

Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy

Lecture 6 — Dornach, April 17, 1921

During the last few days, I have tried to show how Western civilization originated and that a significant and mighty turning point can be noted in mankind's overall evolution in the fourth Christian century. It was also necessary to point out how Greece gradually developed in the direction of this twilight, so to speak; how, based on quite different impulses, the civilization of central and western European culture came about, and how a comprehension of Christianity developed under these influences. To begin with, let us try and refer to the facts under consideration once more from a certain different viewpoint.

Christianity originated in the western Orient from the Mystery of Golgotha. Insofar as its specific nature was concerned, Oriental culture certainly was already in decline. The ancient, primordial wisdom existed in its last phases in what developed in Asia Minor and Greece as Gnosticism. The Gnosis, after all, was a form of wisdom that combined, in the most manifold ways, what presented itself to the human being as phenomena of the cosmos and nature. This notwithstanding, in comparison to the directly perceived, instinctive insight into the spiritual world that was the foundation of Oriental development, Gnosticism already had a more, shall we say, intellectual, rational character. The spiritual life that permeated all human perception in the ancient Orient was no longer present. It was actually from the last vestiges of the ancient wisdom that people sought to fit together the philosophical and humanistic view that was then employed as a body of wisdom for understanding the Mystery of Golgotha. The substance inherent in the Mystery of Golgotha was clothed in the wisdom retained from the Orient in Greece.

Now let us consider this wisdom from the point of view of spiritual science. If we view human beings as they devoted themselves once upon a time to this wisdom, we find that the main thing in the ancient Orient was that people saw the world with what was active in their astral body, with what they could experience in their soul through their astral body — even though their sentient soul and rational or intellectual soul had already developed. It was the astral body that worked into these soul members and enabled people to actually turn their glance away from the earthly phenomena and to still perceive quite clearly what enters in the spiritual, super-sensible sphere from the cosmos. As yet, human beings did not have a view of the world based on the ego. Their self expressed itself only dimly. For the human being the ego was as yet not an actual question. Human beings dwelled in the astral element, and in it they still lived in a certain harmony with the world phenomena surrounding them. In a sense, the really puzzling world for them was the one they beheld with their eyes, the one that ran its course around them. For them, the comprehensible world was the super-sensible world of the gods, the world in which the spiritual beings had their existence. Human beings looked across to these spiritual beings, to their actions, their destinies. It was indeed the essential characteristic of the view of the ancient Orient that people's attention was directed towards these spiritual worlds. People wished to comprehend the sensory world on the basis of these spiritual worlds.

Today, finding ourselves within our civilization, we take the opposite view. To us, the physical-sensory world is given. Proceeding from it, in one way or another, we try to comprehend the spiritual world — if we attempt that at all, if we do not reject doing so, if we do not remain stuck in pure materialism. The material world is seen as given by us. The ancient Orientals saw the spiritual world as given. On the premise of the physical world, we try to discover something with which to comprehend the wondrousness of the phenomena, the purpose of the structure of the organisms, and so on; based on this physical, sensory world, we try to prove to ourselves the existence of the supersensory world. The ancient Orientals tried to comprehend the physical, sensory environment on the basis of the superphysical, supersensory world given to them. Out of it, they wished to receive light — indeed, they did receive it, and without it, the physical, sensory world was to them only darkness and trepidation. Thus, they also experienced what they sensed to be their innermost being as still completely illuminated by the astral body, as having emerged from the spiritual worlds. People then did not say, I have grown out of earthly life. Rather, they said,

I have grown and descended out of divine-spiritual worlds; and the best I bear within me is the recollection of these divine spiritual worlds. Even Plato, the philosopher, speaks of the fact that the human being has insights, memories, of his prenatal life, the life he led prior to descending into the physical material world. The human being certainly viewed his ego as a ray emerging from the light of the super-sensible world. For him, the material world, not the supersensory world, was puzzling.

This world view then had its offshoots in Greece. The Greeks already experienced themselves within the body, but in it they discovered nothing that could have explained this body to them. They still possessed the traditions of the ancient Orient. They viewed themselves in a certain sense as a being that had descended from the spiritual worlds but that in some ways had already lost the awareness of these spiritual worlds. It was actually the final phase of the Oriental life of wisdom that appeared in Greece, and it was on the basis of this world view that the Mystery of Golgotha was to be understood. After all, this Mystery presented the human being with the profound, tremendous problem of life, with the question how the super-sensible, cosmic being from other worlds, the Christ, could have found His way into a human corporeality. The permeation of Jesus by the Christ was the great problem. We see it light up everywhere in the Gnostic endeavors. People had no such insight of their own concerning a link between the super-sensible aspect of their own nature and the sensory-physical element of their being, and because they had no perception of the connection between the soul-spiritual and the corporeal-physical in reference to themselves, the Mystery of Golgotha became an unsolvable problem for the thinking influenced by the Greek world view. It was, however, a problem with which Greek culture struggled and to which it devoted its finest resources of wisdom. History records much too little of the spiritual struggles that took place then.

I have called attention to the fact that the body of Gnostic literature was eradicated. If it were still available, we would be able to discern this tragic struggle for a comprehension of the living union of the super-sensible Christ with the sense-perceptible Jesus; we would observe the development of this extraordinarily profound problem. This struggle was extinguished, however, an end was put to it by the prosaic, abstract attitude originating from Romanism which is only capable of carrying inner devotion into its abstractions by means of whipping up emotions. The Gnosis was covered up and dogmatism and Church Council decisions were put in its place. The profound views of the Orient that contained no juristic element were saturated with a form assumed by Christianity in the more Western world, the Western world of that age, the Roman world.

Christianity emerged from this Romanism imbued, as it were, with the legal element; everywhere, legal concepts moved in as the Roman political concepts spread out over Christianity. Christianity assumed the form of the Roman body politic, and from what was once the world capital, Rome, we see the emergence of the Christian capital city of Rome. We see how this Christian Rome adopts from ancient Rome the special views on how human beings must be governed, how one's rule must be extended over men. We observe how a kind of ecclesiastical imperialism gains ground because Christianity is poured into the Roman form of government. What had been molded in spiritual forms of conception was transformed into a juristic and human polity. For the first time, Christianity and external political science were forged together and Christianity spread out in that form. Such mighty forces and impulses dwell in Christianity that they could, of course, be effective and survive despite the fact that they were poured into the mold of the Roman political system. And as the Roman political system took hold of the Western world, side by side with it, the humble narrations, the factual reports concerning what had taken place in Palestine, continued on.

In this Western world, however, people had been prepared in a quite special way for Christianity. This preparation consisted in the fact that the human being was aware of himself based on his physical nature; he sensed his ego by means of his physical being. Here, the difference became evident between the way Christianity had passed, as it were, through the Greek world, which then declined, and the form of Christianity that then turned into the actually political Christianity, the governmental, Roman Christianity. Then, more from the northern regions, another form of Christianity emerged that was poured into the northern people, called Barbarians by the Greeks

and Romans. It streamed into those northern people who due to their nature and in concentrating their own being, so to speak, sensed their ego. Out of the totality of man in the physical-sensory realm, out of the human physical and sensory ego incarnation, they arrived at self-comprehension. Now they also tried to grasp what reached them as a simple story about the events in Palestine. Thus, in this Barbarian world, the humble tale of the events in Palestine encountered the ego-feeling, I would like to say, the blood-ego-feeling, particularly in the central and northern European realm. These two aspects came together. On the premise of this ego comprehension of man, people tried to grasp the simple report of the events in Palestine. They did not wish to comprehend its deeper content. They did not try to permeate it with wisdom. They only tried to draw it into the physical-sensory, human sphere.

In the Heliand, [Note 1] we can observe how these tales concerning the events in Palestine appear drawn completely down to the human level, into the world of European people, the ego-world. We see how everything is brought down to the human level; unlike the way it was in Greece, people later had no ability to penetrate the Mystery of Golgotha with wisdom. The urge developed to picture even the activity of Christ Jesus as humble human activity without looking up into the super-sensible, and increasingly to imbue these tales with the merely human element. Furthermore, into this were fitted the Church Council resolutions spreading out dogmatically from the Roman-Christian Empire. Like two worlds that were alien to one another, these two merged — the Christianity that in a sense had Europeanized the report from Palestine and the Christianity representing the Greek spirit in juristic, Romanized, abstract form. This is what then lived on through the centuries.

Only a few individuals could place themselves into this stream in the manner I described yesterday, when I spoke of the sages who developed the conception of the Grail. They pointed out that the impulse of Christianity had indeed once been couched in Oriental wisdom, but that the bearer of this Oriental view, the sacred vessel of the Grail, could be brought to Europe only by means of divine spirits who hovered above the earth, holding on to it. Only then, so they said, a hidden castle was built for it, the Castle of the Grail on Mont Salvat. To this was added that a human being could only approach the miracles of the Holy Grail through inaccessible regions. Then these sages did not say that the surrounding impassable region a person has to penetrate in order to reach the miracles of the Grail is sixty miles wide. They put it in a much more esoteric way when they described this path to the Holy Grail. They said, Oh, these people of Europe cannot reach the Holy Grail, for the path they must take in order to arrive at the Holy Grail takes as long as the path from birth to death. Only when human beings arrive at the portal of death, having tread the path, impassable for Europeans, the path that extends from birth to death, only then will they arrive at the Castle of the Grail on Mont Salvat.

This was basically the esoteric secret that was conveyed to the pupil. Because the time had not yet come when human beings would be able to discern with a clear consciousness how the spiritual world might once more be discovered, the pupils were told that they could enter into the sacred Castle of the Grail only by way of occasional glimpses of light. In particular, they were given strict injunctions that they had to ask, that the time had come in human development when the human being who does not ask — who does not develop his inner being and does not seek the impulse of truth on his own but remains passive — cannot arrive at an experience of his own self. For man must discover his ego by means of his physical organization. This I, which discovers itself through the physical organization, must in turn raise itself up by its own power in order to behold itself where, even in the early Greek culture, this self was still beheld, in super-sensible worlds. The I must first lift itself up in order to recognize itself as something super-sensible.

In the ancient Orient, people saw what occurred in the astral body; the consequences of former earth lives were beheld in it. This is why one spoke of karma. In Greece, this conception was already obscured. The cosmic events were observed only with dim astral vision. This is why people spoke vaguely of destiny, of fate. This view of destiny is only a diminished, weaker form of the fully concrete conception held by the ancient Orient concerning man's passage through repeated earth lives, the consequences of which make themselves known to experience within the

astral body, though only instinctively. Thus, the ancient Orientals could speak of karma developing in the recurring incarnations on earth, the consequences of which were simply present in astral experience.

Now the development moved westward to the ego experience. This experience of the ego was initially tied to the physical body. It was egotistically self-enclosed. The first ego experience dwelled in dullness, even when it contained a strong impulse towards the super-sensible worlds. Parsifal, who undertook his pilgrimage to the Holy Grail, is described as a dim-witted man. It must be clearly understood that when the Mithras worship spread across the West from the Orient, it was rejected by the West; it was not comprehended. For he who sat on the bull, who was to become the victor over the base forces, experienced himself, after all, as emerging from these lower forces. If Western man beheld Mithras riding on the bull, he did not comprehend this being, for this being could not be the one the ego felt and experienced out of its own physical organization. An understanding for this riding Mithras faded away and disappeared.

It can be said that all this had to come to pass, for the ego had to experience its impulse in the physical organization. It had to connect itself firmly with the physical organization, but it must not allow itself to become set in this firm experience within the physical organization.

It was a profound reaction to the Orient's treasures of wisdom, when the West increasingly aimed for what developed out of the purely physical element. This reaction was a necessity. Any number of views did come together in Europe to make this reaction a very strong one. But it was not proper for it to extend into this spiritual striving for more than a few centuries. A new spirituality has indeed emerged since then in the first third of the fifteenth century, but it was an abstract spirituality, a sublimated, filtered spirituality.

Human beings took hold of physical astronomy and physical medicine, and, to begin with, they had to have this stimulus based on the ego impulse sensing itself in the physical element. But it must not continue to become firmly set in European civilization if this European culture wishes to avoid its decline. Truly, more than enough forces of decline are present, vestiges which should only be vestiges and which should be recognized as such.

Just remember how the most up-to-date theology — I have often emphasized this — has lost the faculty for comprehending Christ; increasingly it has arrived at the point of turning Christ Jesus completely into an earth being, a human being. It has put the “humble man from Nazareth” [Note 2] in the place of Christ Jesus. Proceeding from Romanism, out of a materialistically oriented principle of authority, the living spirituality, by means of which the human being can really become familiar with the Mystery of Golgotha, was lost more and more. And observe how in modern times a science is developing that tries to comprehend everything external but that does not wish to penetrate to the human being. As a result of this science, see how impulses arise in society that try only to bring about a human, physical order but that do not want to penetrate the human, physical structures with any divine-spiritual, supersensory, spiritual principle.

During all this it is as if in human souls, in a few human souls, there remained an individual glimpse of light. When a ray of the astral element still dwelling within them combined with the ego, these individuals received such glimpses of light. It is part of the most impressive phenomena of modern Europe when we observe how, out of the East, there resounds a mighty admonition in the religious philosophy of Soloviev, [Note 3] a religious philosophy steeped, so to speak, in Eastern sultriness. But something resounds from there to the effect that a super-sensible, spiritual element must permeate the earthly social order. In a sense, we see how Soloviev dreams of a kind of Christ-state. He is capable of that because within him are the last vestiges of a subjective astral experience illuminating the ego.

Compare these dreams of a Christ-permeated state with what has been established in the East accompanied by the negation of all spiritual elements, something that harbors only forces of decline — what an overwhelming,

colossal contrast! The world should pay attention to such a colossal contrast. If people had already today sufficient objectivity to observe these things, they would be able to see, on the one hand, the one who raises the demand of the Christ-permeated state, the Christ-permeated social structure, Soloviev. They would view him as somebody still stimulated by the Oriental element and casting, so to speak, a final spark into this Europe growing torpid, in order to revive it again from this viewpoint. On the other hand, Czar Nicholas or his predecessors could well be placed together with Czar Lenin; the fact that they give vent to different ideas in the historical development of mankind does not constitute a fundamental difference between them. What matters are the forces living in them and shaping the world, and the same forces dwell in Lenin that dwell in the Russian Czar; there really is no fundamental difference. It is naturally difficult to find one's way within this melee of forces that extend into European civilization from earlier times. Initially, it is indeed a melee of forces and a firm direction must be sought. Such a firm direction can be found in no other way than by lifting the ego up to a spiritual comprehension of the world. Through a spiritual comprehension of the world, the Christian impulse must be reborn. What has been striven for in regard to the external world since the first third of the fifteenth century must be striven for in reference to the totality of the human being; the whole human being has to be understood based on the knowledge of the world.

The comprehension of the world must be viewed in harmony with the understanding of humanity. We must understand the earth evolution in phases, in metamorphoses. We have to look at earlier embodiments of our earth, but we must not consider a primordial nebula devoid of human beings. We have to look at Saturn, sun, and moon as already permeated with the activity of human beings; we must observe how the present structure of the human being originated from the earlier metamorphoses of the planet earth and how the human form in an early phase was likewise active there. We must recognize the human being in the world, and out of this knowledge of man in the world an understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha can well up once again. Human beings must learn to understand why an impassable region surrounds the Castle of the Grail, why the path between birth and death is difficult terrain. When they understand why it is difficult, when they grasp that the ego experiences itself based on the physical organization, when they sense how impossible a merely physical astronomy, a merely physical medicine are, then they themselves will clear the paths. Then people will bring something into this hitherto difficult terrain between birth and death that comes into being through their own soul efforts.

Out of the substance of the soul and spirit, human beings have to fashion the tools with which to break the ground on the field, the soul-field, leading to the Castle of the Grail, to the Mystery of Bread and Blood, to the fulfillment of the words, "Do this in remembrance of me" [Luke 22:19]. For this remembrance has been forgotten; people are no longer aware of what dwells in the words, "Do this in remembrance of me." For this is truly done in remembrance of the mighty moment of Golgotha if the symbol of the bread, that is what develops out of the earth through the synthesis of cosmic forces is understood. It is done rightly if we understand once again how to comprehend the world through a spiritualized cosmology and astronomy, and if we learn to comprehend the human being based on what his extract is, namely, the element where the spiritual directly intervenes in him — if we grasp the Mystery of the Blood. Through work on the inner being of human souls the path must be discovered that leads to the Holy Grail. This is a task of cognition, this is a social task. It is also a task that, to the greatest extent possible, is hated in the present

For due to being placed within the ego education of Western civilization, human beings develop above all a longing to remain passive inwardly in the soul, not to allow earthly existence to give to them what could bring progress to their souls. The active taking hold of the soul forces, the inward experiencing, and this does not necessarily mean occult development but merely the experience of soul nature in general; yet this is something European humanity does not like. Instead, it wishes to continue what was natural for the epoch directly preceding it, namely, the ego development, which does, however, lead to the most blatant egotism, to the blindest raging of instincts, when it is extended beyond its own age. This ego feeling, extending beyond the time properly assigned to it, first of all has penetrated the sentiments of national chauvinism. It appears in national chauvinism; from these feelings arise the spirits who wish to keep the path to the Holy Grail in an impassable condition. But it is our

obligation to do everything that can be done in order to call human souls to activity in the area of knowledge as well as in the social sphere. Yet, all those forces filled with hatred against such activity of the soul emerge in opposition to such a call. After all, haven't people been conditioned long enough so that they concluded, We must consider heretical all our own soul efforts to free ourselves from guilt; we must properly cultivate the awareness of sin and guilt, for we must not progress by means of our own efforts, but must be redeemed in passivity through Christ?

We fail to understand Christ if we do not recognize Him as the cosmic power that completely unites with us when through questions and inner activity we work our way through to Him. Everywhere today, from the denominations, from theology and those who were always connected to theology, from the military and science — from all this we see arise those powers today that try to obstruct the path of inner activity.

For a long time, I have had to call attention to the fact that this is the case, and I have had to say again and again: the arising opposing powers will become more and more vehement. Indeed, to this day this has certainly come true. It is definitely not possible to say that the opposition has already reached its greatest strength. Not by a long shot has it attained its culmination. This opposition has a strong, organizing power in concentrating together all the elements that, while they are in reality destined to decline, can obstruct in their very decline for the time being everything working with the forces of upward striving progress. The forces fostering the activity of souls are weak today in comparison to the opposing elements. Those forces that, based on the comprehension of the spiritual world, try to turn the progressive forces into forces of their own soul are weak. The world has taken on an ahrimanic character. For it was inevitable that the ego, having comprehended itself in the physical element, is taken hold of by ahrimanic forces if it remains in the physical element and does not lift itself up at the right time to a spiritual understanding of itself as a spiritual being. Indeed, we see this process of usurpation by the ahrimanic powers; we observe it in the fact that, little as the sleepy souls would be willing to admit this, an actual tendency towards evil is making itself felt everywhere today.

An inclination towards evil is clearly noticeable, for example, in the manner opponents fight against anthroposophical spiritual science and everything related to it. From the most questionable sources come the means with which individuals battle today against spiritual science, even individuals who enjoy a prestigious standing in the world in scientific or theological circles. The truth is not what people are concerned with. It is only a matter of what slander suits these individuals best and what they like better. It is truly a matter of humanity being strongly possessed by the forces of evil, by a love for evil. Those who are unable today to reckon with this tendency for evil, with this ever increasing love for evil in the battle against anthroposophy, will not be able to develop a feeling, an awareness of the kind of opposing forces and powers that will yet arise in the future. For years, reference has been made to this ever-increasing development. If nothing more can be attained than a clear feeling of it, then this clear feeling, which is, after all, also a force, must at least be maintained. We have to look into the world and be aware of the way it surrounds us. With a sober mind we must realize what is really facing us in the filthy slander that is now emerging from among our opponents and that is the more impressive the more tarnished its source.

It is really necessary to become acquainted with this particular tendency, with this love of evil, that will become more and more prevalent. It is truly necessary not to wallow groggily in excuses that the opponents are convinced of what they say. Do you really believe that in individuals such as the one who has emerged as the newest opponent against anthroposophical spiritual science even the possibility for an inner force of conviction is present? Not even the possibility of conviction is present in him. He acts out of quite different deeper motives. It is indeed a clever move to seek particularly in this direction, to seek for the manner of viewing things that is based on fooling the opponent. Who is the better commander? He who can best fool the enemy! But when this principle is transferred to the means of battling against truth, then such a battle is a battle of the lie, of the personified lie against truth. We must realize that this battle of the personified lie against truth is capable of anything, that it will definitely attempt to take away from us what we have tried and are still trying to attain in the way of outward supports in order to find bearers of truth in this civilization. It is not exaggerated to say that there exists the most profound and

thoroughgoing wish to deprive us of the Waldorf School and this building. [Note 4] And if we pay no attention to this; if we do not even develop in us a feeling concerning the ways and means of this opposition, then we remain sleeping souls. Then we do not take hold with inner alertness of what is trying to pour forth out of anthroposophical spiritual science.

Basically, we should not be surprised now that the opponents could turn out the way they did for that could have been known long ago. The overwhelming impression for us today certainly is that there are too few individuals who can be active representatives of our spiritual movement. It is generally still easier to be effective among human beings by means of force, control, and injustice than by means of freedom. The truth that is to be proclaimed through anthroposophical spiritual science is permitted to count only on human freedom. It must find people who ask questions. One certainly cannot say, Why doesn't this truth possess in itself the strength to compel human souls by virtue of divine-spiritual power? It does not wish to do that; it cannot do that. The reason is that it will always consider inner freedom, the freedom of the human being in general, to be something absolutely inviolable. If the human being is to come to anthroposophy out of his own judgment, he must become one who asks questions; out of the innermost freedom of judgment he must convince himself. The word of spiritual truth will be spoken to him; convincing himself of it is something he must do on his own. If he wishes to cooperate and be active in society, he must do so out of the innermost impulse of his heart. Those who belong in the truest sense of the word to anthroposophical spiritual science must become people who ask questions.

What do we encounter on the side of the opposition? Do not believe that only those who band together who are in some way one-sided in any one creed. No, in a Catholic church in Stuttgart, a sermon tells its listeners, Go to the lecture by Herr von Gleich. [Note 5] There you can invigorate your Catholic souls and can vanquish the opponents of your Catholic souls! And these Catholic souls go there; the Catholic, General von Gleich, gives a lecture and concludes with a song by Martin Luther! A fine union of one side and the other — the opponents organize as one! It certainly matters not if they agree in any way in their faith, their convictions.

For us, what matters is the strength to stand firmly on the ground of what we recognize as right. Yes, nothing will be left undone to undermine this ground; of this you can be sure. I had to bring this up one more time, particularly in connection with the considerations concerning the course taken by European civilization; for it is necessary that at least the intention develops to place oneself firmly on the ground we must recognize as the right one. It is also necessary that among ourselves we do not give ourselves up to the popular illusions concerning the various oppositions. Their aim is to undermine the ground we stand on. It is up to us to work as much as is humanly possible, and then, if the ground under us should become undermined and we do slide down into the chasm, our efforts will nevertheless have been such that they will find their spiritual path through the world. For what appears now are the last convulsions of a dying world. But even if it is in its last throes of death, this world can still strike out like a raving maniac, and one can lose one's life due to this frantic lashing out. This is why we must at least recognize what kind of impulses give rise to this mad lashing out. Nothing can be achieved by what is timid; we must appeal to what is bold. Let us try to measure up to such an appeal!

I had to include this so that you would sense that we face an important, significant, and decisive moment, and that we have to consider how we are to find the strength to persevere.