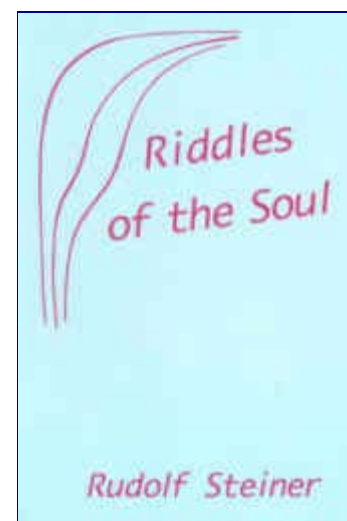




A READER'S JOURNAL

Riddles of the Soul, GA#21, A Book by Rudolf Steiner

Translated by William Lindeman
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2005



In my study of modern physics and modern physicists, it has become obvious that when one struggles to learn as much as possible about the

material world, eventually one comes up against a boarded-up wall that one cannot penetrate without leaving behind the belief that the material world is all that exists. In a 1923 talk Rudolf Steiner gave us an image of him knocking away those boards with a shovel to reveal the spiritual world behind the wall:

[page 1, 2] Take this first essay of *Riddles of the Soul*. . . Its purpose is to awaken the realization: If I stop where modern civilization stops, then the world is actually boarded up for me. From natural science I try to go further. There come the barriers. There the world is boarded up for me.

The content of this first essay of *Riddles of the Soul* is an effort to knock away those boards with spades.

When we feel that we are working with spades to knock away the planks that have boarded up the world for centuries, when we consider the words to be spades, then we arrive at the soul-spiritual realm.

It is as if we have been living in a large mansion since 1413 A. D. when materialistic science began to direct our focus solely to our sensory inputs and away from the windows. In successive centuries since then, science has progressively boarded up more and more of the windows until the great majority of us have forgotten that the windows ever existed and either find puzzling or make fun of old texts inked by those writers who could still see through those windows into the spiritual world. Science, rightly understood, shows a blatant "chronological snobbery" — a wonderful phrase of C. S. Lewis — by blocking out and denigrating what it no longer comprehends.

In this book's first essay, "Where Natural Science and Spiritual Science Meet", Steiner drops his pen and picks up soul shovels to knock away the boards covering the windows. As he continued in his talk quoted again from page 2 below, each one of us must wake up and, with our "soul spades," knock away the boards from the windows of our mansion or continue to be isolated from the spiritual world.

[page 2] Most people have the unconscious feeling that an essay like the first one in *Riddles of the Soul* is written with a pen from which ink flows. But it is not written with a pen. It is written with soul spades, which want to rip away the planks that board up the world, i.e., which want to clear away the limitations of natural science, but want to do so with inner work of the soul. The reader must participate in this activation of the soul,

however, when reading an essay such as this.

In this dramatic fashion, Steiner himself talked about the first essay of this book in Dornach, February 4, 1923. While the essay extends only over 20 pages, the material in Chapter IV, "Sketches of Some of the Ramifications of the Content of This Book" contains about 50 pages of elaborations on the material in the first essay and these should be read in context as one reads the first essay. The remainder of the book is devoted to essays on two men, Brentano was a philosopher whose work nearly breached the walls of boarded-up windows that Steiner had knocked the planks away from. Max Dessoir was a philosopher who failed miserably at breaching the walls, and who subsequently turned on Steiner, attacking him for the folly of attempting what to Dessoir was impossible. In Chapter II Steiner rebuts Dessoir's attack on anthroposophy, and even prints in the Appendix Dessoir's response to the rebuttal. In Chapter III, Steiner writes a tribute to the memory of Brentano whose life ended before he completed knocking away the boards. Here are Steiner's words from the Preface about why he wrote these various essays.

[page 3] In the first essay on anthropology and anthroposophy ("Where Natural Science and Spiritual Science Meet"), I seek to show briefly that the true natural-scientific approach not only does not stand in any contradiction to what I understand by "anthroposophy" but that anthroposophy's spiritual-scientific path must even be demanded as something essential by anthropology's means of knowledge. There must be an anthroposophical spiritual science if the anthropological knowledge of natural science wishes to be what it must claim to be. Either the reasons for the existence of an anthroposophy are legitimate, or true validity cannot be attributed to natural-scientific insights either. This is what I endeavor to present in the first essay in a form not yet expressly stated in the books I have already published, although present there in a germinal state.

About his rebuttal of Max Dessoir, Steiner said that he had no desire to write this essay but felt that Dessoir's attack on anthroposophy, based as it was on misreadings and misconceptions, could not be allowed to stand.

[page 4] I deeply regret that the essay on Max Dessoir's attack on anthroposophy could not be what I gladly would have made it. I would have liked to enter into a discussion of the way of picturing things advocated by Dessoir on the one hand and by anthroposophy on the other. Instead of this I am obliged by Dessoir's "critique" to show that he presents his readers with a distorted picture of my views, and then speaks, not about them, but about what he has made of them, which has nothing at all to do with my views. I had to show how Max Dessoir "reads" the books that he undertakes to attack. Therefore my essay is filled with discussion of things that might seem trivial. How can one proceed differently, however, when trivial details are needed for presenting the truth? I leave it up to the readers of my book — who can decide from it how much this "critic" could understand of my views with his way of reading my books — to judge whether Max Dessoir has the right to debase the anthroposophy advocated by me through his act of including it in spiritual streams of which he says that they are "a mixture of incorrect interpretations of certain soul processes and incorrectly judged relics of a vanished world view."

As for his essay about Franz Brentano, Steiner only regretted not having written it while Brentano was yet alive.

[page 4, 5] I must say just the opposite about the third essay, "Franz Brentano, in Memoriam." Writing it was my deepest need. And if I regret anything about it, it is that I did not write it long ago and could not make the attempt to bring it to Brentano's attention while he still lived. It is only that, although I have been an ardent reader of Brentano's writings for a long time, his life's work has only now appeared before my

soul in such a way that I can present its relation to anthroposophy as is done in this book. The passing of this revered man moved me to relive in thought his life work; and only from this did my views of his life work reach the provisional conclusions that underlie the discussions in my essay.

Anthroposophy is the study of the whole human being as body, soul, and spirit whereas anthropology is the study of the human being as a body — only those aspects of the human being which are susceptible to sense-perceptions. Anthropologists must stop their intellectual concepts at the wall created by their sense perceptions, but anthroposophists can breach that wall to view the flowering of the soul.

[page 7, 8] The advocate of anthropology limits himself to relating his intellectual concepts — experienced in the soul — to his sense perceptions. The advocate of anthroposophy observes that these concepts — apart from the fact that we relate them to sense impressions — are able in addition to unfold a life of their own within the soul. And that, by unfolding this life within the soul, these concepts effect a development of the soul itself. The advocate of anthroposophy sees how the soul, if it is sufficiently attentive to this development, discovers spiritual organs within its own being.

To understand what Steiner means by a spiritual organ, it helps to understand how our human eyes were formed by their exposure to light. It would have been folly indeed for the human body to develop eyes in the absence of light, would it not? There are species of fish in deep caves which, lacking any light at all in their environment, have formed no eyes. While our eyes formed automatically for us in the presence of light, it is the job of the individual human being at this point in our evolution consciously to form organs of spiritual sight. Steiner adopts the usage of the term "spiritual organs" from Goethe, and hastens to explain that the spiritual sight they provide is *not* the origin of pathological visions or hallucinations. In addition Steiner rebuffs in advance any attempts to claim, as some have attempted in recent years, that spiritual sight originates in various organs of the body such as the [pineal gland](#).

[page 8] Such spiritual organs, therefore, are for the soul what sense organs are for the body. These spiritual organs must of course be understood as being *entirely* of a soul nature. Any attempt to connect them with one or another bodily configuration must be strictly rejected by anthroposophy. Anthroposophy must not picture these spiritual organs as extending in any way beyond the soul realm or encroaching upon the structure of the body. It would regard any such encroachment as a pathological configuration, to be strictly excluded from its domain. The way anthroposophy portrays the development of our spiritual organs should be strong enough proof — to anyone who really informs himself about it — that the researcher in the real spiritual realm arrives at the same conclusions as anthropologists about abnormal soul experiences like illusions, visions, and hallucinations.

Our eyes do not provide us with sensory input when we are asleep. They remain capable of sight, but due to our lids being closed and our being asleep, we receive no information from them. Our spiritual eyes are open all the time, but when we are awake consciously, we are asleep as far as our spiritual eyes are concerned and receive no information from them, unless we have trained ourselves to a condition of *seeing consciousness* as Steiner describes in the next passage. This special type of seeing seems to correspond roughly with what Don Juan called [seeing](#) when he trained Carlos Castaneda in the process.

[page 12] . . . our power of mental picturing can unfold the necessary attentiveness only for sense impressions, whereas the actual soul activity that is also occurring is present to consciousness as little as what is experienced in a state of sleep. We are dealing here with two streams of experience; one of these is apprehended in a waking state; the other — the soul stream — is grasped simultaneously, but only with an attentiveness as weak as the mental perception we have in sleep, i.e., it is hardly grasped at all. We must by no means ignore the fact that during our ordinary waking state, the soul disposition of sleep

does not simply cease, but continues to exist alongside our waking experience, and that the actual soul element enters the realm of perception only when the human being awakens not only to the sense world — as this occurs in ordinary consciousness — but awakens also to a soul existence, as is the case in *seeing consciousness*.

Materialistic skeptics say about spiritual sight that “the intellect has no right to judge a reality for which it lacks the foundations of sense perceptions,” and they aver that, absent such foundations, the content of a spiritual sight must be void of meaning. Steiner writes that such skeptics are setting themselves an artificial limit to knowledge, one which is not required by his spiritual science.

[page 15, 16] What can be experienced within the soul itself when it fills itself with those mental pictures to which it is led when confronted by our usual limits of knowledge? After sufficient self-examination, the soul can then say to itself: Through such mental pictures I cannot, in the ordinary sense of the word, know anything; but in the event that I really make *this* powerlessness of my knowing activity inwardly visible to myself, then I become aware how these mental pictures work within my own self. As ordinary cognitive pictures, these mental pictures remain mute; but the more their muteness communicates itself to our consciousness, the more these mental pictures take on an inner life of their own that unites with the life of the soul. And the soul then notices how, with this experience, it is in a situation comparable to that of a blind being who has also not experienced much development of its sense of touch. Such a being would at first keep bumping into things. It would feel the resistance of outer reality. And from this generalized sensation, it could develop an inner life for itself, filled with a primitive consciousness that no longer has merely the general sensation of bumping into things, but that differentiates this sensation and distinguishes between hardness and softness, smoothness and roughness, etc.

In the same way, the soul can hold and differentiate its experience of the mental pictures it forms in its encounter with the limits of knowledge. The soul learns to experience that these limits represent nothing more than what arises when the soul is touched by the spiritual world in a soul way. The dawning awareness of such limits becomes an experience for the soul that can be compared with the experience of touch in the sense world. What the soul formerly regarded as limits to knowledge it now sees as a soul-spiritual touching by a spiritual world.

Theodore Vischer wrote that skeptics aver, "No spirit where there is no brain," but turned that argument on its head saying, in effect, "No brain where there is no spirit." (Page 114 Addendum to page 16) As we humans have the most highly developed brain, it follows that we have the most developed spirit, and that we enter the spiritual realm at the point where we bang into the limits of our knowledge. Whereas materialist scientists stop their seeking when they reach the wall, spiritual scientists embrace the wall as the beginning of their fruitful search — they recognize that "at such a borderland of knowledge a different form of knowing activity can enter." This apparent wall is the place where Imagination (imaginative perception), Inspiration (inspirational perception), and Intuition (intuitional perception) begins. Steiner says that a man cannot "live at these borderlands in the same kind of knowing activity which sufficed for him before he arrived at them."

[page 115] Anthroposophy attempts to show that science does not end where our ordinary knowing activity gets "bruised," where these "cuts and blows" occur in the counterstroke of reality; anthroposophy tries to show that the experiences resulting from these "bruises, cuts, and blows" lead to the development of a different kind of knowing activity, which transforms the counterthrust of reality into a spiritual perception that, to begin with, on its first level, is comparable to tactile perception in the sense world.

[page 116, 117] Thus, even the contemplation of thinking itself leads the thinker to the limits of ordinary knowledge. Anthroposophy sets in with its knowing activity at these

limits; it knows that essentiality confronts the abilities (art) of intellectual thinking like an impenetrable wall. For a thinking *that the thinker experiences*, however, the impenetrability of this wall disappears; this experienced thinking finds a light with which to illuminate *and look into* the "darkness unlit by any ray of light" of a merely intellectual thinking; and the "bottomless abyss" is so only for the realm of sense perception; anyone who does not halt at this abyss but dares to proceed with thinking even when this thinking must set aside what the sense world has inserted into it, such a person finds a spiritual reality in this "bottomless abyss."

We could continue indefinitely like this, presenting the experiences that serious thinkers have at the limits of knowledge.

Such examples would show that anthroposophy is the natural result of the evolution of present-day thought. Many things point to anthroposophy if these many things are seen in the right light.

The above passages inspired this poem I wrote:

Bang Into It

I.

When we reach the highest form of matter
We run Bang! into it — our brain.

When we reach the highest form of thinking
We run Bang! into it – Contradiction:

The Wall of Analytic Intellect.

When we bang into it
Then we Bang! Intuit!

II.

And
When we reach the bottomless abyss
And
We run Bang! into it — we find

Instead of an abyss
A bliss of spiritualness.

When we reach the finality
of a spiritual reality
We find we have run Bang! into it!

We Bang! Intuit!

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If we buy a bag of wheat kernels we can mill them into flour to bake bread to eat or we can plant them in the ground to grow into a field of wheat plants. Steiner uses this as a metaphor for two ways of experiencing mental pictures.

**[page 17] Likewise, one can hold mental pictures — gained through sense impressions —**

**within one's consciousness in such a way as to experience them as copies of sense-perceptible reality. Or, one can experience these mental pictures in such a way as to let work in the soul the power these pictures exercise through what they are, irrespective of the fact that they reproduce sense perceptions.**

As a seed is detoured from its normal course of development if it is eaten as food, "so a mental picture too is diverted from its own essential course of development when it is used by the picturing soul to reproduce a sense perception." (Page 18) In our ordinary consciousness, the one *sans* spiritual organs, these mental pictures are dampened, dimmed, trimmed down or crippled (*lamed*, as Steiner calls it) during the process of arising to the awareness of some sensory experience.

**[page 19] Now, as to how mental pictures become mediators of such knowledge, anthroposophical observation, which employs spiritual organs, arrives at different conclusions than those epistemologists do who reject this observation. Anthroposophical observation reveals the following.**

**Mental pictures, as they are in their own primal nature, do in fact form a part of the life of the soul; but they cannot become conscious in the soul as long as the soul does not consciously employ its spiritual organs. As long as these mental pictures are active in a way corresponding to their own essential nature, they remain unconscious in the soul. The soul *lives* by virtue of them, but can *know* nothing of them. These mental pictures must dampen down their own life in order to become conscious soul experiences for ordinary consciousness. This dampening down occurs with every sense perception. Thus, when the soul receives a sense impression, there occurs a laming of our life in mental pictures; and the soul experiences this lamed mental picturing consciously as the mediator of our knowledge of external reality.**

How do we know we are experiencing a lamed-mental picture in our everyday life? We find ourselves formulating a concept which is the dead remains of the internal living mental picture we started from. We each have *living* supersensible connections with the objects we perceive with our senses. But this connection is flattened out into a concept by our intellectual mind.

**[page 119, 120] The living element that exists in man through this connection is lamed, reduced to a "concept" by his intellectual organization. The abstract mental picture is this real element — which has died in order to present itself to ordinary consciousness — in which man does live during sense perception, but whose living quality does not become conscious. The abstractness of our mental pictures is caused by an inner necessity of the soul. Reality gives man something living. He deadens that part of this living element which enters his ordinary consciousness. He does so because he could not achieve self-consciousness in his encounter with the outer world if he had to experience his actual connection to this outer world in its full vitality. Without the laming of this full vitality, man would have to recognize himself as one part within a unity extending beyond his human limits; he would be an organ of a greater organism.**

Steiner has thus revealed one of the *riddles of the soul* he promised in the title of this amazing book. Anyone who has a living soul will admit having experienced this sense of being part of a greater unity at one time or another in one's life. That reality lies there as I type these words, as you read them, living and throbbing mostly unseen and unfelt below an encrustation of intellectual baffle-gab, up until now.

It might occur to you, dear Reader, to ask, "Well, how can one release these living pictures from their cold dungeon?" The process of doing this is what Steiner calls Imagination and through it one can bring forth the soul's "Imaginative mental pictures." This next passage is the best definition of the process of Imagination that I have found so far:

**[page 21] In order to bring them forth, the soul must know this inner process of uniting**

**the life of mental pictures with sense impressions so exactly that it can prevent any sense impressions — or their aftereffects, as the case may be — from flowing into its life of mental picturing. One can achieve this exclusion of perception's aftereffects only if one has learned to know how mental picturing is gripped by these aftereffects. Only then is one in a position to unite the spiritual organs in a living way with the essential being of mental picturing and thereby receive impressions from spiritual reality. Through this, the life of mental pictures is permeated from an entirely different quarter than in sense perception. One's experiences are essentially different from those to be had from sense perceptions.**

Steiner has shown us something that only *anthroposophy* or spiritual science can reveal, how we as full human beings or *anthropos* can arrive at the *sophy* or knowledge which allows us to transcend the restricted realm of the sense world.

**[page 23, 24] The anthropologist sees mental pictures arising from the human organism. In observing this, he must come to a halt in a certain sense. With mere anthropology, he cannot apprehend the inner, lawful connectedness of mental pictures. Just as anthroposophy, at the end of its path through spiritual experiences, still looks at the spiritual being of man — insofar as this manifests through the perceptions of the senses — so anthropology, at the end of its path through the sense world, must look at the way the sense perceptible human being is active in mental picturing in its encounter with sense perceptions.**

In our investigation of the realms of the sense world to find the complete human being, we have, in effect, arrived at the end of our path only through anthroposophy:

**[page 23] Then, at the end of its path of spiritual investigation, so to speak, anthroposophy can employ its vision further and see how the real life of mental pictures is lamed by the perceiving senses. With the light it sheds from the spiritual quarter, anthroposophy shows this lamed life of mental pictures to be characteristic of man's life in the sense world, insofar as he forms mental pictures. In this way, as one of the last results of its investigations, anthroposophy arrives at a philosophy of the human being. What lies on its path down to this point is to be found purely in a spiritual realm. With the results of what it has found on its spiritual path, anthroposophy arrives at a characterization of the human being who lives in the sense world.**

Steiner has one more metaphor for us before he leaves this subject which proves "a really fruitful understanding is possible between anthroposophy and anthropology." (Page 25) It is that of anthroposophy producing a final positive print of what anthropology produces only a negative image on film. He says that those will find the underlying harmony of the two philosophies of anthroposophy and anthropology who will consider this metaphor as indicating their relationship. When we shine the light of the spirit of anthroposophy through the negative which is anthropology, we can produce a print of the full human being before our eyes.

The long essay on Max Dessoir and his later response to Steiner's essay is like an academic duel between two scholars and deserves the attention of philosophical exegetes, but here is a crude analogy to summarize the dueling essays. These two philosophers are separated by the wall mentioned in detail above, which intellectual analysis cannot penetrate by its own admission. Steiner and Dessoir are like an East Berlin man and West Berlin man in 1987 throwing brickbats and epithets at each other over the Brandenburg Gate about who holds the reality of what it means to be a Berliner. Until the Berlin Wall came tumbling down, their boisterous debate could have gone on indefinitely with each convinced of the truth of his position.

There are two parts of the debate which caught my attention. One is this: readers often neglect the fact that

an author's writings at time = 2 are more advanced and easier to understand than the same author's earlier writings at time = 1. This usage of the time index to understand the world is one which only appeared in the philosophy of [Alfred Korzybski](#) several years after Steiner died, but in this next passage Steiner points out the phenomenon:

**[page 28] Now Dessoir might object to this by saying that he could not find in my earlier works any presentation as clear as that in the preceding essay on the conclusions to be drawn from my views on the point at issue here. I admit right away that on many points of anthroposophy my later presentations contain a more exact exposition of what I stated earlier, and that readers of my earlier works can perhaps arrive at an erroneous view here and there of what I myself consider to be the necessary conclusions to be drawn from my views on a certain point. I believe that any insightful person would find this obvious.**

Of my earlier writings on the science of doyletics, I will admit that readers of them have at times arrived at erroneous views and I have occasionally had to point them my [latest insights](#) to get them on the right track again. Steiner had to deal with similar responses from Dessoir and it is a tough slog to go through Steiner's rebuttal of him and then Dessoir's re-rebuttal.

The other part I would like to share with you is a light moment in the exchange. Have you ever gotten wet from having a mental image of a rainfall?

**[page 33] With respect to my presentation Dessoir's assertion, that in cases like that of old India I am pointing at symbols not realities, can only be compared with the following. Someone finds, from the condition of a certain stretch of ground, that in the region where he now is, it must have rained a short while ago. He communicates this to someone else. Naturally, he can only communicate his *mental picture* of the fact that it has rained. Therefore, a third person asserts that the first person is saying that the condition of the ground did not result from real rain, but only from a mental picture of rain.**

Often when some one objects to another's writings, characterizing it as "childish", it is but a projection of one's own childishness which leads to the puerile characterization. Dessoir's process of projection is revealed by Steiner in this statement by Dessoir:

**[page 34] "It is self-contradictory to say that from 'envisioned' and merely 'symbolic' circumstances, the actual facts of real existence are supposed to have evolved." But you will not find any such self-contradictory way of picturing things in any of my work. Dessoir only imputes such an element to my work. And when he goes so far as to assert: "For the point is not whether one regards the spiritual as brain activity or not, but whether the spiritual is to be regarded in the form of a childish way of picturing things or as a realm with its own lawfulness," then the response must be: I agree with him totally that everything he serves up to his readers as my view bears the mark of a childish way of picturing things; however, what he labels as childish has nothing to do with my real views, but refers totally to his own mental pictures, which he has created by distorting mine.**

It should be clear now why Steiner said he "felt no subjective desire" to write his essay on Dessoir — as the saying goes, "If you wrestle with pigs, you get filthy, and the pigs like it." One cannot avoid seeming childish when one rebuffs a childish attack on oneself.

One is taught in grade school language classes to avoid repeating oneself, only to find as one matures as a writer that it is often necessary to repeat oneself. Let me say that again: one often must restate some previous sentence in a slightly different fashion to make one's point. This is especially true when the nature of subject is very new (as in doyletics) or very difficult (as in anthroposophy). In this next passage,



Steiner explains how two similar sentences with the second of a slightly different construction can bring clarity of expression to some difficult topic by the act of the second sentence shining light on the first sentence, so that their sum of meaning is greater than the meaning of the individual sentences.

**[page 37] The relationships that hold sway in the spiritual realm and the particular nature of what one can call the beings and occurrences there are much more complicated, subtle, and manifold than what comes to expression in our ordinary use of language. One attains the goal only if one avails oneself of the linguistic potential of sentence structure and word transformation, and if one strives to bring to expression through a second sentence — *in connection with the first* — something that one cannot adequately express in one sentence. To understand anthroposophy it is absolutely necessary to enter into such matters.**

As a reviewer of Steiner's works, I am loath to re-word or summarize his passages unless I perceive their reality in me. Note how Dessoir's simple shortening of the phrase "annihilated lower elements of our drives and passions" creates a distortion of meaning which Dessoir then exercises his pedagogical imperative to correct.

**[page 38] You can see that I do *not* say that the cross is a symbol for "annihilated lower drives," but for the "annihilated lower elements of our drives and passions," So, the lower drives and passions are not "annihilated," but rather "transformed," in such a way that their lower element is cast off and they themselves manifest as purified. This is how Max Dessoir deals with something that he wants to critique. Then he can portray it as a childish way of picturing things.**

In 1964 I read a short article on how the structure of a software application mirrors the organization of the group of programmers which designed and implemented the application. A decade later I was designing computer hardware and began to notice how the hardware design mirrored the structure of the human brain. It seems that we are only able to create computers which are designed in ways our own brain works, and the more we learn about the intricacies of our brain structure, the more intricate our computers become. This relationship of tools to our brain was noticed in 1917 by Steiner.

**[page 41, 42] For reasons too extensive to present here, I arrive at the view that our conscious life of mental picturing does indeed develop further the wisdom active in early childhood in certain formations of the human organism, but that this conscious life of mental pictures relates to that unconscious working of wisdom the way, for example, the structure of a tool stemming from conscious human wisdom relates to the marvelous structure of the human brain.**

This next passage is important because Steiner is giving us a précis of his goal for his landmark book, which is over-read and under-appreciated by many: [The Philosophy of Freedom](#).

**[page 46, 47] In *The Philosophy of Freedom* I wished to express, in a systematic, organic form, what I had written in the previous (almost entire) decade of extensive publications of epistemological groundwork and its ethical-philosophical implications for a view aiming at a grasp of the spiritual world.**

**[page 47, 48] In my book, after an extensive discussion of other philosophical directions, I tried to show that, for man, full reality is not present to sense observation, that the world picture given by the senses, therefore, is an incomplete reality. I made every effort to demonstrate that the human organization causes this incompleteness. Nature does not hide from man what is missing from the sense-perceptible picture as its essential being; rather *man* is so constituted that through this constitution, at the level of merely observational knowing, he hides from himself the spiritual side of his world picture. In**

**active thinking then, the opening up of this spiritual side begins. In active thinking, according to my world view, something real (spiritual) is *directly present* that cannot yet be given to mere observation. That is precisely what characterizes my epistemological foundation for a spiritual science: that in intuition — insofar as it comes to expression in thinking — I do not see "merely the forms in which a thought content at first appears."**

In the [Clan of the Cave Bear](#), Jean Auel presents us with a Neanderthal tribe whose members lack the advanced neo-cortex of the Cro-Magnon girl Ayla they adopt. Auel portrays the Clan as having ancient memories of how to do things carried down to them from their ancestors. Ayla, a nascent Cro-Magnon woman, lacked these memories, but she had a new form of memory, cognitive memory, which allowed her to learn new things and remember how to do them in ways that the Cave Bear Clan members could not. From Steiner I came to understand the evolution of consciousness which accompanied the transition from the Neanderthal to the Cro-Magnon people, and how the memories carried in the blood began to dissipate with the advent of the advanced neo-cortex with its cognitive memory capability(1). Max Dessoir, unfamiliar with the evolution of consciousness and its reflection in brain structure and completely oblivious to the function of the blood as a carrier of ancient memories, calls Steiner's claim of memories in the blood "monstrous".

**[page 54] This kind of monstrous ignoring of all facts combines with the assertion — just as unprovable as it is incomprehensible — that prehistoric man, in the "pictures that his blood received," also remembered the experiences of his ancestors.**

Discussions about Steiner's work with a critic is like trying to climb up a rope on a dare from a person who is standing above the top of the rope pouring lubricating oil on the rope. The harder you try, the more oil you find coming on the rope making progress upward unlikely. Let the critics argue with each other is my approach. But Steiner was defending his own work, and he could not resist showing the folly of Dessoir's rebuttal of his work. With this passage we allow Steiner the final words on the matter:

**[page 61] If, in spite of the fruitlessness to which a discussion with this critic is doomed from the beginning, I nevertheless undertake one here, it is because I *had* to show once again, with an example, the kind of judgment encountered by what I call anthroposophy; and because there are altogether too many "unsuspecting readers" who form judgments about such a spiritual striving from books like Dessoir's without acquainting themselves with what is being judged, and without even an inkling of the true nature of what is being caricatured for them.**

**I will also not judge, but leave it up to the readers of my books to judge, what significance it has when someone like Dessoir, who is far from understanding my goals and who reads the books he is judging the way he does, asserts "from on high" that I "care about certain connections with science," but possess "no inner relation to the spirit of science."**

In his chapter on Brentano Steiner adds what he deems to be a "superfluous comment in a footnote" which bears repeating here as many people may be confused in a similar way as to the meaning when Steiner compares consciousness to a mirror image. Have you ever gotten wet by rain splashing out of a mirror? No, because the rain in the mirror is only an image of the actual rain. The distinction Steiner is making in the passage below is between *living images* in the soul and the cold, distant reflection of those living images which appear in our ordinary consciousness.

**[page 74] . . . with my comparison of consciousness to a mirror image, I am not referring to the usual practice of calling our world of mental pictures a mirror image of the outer world; I am calling the soul's experiences in ordinary consciousness a mirror image of the soul element.**

We have mentioned before the second level of spiritual cognition that Steiner came to refer to as

Inspiration, with an initial capital to distinguish it from the ordinary meaning of inspiration. Again in a footnote, Inspiration appears also in its original form as "Inspired cognition":

**[page 76] The first form of a "seeing cognition" — Imaginative cognition — passes over into the second form, which is called "Inspired cognition" in my books. In addendum 6 on page 131, "The Physical and Spiritual Dependencies of Man's Being," there is a description of how an Imagination that has already passed over into Inspiration actually lives in Brentano's definition of loving and hating.**

The third form of spiritual cognition is called Intuition, again with an initial capital, and these three forms are described many places in Steiner's books and lecture series. The three processes of thinking, feeling, and willing are described in detail in Addendum 6. It is helpful to know that Imaginations are continuously instilled into your body to maintain your vitality giving you ideas which support your thinking, that Inspirations flow down into your breathing and circulations which support your feeling, and that Intuitions slip into the metabolic and movement activity which support your willing. (Summarized from [Cosmosophy, Vol. 2](#), pages 126 -128)

The translator for this edition, Walter Lindeman, wrote in his Introduction to this book:

**[page 2] In addendum 6 on page 131 of this book, Rudolf Steiner describes for the first time his thirty-year-long work in relating the three soul forces of thinking, feeling, and willing to the three systems of the body: the nervous, rhythmical, and metabolic. In the same section we are shown why he believed the theoretical division into sensory and motor nerves to be so harmful.**

This is an important issue which is mentioned in several places, but rarely explained. We would be remiss if we did not share with you what Steiner writes on that matter:

**[page 139, 140] The division of nerves into sensory and motor nerves has created terrible confusion in the study of all these things. No matter how deeply rooted this division may seem to be in today's physiological picture of things, it is not based on unbiased observation. What physiology presents on the basis of nerve severance or of pathological elimination of certain nerves does *not* prove what appears upon the foundation of experiment or outer experience; it proves something completely different. It proves that the difference is not there at all which one assumes to exist between sensory and motor nerves. On the contrary, both kinds of nerves are of the *same nature*. The so-called motor nerve does *not* serve movement in the sense assumed in the teachings of the division theory; rather, as *the bearer of nerve activity* it serves the inner perception of that metabolic process that underlies our willing, in just the same way as the sensory nerve serves the perception of what takes place in the sense organ. Until the study of the nerves works with clear concepts in this regard, a correct relation of our soul life to the life of the body will not come about.**

What is an evolution of consciousness and how do we detect when one has occurred? This is difficult to define, but easy to point out examples. Here's one example which will help you, dear Reader, over time learn to recognize when you encounter similar examples of such evolution in action. It shows up when Steiner compares today's natural-scientific outlook with earlier historical stages of knowledge. (Page 102) Steiner has said in several places that discussion begins when knowledge ends. The very fact that Steiner must discuss the material in this next passage indicates that our knowledge of living in a spiritual world has faded since the 15th century when our attention began to focus solely on observations of the sensory world.

**[page 102, 103] This fact shows up much more strongly in today's natural-scientific outlook than was the case in earlier historical stages of knowledge. At these earlier stages, when observing the outer world, one still formed concepts that took up into their**

**content something of the spiritual foundations of this outer world. And one's soul felt itself, in its own spirituality, as unified with the spirit of the outer world. In accordance with its own essential being, recent natural scientists must think nature in a purely natural way. Through this, to be sure, it gains the possibility of validating the *content*, of its ideas by observation of nature, but not the *existence* of these ideas themselves, as something with inner soul being.**

**For this reason, precisely the genuine natural-scientific outlook has no foundation if it cannot validate its own existence by anthroposophical observation. *With* anthroposophy one can fully endorse the natural-scientific outlook; *without* anthroposophy, one will again and again want to make the vain attempt to discover even the spirit out of the results of natural-scientific observation. The natural-scientific ideas of recent times are in fact the results of the soul's living together with a spiritual world; but only in the living spiritual vision can the soul *know* about its living together with that world.**

One might ask, "Why did we have to go through this seemingly decadent period of natural science observation which separated us from the spiritual world?" Steiner pinpoints the reason for us here:

**[page 104] The connection with the spirit, however, must then be sought in knowledge not through these ideas of nature but through spiritual vision. The development of modern natural science is a necessary stage in the course of mankind's soul evolution. One understands the basis of this development when one sees how the soul needs it in order to find itself. On the other hand, one recognizes the epistemological implications of this development when one sees how precisely *it* makes spiritual vision a necessity(2).**

What we can know through Steiner's exposition of the reasons for our loss of the vision of our unity with the spiritual world (from which all our lives and forms of being proceed) is that we have such a connection *beyond any doubt*. His explanation is not some *ad hoc* jury-rigged explanation, but one that is intricately interwoven into all the fabric of his books and lecture series. When one confronts such a mass of interwoven explanations, one can only be convinced of the veracity of their content.

We had to lose direct knowledge of our connection to the inner spiritual world in order to focus our observations on the exterior physical world. The time is now for us to begin retrieving our knowledge of the spiritual world by forming within ourselves organs of spiritual sight. We are facing a new transition in the coming years and centuries into a world in which we develop a consciousness of the spiritual world which co-exists with our consciousness of the physical world. With Steiner's exposition of the problem, the solutions, and the path we are to follow, our pathway is illuminated, our footing is sure, and our goal is certain. The decision to move is one which we are fully equipped to make in freedom and light.

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

**Footnote 1.** Cognitive memory is what we simply call "memory." The use of the term allows me to distinguish from the [doylic memory](#) of the Neanderthals which preceded the advent of cognitive memory in the Cro-Magnons.

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

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Footnote 2. [RJM: Actual footnote from page 104] What is expressed here is presented in a detailed way in my book [The Riddle of Philosophy](#). One of the basic thoughts of that book is to show how natural-scientific cognition proves its power in the soul progress of humanity.

[Return to text directly before Footnote 2.](#)

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