

# Materialism and the Task of Anthroposophy

## Lecture 7 — Dornach, April 22, 1921

A future study of history will record these days as belonging among the most significant ones of European history, for today central Europe's renunciation of a will of its own became known. [Note 1] It remains to be seen in what direction matters will develop further in the next few days, but whatever takes place, it is, after all, an action that much more so than many that have preceded it in our catastrophic age, is connected with human decisions of will that originated in the full sense of the word from the forces of decline in European civilization. Such a day can remind us of the periods from which emerged everything within European civilization, the origin of which I described in the past few weeks. It has its point of departure, as it were, in what is described so superficially by history but what so profoundly influenced the civilization of mankind after the fourth Christian century.

We have characterized these events from several perspectives. We have outlined how after the fourth century the element that could be termed the absolutely legalistic spirit invaded the ecclesiastical and secular civilization of the Occident and then became more and more intensified. We then indicated the sources from which these matters originated. Indeed, already earlier we have called attention to the fact that in the middle of the nineteenth century modern humanity underwent a crisis that, although given little notice, can even be described from an anatomical, physiological standpoint, as we saw here a few weeks ago. [Note 2] All that then took its course in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the last third, culminating in the unfortunate first two decades of the twentieth century, stands under the influence of what occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century.

This day in particular gives us cause to introduce these considerations we intend to pursue in the next few days with the contemplation of a certain personality. This is something we have done already on several occasions, but it might be especially important from the viewpoint I wish to assume today. One could say that this is an individual who, partly as a spectator and partly as one undergoing the events of history as a tragic personality, experienced what was present in the form of forces of decline within European civilization in the last third of the nineteenth century. I am referring to Friedrich Nietzsche. [Note 3]

We are not assuming our standpoint today in order to biographically consider the personality of Nietzsche in any way. We only do so in order to demonstrate a number of aspects of the last third of the nineteenth century through the person of Nietzsche. After all, his activities fall completely within this period of the nineteenth century. He is the personality who participated, I would like to say, with the greatest sensitivity in all the cultural streams pervading Europe during that period. He is the one who sensed the forces of decline inherent in these trends in the most terrifying manner and who, in the end, broke down under this tragedy, under these horrors.

Naturally, one can approach the picture we have in mind from any number of directions. We shall focus on a few of them today. Friedrich Nietzsche grew up in a parsonage in central Germany. This implies that he was surrounded all through his childhood by what can be designated as the modern confinements of culture, the narrowness of civilization. He had around him all that expresses itself in a philistine, sentimental manner and yet simultaneously exhibited smugness, conceit, and trivial contentment. I say complacent, conceited, for this culture believed it had a grasp on the untold number of secrets of the universe in threadbare, superficial sentiments. I say content with trivialities because these sentiments are indeed the most commonplace. They penetrate philistine sentimentality from the very simplest human level and, at the same time, are valued by this philistine sentimentality as if they were the pronouncements God uttered in the human mind.

Nietzsche was a product of this narrowness of culture, and as a young man he absorbed everything someone can acquire who passes through the present-day higher forms of education as a, let me say, unworldly youth. Already during his early teens, Nietzsche was attracted with all his heart to everything that streams out of Greek tragedies such as those by Sophocles or Aeschylus. [Note 4] He imbued himself with all that strives out of Greek humanism towards a certain spiritual-physical world experience. And with all of his human nature, with his thinking, feeling, and willing, Nietzsche wanted to stand within this experience of world totality of which Man can feel himself to be a part, an individual member.

Time and again, the soul of young Friedrich Nietzsche must have confronted the mighty contrast existing between what the majority of modern humanity in its philistine sentimentality and narrow, trivial self-contentment calls reality and the striving for loftiness inherent in the tragic poets and philosophers of early Greek antiquity. Certainly, his soul swung back and forth between this philistine reality and the striving for sublimity in the Greek spirit that surpasses all trivial human striving. And when he subsequently entered the sphere of modern erudition, the lack of spirit and art, the mere intellectual activity of this modern scholarship was particularly irritating to him. His beloved Greeks, through whom he had most intensely experienced the striving for loftiness, had for him been remolded by modern science into philological, formal trivialities. He had to find his way out of the latter. Hence he acquired his thorough antipathy against that spirit he considered the source of modern intellectualism. He was seized with profound antipathy against Socrates [Note 5] and all Socratic aspirations.

Certainly, there are the impressive, positive sides of Socrates; there is all that one can learn in a thorough manner through Socrates. Yet, on the one hand, we have Socrates as he once existed within the world of Greece and, on the other hand, there is Socrates, the ghostly specter haunting the descriptions of modern high school teachers and university philosophers. With whom could young Nietzsche become acquainted when he initially observed his surroundings? Only with the ghostly specter Socrates! This is how he acquired his dislike against this Socrates, out of what has arisen through this Socratism within European civilization. Thus, he saw in Socrates the slayer of human wholeness that in the art and philosophy of the pre-Socratic age had streamed through European civilization. In the end, it seemed to him that what overlooks the world from the foundation of existence is a reality turned philistine and desolate. He felt that any lofty, noble striving to ascend to the spiritual spheres of life must struggle to overcome such a reality.

Nietzsche was unable to discover such noble tendencies in anything that could have emerged from the prevailing striving for knowledge; he could find it only in what originated from efforts of artistic character. For him, what had developed as tragic art out of ancient Greece illuminated the philistine atmosphere into which Socratism had finally turned. He saw Greek tragedy reborn, as it were, in what Richard Wagner was endeavoring to create as tragedy out of the spirit of music towards the end of the 1870's and beginning of the 1880's. [Note 6] In the musical drama to be created he saw something that by ignoring Socratism was connected directly with the first Greek age of total humanism. Thus, he recognized two streams of art, on one hand, the Dionysian, orgiastic one that, arising from unfathomable depths, attempts to draw the whole human being into the world, and, on the other hand, the one that eventually was so perverted in Europe that it lost all its luster and decayed into the absolute spiritual sclerosis of modern scholarship, namely, the Apollonian stream. Nietzsche strove for a new Dionysian art. This pervades his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik*). Right away, he had to experience how the typical philistine railed at what expressed itself in this book out of a knowledge borne aloft by wings of imagination. Immediately, the leading philistine of modern civilization, Wilamowitz [Note 7], mobilized. (Subsequently he became the luminary of the University of Berlin and clothed the Greek creators of tragedy in modern, trivial garments that won the undying admiration of all those who penetrate as deeply into the Greek word as they are distant from the Greek spirit.) Right away the collision occurred between the stream that, borne by the spirit, tried to penetrate the artistic element based on knowledge and the other that does not feel comfortable within this richly imaginative spirit of knowledge, this knowledge borne by the spirit, and that therefore escapes into philistine pedantry.

Everything his soul could experience through this contrast was then poured out by Nietzsche in the beginning of the 1870's in his four so-called Thoughts Out of Season [Note 8] (Unzeitgemäesse Betrachtungen). The first of these contemplations was dedicated to the educated philistine proper of the modern age. These Thoughts Out of Season have to be considered in the right light. They were certainly not intended as attacks against individual persons. In the first contemplation, for example, the otherwise quite worthy and upright David Strauss [Note 9] was not meant to be attacked personally. He was to be considered as the typical representative of modern philistinism in education which is so infinitely content with the trivialities developing out of this modern life. We actually experience this again and again, because, basically, matters have not improved since those days, they have only intensified.

This is approximately the same experience as the one we have when we attempt to contribute something to the comprehension of the world out of the depths of spiritual science. Then people come and say that although what is being said concerning an etheric and astral body and spiritual development may all be true, it cannot be proven. One can only prove that two times two is four. Above all else, one has to consider how this unprovable spiritual science relates to the certain truth that two times two is four. You can hear today in all possible variations — although perhaps put not quite so bluntly — that the objection that two times two is four must be raised against every utterance concerning soul and spirit land. As if anybody would doubt that two times two is four!

Friedrich Nietzsche wished to strike out against the philistinism of modern education when he described its prototype, David Friedrich Strauss, the author of *Old and New Faith* (Alter and neuer Glaube), this arch-philistine book. He also tried to demonstrate how desolate things stood with modern spirituality. We need only recall some important facts to show just how desolate they are. We need only remember that in the first half of the nineteenth century there still existed fiery spirits, for example, the historian Rotteck, [Note 10] who lectured on history in a one-sidedly liberal form but with a certain fiery spirituality. We only have to recall that in Rotteck's *History* (Geschichte) something of the totality of man holds sway, albeit a somewhat withered one, something of the human being who at least brings into the whole experience of mankind's development as much spirituality as there is rationality in it. We need only compare this with the people who said later, It will lead nowhere to try and develop a national constitution or social conditions out of human reason. Instead, we ought to study ancient times, concentrate on history. We should study the way everything developed and accordingly arrange matters in the present.

This is the attitude that, in the end, bore its dull fruits in the teachings of political economy represented, for instance, in somebody like Lujo Brentano, [Note 11] the attitude that only wished to observe history, and actually held that anything productive could only have been brought into humanity's evolution in ancient times.

It held that nowadays one would really have to empty out the human being and then, like a sack, stuff him full with what can still be gained from history so that modern man, aside from his skin — and at most a little of what lies under the skin — would, underneath this tiny area, be stuffed full with what former ages have produced, and would in turn be able to utter ancient Greek insights, old Germanic knowledge, and so on. One did not think nor wished to believe that the modern human soul could be imbued with any productivity. History became the catchword of the day. Nietzsche in the 1870's was disgusted by this and wrote his book *The Use and Abuse of History in Life* (Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie fuer das Leben) in which he indicated how modern man is being suffocated by history. And he demanded that productivity be attained once again.

The artistic spirit still lived in Nietzsche. After he had turned to Wagner, "a philosopher, as it were," [Note 12] he again dealt with another philosopher, namely Schopenhauer. [Note 13] In Schopenhauer's ideas he saw something of the reality of the otherwise dull and dusty spirit of philosophy. Nietzsche regarded Schopenhauer as an educator of modern humanity, not only as someone who had been but as

someone who ought to become such a teacher. And he wrote his book *Schopenhauer as Educator* (*Schopenhauer als Erzieher*). He followed this with *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, pointing out in an almost orgiastic manner how a revival of modern civilization through art would have to come about.

Strange indeed are the depths from which *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* originated. Friedrich Nietzsche himself had painstakingly edited out everything he had written in addition to what was then published under the title, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*. One could almost say that for each page of this book, printed in 1876, there exists a second page that contains something completely different. While *Bayreuth* and its activities are enthusiastically celebrated in this book, in addition to each page Nietzsche wrote another, as it were, different page filled with deeply tragic sentiments concerning the forces of decline in modern civilization. Indeed, even he could not believe in what he was writing; he could not believe that the power to truly transform the forces of decline into those of ascent lay in Bayreuth. This tragedy prevails especially in those pages, deleted at that time, that remained in manuscript form and were made public only after Friedrich Nietzsche had fallen ill. It was at that time that the great change came over him, actually already in 1876. This period of Nietzsche's life ended tragically in the agony over the forces of decline inherent in modern culture.

Already in 1876 the disgust concerning the decline was stronger in his mind than the joy over the positive forces he had initially noted in Bayreuth. Above all, his soul was inundated by the observation of all that has pervaded modern civilization of untrue elements, of the present-day lack of truthfulness. And I would like to say this concentrated itself in his mind into a picture of what affects this modern civilization on the human level. He was actually no longer able to discover in this modern culture any redeeming spirituality that could surmount the philistine view of reality. Thus, he entered his second period in which he opposed the distorted self-concept of human beings in modern times with what he called the "all-too-human" (*Allzumenschliche*), with the true concept of the human being, of which people these days do not want to know anything.

One would like to say, Just look at those individuals who have celebrated modern history in this manner, such as Savigny [Note 14], Lujo Brentano, Ranke [Note 15] and the other historians and ask what they are actually doing? What is woven into the tapestry of the active spirit of the times? Something is being produced that is supposed to be true. Why is it presented as truth? Because those individuals who speak of such a truth are in reality themselves spiritually impotent. They deny the spirit because they themselves do not possess it and cannot discover it. They dictate to the world: You must be thus and thus — for they lack the light they are supposed to shed over the world. The all-too-human, the whole all-too-narrow attitude is what is built up to the human element and presented as absolute truth to mankind. From 1876 on, this dwelled as a feeling in Nietzsche while he wrote his two volumes *Human, All Too Human* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*); then *Dawn Morgenroete*, and finally, *Joyful Science* (*Froehliche Wissenschaft*), by means of which Nietzsche plunged as if intoxicated into nature so as to escape from what had actually surrounded him.

Nevertheless, a tragic feeling was present in him. Northern Germany, northern Europe in general and central Europe had had an effect on him; he absorbed all that and from Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner in particular he found his way to Voltairism; the text *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* was dedicated to Voltaire. [Note 16] He attempted to revive Socratism by trying to breathe new life into it, but he did this by seeking the all-too-human truth, human narrowness, behind the lie of modern civilization. He tried to reach the spirit out of this human narrowness. He did not find it behind the accomplishments of men of more recent times. He believed he could find it through a kind of intoxicated plunge into nature. He endeavored to experience this intoxicated plunge into nature in his life by traveling south repeatedly during his vacations in order to forget, in the warm sun and under the blue sky, what men have produced in the modern age. This drunken plunge into nature underlies his *Morgenroete* and the *Froehliche Wissenschaft* as the basic feeling. He did not find joy through it; his sense of tragedy remained. It is especially pronounced when we see him express his sentiment in poetry and hear: [Note 17]

Die Krähen schrei'n und ziehen schwirren Flugs zur Stadt: bald wird es schnei'n, — wohl dem, der jetzt noch — Heimat hat!

(The ravens shriek and fly with flutt'ring wings to town; soon it will snow, — how fortunate is he who now still has — a home!

Nietzsche, too, had no home. "Fly, bird! Rasp your song in sounds of wasteland birds." He had no home because this is the impression he had of himself, as if ravens were shrieking round him when he fled again and again from Germany to Italy. Soon, however, it became evident that he could not remain in this mood. There are verses by Nietzsche in which he remonstrates against anybody who takes this mood expressed in the lines, "The ravens shriek and fly with flutt'ring wings to town," too seriously. He did not wish to be considered only as a tragic person; he also wanted to laugh about everything that had occurred in modern culture. As I said, just read the few lines that follow after the above poem in the most recent Nietzsche edition. So in the last third of the nineteenth century we have, in a sense, in Nietzsche a spirit predestined to abandon everything people in the modern age have produced, to flee everything the arts and the sciences have accomplished, in order to find something original, to discover new gods and smash the old

We might say that this individual was too deeply wounded by his age for these wounds to heal, much less for them to give rise to a productive new impulse. Thus, from these wounds sprang forth creations and ideas devoid of content. The Superman appeared, pervaded by sensuous, bleeding lyricism. In the last third of the nineteenth century, it was no longer possible for Nietzsche to penetrate to the true human being on the basis of natural science, which had extinguished man, or on the basis of sociology or the social structures of the last century, an age that possessed machines but no longer the human being, except as he stands in front of the machine. Nietzsche did, however, experience the urge to escape through negation, to flee what was no longer known and felt to be human. Instead of a comprehension of the human being out of the whole cosmos, instead of an "occult science," there emerged the abstract, lyrical, sultry and overheated, pathological and convulsive Superman, appearing in visions before his soul in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Also sprach Zarathustra; [Note 18] visions that in part touch the deepest aspects of human nature but that basically always sound disharmonious in some way, expressing intentional disharmony.

Then, there is the other negation, or rather idea devoid of content. This life between birth and death cannot be understood if it is not at the same time seen as extending beyond the one earth life. Those who truly possess a feeling for grasping the one life between birth and death, who take hold of it with such a profound feeling and lyricism as did Friedrich Nietzsche, those sense in the end: This life cannot be comprehended as a single one, it must be viewed in its development through many lives. But as little as Nietzsche could bestow a content on the human being and therefore proceeded in a convulsive manner to his negation, the Superman, as little could he give substance to the idea of repeated earth lives. He hollowed these lives out; they turned into the desolate, eternal return of the same. Just think for a moment what can arise in our mind concerning repeated earth lives, which are linked to each other in karma through a mighty progression of destiny. Just picture how one life pours content into the following one; then imagine these earth lives as shadowy, empty husks, emptied of all content, and there you have the eternal return of the same, the caricature of the repeated earth lives.

Impossible to penetrate to the image of the Mystery of Golgotha by means of what the modern confessions represent — this is how what could have disclosed itself to him through Christianity appeared to Nietzsche! It was impossible to penetrate the religious conceptions that had come about since the fourth century and to arrive at an idea of what had occurred in Palestine at the beginning of the Christian era. Yet, Nietzsche was filled with a profound desire for truth. The all-too-human had come before his soul in a saddening form. He did not wish to participate in the lie of modern civilization; he was not fooled by an image of the Mystery of Golgotha such as the one presented with absolute mendacity to the world by the

opponents of Christianity, by the likes of Adolf Harnack. [Note 19] Even in the lie, present as actual reality, Nietzsche still tried to discern the truth. This was the reason for his distortion of the Mystery of Golgotha in his *Antichrist*. [Note 20] In the *Antichrist*, he depicted the image one has to present on the basis of the modern religious conceptions if, instead of lying, one wishes to speak the truth based on this form of thinking and yet, at the same time, is unable to penetrate what modern knowledge offers and to come to what in truth is present in the Mystery of Golgotha.

This is approximately Nietzsche's state of mind in the years 1886 and 1887. He had abandoned everything offered by modern cultural insights. He had passed on to the negation of man in the Superman, because he could not attain to the idea of man in modern knowledge, which has eradicated the human being from its field. From his feeling concerning the one earth life he had received an inkling of repeated earth lives, but modern thinking could not give him any content for them. Thus, he emptied out what he sensed; he no longer had any content; only the formal continuation of the eternally same, of the eternal repetition, stood before his soul. And in his mind, he beheld the travesty of the Mystery of Golgotha, as he described it in his *Antichrist*, for if he wished to cling to the truth, he could find no way leading from what modern theology offers to a conception of the Mystery of Golgotha

He had been able to study quite a bit concerning the Christian nature of modern theology in the writings of Overbeck, [Note 21] the theologian from Basle. The fact that this modern theology is not Christian is in the main proven in Overbeck's texts dealing with modern theology. All the unchristian elements pervading modern Christianity had lived deeply in Nietzsche's soul. The hopeless lack of vision in this modern knowledge had deprived him of a true overview of what is produced in the human being in one life for the next one. Thus arose in him the empty idea of the return of sameness. The Christian impulse had been taken from him by what calls itself the Christian spirit in the modern age, and he saw the untruthfulness of his age, and he could not even believe any longer in the truthfulness of art in which he had tried to believe at the beginning of his ascending career. He was already filled with this tragic mood when utterances burst forth from his soul, such as "And the poets lie too much ..." [Note 22] Out of their innermost human nature, poets and artists of the modern culture have indeed lied too much and lie too much to this day. For what the forces of the future need most and what modern civilization possesses least of all is the spirit of truth.

Nietzsche strove for this spirit of truth; which alone can present to the human being the true idea of himself. Through the development in repeated earth lives, it alone can bestow on this one earth life a meaning other than that of the senseless return of the same. Through a sense for truth, he thirsted for the true conception of the One Who tread the earth in Palestine. He found only a travesty of it in modern theology and present-day Christian demeanor. All this broke him. Therefore, the personality of Friedrich Nietzsche expresses the breakdown of the spirit striving for truth amid the falsehood that has arisen since the point of crisis in modern times, namely, since the middle of the nineteenth century. The rise of this untruthfulness is so powerful that people do not even have an idea of how deeply they are enmeshed in its nets. They do not even give a thought any more to how truthfulness should replace falsehood at every moment.

In no other way, however, than by realizing that our soul has to be imbued with this fundamental feeling that truth instead of falsehood must prevail, only through this profound feeling can anthroposophical spiritual science live. Modern civilization has been educated in the spirit of untruth, and it is against this spirit of falsehood — this can really be cited as an example — that anthroposophic spiritual science has to fight the most. And today, matters have reached the point, as I mentioned already at the conclusion of my last lecture, [Note 23] where even in regard to our anthroposophically oriented spiritual science we find ourselves in a deep, intense crisis. What we need to do very much is to work, to be intensely active out of enthusiasm for truth. For the malaise our culture suffers from is exemplified in what is happening hourly and daily, the malaise that will cause its downfall if humanity does not take heart.

In the last issue of a weekly magazine, [Note 24] which usually expresses widely prevailing public opinion, we read of agitation against Simons' political policies. It goes without saying that neither anthroposophic spiritual science nor the threefold social order have anything to do with Simons' politics. Anthroposophic spiritual science, however, is thrown together today with Simons' politics by a far-reaching spirit of falsehood. People know what is achieved by such means, and much will be achieved. Something of the whole rotten mendacity comes to expression when one reads a sentence that with quotation marks, appears in this magazine and is supposed to characterize Simons: "He is the favorite disciple of the theosophist Steiner, who has prophesied a great future for him. He stands firmly on the gospel of the threefold social order, but in the spirit of his home town of Wuppertal he is also a devout Christian."

Well, there are as many lies here as there are words! I did not say there were as many lies as there were sentences, I said on purpose, There are as many words as there are brazen lies — with the exception of the last sentence — but the first sentences are lies word for word.

By adding this last sentence to the preceding ones, absolute paralysis is added to mendacity. Just imagine the creature that would come into being if somebody would become my favorite pupil, if I would predict a great future for him, if he would firmly cling to the "gospel of the threefold social order" and, on top of that, if he would be a pious Christian in the sense of the good citizens of Wuppertal! Imagine such a person! This, however, is present-day civilization. As insignificant as it may appear, it is a clear symptom of modern civilization. For those who frequently attack such things, attack with the same lies and the same paralysis. And the others are not even aware of the strange figures that are "conjured up before their stupid eyes" [Note 25] — forgive me but I am merely quoting something that is said by the gnomes in one of my mystery plays. They do not notice at all what is conjured up before their, let us say, "intelligent" eyes — intelligence in the sense of modern civilization. People actually swallow anything today, because the feeling for truth and veracity is lacking, and the enthusiasm is missing from the assertion of truth and truthfulness in the midst of an untruthful, lying culture.

Things cannot progress as long as these matters are not taken seriously. A different picture must be placed before the soul today. These days, it becomes quite clear that Europe is intent on digging the grave of its own civilization, that it wishes to call on something outside of Europe so that, above the closed grave of the old civilization as well as above the already closed grave of Goetheanism, something completely different can arise. We shall see whether anything can still come out of that culture for which the politicians are now digging the grave. We shall see whether something can emerge from it that will truly receive the forces of progress; that will discover the human being, find the only true impulse of the idea of eternity in repeated earth lives, and discover the true Mystery of Golgotha and Christianity as the right impulse in the face of all that appears in this area as untruth and falsehood.