

## 5. *Man Today, Karma and the Macrocosm*

*Out of this wood do not desire to go:  
Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no.*

*And I will purge thy mortal grossness so  
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.<sup>1</sup>*

— William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

The social being of Anthroposophy has been described as spiritually informed. In a rainbow-like way the applications are meditations and vice-versa. Coherence comes from shared seeking based on Steiner's work. The Anthroposophical mind is on a perpetual quest to realise the spirit that is already in matter through attaining the higher states of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition. Following the path to these sublime states, Steiner's followers increasingly perceive the cosmos as he revealed it. These 'objective spiritual truths' are the ultimate justification for everything Anthroposophical.

They are rarely systematised<sup>2</sup> or seen as culturally relative. Getting to know the revelation is like entering an enchanted wood. There is no allowable way of seeing it as a mapped whole and the attempt to do so (as in this book) is close to a profane, or Ahrimanic, act. There are none of the linear, sharp perspectives that belong to the outside, contemporary 'Ahrimanic' world. This and the following chapter go into the wood as far as possible in an attempt to give an overview of the cosmology.

The way in has largely been through English-speaking Anthroposophy. The poetic, mythic, and lived processes whereby Anthroposophy is communicated are an important part of the message and are noticed briefly at the end of the chapter and through quotations in this and the following chapter. However, no structural analysis of Steiner's revelation seems to exist. As will be seen, its structures can be interpreted as corresponding to the meanings of the Goetheanum serpent and of Anthroposophy's social being, which has already been described.

Members have greatly helped me to understand the cosmology and they, as much as written sources, have – without being in any way responsible for it – contributed to this Ahrimanic version.<sup>3</sup> Told as a whole it is inevitably intricate.

### **The Nature of Man Today**

Rudolf Steiner's simplest description of man was to compare him to a plant. The stalk is analogous to the soul, which 'takes root' in the physical world and 'blossoms', through the 'I', in the spiritual world. The familiar splitting into body, soul and spirit is the starting point from which he opens out his vision.

A ninefold division arises through subdividing the three primary realities of body, soul and spirit into three subtle entities (or 'natures') each. The body of man is described as consisting of 'physical', 'etheric'<sup>4</sup> and 'soul' natures or 'bodies'. Of these, only the physical contains matter in the everyday, sense-perceptible use of the word. The etheric nature is what gives the physical form and shape; the latter decomposes when (as in 'death') this etheric nature leaves it. There are, for example, etheric fingers and hearts, all in flow and movement and much more complicated than the physical organs. Steiner's revelations about the etheric nature have been related to the beginning of energy field theory in modern biology. The etheric nature is the passer on of heredity. The soul nature is the rouser of consciousness; nevertheless, it is seen as part of the body of man.

The second of the three main divisions, the soul of man, also consists of three natures. The first subdivided aspect is the 'sentient soul', which is barely distinguishable from the soul nature of the body. Steiner often grouped them together, calling them the 'astral body'. The sentient soul responds through the senses to the stimuli of the outside world; it is also the area of human subjectivity, that is to say, feelings, passions, and instincts. The other two natures of soul, the 'intellectual' and 'spiritual' souls, are implicitly spiritual principles. The intellectual soul arises when thinking is brought to bear on sense perception to change the physical world, thus creating technology and material civilisation. But such thinking, even when unconscious of its origins, is, Steiner states, really spiritual because it is connected with the transcendent individuality of man, the 'I'. The spiritual soul is formally part of the basic soul reality of man, but is implicitly spirit because it is the God within, at the developmental stage when the soul comes to know the 'I'. It is, in Anthroposophy's ethical intuitionism, identified with the good, the true, and inner duty.

The eye in the head of the Goetheanum serpent as it coils round to enclose its tail-end suggests the guiding theme of the three spirit natures. Consciousness becomes aware of the lower bodies in a process that remarkably resembles the path of knowledge, with its stages of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition. 'Spirit-self' arises when the astral body is transmuted to a higher state. 'Life-spirit' is the similar transformation of the etheric nature. 'Spirit-man' is the conscious penetration and complete transmutation of the physical organism itself. These spiritual states are considered to belong generally to the future but, it seems, are anticipated in the Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition of the path of knowledge.

In Steiner's *Theosophy* the threefold approach, having been expanded as described into one that is ninefold, is then contracted to seven and, finally, four aspects (see Table 2). The nine subtle natures (three each for the body 'root', the soul 'stalk' and the spirit 'blossom') contract to seven. The last of the body and the first of the soul natures constitute the astral body; and the last nature of the soul, the spiritual soul, is combined with the first of the spirit natures, spirit-self, and takes the latter's name. There is a further contraction to four entities. The last two soul natures have become spirit since the higher one has become spirit-self while the other one, the intellectual soul, has become identified with the 'I'. Thus all is spirit until the astral body; then there are the etheric and physical natures. This fourfold division seems to be the one that is most significant for Anthroposophists, for the physical body is what man today has in common with minerals, plants and animals; the etheric corresponds to the life of plants and animals, the astral to that of animals, while spirit is within humanity and other 'Beings'.

Apart from the present physical body all the natures of man are considered to be supersensible. Furthermore, of the original nine natures, five are related to what Steiner terms 'spirit'. This illustrates the importance of spirit in his cosmology. Subjectivity and affects are represented in the astral body alone, as what is formally 'soul' (our 'stalk') loses two of its natures to spirit.

Given that technical advances such as scanning brain processes have now made it possible to link states of consciousness with physical correlates, it is interesting to compare Steiner's revelation with one of the most down to earth yet poetic expositions of the new neuroscience. Antonio Damasio in *The Feeling of What Happens* distinguishes between a minimal proto-self and wakefulness, core consciousness with a sense of self which involves a 'second order

map of organism-object relationship', and extended consciousness which is uniquely human, involving autobiographical memory and conscience.<sup>5</sup> There appear to be similarities between these and, if the macrocosmic dimensions are momentarily ignored, Steiner's etheric body, astral body and intellectual soul.

### **Karma and Repeated Earth Lives**

In Anthroposophy man has a destiny that far transcends his present limitations. After explaining the nature of man Steiner goes on to describe karma in what is perhaps the best example of his translated style.

By means of its actions, the human spirit has really brought about its own fate. In a new life it finds itself linked to what it did in a former one. . . . The physical body is subject to the laws of heredity. The human spirit, on the contrary, has to incarnate over and over again; and its law consists in its bringing over the fruits of the former lives into the following ones. The soul lives in the present. But this life in the present is not independent of the previous lives. For the incarnating spirit brings its destiny with it from its previous incarnations. And this destiny determines its life. What impressions the soul will be able to have, what wishes it will be able to have gratified, what sorrows and joys shall grow up for it, with what individuals it shall come into contact — all this depends on the nature of the actions in the past incarnations of the spirit. Those people with whom the soul was bound up in one life, the soul must meet again in a subsequent one, because the actions which have taken place between them must have their consequences. When this soul seeks re-embodiment, those others, who are bound up with it, will also strive towards their incarnation at the same time.<sup>6</sup>

In Anthroposophy death is considered to be a process similar to, but going beyond, sleep. In sleep, if it is dreamless, the astral nature or body and the 'I' separate from the physical and etheric bodies of the sleeper. The former return to replenish the latter and the sleeper awakes. On death, the (formative) etheric as well as the astral body and 'I' are believed to leave the physical body, which thereby disintegrates.

Dying, usually at least, is perceived to be gradual and not confined to the physical body alone. The etheric and astral bodies also become 'corpses'. After the death of the physical body, the etheric and astral bodies and the 'I' are joined together. The etheric body, freed from the memory-limiting physical body, is believed to make the past

life appear in a vivid, all-embracing simultaneous tableau, then (after a few days) to die. The essence of the memory tableau is retained.

Following the death of the etheric body, the next process begins. It takes about as long as the time spent sleeping in the previous incarnation, and involves the purging of the astral body, which then becomes a corpse itself. This takes place in the 'soul-world'. The past incarnation is purged by being lived backwards to the time (at birth or conception?) when spontaneous experience of the 'spirit-world' had been lost. This purging results in a spiritual 'seed', which then grows in the spiritual world of the freed 'I'.

Anthroposophically, the soul-world occupies the same planes as the physical world but, as described, has different essences: passions and higher feelings. The forces of 'sympathy' overcome those of 'antipathy', which are concentrated in the two lowest of the seven 'regions' of the soul-world. (The three highest contain no antipathy at all.)

In the lowest region, that of 'Burning Desire', cravings form actual beings which to the spiritual eye cause pain and ghastly horror. They are greedy and avaricious, determining the lower sensual impulses and dominating selfish instincts in animals' and men's souls. This purgatory is related to the Hindu Kamaloca. The next region, that of 'Flowing Susceptibility', consists of the external glitter and worthless trifles of life. Its successor, 'Wish Substance', purges wishes. In 'Attraction and Repulsion' there is the special trial of losing the illusion of bodily self. The highest three regions purge lesser goods: that of 'Soul Light' removes sensuous enthusiasm, whether for natural, educational or welfare ideals; 'Active Soul Force' disposes of (among other things) aestheticism; the highest, 'Soul Life', frees man from any lingering attachments to the physical world.

The 'I' is progressively freed after the death of the physical body to grow in the spirit-world with a purged and spiritualised memory tableau and astral body. The 'I' grows rather than undergoes purgation. Steiner states that 'to avoid confusion'<sup>7</sup> a careful distinction must be made between what can be purged in the soul-world and what can only be redeemed through the karmic law of reincarnation; but having made the abstract distinction he does not seem to give it any content.

The spirit-world is 'woven out of the substance of which human thought consists'.<sup>8</sup> Steiner tells us that initially it is bewildering: it consists of continuous creative activity expressed, for example, in spiritual colour, taste and sound (hence the Pythagorean 'music of the spheres'). Like the soul-world, it has seven interpenetrating

regions; these Steiner refers to by number. The first three are the spiritual forms of what are, on earth, life in the sense-world, feeling and emotion. In the first, it appears, family and those closest to us are rejoined. The fourth region contains the archetypes of the arts, sciences, technology, the state, and of thoughts generally. The fifth consists of the archetype of Wisdom. In the sixth, man will fulfill that which is most in accord with the true being of the world. The seventh leads man to 'Life-kernels' that give him a complete survey of the spirit, soul, and material worlds.

The regions of the spirit-world have been working with the 'I' to change the conditions of earth for the next incarnation. After a discarnate period of, it seems, about 500 to 1,000 years, the 'I' is believed to gain a new astral and etheric body and to be guided by spirit-beings towards its choice of mother and father. Usually the rebirth is as the opposite sex to that of the previous incarnation. On re-entry into physical life the 'I' is said to experience a prevision of the coming life, a tableau which shows all the obstacles to be removed.

Anthroposophical development is thus macrocosmic, unlike psychological theories such as Stern's or Erikson's. Here the mystery of the macrocosm tends to become contracted to the mystery of the infant's experience, or at most to that of the individual lifespan. Subject to this there are some structural similarities between Stern's developmental schema (which is based on sense perception) and Steiner's. For Stern, the infant is endowed with observable capacities that mature. 'When these become available, they are organised and transformed, in quantum mental leaps, into organising subjective perspectives about the sense of self and other. Each new sense of self defines the formation of a new domain of relatedness. While these domains of relatedness result in qualitative shifts in social experience, they are not phases; rather, they are forms of social experience that remain intact throughout life. Nonetheless, their initial phase of formation constitutes a sensitive period of development'.<sup>9</sup> After the sensitive periods there may be regression or, alternatively, development, for example through the psychotherapeutic process of reconstructing a past.

### **The Macrocosm**

At this stage, in his seminal *Occult Science*, Steiner reveals the most far-reaching visions of all: he describes the beginning, nature, and future of the macrocosm.<sup>10</sup> The preceding account of man, karma

and rebirth is more or less confined to the present; it is merely a contemporary aspect of the Anthroposophical esoteric synthesis.

Steiner's revelation is about spiritual experience, not 'Ahrimanic' intellectual analysis of the structures. If this book were to reflect only the insider experience of Anthroposophists, the analysis which follows would not be made. They do not experience structures. What follows are interpretations made here. They are not 'Anthroposophy' but represent an external attempt to make sense of the revelation from the point of view of the history of ideas. Only an outsider could contribute such a perspective, and in the very giving of this added perspective much of the spirit of Anthroposophy is inevitably lost.

Anthroposophy's cosmological structures have already been suggested in the interpretation given here of the macrocosmic serpent. Some introduction has also been made in chapter two, in order to explain the movement's attitude towards education, and elsewhere. As will be suggested in the next part of the book, the revelation's prototype is 'Syrian-Egyptian gnosis'. This term, as used in this book, extends a description of a controversial historical (and loosely boundaried) variant of gnosticism into an ideal-type. It thereby provides a schema for an understanding of the structures of Steiner's revelation.

### **Cosmological Structures**

#### *1. In the beginning all was spirit and at the end it will mostly or entirely become spirit again.*

In orthodox Christian cosmogony God creates a finite world and mankind. Similarly, in Judaism and Islam there is a creator God who is utterly other. In contrast, spirit for Steiner is the original state of everything; he reveals no self-sufficient, pre-existing creator God comparable to that of the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. The Anthroposophical Trinity consists of spiritual essences outside the solar system; yet they are also the ultimate identity of man and the world. Spirit gradually becomes matter in cosmic embodiments. In Anthroposophy this is accompanied by an 'abnormal' or pathological development in which matter becomes 'too' hard or gross. This is sometimes in Anthroposophical explication linked to the idea of a 'Fall'.<sup>11</sup>

In this Syrian-Egyptian pattern – usually somewhat before the 'present age', whenever that may be – there is a turning point. This inaugurates a reverse process, one of spiritual restoration or redemption. All matter has gradually formed as the result of the

dynamic activity of spirit; but after the turning point most, or perhaps all of it is due to respiritualise. Pictorially this can be interpreted as being expressed at the point where the Goetheanum serpent, like other serpents in Western Gnosticism,<sup>12</sup> starts to coil round so that its head approaches its tail-end. The macrocosmic idea that matter or, at least, gross or ‘too hard’ matter needs to be redeemed is different from traditional Christian eschatology with its judgment for human beings only and everlasting heaven or hell.

In the Anthroposophical beginning there were no earth, moon, sun, stars or solar system as we know them; instead, the macrocosm consisted of undifferentiated essences in states of ‘spiritual warmth’. Steiner gave the macrocosm at this stage the name of ‘Saturn’.

A benign spiritual tension occurred between the essences of which Saturn consisted. The tension led eventually to a rather denser cosmic embodiment consisting of ‘spiritual air’, which is known as ‘Sun’. The tension increased, leading to the ‘liquid’ cosmic embodiment of ‘spiritual water’: this stage of the macrocosm is called ‘Moon’. With further tension solid matter itself began to form and the present solar system hardened out. Accompanying this was a development in which matter ‘fell’. Steiner gave this present cosmic embodiment the name of ‘Earth’. (The earth – with a small ‘e’ – on which we live is just a part of the macrocosmic Earth, our present solar system.) The densest part of the descent from spirit is reached in Earth, the fourth and middle of the seven macrocosmic planetary embodiments.

However, there is also an ‘abnormal’ development whereby matter becomes too solid. This is linked to a rebellion by Lucifer, who is the karma of Ahriman, the spirit of hardening. As a result of this rebellion and excess hardening the turning point within the planetary embodiment of Earth is just after the middle point. It takes place in the fifth, not fourth, of the seven ‘epochs’ or sub-divisions of Earth<sup>13</sup>.

The turning point, the start of the reverse process which respiritualises the macrocosm, has just begun. This is marked by the redeeming descent of Christ. Steiner devotes far less space to the future than to the past. The macrocosmic embodiment to follow is known as ‘Jupiter’. It is more spiritual than Earth, corresponding, though in a more consciously developed way, with the ‘spiritual water’ of Moon. Thus the fifth planetary period is a restoration – though with greater conscious differentiation – of the spirituality of the third period. Similarly, the sixth, respiritualised embodiment (known as ‘Venus’) differentiates ‘spiritual air’ and so corresponds to Sun, the second stage. In the seventh, final embodiment (that of ‘Vulcan’), the macrocosm – apart from a possible ‘irreclaimable

moon' – has circled back round again to differentiate the pristine 'spiritual warmth' of Saturn, the first stage, into ineffable spiritual individuality.

Thus there is a fundamental structural symmetry: increasing tension leads to a macrocosmic descent to an apogee, just after the middle point, when matter is too solid. Then there is a gradual return of most if not all matter to its source through respiritualisation. This pattern is basic to Anthroposophy. Steiner's description of the nature of man and repeated earth lives only applies to the current stage of our Earth embodiment.

Steiner infused it with another structure which has correlates with Theosophy and Indian cosmology.<sup>14</sup> There are great pulsating rhythms of collapse into spirit and manifestation (Theosophically and Anthroposophically known as pralaya and manvantara respectively). The collapses into spirit occur between the 'planetary' embodiments: for example, between Saturn and Sun, Sun and Moon, Moon and Earth, and so on. The manifestations reach their peaks at the middle of each embodiment, for example, at the middle of Saturn, Sun, Moon, Earth, etc. These major rhythms are indented with minor rhythms which go in the opposite direction, so that there is an exceedingly complex rippling effect. This resonates with Hinduism. Steiner named the present period after the lesser Hindu cycle of Kali Yuga, though for him this has a duration of only a few thousand years and not the Hindu 432,000 years. This is consistent with the tendency for revealed time-scales in Western tradition – for example, in Genesis – to be much shorter than Hindu ones, and also much shorter than those of contemporary science.

A further correlate with the structures of Steiner's revelation has been said to be the theory of thermodynamics. Differentials of temperature are fundamental to the description of the origins of the Anthroposophical cosmos (i.e. its cosmogony). This may, of course, have its origins in Steiner's scientific training.

## 2. *Man is a microcosm of the macrocosm*

Today it is conventional in the secular West to perceive the natural environment in a post-Kantian way as unknowable 'in-itself'. Thoughts manifesting through mental processes are not conventionally thought to have a literal correspondence with essences in the outside world. To Anthroposophists this outlook is, philosophically, a residue of undeveloped positivism.

In Anthroposophy concepts are understood to have literal

correspondences with what is perceived as being outside. Indeed, 'inside' and 'outside' are not sharp distinctions. If they appear to be so, this is because the person concerned is thought to be uninitiated, not realizing that he is a microcosm, a miniature of the macrocosm.

During the Saturn phase the prototype physical body was more or less universal and largely undifferentiated into individual physical bodies. This was, to a lesser extent, the case with the etheric body common to all living organisms which began to develop in its Sun phase. It was also somewhat the case with the astral body, common to all animals, which began to develop on Moon. Thus the present physical, etheric and astral bodies of man have evolved out of and so correspond to the physicality, ether and astrality outside man. Only the 'I' itself, the spiritual spark which is individual for each human being, is truly a unique activity, though even this is also macrocosmic spirit. The 'I' has in Anthroposophical evolutionary time only descended to the level of its physical, etheric and astral 'sheaths' around the middle of the Earth era. The redeeming Christ, who also descended at this time, is the archetypal 'I'. Man is not a discrete creation out of dust, as in Christian orthodoxy, but is composed of a pantheistic, living nature and, through the 'I', is of the same essence as Christ himself, though individual at the same time.

As will be seen, this anthropology has many correspondences with gnosticism. The latter incorporated Babylonian astrology and developed magical practices based on planetary correspondences between 'inside' and 'outside'. The aim was to experience transcendence through the spark of spirit, which, it was thought, had become entangled in passion (soul) and overlaid by matter in an original cosmic fall.

It was said that in Anthroposophy the prototype physical body of man was present on Saturn, the first planetary embodiment. How can this be if, as has also been stated, the macrocosm only condensed into matter in the present, fourth embodiment of Earth? Can the physical body be other than matter as we know it?

Steiner states that it can be. It just so happens that the physical body is our kind of earth-bound matter at the present. The physical body has been spirit before; it can exist immaterially as warmth and archetypal form. This doctrine does not seem to be Theosophical: a Theosophist with a Ph.D. could only mutter with astonishment when I tried to explain it to him. However, as with much else in Anthroposophy, there is an antecedent in Valentinian gnosticism (see chapter seven).

### 3. *Hardest matter is a negative organizing principle*

Dynamic spirit has come to rest in matter, which is frozen or crystallized spirit, just as architecture is considered to be frozen music. Anthroposophists believe in a need to realise the spirit that they perceive as already in matter (there is nowhere Christ did not go), and so they state that matter for them is not a negative organising principle. Ahriman, the opponent representing hardening, is not a force to be overcome but to be redeemed. An outside interpretation that Anthroposophy uses hardest matter as a negative organising principle depends on interpreting their situation differently, that implicit in the mission of realising the spirit which is in matter is a sense that spiritually unrealised matter is in a lower state.

Furthermore, there is an explicit Anthroposophical concept (stated in Steiner's *Occult Science*) of over-hardened matter. The cold necessity of Ahriman, who imprisons everything, and the rebellious Lucifer, who is considered to be the karma of Ahriman, intervened in the evolution of the planetary embodiments so that matter condensed too much. This is apparent not only from present sclerotic aspects of the world but also from the specialised forms of animals. Thus hardest matter is the turning point – and so, cosmologically, the negative organising principle – for the serpent, which redemptively coils back round towards its own tail; and also for humans, who develop spiritually once they recognise their microcosmic correspondence with the macrocosm.

To non-Anthroposophists, matter's degrees of hardness are not central to existential, moral or cosmological issues. Anthroposophy's emphasis here is unlike orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, many<sup>15</sup> schools of Hinduism and, strictly, Buddhism. Anthroposophical salvation seems to consist in part of transcending and transmuting over-hardened identifications through finding the true 'I' of objective spirit. In Anthroposophy, as with the most sophisticated (Valentinian) form of gnosticism, the path entails mild asceticism, or at least a marked moderation. In other gnostic systems it has sometimes been severely ascetic, or occasionally, in the attempt to free the self from perceived imprisonment in a material body, orgiastic and antinomian.

Hardened matter is negative with a seed of spiritual promise (and so also ambivalent) because individually fashioned redemption is put centrally on the agenda by the fact of the hardening. Steiner rejected the excessive hardening caused by Ahriman but nevertheless saw the condensation of matter as a gift that enables man to evolve. There are analogies between Ahriman and the Satan of Valentinian gnosticism:

he is structurally necessary to make sense of the situation. Understood psychologically, there seems in Anthroposophy to be a cosmological ambivalence towards matter which expresses the experience of many spiritually-minded and creative people, not least of Steiner himself, towards the world. This can be perceived as pervading its many social applications, whose 'embeddedness' gives a means of living in spiritualised enclaves of the material world.

Anthroposophists believe that we can find within ourselves the capacity to release the frozenness. We can remove ourselves from this local, temporary level of hardness. So Anthroposophy is not internally perceived as dualistic – with a spirit/matter split – because it is the Anthroposophical view that matter can be redeemed, and that this is the direction the cosmos is going and its true nature. Indeed, Steiner wanted to break out of the idealism/materialism dichotomy. However, from external ontological perspectives it is the here and now perception from which Anthroposophy is starting, not its internally believed-in redemption, which is the frame of reference. Hence non-Anthroposophical perspectives will interpret its cosmos as dualist.

#### *4. There is development towards spiritual individuality*

An ascending spiritual individuality which evolves through transmuting the world in which it lives is the ultimate meaning of Steiner's cosmos. This is the purpose of the tension which starts in the Saturn phase and gathers momentum, with rhythmic respites or pralayas, until about the middle of the Earth era. There is a tension between two poles of reality. These are the pristine world of spirit, including the Trinity and many of the Spiritual Hierarchies, and the over-condensing world, which includes other Spiritual Hierarchies. This 'abnormal' 'fall', in becoming gross and more rebellious – as with the 'Luciferic' spirits in the Moon phase – also becomes more independent and developed. With the polarization at its apogee in the Anthroposophical Earth era there has arisen individualism. Ahriman's domineering hardness has given man an overriding need to control. Nevertheless, individualism gives man the freedom to choose to develop spiritual individuality. This, as has been seen, lessens the tension by infusing hardness with spirit through a cosmic ascent of consciousness, which arrives back at its origins in an ever more differentiated, aware state. The Goetheanum serpent's large head and eye can be interpreted as depicting this aware ascent.

In the Anthroposophical beginning – its Saturn phase – one part of the original macrocosmic essence, aided by self-sacrificing Spiritual

Hierarchies, began to rotate around the other. This rotation causes the development of prototype physical bodies. The greater rotation and differentiation of the Sun phase, together with grace emanating from spiritual beings, result in the physical bodies, which are not matter but a form of rudimentary consciousness, ascending to a higher level of organization: that of etheric bodies. In the Moon phase there is a further ascent from the rather less rudimentary consciousness of the etheric bodies towards the more differentiated picture-like consciousness of the astral bodies. This ascent of consciousness accompanies the condensation into subtle matter and 'fall' into 'abnormal' or gross matter. In the Earth era there is a further ascent of consciousness to the intellectual stage: that is, intellectualism where it is unaware of its identity with the 'I'. At the same time there is the furthest possible separation and fall, whereby the most Ahrimanic matter hardens furthest. This fall is paradoxical in nature: it is not the 'true purpose' of evolution, yet its alienation enables man's freedom of choice.

The ascent continues, after the Earth era, in the Jupiter phase. Here, consciousness will become aware of the astral world (this is the spirit-self stage). In so doing, some of the tension will be reduced and the macrocosm will be partly restored from the fall into grossness. In the next stage of the ascent of consciousness – the Venus phase – life-spirit represents the extension of awareness to the etheric world; as a result the polarized tension is further reduced and there is a further respiritualisation. In the final phase – Vulcan – the rudimentary, diffuse, physical consciousness of the Saturn phase is penetrated by individual consciousnesses ascending to 'spirit-man' and becoming aware of their 'I's. The tension is entirely abolished and the macrocosm saved and respiritualised at a higher level. Man has redeemed the planetary phases through becoming entirely aware of and responsible for his nature. Perhaps this is close to the meaning of Paracelsus' motto, 'Let no one be another's who can be his own'.<sup>16</sup>

There are some more detailed ascending structures in the notes<sup>17</sup> and tables 3 and 4. Steiner's is probably the most complex example of what the French occultist Edouard Schuré called the glory and incomparable splendour of the esoteric synthesis.

### *Knowledge*

The cosmological 'structures' are here interpreted as the organising principles of Anthroposophy. Knowledge such as karma and rebirth, modern astronomy, evolution and the Atlantean epoch is synthesised through these structures, increasing the integration.

In Anthroposophical experience, as explained earlier, the revelation is true as a whole: it coheres without analytical distinctions between ‘structures’ and ‘knowledge’. Thus the Indian idea of karma becomes identified with what has been termed here a structure, the ascent of consciousness to transmute the world and thereby realise spiritual individuality. Albert Steffen wrote, ‘Consider well the symbol of the serpent that forms a circle and bites its own tail. It admonishes us to view the whole world in accord with the laws of Karma and reincarnation.’<sup>18</sup>

The ‘Christian’ Trinity in Anthroposophy transcend yet permeate the macrocosm, except within gross matter. The macrocosm is identical to the solar system; the Trinity have their abode beyond it. Thus Steiner assumes the astronomical finding that the cosmos extends beyond what has been identified as the solar system. However the presence of the Trinity, rather like that of Bhagvān in Hinduism, is pervasive. They are not, as has been seen, sharply separated from man as creative forces. The Trinity have correspondences with the gnostic Pleroma. They are the greatest ultimate described, and in one aspect, that of Christ, descend as the archetypal ‘I’ to fallen matter to mark the turning of the macrocosm towards restoration. Conventional Christian doctrine is absent. The ‘Trinity’ is a familiar name applied unusually to the spiritual essence(s), the ‘Crystal Heaven’, beyond and yet partially penetrating the solar system. The ‘I’ is divine because of its identity with Christ.

Darwinian evolution is fused with the structures. Thus the facts on which the Darwinian hypotheses are based are, in Anthroposophy, fused with the idea of a spiritually descending specialization and ascending complexity. Animal forms hardened first and most grossly, hence early fossil remains. Steiner stood Haeckel’s materialistic evolutionism on its head.

The optimistic evolutionism of Steiner’s age (until 1914 or so) is in accord with the great emphasis in Anthroposophy on the upward ascent of consciousness to realise spiritual individuality. This has some correspondences with Syrian-Egyptian gnosis, but in Anthroposophy it seems to have been much reinforced by the progressive evolutionism of the later nineteenth century.

The enormous contemporary hopes for – and prestige of – science also correspond with the nomenclature of Steiner’s spiritual path. He called his system ‘spiritual science’. Unlike most similar spiritual leaders he trained successfully as a scientist. L. Ron Hubbard of Scientology only claimed to have done so. Blavatsky, who – if Goethe is not included in this more recent company – perhaps pioneered

the notion of ‘spiritual science’, and Mary Baker Eddy, with her Christian Science, had no scientific training. A frequent doctrine of modern spiritualities is the claim to be based on scientific research. Similar claims can also be seen in Freudian, Jungian and other psychological revelations: these convey an atmosphere of scientific credibility, despite the devastating sociological and epistemological critiques by Gellner, Grunbaum and Popper,<sup>19</sup> because of their medical provenance.

The arrangement of Steiner’s revelation is not predictably symmetrical. The turning point does not occur exactly halfway through the Earth era, which is itself the middle planetary state. It occurs slightly later. In his early days as General Secretary of the German Section of the Theosophical Society, Steiner was identified with Blavatsky’s teachings. Earth, itself the middle planetary embodiment, has seven ‘epochs’ and we are now (according to both Blavatsky and Steiner) in the fifth, not the fourth. Before Anthroposophy had evolved to be an independent thought form from Theosophy, Steiner had repeated Blavatsky’s clairvoyant finding that there were four epochs, including Lemuria and Atlantis, before the present one. The specifically Anthroposophical Christ was revealed to have descended in the fifth epoch and not the half-way point.

The Anthroposophical explanation of this is that Christ could not intervene in the central, fourth, epoch because of the ‘abnormal’ intervention of Lucifer and Ahriman. To balance them, Christ descended to Palestine in the fifth epoch. There is perhaps an analogy with Wagner’s *Ring* in that necessity, symbolised by the three Norns, is overridden by the birth of freedom from the moment Brunnhilde lovingly and courageously differentiates herself as more than merely the blind will of Wotan. The Norns’ ropes of fate, that is, the predictability of things, eventually break. Abnormal interventions break the predictable symmetry provided by necessity. *Occult Science* and Wagner’s *Ring* are vastly different in many important ways, but it will be suggested later that there is a common matrix of nineteenth century German culture.<sup>20</sup>

## Language

Inseparable from the structures and knowledge of Anthroposophy is its mode of expression. In the foregoing analysis this ‘feel’ has all but disappeared, but, in its English-speaking form, it will emerge rather more in the following chapter.

The rainbow-like social being of the Rudolf Steiner movement

corresponds to the literalness of Steiner's prodigious revelation. He wrote many books and there are – often unreliable – notes of about 6,000 of his lectures. If there is an essential metaphor, this is only because he is having to reduce his perceptions from Intuition and Inspiration to their less spiritual manifestations. Thus his Imaginative pictures of high, supersensible realities are necessarily modelled on his tangible contemporary world. There is an unusual synecdoche in which the spiritual whole is described by means of the more condensed Imaginative part. For example, 'warmth' (on 'Saturn'), 'air' (on 'Sun'), and 'water' (on 'Moon') are not mere metaphors, nor are they absolute literal truth: they are a partial, synecdochal truth. Perhaps this is what Steiner's translators are trying to convey by 'half-metaphorically' and 'as it were'.<sup>21</sup>

Anthroposophists see the older English translations as poor. Nevertheless the Anthroposophical spiritual world with its movement of forms and processes outside conventionally perceived boundaries makes an impact. 'If we imagine something intermediate between the nutrition and breathing of today, we shall have a fair idea of what is taking place in this direction.'<sup>22</sup> Or 'the second kingdom of the Sun is endowed with the character of personality'.<sup>23</sup> Or again, 'That which remains behind when the soul departs from the body is no longer merely like a seed, to be kindled to life by the returning soul;'<sup>24</sup> here, the apparent mixed metaphor of 'kindling' a 'seed' to 'life' is Anthroposophically synecdochal, because fire and seeds are spiritually close as essences.

The imagery, whether sustained or casual, is nearly always taken from nature and tradition, with very little from contemporary technology (even the spread of railways). 'Seed', 'kernel' and 'fruits' are much used, as is the elemental 'raying back'. 'Kingdom' and 'domains' are frequent. Those artefacts used to provide immediate metaphors have a long human history, for example, 'thread', 'coin' and the frequent 'veil'.

Contemporary translations of main works have been produced. The older translations evoke the sacred through everyday words or syntax that may have been in keeping with popular Edwardian poetry but are now out of use. Examples are 'nay', 'partake but feebly', 'perforce', 'bedecked', 'one needs must have', 'now therefore the souls, formerly translated onto Mars, Jupiter. . .'. Biblical resonances tend to occur strangely in Hellenic contexts, as with 'sinning against the law of harmony' and 'the altar of humanity'. There are occasional poetic evocations, for example, the quasi-Coleridgean 'wondrous magic scenes'. Mixed in is some residual Theosophical terminology

from the East, such as pralaya and manvantara. Capital letters are used for hypostasised qualities such as 'Thought', 'Wisdom', 'Event of Palestine', 'Imperishable Reality'. Hyphens are pressed in aid, as in 'being-of-will', 'warmth-of-soul'. There is repetition, for example, 'first foundation', 'in that age of time', 'first harbingers', and circumlocution, as in the sentence: 'It is by no means out of keeping with the facts to say that in those pristine ages the Earth underwent a day-time and a night-time.'<sup>25</sup> Especially because of the difficulties of translation, the trees are difficult to understand without having first taken the Anthroposophical wood as the unit for comprehension.

SAMPLE