

Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy

Lecture 5 — Dornach, April 16, 1921

Yesterday I referred to the significant turning point in the development of Occidental civilization in the fourth century A.D. I pointed out that, on the one hand, this was the time when Greek wisdom disappeared from European culture, wisdom through which people had tried to bring to expression the depths of Christianity in a wisdom-imbued way. The time of the outer expression of this disappearance falls somewhat later, namely, when Emperor Justinian declared the writings of Origen heretical, abolished Roman consulship, and closed the Greek Academy of Philosophy at Athens. The guardians of Greek wisdom thus had to flee to the Orient, withdrawing, as it were, from European civilization. The wisdom teaching that had extended from the East as far west as Greece and had assumed its special form there, is one aspect of the picture.

On the other hand, the Mithras worship was supposed to indicate in a significant external ritual how, with their soul-spiritual nature, human beings were to raise themselves above all that could be comprehended through the interplay of beings of the planetary sphere with terrestrial forces, how the human being could sense his full humanity. This was the object of the Mithras cult. This Mithras worship, which was intended to reveal to man his own being, likewise disappeared after it had spread through the regions along the Danube and on into central and western Europe. These two streams, one a cultic stream, the other a stream of wisdom, were replaced in Europe by factual narrations of the events of Palestine. Thus, one has to say that neither a cultic worship, which would have recognized in Christ Jesus the victor over all the human being, was meant to bring under his control in the course of world evolution, nor a wisdom that would have tried to grasp the actual mysteries of Christendom in a wise manner were able to enter Europe. Instead, the superficial narration of the events of Palestine became popular. The concepts that should have been found in these happenings in Palestine were instead steeped in the flood of juristic thinking, which replaced the investigation of cosmic secrets with the determination of dogmas by means of majority resolutions in Church Councils, and so forth.

This very fact indicates that a change of great and far-reaching significance had taken place in the fourth century A.D. in the development of Western civilization, and consequently in the evolution of the whole of mankind. Proceeding from the Orient, all the influences that had laid hold of eastern European civilization were in a sense pushed back again towards the Orient. Only the increasing tendency towards abstract thinking in the Roman world maintained itself in the Occident alongside the comprehension of the external, sensory world of facts.

How alive the conceptions of the Greek gods had been among the Greeks, and how conceptually abstract the ideas were the Romans entertained of their gods! Actually, in the later period, what the Greeks possessed of ideas concerning the super-sensible world was already lifeless, although quite alive as such within itself. Yet, it was a lifeless element in comparison to the living conceptions of the super-sensible worlds present during the ancient Persian and Indian civilizations, which represented a living within these higher worlds. In those times, albeit with a purely instinctive human perception, people lived in communion with the super-sensible worlds just as mankind in the present communes with the sensory world. For human beings in the ancient Orient, the spiritual world was readily accessible. For them, the beings of the spiritual world were present just as other human beings, our fellowmen, live side by side with us. Out of this living, super-sensible world, the Greeks built up their system of concepts. In the ages before Aristotle, up to the fourth century B.C., Greek ideas were not abstract ideas gained through external sensory observation and then lifted up into abstraction. These Greek ideas still originated from the living, super-sensible world; they were born of a primeval power of vision. These living Greek ideas still imbued a person with soul sustenance and warmth; insofar as he could share in them, they bestowed on him the necessary enthusiasm for his form of social order. Certainly, we must never forget that a large part of the Greek people was denied a share in this life of thought; this was the extensive world of the slaves. But the bearers of Greek culture

certainly participated in a realm of ideas that was basically a downpouring of super-sensible, spiritual powers into the world of the earthly sphere.

In comparison with this, the Roman world — separated from Greece only by the sea — definitely had a quite abstract appearance. The Romans described their gods in the same prosaic, unimaginative ways as, shall we say, our modern scientists speak of the laws of nature. Although this is an indication of the significant change I have to point out here, we confront this change in a special way if we turn our attention to a factor in the life of soul that found only partial realization in world history and did not develop to its full potential.

Consider for a moment the destiny of the ancient Greek people. It is fraught with a certain tragedy. After its period of great glory, Greek culture pined away and, in essence, vanished from the stage of world history, for what replaced it in that territory cannot be said to have been a true successor. The Greek nation went into decline in a severe, world-historical illness, and from its ancient ideas it produced what, I would say, represents the dawn of all later culture. It brought forth Stoicism and Epicureanism, [Note 1] systems or views of life in which the more abstract mode of thought, characterizing the later Western civilization, already found an early expression. But we can see in Stoicism and Epicureanism, even in the later Greek mysticism, that they express a decline of ancient Greece.

Why was it that this culture of Greece was destined to decline and ultimately to pass away from the stream of world evolution? [Note 2] One could say that this decline and death of the ancient Greek people indicates a significant mystery in world history. With faculties of vision handed down to them as an echo of the ancient Oriental world view, the ancient Greeks still beheld the soul-spiritual human being in his full light. After all, in the earlier periods of Greek culture, every individual knew himself to be a being of soul and spirit that had descended through conception and birth from the spiritual worlds, that has its home in a super-sensible sphere and is destined for super-sensible spheres. Yet, at the same time, even in its prime, Greece sensed its decline in world history — I have often referred to this. It sensed that human beings cannot fully attain to humanity on earth by merely looking up into super-sensible worlds. It felt itself surrounded and pervaded by the earth's forces. Hence the ancient saying: "Better it is to be a beggar in the sense world than a king in the realm of shades" [Note 3] The Greeks of earlier periods had still beheld all the shining glory of the super-sensible world; at the same time, by attaining full humanity in ancient Greece, they sensed that they could not maintain this radiance of the spiritual worlds. They felt they were losing it and that their soul nature was becoming ensnared in the things of the earth. Fear of death arose in them because they realized that life between birth and death can estrange the soul from its spiritual home. Greek culture must definitely be described in accordance with this feeling.

Men like Nietzsche basically had true insight into these matters. [Note 4] Nietzsche had the right feeling when he designated the period of Greek development preceding the Socratic and Platonic age as the tragic epoch of Greek culture. For already in thinkers such as Thales, [Note 5] and particularly Anaxagoras [Note 6] and Heraclitus, [Note 7] we observe the twilight of a magnificent world view which modern history does not mention at all. We note the fear of becoming estranged from the super-sensible world, of becoming tied to what alone remains from the passage through life between birth and death, namely, of becoming linked to the world of Hades, the world of shades, which basically becomes man's lot. Nevertheless, the Greeks preserved one thing; they saved what appeared at its height in the Platonic idea. There emerged amid the onset of progressive decline this world of Platonic ideas, the last glorious remnant of the ancient Orient, though it, too, was then fated to perish in Aristotelianism.

Yet these Greek ideas did appear, and Greek thinking constantly sensed how the human ego is really something that is becoming lost in human life. This was a fundamental experience of the Greeks. Take the description I gave concerning ego evolution in my book *Riddles of Philosophy*, [Note 8] where I described that the ego was then connected with thinking, with external perception. But since the whole ego experience is bound up with thinking,

the human being experienced his I not so much within his own corporeality. Rather, he felt it linked to all that lives in the world outside, to the blossoming of the flowers, to lightning and thunder in the sky, to the billowing clouds, to the rising mist and the falling rain. The Greeks experienced the ego connected to all this. They sensed with the forces of the ego, as it were, but without the housing of this ego. Instead, they felt, When I look out upon the world of flowers, there my ego is attached, there it blossoms in the flowers.

It is justifiable to say that this Greek culture could not have continued. What would it have become if it had continued? It was not inherently possible for it to continue on a straight line. What would it have become? Human beings would gradually have come to consider themselves earth beings that are subhuman. The actual soul-spirit being in us would have been experienced as something that really dwells in the clouds, the flowers, the mountains, in rain, and sunshine, a being that occasionally comes to visit us. If the development of Greek culture had continued in the same direction, human beings increasingly would have felt that at night, when they had fallen asleep, they could experience the approach of their own ego in all its radiance and that it paid them a special visit then. But upon waking in the morning and becoming involved in the world of the lower senses, they also would have felt that insofar as they are a being of the earth they are but the outer housing of the ego. A certain estrangement from the ego would have been the consequence of an unbroken development of what can be noticed or sensed as the fundamental keynote or actual basic temperament of Greek nature.

It was necessary that this ego, which was escaping, as it were, into nature and the cosmos, should be firmly anchored in the inner constitution of the human being, an organic being moving about on the earth. A powerful impulse was required for this to happen. It was, after all, the peculiar characteristic of the Oriental world view that while it clearly drew attention to the ego — precisely because of its teaching of repeated earth lives — it also had the inherent tendency to alienate this ego from the human being, to deprive us of the ego. This is how it came about that the Occident, unable to rise to the heights attained by Greece, lacked the inner strength to assimilate the wisdom of Greece in its full strength and allowed it instead to flow back, so to speak, towards the Orient. The West also lacked the strength to take possession of the Mithras cult and allowed it to flow back to the Orient. By dint of the robust, sturdy forces of human earthly nature, the West was capable only of listening to purely factual narrations of the events of Palestine and then of having them affirmed by dogmas laid down in the Councils. At the outset, the Europeans were confronted with a materialistic view of the human personality.

This became most evident in the transition in the fourth century. All knowledge that would have been capable of producing a deeper comprehension of Christianity gradually withdrew back into Asia, all insight that could have brought about a cult in which the Christ Triumphant would have appeared rather than He who is overwhelmed by the burdens of the Cross, whose triumph can only faintly be surmised behind the shadow of the Crucifix. For the Occident, this ebbing away of the wisdom and the ancient ceremonial worship was initially a matter of securing the ego. From the robust force dwelling in the barbaric peoples of the north, the impulse emerged that was intended to supply the power to attach the ego to the earthly human organism.

While this was happening in the regions around the Danube, somewhat south of there, and in southern and western Europe, Arabism was transplanted from the Orient in forms differing from those of the earlier Oriental wisdom. Arabism then made its way as far as Spain, and southwestern Europe became inundated by a fantastic intellectual culture. This was a culture that in the external field of art could not achieve anything more than the arabesque, since it was incapable of permeating the organic realm with soul and spirit. Thus, in regard to the cultic ceremonies, Europe was filled, on the one hand with the narration of purely factual events; on the other hand, it was engrossed in a body of abstract, fantastic wisdom that, entering Europe by way of Spain, turned in filtered form into the culture of pure intellect.

Within this region, where the stories about the events of Palestine referring solely to the external aspects prevailed, where only the fantastic intellectual wisdom from Arabism existed, there a few individuals emerged —

after all, a few isolated individuals appear now and again within the totality of mankind – who had an idea of how matters really stood. In their souls a feeling dawned that there is a lofty Christian mystery, the full significance of which is so great that the highest wisdom cannot penetrate it; the most ardent feeling is not strong enough to develop a fitting ceremonial worship for it. Indeed, they felt that something emanated from the Cross on Golgotha that would have to be comprehended by the highest wisdom and the most daring feeling. Such ideas arose in a few individuals. Something like the following profound Imagination arose in them. In the bread of the Last Supper, a synthesis of sorts was contained, a concentration of the force of the outer cosmos that comes down to the earth together with all the streams of forces from the cosmos, penetrating this earth, conjuring forth from it the vegetation. Then, what has thus been entrusted to the earth from out of the cosmos, in turn springs forth from the earth and is synthetically concentrated in the bread and sustains the human body.

Still another element pierced through all the clouds of obscurity that covered the ancient traditions. Something else was passed on to these European sages, something that, it is true, had had its origin in the Orient but penetrated through the cloud cover and was understood by some individuals. This other mystery, which was linked with the mystery of the bread, was the mystery of the holy vessel in which Joseph of Arimathea had caught the blood flowing down from Christ Jesus. This was the other aspect of the cosmic mystery. Just as the bread was regarded a concentrated extract of the cosmos, so the blood was regarded as the extract of the nature and being of man. In bread and blood – of which wine is merely the outer symbol – this extract expressed itself for these European sages. They had truly stepped forth as if out of the hidden places of the mysteries and towered far above the masses of the European population who could only hear the facts of Palestine, and who, if they advanced to scholarliness, found their way only slowly into the abstract fantasy of Arabism. In these wise men, who distinguished themselves by something that was like the overripe fruit of Oriental wisdom and at the same time the ripest fruit of European perception and feeling, there developed what they called the Mystery of the Grail. But, so they told themselves, the Mystery of the Grail is not to be found on earth.

People have grown accustomed to developing the kind of intelligence that found its highest form in Arabism. They are in the habit of not looking for the meaning of external facts, but are satisfied with being told of these outer facts from the aspect of sensory reality. One must penetrate to an understanding of the Mystery of the Bread, which is said to have been broken by Christ Jesus in the same chalice in which Joseph of Arimathea caught His blood. As legend tells it, this chalice was then removed to Europe, but was preserved by angels in a region high above the surface of the earth until the arrival of Titirel [Note 9] who created for this Grail, this sacred chalice, a temple on Mont Salvat. Through the clouds of abstraction and narrations of mere facts, those who had become European mystery sages in the manner described above wished to behold in a sacred, spiritual temple the Mystery of the Grail, the mystery of the cosmos that had disappeared along with etheric astronomy and the Mystery of the Blood that had vanished along with the ancient view of medicine. For just as the ancient medicine had fallen victim to abstract thinking, the old etheric astronomy, too, had passed over into abstract thought.

At a certain period in time, this whole trend of abstract thinking had reached its prime and had been brought to Spain by the Arabs. It was precisely in Spain where the Mystery of the Grail could not be found outwardly anywhere among people. Only abstract intellectual wisdom prevailed. Among the Christians, there was only narration of bare, external facts; among the Arabs, the Moors, there existed a fantastic development of the intellect. Only in the heights, above this earth, hovered the Holy Grail. This spiritual temple, this Holy Grail, this temple that encompassed the mysteries of bread and wine, could be entered only by those who had been endowed by divine powers with the necessary faculties. It is not by chance that the temple of the Grail was supposed to be found in Spain, where one literally had to move miles away from what earthly actuality presented, where one had to break through brambles in order to penetrate to the spiritual temple that enshrined the Holy Grail.

It was out of such prerequisite feelings that the conception of the Holy Grail developed. The invisible Church, the super-sensible Church, which is nevertheless to be found on earth – this was what concealed itself in the

Mystery of the Grail. It was an immediate presence that cannot be discovered, however, by those who turn their mind indifferently to the world. In ancient times, the priests of the mysteries went out into the world, looked around among human beings, and based on seeing their auras, concluded, Here is one we must receive into the mysteries; there is another one we must accept into the mysteries. People did not need to ask; they were chosen. Inner initiative on the part of the individual was not required; one was chosen and bidden to enter the sacred mystery centers. This age was over already around the eleventh, twelfth, and ninth and tenth centuries.

The impulse urging a person to ask, What are the secrets of existence? had to be grounded in the human being through the Christ force, which had moved into European civilization. No one could approach the Grail who passed through the outer world with a drowsy, apathetic mind. It was said that he alone could penetrate into the miracles, that is, the mysteries of the Holy Grail, who in his soul felt the inclination to ask about the secrets of existence, both the cosmic secrets and those of man's inner being. Fundamentally speaking, it has remained so ever since. After the first half of the Middle Ages, however, when human beings had been earnestly directed to pose questions, had been told that they should indeed ask questions, a great reaction set in beginning with the first third of the fourteenth century. By that time, those who asked about the Mysteries of the Holy Grail had become fewer and fewer in number, and inertia was creeping into the souls of men. They turned their attention wholly to the outer forms of human life on earth, to all that may be seen, counted, weighed, measured, and calculated in the cosmos.

Nevertheless, the sacred challenge had already entered European civilization in the early Middle Ages, the sacred challenge remained: To enquire into the mysteries of the cosmos as well as into the inner mysteries of man, namely, the mysteries of the blood. After all, it was in a great variety of phases that humanity has passed through what materialism with all its forces by necessity had to bring into European civilization. Momentous, stirring words were uttered, though in many instances they have died away. We have to consider how great the possibility was for momentous words to be spoken within European civilization. What was destined for a certain age, namely, the factual narration of the events of Palestine, the permeation of these outer facts with Arabism, which was accomplished by scholasticism [Note 10] in the Middle Ages, was indeed of great significance for that particular age. But just as it developed out of an age of greater wisdom and ceremonial practices, both of which had only been pushed back to the East, it also did not understand how to listen to the super-sensible mysteries of Christianity, the mysteries of the Holy Grail. All the truly compelling voices that resounded in the early Middle Ages – and there were more than a few of them – were silenced by Rome's Catholicism, which was becoming more and more engulfed in dogmatism, in the same way as the Gnosis – as I pointed out again yesterday – was eradicated root and branch.

We must not form a negative judgment of the period between the fourth and the twelfth and thirteenth centuries merely on the basis of the fact that of the numerous voices raised, as it were, in holy, overripe sweetness throughout European civilization – which, for the rest was barbaric – only the somewhat awkward voice of one man has remained who could not write, that of Wolfram von Eschenbach. [Note 11] For all that, he was still great; he was spared by the dogmatism that had gripped Europe and had basically eradicated the powerful voices that had called amid strife and bitterness for the quest of the Holy Grail. Those who raised this call for the Holy Grail meant to let it resound in the spirit of freedom dawning in the dull souls. They did not wish to deprive the human being of his freedom; they did not mean to push anything on him; he was to be the questioning one. Out of the depths of his own soul he was to ask about the miracles of the Grail.

This spiritual life that later became extinct was truly greater than the spiritual life opposing it, although the latter, too, was not without a certain greatness. When what has been described by the servants of the Holy Grail as a spiritual path was then superseded by the earthly path of the journey to the physical Jerusalem over in the East, namely, when the crusade to the Grail was replaced by the crusades for the terrestrial Jerusalem, when Gottfried of Bouillon [Note 12] set out to establish an external kingdom in Jerusalem in opposition to Rome, letting his cry, "Away from Rome!" ring out, his voice was really less persuasive than that of Peter of Amiens. [Note 13] His voice

sounded like a mighty suggestion to translate into something materialistic what the servants of the Holy Grail had intended as something spiritual.

This, too, was one of the paths that was taken because of materialism. It led to the physical Jerusalem, not to the spiritual Jerusalem, which was said to enshrine in Titirel's temple what had remained of the Mystery of Golgotha as the Holy Grail. Legend held that Titirel had brought this Holy Grail down to the earth's sphere from the clouds, where it had hovered, held by angels during the age of Arabism and the factual narration of the events of Palestine. The age of materialism, however, did not begin to ask about the Holy Grail. Lonely, isolated individuals, people who did not have a share in wisdom but dwelled in a kind of stupor, like Parsifal, were the ones who set out to seek the Holy Grail. But they also did not really understand how to ask the proper, appropriate question. Thus, the path of materialism, which began in the first third of the fourteenth century, was preceded by that other path of materialism already expressed in the turn to the East, the eastward journey to the physical Jerusalem. This tragedy was experienced by modern humanity; human beings had to and still have to undergo this tragedy in order to comprehend themselves inwardly and to turn properly into people asking questions. Modern mankind had to and still has to experience the tragedy that the light that once had approached from the East had not been recognized as spiritual light. The spiritual light had been rejected, and instead people set out to find a physical country, the physical materiality of the Orient. In the Middle Ages, humanity began to seek the physical East after the spiritual East had been rejected at the close of antiquity.

Such, then, was the situation in Europe, and our age today is still a part of it. For if we understand the true, inner call resounding in human hearts, we still are and should be seekers for the Holy Grail. The strivings of humanity that emerged beginning with the crusades still await their metamorphosis into spiritual endeavors. We have yet to arrive at such a comprehension of the cosmic worlds so that we will be able to seek for the origin of Christ in these cosmic worlds. As long as these cosmic worlds are investigated only with the methods of external, physical astronomy, they naturally cannot be conceived of as the home of Christ. From what the modern astronomer teaches as the secret of the heavens, which he describes only by means of geometry, mathematics, and mechanics and observes only with the telescope, the Christ could not have descended to earth in order to incarnate in the human being Jesus of Nazareth. Neither can this incarnation be understood on the basis of knowledge about the physical nature of the human being, knowledge that is obtained by moving from people in actual life to the clinic, where the corpse is dissected for the purposes of research so that views concerning the living human being are arrived at based on the corpse.

People in antiquity possessed an astronomy imbued with life and medical knowledge filled with life. Once again, our quest must be for a living astronomy, a living medicine. Just as a living astronomy will reveal to us a heaven, a cosmos, that is truly pervaded by a spirituality and from where the Christ could descend, so an enlivened medicine will present to us the being of man in a way that enables us to penetrate with insight and understanding to the Mystery of the Blood, to the organic inner sphere where the forces of the etheric body, the astral body, and the ego transform themselves into the physical blood. When a true medical knowledge has grasped the Mystery of the Blood and a spiritualized astronomy has understood the cosmic spheres, we shall comprehend how it was possible for the Christ to descend from these cosmic spheres to the earth, how He could find on earth the human body that could receive Him with its blood. It is the Mystery of the Grail that in all earnestness must be sought in this manner, namely, by setting out on the path to the spiritual Jerusalem with all that we are as human beings, with head and heart. This, indeed, is the task of modern humanity.

It is strange how the essence of what ought to come to pass weaves objectively through the sphere of existence. If it is not perceived in the correct way, it is experienced outwardly, it is superficially materialized. Just as formerly the Christians flocked to Jerusalem, so now large numbers of Jewish people travel to Jerusalem, [Note 14] thus expressing yet another phase of materialism that indicates how something that ought to be understood spiritually by all of modern humanity is interpreted only materialistically. The time must come when the Mystery of the Grail

will once again be comprehended in the right way. You know that I have mentioned it in my An Outline of Occult Science. [Note 15] It is, in a manner of speaking, woven into the text that refers to all we must seek to discover along this path of spiritual science. Thus, I indicated what we have to acquire as a kind of picture and Imagination for what must be sought in earnest striving of the spirit and with profound human feeling as the path to the Grail.

Tomorrow, we will discuss this further.