playing and poetry. These quotes illustrate this.

**[page 174] One may say about the romantic movement that it carries Schiller's statement to its extreme consequence, "Man plays only where he is human in the full sense of the word, and he is only wholly human when he is playing." Romanticism wants to make the whole world into a realm of the artistic.**

**[page 175] Novalis says, "It is quite bad that poetry has a special name and that the poet represents a special profession. *It is not anything special by itself. It is the mode of activity proper to the human spirit*. Are not the imaginations of man's heart at work every minute?" The ego, exclusively concerned with itself, can arrive at the highest truth: "It seems to man that he is engaged in a conversation, and some unknown spiritual being causes him to develop the most *evident thoughts* in a miraculous fashion. Fundamentally, what the romanticists aimed at did not differ from what Goethe and Schiller had also made their credo: A conception of man through which he appeared as perfect and as free as possible.**

Steiner tells us that "Nature and spirit are not two different entities, but one and the same being in two different forms." He quotes Schelling as saying: "*Nature is to be the visible spirit; spirit the invisible nature*. At this point then, at the point of the absolute identity of the spirit *in us* and of nature *outside us*, the problem must be solved as to how a nature outside ourselves should be possible." Then Steiner adds:

**[page 177] Nature and spirit, then, are not two different entities at all but one and the same being in two different forms. The real meaning of Schelling concerning this unity of nature and spirit has rarely been correctly grasped.**

Schelling dealt with the conundrum of how it is possible that the Sun attracts the Earth in spite of there

being nothing in the space between the Sun and the Earth by saying that the Sun extends its sphere of activity to places where it is not present. (Paraphrase of page 178)

**[page 178] Those who live in coarse, sensual perceptions see a difficulty in such a thought. How can a body act in a place where it is not? Schelling reverses this thought process. He says, "It is true that a body acts only where it is, but it is just as true that it is only where it acts." If we see that the sun affects the earth through the force of attraction, then it follows from this fact that it extends its being as far as our earth and that we have no right to limit its existence exclusively to the place in which it acts through its being visible. The sun transcends the limits where it is visible with its being. Only a part of it can be seen; the other part reveals itself through the attraction. We must also think of the relation of spirit and nature in approximately this manner. The spirit is not merely where it is perceived; it is also where it perceives. Its being extends as far as to the most distant places where objects can still be observed. It embraces and permeates all nature that it knows. When the spirit thinks the law of an external process, this process does not remain outside the spirit. The latter does not merely receive a mirror picture, but extends its essence into a process. The spirit permeates the process and, in finding the law of the process, it is not the spirit in its isolated brain corner that proclaims this law; it is the law of the process that expresses itself. The spirit has moved to the place where the law is active. Without the spirit's attention the law would also have been active but it would not have been expressed. When the spirit submerges into the process, as it were, the law is then, in addition to being active in nature, expressed in conceptual form.**

Everywhere in nature we see diversity, we see things changing. Rarely do we see nature as stagnant, unchanging, in fact, only in places we call *dead* do we see nature unchanging. Nature is thus always engaged in the process of the destruction of sameness, just as the true artist is engaged in the process of the destruction of sameness(5).

**[page 180] The manner in which Schelling has nature return as spirit in himself reminds one of what Goethe believes is to be found in the perfect artist. The artist, in Goethe's opinion, proceeds in the production of a work of art as nature does in its creations. Therefore, we should observe in the artist's creation the same process through which everything has come into being that is spread out before man in nature. What nature conceals from the outer eye is presented in perceptible form to man in the process of artistic creation.**

In discussing Schiller's essay, *On Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, Steiner quotes him [page 185] as explaining the reason for Christ's appearance in human form on Earth thus: "For only the personal can heal the personal, and God must become man to enable man to come to God."

This brings us to Hegel — and Steiner's treatment of him. We find that thinking is the one thing which distinguishes humans from animals, which adds to our soul a spirit while animals have only a soul.

**[page 193] It is thinking only that makes the spirit out of the soul, the soul with which the animal also is gifted. Philosophy is only a consciousness of this content, of the spirit and of its truth. It is consciousness of man's essential nature that distinguishes him from the animal and *makes him capable of religion*. The whole spiritual physiognomy of *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 - 1831)* becomes apparent when we hear words like these from him, through which he wanted to express clearly and poignantly that he regarded *thinking* that is conscious of itself as the highest activity of man, as the force through which alone man can gain a position with respect to the ultimate questions.**

Hegel says, in effect, that there is no being, only becoming.

**[page 204] According to Hegel, there is nowhere in existence a completed first being, but there is only one in eternal motion, in the process of continual *becoming*.**

Are we active participants in the evolution of the world or just thought-cows who lazily chew on thought-cuds? Hegel clearly avers the former to be the case.

**[page 206] It is entirely in Hegel's sense if one maintains that the first being created the lower strata of nature and the human being as well. Having arrived at this point, it has resigned and left to man the task to create, as an addition to the external world and to himself, the thoughts about the things. Thus, the original being, *together with the human being as a co-agent, create the entire content of the world*. Man is a fellow-creator of the world, not merely a lazy spectator or cognitive ruminator of what would have its being just as well without him.**

In this next passage of Steiner's words we can spot a precursor in Hegel for Collingwood's thesis that all history is the history of thought (mentioned above) especially the thoughts which comprise our evolving consciousness of freedom.

**[page 207] Man lifts himself up to the vantage point of the supreme being that rules within him and is the source of his morality. For his moral commandment, he no longer looks to the external world but within his own soul. He makes himself dependent only on himself (paragraph 552 of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*). This independence, this freedom then is nothing that man possesses from the outset, but it is *acquired in the course of historical evolution. World history is the progress of humanity in the consciousness of freedom*.**

One cannot understand the impact Goethe had on the world of thought unless one grasps how Goethe suggested one view a plant in the various stages of its growth. From it one can learn of the evolution of every form of life, from the microscopic to the macrocosmic. Steiner speaks of how Goethe saw the process of plant growth and how Hegel extended that process to the cosmos.

**[page 209] Watch how the plant *in its growth* changes step by step and, gradually led on, transforms from blossoms to fruits. Hegel wants to comprehend all world phenomena in the gradual progress of their development from the simplest dull activity of inert matter to the height of the self-conscious spirit. In the self-conscious spirit he sees the revelation of the primal substance of the world.**

These next words express in Hegel's own words, "the most significant traits of his mode of conception."

**[page 209] "The bud vanishes in the breaking of the blossom, and one could say that the former is contradicted by the latter. In the same way, the fruit declares the blossom to be a false existence and replaces it as its truth. These forms are not merely different from one another but they crowd each other out as they are incompatible. Their fluid nature makes them at once into moments of the organic whole in which they not only do not contradict each other, but in which the one is as necessary as the other, and it is only this equal necessity that constitutes the life of the whole."**

Are thoughts independent entities within us? Does a thought, like an embryo, gestate within us before it comes into the light of day as a full-blown thought? Should we sleep on this thought before we hastily decide? What does it mean to sleep on a thought if not to let it gestate on its own?

**[page 237] Why do we often fail to make headway with some intellectual work in spite of the greatest exertion of our will until some external occasion, often no more than a change in the weather, sets our thoughts afloat again? *This is caused by the fact that our***

***thought process is also an organic activity. Why must we often carry some thoughts with us for years before they become clear and distinct to us? For the reason that our thoughts also are subject to an organic development, that our thoughts also must have their time to mature as well as the fruits in the field or the child in the mother's womb.***

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804 - 1872) answers the question for us, "Do my actions as an individual correspond to what is adequate to the nature of humanity in general?"

**[page 249] If the essence of humanity is man's supreme being, then the highest and first law of his practical life must also be the love of man to man. *Homo homini deus est*, man is God to man. *Ethics is in itself a divine power.***

In Part II of this book, Steiner takes a critical look at Hegel and allows us to see Hegel as a "dead seed" philosopher. He does this by looking at how Vischer followed Hegel's process, but ending up becoming a critic of his own work.

**[page 273] If one searches for the deeper reason for this strange process, one finds that Vischer has become aware of the fact that, as he had permeated his work with Hegelian thoughts, he had introduced an element that had become dead, since it had been taken out of the ground that had provided its life conditions, just as a plant seed dies when its growth is cut off. A peculiar perspective is opening before us as we see Hegel's world conception in this light. The nature of the thought element could demand to be received as a living seed and, under certain conditions, to be developed in the soul. It could unfold its possibility by leading beyond the world picture of Hegel to a world conception in which the soul could come to a knowledge of its own being with which it could truly hold its own position in the external world. Hegel has brought the soul to the point where it can live with the element of thought; the progress beyond Hegel would lead to the *thought's growth in the soul beyond itself and into a spiritual world*. Hegel understood how the soul magically produces thought within itself and experiences itself in thought. He left to posterity the task of discovering by means of living thoughts, which are active in a truly spiritual world, the real being of the soul that cannot fully experience itself in the element of mere thought.**

Thus Steiner shows us that it is not thought in content that is important, but thought in process, that is, not the *perception* of thought, but the *experience* of thought. He summarizes it this way:

**[page 274] It has been shown in the preceding exposition how the development of modern world conception strives from the *perception* of thought toward the *experience* of thought. In Hegel's world conception the world seems to stand before the soul as a self-produced thought experience, but the trend of evolution seems to indicate further progress. Thought must not become stationary as thought; it must not be *merely* thought, not be *experienced merely through thinking*; it must awaken to a still higher life.**

In Lorenz Oken (1779 - 1859), we find a solution for the age-old question, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" Oken shows us how the egg came first when we understand the evolutionary origin of the eggs in such things as cocoons and crustaceous animals.

**[page 322] Oken compares the stages of transformation of the insects with the other animals and finds that the caterpillars have a great similarity with worms, and the cocoons with crustaceous animals. From such similarities this ingenious thinker draws the conclusion that "there is, therefore, no doubt that we are here confronted with a conspicuous similarity that justifies the idea that the evolutionary history in the egg is nothing but a repetition of the history of the creation of the animal classes."**

The dictum that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" is one that students of biology have had to memorize

and understand in college historically. In Ernst Haeckel, we find the person who first understood this process as a way of understanding both ontogenesis — the growth in one lifetime from conception to maturation of one member of a species and phylogenesis — the growth in evolutionary periods of time of the various species from one another.

**[page 328] If we want to explain some organ of an animal of the present age, we look back to the ancestors that had developed this organ under the circumstances in which they lived. What has come into existence through natural causes in earlier times has been handed down to our time through the process of heredity. Through the history of the species the evolution of the individual receives its explanation. The phylogenesis, therefore, contains the causes for the ontogenesis. Haeckel expresses this fact in his fundamental law of biogenetics: "The short ontogenesis or development of the individual is a rapid and brief repetition, an abbreviated recapitulation of the long process of phylogenesis, the development of the species."**

Another giant in the field of science was Muller who gave materialistic scientists a basis for their world conception, a Kantian basis in the sense that "all our knowledge had reference only to processes within ourselves, not to things in themselves."

**[page 342, 343] The physiologist, Johannes Muller (1801 - 58), drew the conclusion from these facts that what man has as his actual sensation does not depend on the external processes but on his organization. Our nerves transmit sensations to us. As we do not have the sensation of the knife that cuts us but a state of our nerves that appears to us as pain, so we also do not have a sensation of the external world when something appears to us as light. What we then really have is a state of our optic nerve. Whatever may happen outside, the optic nerve translates this external event into the sensation of light. "The sensation is not a process that transmits a quality or a state of an external object to our consciousness but one that transmits a quality, a state of our nerves caused by an external event, to our consciousness. This Johannes Muller called "the law of specific sense energies." If that is correct, then our observations contain nothing of the external world but only the sum of our own inner conditions. What we perceive has nothing to do with the external world; it is a product of our own organization. We really perceive only what is in us.**

In 1814, Laplace laid down his thesis that the future of the world could be known to a certainty if we knew the current position of the things of nature and the equations of their motions. He writes:

**[page 350, 351] A mind that would know for a given moment all forces that activate nature as well as the mutual position of the entities of which nature consists would, if its power of comprehension were otherwise sufficient, comprehend in the same formula the motions of the largest celestial body and of the lightest atom. Nothing would be uncertain for such a mind, and the future as well as the past would be within the scope of its perfect and immediate knowledge. Man's power of reasoning offers, with the perfection that it has given to astronomy, a feeble imitation of such a mind.**

Eugen Duhring (1833 - 1921) goes a bit further and suggests we should all think like physicists and confine ourselves to the data provided by sense perception.

**[page 401] One should think like a real expert in mechanics, a real physicist who confines himself to the results of sense perception, of the logical combinations of the intellect and the operations of calculations. Anything that goes beyond this is idle playing with empty concepts. This is Duhring's verdict. Duhring means to raise this form of thinking, however, to its justified position. Whoever depends exclusively on that form of thinking can be sure that it supplies him with insight concerning reality. All brooding**

**over the question of whether or not we actually can penetrate into the mysteries of the world process, all investigations, which, like Kant's, want to limit the faculty of knowledge, are caused by logical distortion. One should not yield to the temptation of a self-sacrificing self-denial of the mind that does not dare to make a positive statement about the world. What we can know is a real and untarnished presentation of the real.**

Near the end of the nineteenth century there were philosophers discussing how the body and spirit affect each other. Gustav Fechner (1801-1887) was one of those.

**[page 415 According to Fechner's mode of conception, it is of no use to ponder on how body and spirit effect each other, for they are not two entities at all; they are both one and the same thing. They appear to us only as different when we observe them from different viewpoints. Fechner considers man to be a body that is spirit at the same time. From this point of view it becomes possible for Fechner to imagine all nature as spiritual, as animated.**

Steiner was another one of those discussing how the body and the spirit interact with each other. He strove to bring a scientific method to investigating the spiritual world. He states this clearly on page 423, "One would like to have truths concerning the spiritual world concerning the destiny of the soul and its connection with the world that are gained in the same way as the conceptions of natural science." Following that he points to Brentano as such a person.

**[page 423] A thinker who derived his thoughts as much from the philosophical thinking of the past as from his penetration of the mode of thinking of natural science was *Franz Brentano* (1828 - 1912). He demanded of philosophy that it should arrive at its results in the same manner as natural science. Because of this imitation of the methods of natural science, he hoped that psychology, for instance, would not have to renounce its attempts to gain an insight into the most important problem of soul life.**

**[Brentano's words] But for the hopes of a Plato and Aristotle to attain sure knowledge concerning the continued life of our better part after the dissolution of our body, the laws of the association of ideas, the development of convictions and opinions and of the origin and development of pleasure and love would be anything but a true compensation. If this new natural scientific method of thinking would really bring about the elimination of the problem of immortality, this would have to be considered as significant for psychology.**

Near the end of the nineteenth century we find the mode of modern thinking is adopted from natural science due to its fruitfulness and efficiency.

**[page 449] An affirmation of this is to be found in the work of a natural scientist like *T. H. Huxley* (1825 - 95). He does not believe that one could find anything in the knowledge of natural science that would answer the last questions concerning the human soul. But he is convinced that our search for knowledge must confine itself to the limits of the mode of conception of natural science and we must admit that man simply has no means by which to acquire a knowledge of what lies behind nature. The result of this opinion is that natural science contains no insight concerning man's highest hopes for knowledge, but it allows him to feel that in this mode of conception the investigation is placed on secure ground. One should, therefore, abandon all concern for everything that does not lie within the realm of natural science, or one should consider it as a matter of belief.**

William James (1842 - 1910) developed his philosophy of pragmatism, and Hans Vaihinger (1852 - 1933) his philosophy of "As-If" along the same lines as pragmatism.

**[page 450] Pragmatism can be called disbelief in the power of thought. It denies that thinking that would remain within its own domain is capable of producing anything that can be proved as truth and knowledge justifiable by itself. Man is confronted with processes of the world and must act. To accomplish this, thinking serves him in an auxiliary function. It sums up the facts of the external world into ideas and combines them. The best ideas are those that help him to achieve the right kind of action so that he can attain his purpose in accordance with the facts of the world. These ideas man recognizes as his truth.**

**[page 452] If one imagines that there are atoms, there will be order in the chaos of perceived natural phenomena. It is the same with all leading ideas. They are assumed, not in order to depict facts that are given solely by perception. They are invented, and reality is then interpreted "as if" the content of these imagined concepts really were the basis of reality. The impotence of thought is thus consciously made the center of this philosophy. The power of the external facts impresses the mind of the thinker so overwhelmingly that he does not dare to penetrate with his "mere thought" into those regions from which the external reality springs. But as we can only hope to gain an insight into the nature of man if we have spiritual means to penetrate into the characterized regions, there can be no possibility of approaching the highest riddles of the universe through the "As-If Philosophy."**

Lastly we arrive at the contributions of Albert Einstein (1879 - 1955) as we enter the twentieth century and encounter his thoughts we call the Theory of Relativity which blended geometry into physics, of all things!

**[page 480] The assumption of space makes a geometry that is thought for this space, but this same geometry can be applied to the world of things. It arises in a mere thought world. Things have to obey the laws of this geometry. One can say that the events and situations of the world must follow the laws that are established *before* the observation of things. This geometry now is dethroned by the theory of relativity. What exists are only things and they stand in relations to one another that present themselves geometrically. Geometry thus becomes a part of physics, but then one can no longer maintain that their laws can be established *before* the observation of the things. No thing has any *place* in space but only distances relative to other things.**

Steiner considered the theory of relativity as pointing to his own method of spiritual science as the proper course to take — if one is to study the spirit, one should do so without using sensory observation which is only important for studying the material world of nature. [Paraphrased from page 481]

To wrap up the philosophers he covered in this book, which number several times more than those we have noted in this brief review, Steiner explains why he omitted some prominent thinkers along the way.

**[page 481] It was the intention of this book to describe the development of what may be called philosophical activity in the proper sense of the word. The endeavor of such spirits as Richard Wagner, Leo Tolstoy and others had for this reason to be left unconsidered, significant as discussion of their contribution must appear when it is a question of following the currents that lead from philosophy into our general spiritual culture.**

In the final chapter, "A Brief Outline of an Approach to Anthroposophy" Steiner gives us his view of spiritual science which he composes from *anthropos* and *sophy* or *anthroposophy* and intends it be a science of the full human being as a being of body, soul, and spirit, as opposed to anthropology, which is a science of the human being as revealed by sensory observation of human bodies.

**[page 495, 496] The spiritual science that the author of this book has in mind points to a**

**form of experience that the soul can have independent from the body, and in this experience an individual entity is revealed. It emerges like a higher human nature for whom the physical man is like a tool. The being that feels itself as set free, through spiritual experience, from the physical body, is a spiritual human entity that is as much at home in a spiritual world as the physical body in the physical world. As the soul thus experiences its spiritual nature, it is also aware of the fact that it stands in a certain relation to the body. The body appears, on the one hand, as a cast of the spiritual entity; it can be compared to the shell of a snail that is like a counter-picture of the shape of the snail. On the other hand, the spirit-soul entity appears in the body like the sum total of the forces in the plant, which, after it has grown into leaf and blossom, contract into the seed in order to prepare a new plant. One cannot experience the inner spiritual man without knowing that he contains something that will develop into a new physical man. This new human being, while living within the physical organism, has collected forces through experience that could not unfold as long as they were encased in that organism. This body has, to be sure, enabled the soul to have experiences in connection with the external world that make the inner spiritual man different from what he was before he began life in the physical body. But this body is, as it were, too rigidly organized for being transformed by the inner spiritual man according to the pattern of the new experiences. Thus there remains hidden in the human shell a spiritual being that contains the disposition of a new man.**

Here we find his insight informed by the process of growth of plants which he uses to provide a metaphor for us to understand the processes one uses in his spiritual science. This next passage is a high-level description which may seem too abstract to some, but it is an accurate description of the specific processes he suggests in many books and lecture series which can be studied to learn these processes.

**[page 496] Thoughts such as these can only be briefly indicated here. They point to a spiritual science that is essentially constructed after the model of natural science. In elaborating this spiritual science one will have to proceed more or less like the botanist when he observes a plant, the formation of its root, the growth of its stem and its leaves, and its development into blossom and fruit. In the fruit he discovers the seed of the new plant-life. As he follows the development of a plant he looks for its origin in the seed formed by the previous plant. The investigator of spiritual science will trace the process in which a human life, apart from its external manifestation, develops also an inner being. He will find that external experiences die off like the leaves and the flowers of a plant. Within the inner being, however, he will discover a spiritual kernel, which conceals within itself the potentiality of a new life. In the infant entering life through birth he will see the return of a soul that left the world previously through the gate of death. He will learn to observe that what is handed down by heredity to the individual man from his ancestors is merely the material that is worked upon by the spiritual man in order to bring into physical existence what has been prepared seed-like in a preceding life.**

Everyone has had the experience of re-reading a book one read years or decades earlier only to find the text much more meaningful the second time around. It is important to note that one is not the same person as one was during that first reading. For one thing, one may have changed dramatically as a result of the first reading, not necessarily immediately, but slowly during the decades which passed between the first and second reading. All these accumulated changes are revealed upon the second reading.

**[page 496, 497] One can observe how the human soul is transformed by experiences that represent, in a certain sense, repetitions of earlier experiences. If somebody has read an important book in his twentieth year and reads it again in his fortieth, he experiences it as if he were a different person. If he asks without bias for the reason for this fact, he will find that what he learned from his reading twenty years previous has continued to**

**live in him and has become a part of his nature. He has within him the forces that live in the book, and he finds them again when he re-reads the book at the age of forty. The same holds true with our life experiences. They become part of man himself. They live in his "ego." But it is also apparent that within the limits of one life this inner strengthening of the higher man must remain in the realm of his spirit and soul nature. Yet one can also find that this higher human being strives to become strong enough to find expression in his physical nature. The rigidity of the body prevents this from happening within a single life span. But in the central core of man there lives the potential predisposition that, together with the fruits of one life, will form a new human life in the same way that the seed of a new plant lives in the plant.**

Why did Steiner write this book? He says it was because philosophy itself demanded it of him.

**[page 498] One of the teachers of this world conception is the history of philosophy itself. It shows that the course of philosophical thought tends toward a conception that cannot be acquired in a state of ordinary consciousness. The accounts of many representative thinkers show how they attempt in various ways to comprehend the self-conscious ego with the help of the ordinary consciousness. A theoretical exposition of why the means of this ordinary consciousness must lead to unsatisfactory results does not belong to a historical account. But the historical facts show distinctly that the ordinary consciousness, however we may look at it, cannot solve the questions it nevertheless must raise. This final chapter was written to show why the ordinary consciousness and the usual scientific mind lack the means to solve such questions. This chapter was meant to describe what the characterized world conceptions were unconsciously striving for. From one certain point of view this last chapter no longer belongs to the history of philosophy, but from another point of view, its justification is quite clear. The message of this book is that a world conception based on spiritual science is virtually demanded by the development of modern philosophy as an answer to the questions it raise.**

Those philosophers who argue against immortality have it correct, Steiner says, if they refer to it as the immortality of life, not of the soul. Our physical body acts as a reflector of our normal consciousness, so if our body is gone, that normal consciousness must also be gone.

**[page 501] What may survive the loss of the body cannot be designated as substance; it must be another form of consciousness. But this other consciousness can be discovered only through the inner activity that frees the soul from the body. This shows us that the soul can experience consciousness even without the mediation of the body. Through such activity and with the help of supersensible perception, the soul will experience the condition of the complete loss of the body. It finds that it had been the body, itself, that obscured that higher consciousness. While the soul is incarnated, the body has such a strong effect on the soul that this other consciousness cannot become active. This becomes a matter of direct experience when the soul exercises indicated in this chapter are successfully carried out. The soul must then consciously sup-press the forces that originate in the body and extinguish the body-free consciousness. This extinction can no longer take place after the dissolution of the body. It is the other consciousness, therefore, that passes through successive lives and through the purely spiritual existence between death and birth. From this point of view, there is reference to a nebulous soul substance. In terms that are comparable to ideas of natural science, the soul is shown how it continues its existence because in one life the seed of the next is prepared, as the seed is prepared in the plant. The present life is shown as the reason for a future life, and the true essence of what continues when death dissolves the body is brought to light.**

After reading over 150 books by Rudolf Steiner, I can say that he has never spoken detrimentally about natural science. He will at times speak of its limitations, and the one big limitation it has is that natural

science refuses to "admit that with its methods one cannot gain insight into the realm of the spiritual," preferring instead to pronounce the spiritual world a fantasy. He also points out in many places that his spiritual science has not borrowed its insights from any older form of religion.

**[page 501, 502] One is easily misled to this view because the conception of reincarnation, for instance, is a tenet of certain creeds. For the modern investigator of spiritual science, there can be no borrowing from such creeds. He finds that the devotion to the exercises described above will lead to a consciousness that enters the spiritual world. As a result of this consciousness he learns that the soul has its standing in the spiritual world in the way previously described.**

"When knowledge ends, discussion begins." — Rudolf Steiner. Theorizing is a kind of discussion and discussion cannot provide knowledge of the basic questions of human beings: "Where did I come from before this lifetime on Earth, and where am I going after it?"

**[page 503] We see that the riddles of human destiny cannot be solved merely by theorizing about them, but only by learning to understand how the soul grows together with its fate in an experience that proceeds beyond the ordinary consciousness. Thus, one will gradually realize that the causes for this or that stroke of destiny in the present life must be sought in a previous one. To the ordinary consciousness our fate does not appear in its true form. It takes its course as a result of previous earthly lives, which are hidden from ordinary consciousness. To realize one's deep connection with the events of former lives means at the same time that one becomes reconciled with one's destiny.**

A seed that develops on a plant can be used in one of two ways: for human food or to create a new plant. The food route treats the seed as a *content*, some thing to be consumed. The plant route treats the seed as *process*, something to be experienced, a living being. Developing a world conception is similar to viewing the seed as a *content*. We can go so far as to make a chemical analysis of the seed as to its food value and we will still miss the seed's essence which is the experience, the *process* of growing into a new plant. Theology, rightly understood, can be considered as the study of the food content of the seed of spirituality. What, then, is the process of spirituality?

**[page 505] Real spiritual science can be gained only when the soul finds, in the course of its own disciplined meditative work, the transition from the ordinary consciousness to one with which it awakens in and becomes directly aware of the spiritual world. This inner work consists in a heightening, not a lowering of the ordinary consciousness.**

Any process which requires one to lose consciousness creates a lowering of consciousness and will not suffice. And even philosophy itself can consist of a process which evolves out of the content of philosophical work in the form of forces of the soul.

**[page 505] These forces must eventually lead to the point where it becomes possible to recognize a "body-free soul experience." Philosophers will then recognize that the "world riddles" must not merely be considered scientifically but need to be experienced by the human soul. But the soul must first attain to the condition in which such an experience is possible.**

We have now arrived at the point where we can recognize the power of Steiner's spiritual science: it provides a way of understanding and approaching the spiritual world as robust and powerful as modern science's way of understanding and approaching the natural world.

**[page 505, 506] The supersensible truths can be *found* only by a soul that enters into the supersensible. Once they are found, however, they can be fully understood by the ordinary consciousness. For they are in complete and necessary agreement with the knowledge that can be gained for the world of the senses.**

This book has been a tough slog for me — a trek from one end of philosophy to the other, stopping at every oasis along the way to chat with philosophers on their favorite subject. We note how each philosopher is aware of those we met earlier on our trip, but how each one has formed a unique philosophy for us to examine. They drop their philosophic seeds in our hands to examine and invite us to dine on them, prepared and cooked into exotic and exquisite delicacies. As we near the end of our long journey, we find that we are more and more inclined to turn away the seeds as food, and imagining instead the living forces growing in us to lead our soul to the recognition of its own supersensible nature.

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

**Footnote 1.** The page numbers used in this review are unique to the eLib copy I printed out for the purpose of reading and reviewing this text. (This volume is currently out of print.)

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**Footnote 2.** The phrase "in this way" refers to the process of studying Steiner's [Philosophy of Freedom](#). Obviously Aristotle was not aware of Steiner, but given the evidence that Steiner studied Aristotle and may have been a reincarnation of Aristotle, it would not be surprising that Steiner would write about a process by which one actualizes thinking to attain human freedom.

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**Footnote 3.** On page 165 one can see this process at work in Steiner's statement, "The Greek *had* nature; modern man *searches* for nature."

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**Footnote 4.** For details, see my review of Steiner's [Light Course](#) at <http://www.doyletics.com/arj/lightcou.htm> .

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**Footnote 5.** See my essay entitled, [Art is the Process of Destruction](#).

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