

3. The Science of the Spiritual and the Social Question

'The Science of the Spiritual and the Social Question' was originally published in three instalments in 1905/06 in the Journal Lucifer Gnosis. The first selection comes from No. 29, published in October 1905, the second from No. 30 and the third from No. 32. I have in my possession copies of No. 29 and No. 32. No. 32 begins by stating that the prior part of the essay is from No. 30. I mention these details as the literary overview of Steiner's works in German, the so-called Uebersichtsbaende, places the essays in No. 28, No. 29 and a combined No. 30/31. So, there is some confusion regarding the original source.

As explained in the Introduction, this is a seminal essay, where Steiner introduces what he calls 'the fundamental social law'. The law states: 'The well-being of a total community of human beings working together becomes the greater the less the individual demands the products of his achievements for himself, that is, the more of these products he passes on to his fellow workers and the more his own needs are not satisfied out of his own achievements, but out of the achievements of others.'

The essay begins by exploring why spiritual science can offer real insight into social life. Steiner makes this notable statement: 'The laws of human well-being are laid in the fundament of the human soul just as surely as the two times table.' Spiritual science alone has the capacity to discover these laws.

Later in the essay, Steiner takes a look at the noble efforts of the social reformer Robert Owen (1775–1858). Owen created a socialist community in New Lamark, Scotland, around a large textile mill, which was quite successful at raising the condition of the poor workers. He made a second, larger scale, experiment in Indiana known as New Harmony, which ultimately failed

because many workers shirked their work, trying to take it easy and let others carry the burden. Of this failure Steiner states: 'We have to advance from merely a belief in the goodness of human nature that deceived Owen, to a real knowledge of man.' A real knowledge of man, as is explained in the essay, includes insight into egotism and the social problems it creates, and the ways these negative effects can be mitigated.

In looking at the world at the present time with open eyes, we are constantly confronted with what is called the social question. Those who take life seriously have in some way to consider what is involved in this question. And it must appear as a matter of course that a way of thinking that has undertaken to promote the highest ideals of humanity should somehow come to terms with the demands made in social life. The way of thinking practised by the science of spirit sets out to do just this for the present time. It is therefore only natural if questions arise about the relationship of the science of spirit to the social question.

Now it may appear at first as if the science of the spirit has nothing in particular to say about this. What characterizes it more than anything else is the deepening of the soul life and the awakening of the ability to see into the spiritual world. Even those who have had only a passing acquaintance with the ideas promoted by speakers and writers whose work is based on the science of spirit are able by means of unbiased observation to give recognition to this striving. It is, however, more difficult to see that this striving has *practical* significance at the present time. And in particular it is not easy to see its connection with the social question. Someone may well ask how such a teaching can improve our bad social conditions, a teaching which is concerned with reincarnation, with 'karma', with 'the supersensible world', with 'the origin of man' and so on. Such a way of thinking appears to be

divorced from all reality, whereas in fact it is now an imperative necessity for everyone to take his whole thinking in hand in order to do justice to the tasks which the reality of earthly life places before us.

We shall now take two of the many views concerning the science of spirit which we inevitably come across today. The one is, that it is seen as the expression of uncontrolled fantasy. It is only natural for such a viewpoint to exist. And least of all should it be inconceivable to someone striving according to the method of the science of spirit. Every conversation that takes place in the presence of such a person, everything that goes on around him that brings happiness and joy to the human being, all this can teach him that he makes use of a language which for many is bound to be quite ludicrous. He must of course add to this understanding of his surroundings the absolute certainty that he is on the right path. Otherwise he would hardly be able to hold his own when he becomes aware of the clash between his ideas and those of others who belong to the educated and thinking part of humanity. If he has the necessary assurance, if he knows the truth and weight of his views, he can say: I know quite well that at the present time I can be regarded as an oddity and I can see why this is, but the truth is sure to prevail even when it is ridiculed and mocked, and the effect it has does not depend upon the views which people have about it, but upon its own firm foundation.

The other view affecting the science of spirit is that although its thoughts may be beautiful and satisfying, these really apply only to the inner life of the soul and cannot be of any value for the struggles of daily life. Even those who turn to this substance of the science of spirit to satisfy their spiritual needs can all too easily be tempted to say:

This world of ideas cannot tell us anything about how to deal with social needs and material needs. But this opinion is based upon a complete misjudgement of the real facts of life

and in particular upon the misunderstanding about the fruits of the way that the science of spirit looks at things.

Practically the only question that is asked is: What does the science of spirit teach? How can what it teaches be proved? And then what people seek to get out of it is found in the feeling of satisfaction which is given by the teachings. Nothing could be more natural. For we have first to acquire a feeling for the truth of statements that we meet. But what we really have to seek, the real *fruit* of the science of spirit cannot be sought in this. For this manifests itself only when those who are inclined towards the science of spirit tackle tasks in practical life. It depends on whether the science of spirit helps them to take up these tasks judiciously and with understanding to seek ways and means of solving them. If we want to work effectively in life we have first to understand life. Here we come to the heart of the matter. As long as we only ask: What does the science of spirit *teach*, we shall find its teachings too 'exalted' for practical life. But if we direct our attention to the schooling that our thinking and feeling go through by means of these teachings, we shall then stop raising such an objection. However odd it may appear to a superficial view, it is nevertheless true that the ideas of the science of spirit, even if they may appear to be lost in the clouds, create an eye for the proper conduct of daily life. The science of spirit sharpens our understanding of the demands which social life makes just because it leads the spirit into the luminous heights of the supersensible. However paradoxical this may appear, it is nevertheless true.

An example will show what is meant. An extremely interesting book has recently appeared called *As a Worker in America* (Berlin, K. Siegismund). The author is a certain government counsellor named Kolb who took it upon himself to spend several months as an ordinary worker in America. Through doing this he acquired a judgement about human beings and life which apparently neither the educa-

tion which led to his councillorship had been able to give him, nor the experiences he had had in his post and in the other positions one occupies before becoming a counsellor. Therefore for years he held a relatively responsible position, and it was only after he had left this and lived for a short time in a distant country that he got to know life in such a way that he was able to write the following noteworthy sentence in his book: 'How often had I asked with moral indignation when I saw a healthy man begging: Why doesn't the scoundrel work? Now I knew. *Yes, in practice things are different from what they seem to be in theory, and even the most unpleasant aspects of political economy can be managed quite bearably at one's desk.*' Now there is not the slightest intention here of creating a misunderstanding. The fullest possible recognition must be given to a man who persuades himself to leave his comfortable position in life and to undertake hard work in a brewery and a bicycle factory. The high esteem accorded to this deed is strongly emphasized in order to avoid the impression that we are about to indulge in negative criticism of him. But to everyone who *wants* to see, it is absolutely clear that all the education and knowledge that he had gained had failed to give him the means of judging life. Let us try to understand *what* is implied in this admission: We can learn everything that makes us capable of taking a relatively important position, and at the same time we can be quite isolated from the life which we are supposed to influence. Is this not rather like being educated at an engineering school and then, when faced with building a bridge, not knowing anything about it? *But no:* it is *not* quite like that. A person who has not studied the building of bridges properly will soon have his weaknesses made clear to him when he begins the actual work. He will prove himself to be a bungler and will be rejected everywhere. But a person who is insufficiently prepared in social life will not reveal his weaknesses so quickly. Badly built bridges collapse, and even the most prejudiced will

realize that the builder was a bungler. What is bungled in social life only comes to light in the sufferings of those whose lives are regulated by it. It is not as easy to have an eye for the connection between the suffering and this kind of bungling as it is for the relationship between the collapse of the bridge and an incapable builder. 'But,' someone will say, 'what has all this to do with the science of spirit? Does the scientist of spirit really believe that his teachings would have helped Counsellor Kolb to have a better understanding of life? What use would it have been to him to have known something about reincarnation, karma, and all the supersensible worlds? No one would want to maintain that ideas about planetary systems and higher worlds would have enabled the counsellor to avoid having to admit one day that the most unpleasant aspects of political economy can be managed quite well at one's desk.' The scientist of spirit can really only answer—as Lessing did in a particular case: '*I happen to be this "no one", and I insist upon it.*' Only this does not mean to say that the teaching of 'reincarnation', or knowledge about 'karma' enables a person to act in the right way in social life. That would naturally be naive. It would of course be no good directing those destined to be counsellors to Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* instead of sending them to Schmoller, Wagner or Brentano at the university. What it depends upon is this: Would a theory of political economy originating from the scientist of spirit be such that it could be managed well at one's desk but would let one down in actual life? And this would not be the case. *When* can a theory not hold its own in life? *When* it is produced by means of a thinking that is not trained for life. Now the teachings of the science of spirit are just as much the real laws of life as are the theories of electricity for a factory for electrical apparatus. In setting up such a factory we have first to acquaint ourselves with theories about electricity. And in order to work in life we have to know the laws of life. The teachings of the science of spirit may

appear to be remote from life, but they are, in fact, just the opposite. To a superficial view they appear divorced from the world; to a true understanding they reveal life. It is not just out of curiosity that we retire into a 'spiritual-scientific circle', in order to get hold of all sorts of 'interesting' information about the worlds beyond, but we train our thinking, feeling and willing on the 'eternal laws of existence' in order to enter into life and to understand it clearly. The teachings of the science of spirit are a roundabout way to thinking, judging and feeling *according to life*. The movement for the science of spirit will not be rightly orientated until this is fully realized. Right action arises out of right thinking, and wrong action arises out of wrong thinking or out of a lack of thinking. If we believe that something good can be brought about in the social sphere, we have to admit that it depends on human *capacities*. Working through the ideas of the science of spirit brings about an increase in the capacities needed for working in social life. In this connection it is not simply a matter of which thoughts we acquire through the science of spirit, but of what is made of our *thinking through them*.

Of course, it must be admitted that within the circle of those who have taken up the science of spirit, there is not all that much to show so far. Nor can it be denied that just for this reason those outside the science of spirit have every reason to doubt what has been maintained here. But it must also not be overlooked that the movement for the science of spirit as it is at the moment is only at the beginning of its work. Its further progress will consist in entering into all the practical spheres of life. We shall then see, for instance, as far as the 'social question' is concerned that instead of theories 'which can be managed quite well at one's desk' there will be ideas which give us insight to reach unprejudiced judgements about *life* and to stimulate our will to such action as brings welfare and blessing to our fellow human beings. Some

people would say that the case of Kolb shows that it would be superfluous to refer to the science of spirit. It would only be necessary that in preparing themselves for any particular occupation people would not learn only theories in their studies, but that they be brought into touch with life through having a practical as well as a theoretical training. For as soon as Kolb had a look at life, what he learned was sufficient to change his opinions. *No*, it is not sufficient, because the lack lies deeper than this. If someone sees that his insufficient education only enables him to build bridges which collapse, this does not say that he has already acquired the ability to build bridges that do not collapse. He must first undergo a really suitable preparatory training. Of course, we need do no more than look at social conditions, however insufficient a theory we may have about the fundamental laws of life, to prevent us from saying to someone who does not work: 'Why doesn't the scoundrel work?' We can understand from the conditions why such a person does not work. But does this mean that we have learned how conditions should be brought about in which human beings can prosper? It is doubtless true that all the well-intentioned people who have thought up plans for the improvement of man's lot have not judged as Counsellor Kolb did *before* his journey to America. They were surely all convinced before such an expedition that not anyone who gets on badly can be dismissed with the phrase, 'Why doesn't the scoundrel work?' Therefore, are all their plans for reform fruitful? No, because they often contradict one another. And so we have the right to say that the positive plans for reform which Counsellor Kolb had after his conversion cannot have much effect. It is an error of our times that everyone considers himself capable of understanding life, even when he has not taken the slightest trouble to come to grips with the fundamental laws of life and when he has not first trained his thinking to see the real forces at work in life. Furthermore, the science of spirit is a training for a true

judgement of life because it gets to the roots of life. It is no use seeing that conditions bring the human being into unfavourable situations in life, in which he is found; we have to acquaint ourselves with the *forces* by means of which favourable conditions can be created. Our experts in political economy can do this just as little as someone can do arithmetic who does not know his two times table. However many rows of numbers are put before him, merely looking at them will not help him. If reality is placed before someone who understands nothing about the underlying forces of social life, however penetratingly he may be able to describe what he sees, he will not be able to make anything of how the forces of social life interact to the well-being or detriment of man.

A way of looking at life that leads to the real sources of life is necessary at the present time. And the science of spirit can be just such a way. If all those who wish to form an opinion as to 'social needs' were to go through the teachings about life to be found in the science of spirit, we should get much further. The objection that those who take up the science of spirit only 'talk' and do not 'act', is no more valid than the one that the opinions of the science of spirit have not yet been tested and so could be exposed as vague theories like the political theory of Kolb. The first objection does not mean anything because it is naturally not possible to 'act' as long as the ways to action are barred. However much a person who has great experience in dealing with people knows what a father should do to bring up his children, he cannot 'act' unless the father employs him to this end. In this respect we have to wait patiently until the 'talk' of those working according to the science of spirit has some effect on those who have the power to 'act'. And this will happen. The other objection is just as irrelevant. And it can be raised only by those who are unfamiliar with the real nature of the truths put forward by the science of spirit. Those who are familiar with them know that they do not come into existence as things

that can be 'tried out'. The laws of human well-being are laid in the fundament of the human soul just as surely as the two times table. We have only to penetrate sufficiently deeply into this fundament of the human soul. Of course, we can make what is written into the soul in this way *evident* just as we can make evident that twice two are four if we place four beans in two groups next to each other. But who would maintain that the truth 'twice two are four' first has to be 'tested' with beans? The true situation is: Whoever doubts a truth of the science of spirit has not yet *recognized* it, just as only a person could doubt that 'twice two are four' who has not yet recognized the fact. However much the two differ, because the latter is so simple and the former so complicated the similarity in other respects is nevertheless there. Naturally this cannot be realized so long as we do not enter into the science of spirit itself. This is why it is not possible to offer a 'proof' of this fact for someone who does not know the science of spirit. We can only say: First get to know the science of spirit and then all this will become clear to you.

The important role of the science of spirit in our times will be revealed when it has become like a leaven in the whole of our life. As long as the way into this life is not trodden in the full sense of the word, those working in harmony with the science of spirit will not have advanced beyond the first beginnings of their work. And as long as this is the case they will no doubt also have to listen to the reproach that their ideas are inimical to life. Yes, they are just as inimical to life as was the railway to a life that regarded the mail coach as the 'symbol of true life'. They are just as inimical as the future is inimical to the past.

In what follows, particular aspects of the relationship between 'the science of spirit and the social question' are discussed: There are two opposing views concerning the 'social question'. The one sees the causes of good and bad in social life more in the human being, the other more in the

conditions in which men live. Those who represent the first view want to encourage progress by endeavouring to increase the spiritual and physical ability of the human being and his moral feeling; those who tend towards the second view are above all concerned to raise the standard of life, for they say that when men learn to live properly, their ability and ethical feelings will rise by themselves to a higher level. We cannot deny that today the second view is constantly gaining ground. To stress the first view is felt in many circles to be the expression of a quite antiquated way of thinking. The point is made that anyone who has to struggle with the bitterest poverty from morning to night cannot do anything about the development of his spiritual and moral powers. Such a person should first be given bread before you talk to him about spiritual matters.

This last assertion in particular can easily become a reproach to a striving like the science of spirit. And it is not the worst people who make such reproaches today. They say, for instance: 'The genuine theosophist does not descend willingly from the devachan and karmic spheres to the earth. One prefers to know ten words of Sanskrit rather than be taught what ground rent is.' This we read in an interesting book, *The Cultural Situation of Europe at the Reawakening of Modern Occultism*, by G. L. Dankmar (Leipzig, Oswald Mutze, 1905).

This is an easy enough way of putting the objection. It is pointed out that nowadays families of eight people are herded together into a single room so that even air and light are insufficient, and the children have to be sent to school where weakness and hunger cause them to break down. It is then said: Should not those who are concerned about the progress of the masses concentrate all their efforts on alleviating such conditions? Instead of directing their thinking to teaching about the higher worlds of the spirit they should direct it to the question: How can these terrible social conditions be

dealt with? 'Let Theosophy descend from its icy loneliness to the people; let it put the ethical demand of universal brotherhood earnestly and truly at the top of its programme, and let it act according to this without worrying about all the consequences; let it make the word of Christ about loving one's neighbour a *social deed* and it will become and remain a precious and indispensable possession of humanity.' This is what we read in the above-mentioned book.

Those who make such an objection against the science of spirit mean well. In fact, we must even admit that they are right concerning some people *who* have studied the teachings of the science of spirit. Among the latter there are, without doubt, some who are interested only in their own spiritual needs, who only want to know something about the 'higher life', about the destiny of the soul after death, and so on. And it is certainly not wrong to say that at the present time it appears more necessary to work for the common good and to develop the virtues of loving one's neighbour and of human welfare than, in isolation from the world, to cultivate any higher faculties which might be dormant in the soul. To desire the latter above all else could mean a kind of refined egotism where the well-being of one's own soul is placed higher than the normally accepted human virtues. Another remark that is heard just as frequently is that only those who are 'well off' and who therefore have 'time to spare' can take an interest in such things as the science of spirit. And therefore we should not wish to stuff people who have to toil from morning to night for a miserable wage with talk about universal human unity, about 'higher life', and similar things.

It is only too true that in this respect quite a number of sins are committed by those following the science of spirit. But it is just as correct to say that life led according to the science of spirit, rightly understood, must lead the human being, as an individual, to the virtues of willingly offered work, and of striving for the common good. At any rate, the science of

spirit cannot *prevent* anyone from being just as good a person as the others who do not know or do not want to know anything about the science of spirit. But as far as the 'social question' is concerned, all this misses the main point. Much more is necessary to penetrate to this main point than the opponents of the science of spirit wish to admit. We can agree without hesitation with these opponents that *much* can be achieved with the means that have been suggested by many for the improvement of man's social condition. One party wants one thing, others something else. To a clear-thinking person, some of the demands which such parties make prove to be devoid of any real substance; on the other hand, some of it certainly contains the making of something really substantial.

Robert Owen, who lived from 1771 to 1858 and who certainly was one of the noblest social reformers, emphasized again and again that the human being is moulded by his environment in which he grows up, that his character is not formed by himself, but by the conditions in which he lives. What is so obviously right in such a statement should not be disputed. But neither should it be treated with a disdainful shrug of the shoulder, even if on the surface it appears to be more or less self-evident. Rather, it should be readily admitted that much in public life can be improved by working according to such ideas. The science of spirit, therefore, will never prevent anyone from doing anything for human progress which sets out to produce a better lot for the oppressed and suffering classes of humanity.

The science of spirit *must* go deeper. Really *effective* progress cannot be achieved by such means any longer. If we do not admit this, we have not recognized how conditions come about in which people live. For inasmuch as the life of man is dependent on these conditions the latter themselves are brought about by man. Or who has arranged it that one person is poor and another rich? Other people, of course. But

the fact that these other people have normally lived *before* those who flourish or do not flourish under the conditions, does not alter anything in this situation. The sufferings which *nature* itself places upon the human being are not directly concerned with our *social* position. *These* sufferings have to be mitigated or even removed by human action. If something is lacking in this respect it is in the arrangements that human beings make for each other. A thorough knowledge of things teaches us that all evils connected with social life originate in human actions. In this respect it is not the individual human being but the whole of humanity that is the 'fashioner of individual fortune'.

However certain *this* is, it is also true that by and large no part of humanity, no caste or class, maliciously causes the suffering of another part. All the statements that support this are based on a lack of understanding. Nevertheless, although this too is really a self-evident truth, it must be mentioned. For even if such things can easily be grasped with the understanding, in practice people still act in a different way. Those who exploit their fellow men would naturally *not* want the victims of their exploitation to suffer. We would make considerable progress if people not only found this self-evident, but also adapted their feelings to it.

This is all very well, but what are we supposed to do about such statements? Thus, without doubt, a 'socially minded person' might object. Is the exploited person supposed to look at the exploiter with benevolent feelings? Is it not only too understandable that the former hates the latter and out of hate is led to his party views? It would certainly be a bad recipe—the objection would continue—if the oppressed were admonished to practice human love for his oppressor, somewhat in the same sense as the saying of the great Buddha: 'Hate will not be overcome by hate, but only by love.'

Even so, it is only the knowledge which follows from this

point that can lead us to truly 'social thinking' at the present time. And it is here that the approach of the science of spirit begins. This of course must not cling to the surface of our understanding, but must penetrate into the depths. It therefore cannot remain satisfied with merely showing that misery is created by any particular conditions, but it has to advance to the only knowledge that is fruitful, that is, as to how these conditions are created and continuously created. Compared with these deeper questions, most social theories prove to be only 'vague theories' or even mere manners of speech.

As long as our thinking remains on the surface, we attribute quite a wrong influence to conditions and to external things altogether. These conditions are in fact only an *expression* of an *inner life*. Just as the human body can be understood only when it is known to be the expression of a soul, the outer conditions of life can be rightly judged only if they are seen as the creation of human souls that embody their feelings, attitudes, and thoughts in them. The conditions in which we live are created by our fellow human beings, and we shall never create better ones unless we set out with other thoughts, attitudes, and feelings from those that those creators had.

Let us consider these things in detail. A person who maintains a home in grand style, who can travel first class on the railway, may easily appear on the surface to be an oppressor. And a person who wears a threadbare coat and who travels fourth class will appear to be the oppressed. But one does not have to be an uncompassionate individual nor a reactionary in order to understand the following clearly. Nobody is oppressed or exploited because I wear a particular coat, but only because I pay the man who made the coat for me too little. The poor worker who has acquired his inferior coat for little money is, in relation to his fellow human beings *in this respect*, in exactly the same position as the rich man who

had a better coat made. Whether I am poor or rich, I exploit if I acquire things for which insufficient payment is made. Actually, today nobody ought to call someone else an oppressor; he ought first to look at himself. If he does this carefully he will soon discover the 'oppressor' in himself. Is the work which you have to deliver to the well-to-do delivered *only* to them at the price of bad wages? No, the person who sits next to you and complains to you about oppression enjoys the work of your hands on exactly the same conditions as the well-to-do whom you have both turned against. One should think this through and one will then find a different way of approaching 'social thinking' from the more usual ones.

Thinking things over in this way makes it clear that the concepts 'rich' and 'exploiter' must be completely separated. It depends on individual ability or on the ability of our forefathers, or on quite different things, whether we are now rich or poor. The fact that we exploit the work of others has absolutely nothing to do with *these* things. At least not directly. But it is very much connected with something else. And that is, that our social situation and environment are built upon *personal self-interest*. We have to think very clearly for otherwise we shall arrive at a quite wrong idea of what is said. If I acquire a coat today it appears quite natural, according to the conditions which exist, that I acquire it as cheaply as possible. This means: I have only *myself* in mind. Here, however, we touch the point of view that governs our whole life. Of course, it is easy to raise an objection. We can say: Do not the socially-minded parties and personalities try to do something about this evil? Is there not an effort to protect 'work?' Do not the working classes and their representatives demand higher wages and shorter working hours? It has already been said above that the present-day view can have absolutely nothing against such demands and measures. Nor is there any intention here of agitating for one or the

other of the existing party demands. From the present point of view, we are not concerned with taking sides on particular points, 'for' or 'against'. This, in the first place, lies quite outside the approach of the science of spirit.

However many improvements are introduced to protect a particular class of workers and that would certainly contribute much to the raising of conditions of one or the other group of people, the actual *nature* of exploitation will not be mitigated. For this depends on a person acquiring the products of another person's work from the point of view of *self-interest*. Whether I have much or little, if I make use of what I have to satisfy my self-interest, the other person is *bound* to be exploited. Even if in maintaining this point of view I protect his work, it may seem that I have done something, but in fact I have not. For if I pay more for the work of the other person he will also have to pay more for mine, providing the one is not supposed to acquire a better position through the deteriorating position of the other.

This can be clarified by another example. If I buy a factory in order to earn as much as possible for myself, I shall see that I acquire labour as cheaply as possible, etc. Everything that happens will be done from the point of view of self-interest. If, on the other hand, I buy a factory from the point of view of looking after 200 people as well as possible, all my actions will take on a different character. In practice, today the second case can certainly hardly be differentiated from the first. This simply depends on the fact that a *solitary* selfless person cannot achieve much in a community which otherwise is based on self-interest. It would be quite different, however, if work not based on self-interest were *universal*.

A 'practical' thinker will naturally be of the opinion that no one could manage to help his workers get better wage conditions just by a 'good attitude'. For we cannot increase the return on our goods through meaning well, and without this it is not possible to offer better conditions for the workers.

But it is important to realize that this objection is completely erroneous. All our interests, and therefore all our social conditions, change when in acquiring something we no longer have *ourselves* in mind, but *others*. What does a person have to look to who only looks after his own well-being? To seeing that he earns as much as possible. *How* others have to work in order to satisfy *his* needs cannot be his concern. He therefore has to develop his powers in the *struggle* for existence. If I establish an undertaking which is to bring in as much as possible to *myself*, I do not ask how labour that works for me is mobilized. If I do not consider myself but hold the point of view: How does my work serve others? everything changes. Nothing then forces me to undertake anything prejudicial to someone else. I then place my powers not at my own disposal, but at someone else's. The consequence of this is a quite different unfolding of the powers and capacities of the human being. How this changes social conditions in *practice* will be discussed at the end of the essay.

In a way Robert Owen can be called a genius in practical social activity. He possessed two characteristics which may well justify him being called this: a far-ranging eye for measures that would serve social life, and a noble love for human beings. We only have to consider what he achieved by means of these two capacities in order to appreciate their significance. He created a model industrial set-up in New Lanark and employed his workers in such a way that they not only had a dignified existence materially, but that they also lived in conditions which were satisfactory from a moral point of view. The people who gathered there were in part those who had come down in the world and were given over to drink. Better elements were mixed with these, and their example had an effect. And so the best possible results imaginable were attained. What Owen achieved there makes it impossible to place him on the same level as other more or less fantastic 'improvers of the world', the so-called

Utopians. He restricted himself to measures which could be put into practice, that anyone not inclined to daydreams could assume would lead, within a particular limited area, to the abolition of human suffering. And it is not being impractical to believe that such a small area could serve as an example, and that from it a healthy development of the human condition in the social sphere could be stimulated.

Owen presumably thought along those lines. That is why he was not afraid to take another step in the direction he had already taken. In 1824 he worked towards setting up a kind of small model state in Indiana, in North America. He acquired a district where he wanted to found a human community based upon freedom and equality. Everything was so arranged that exploitation and servitude were an impossibility. Whoever takes such a task upon himself has to bring with him the best social virtues: a desire to make one's fellow men happy, and a belief in the goodness of human nature. He must be convinced that if work organized in the appropriate way appears certain to bring blessing, the desire to work will unfold within human nature.

Owen believed this so strongly that a lot of serious things had to happen before he began to waver. These serious things really did begin to happen. After much noble effort Owen had to admit that 'the realization of such colonies must always come to grief unless the general way of living is transformed first'; and that it would be more valuable to influence humanity in a theoretical way rather than by practical measures. This social reformer was forced to this view by the fact that there were sufficient people who disliked work, who wished to get rid of their work on others, for strife, quarrels, and finally bankruptcy to ensue.

Owen's experience can be a lesson to all who really want to learn. It can be a bridge for all artificially created and thought-out measures for the salvation of humanity to a social work which is more fruitful and which reckons with actual reality.

Through his experience Owen was able to be completely cured of the belief that all human misery comes about through bad 'conditions' in which people live, and that the goodness of human nature would come to life of itself if these conditions were improved. He was forced to the conviction that good conditions can be maintained only if the human beings who live in them are naturally inclined to maintain them, and when they do this with enthusiasm.

One might at first think that it would be necessary to give theoretical instruction to those who are to live in such conditions, that is, in explaining to them that the measures are right and meet the purpose. It is not difficult for an unbiased person to read something like this into Owen's confession. But even so, it is only possible to achieve a really practical result by penetrating more deeply into the matter. We have to advance from merely a belief in the goodness of human nature that deceived Owen, to a real *knowledge of man*. However clear people have been about how purposeful certain measures are which can bring blessing to humanity—in the long run all such clarity cannot lead to the desired goal. For the human being is not able to gain the inner impulse to work by having a clear understanding if, on the other hand, the impulses to be found in egotism rear their heads. This egotism happens to be part of human nature. And this means that it stirs in the feelings of the human being when he lives together with others and has to work within a community. This necessarily leads to the fact that in practice most people think the best social conditions to be those where the individual can best satisfy his needs. Thus, under the influence of egotistical feelings the social question comes to be formulated quite naturally as follows: What must be done in society in order that each person can have the returns of his work *for himself*? And particularly in our own times with their materialistic way of thinking, only a few people would base their view on any other assumption. How often does one hear

it accepted as a matter of course that a social order based on goodwill and feeling for one's fellow human beings is an absurdity. Rather it is assumed that the totality of a human community can prosper best when the individual can pocket the 'full' or greatest possible yield of his work.

Exactly the opposite of this is taught by the science of spirit, which is founded on a deeper knowledge of the human being and of the world. It shows that all human misery is simply a consequence of egotism, and that misery, poverty and distress must necessarily arise at a particular time in the human community if this community is based on egotism in any way. It is naturally necessary to have deeper knowledge than the kind to be found here and there sailing under the flag of social science, in order to understand this. This 'social science' takes only the outer aspect of human life into account, and not the forces which lie deeper. In fact, it is even very difficult with the majority of modern people to awaken even a feeling in themselves that one can speak about such forces. They regard anyone who comes along with such ideas as peculiar. Now in this essay it is not possible to attempt to evolve a social theory based on these deeper-lying forces. For this would need a much fuller work. The only thing that can be done is to point to the true laws which govern how people work together, and to show what reasonable social considerations arise for someone familiar with these laws. Only a person who builds up his view of the world on the science of spirit can have a full understanding of the matter. And it is to convey such a view of the world that this whole magazine works. One cannot expect it from a single article on the 'social question'. All that this article can hope to do is to shed some light on this question from the spiritual point of view. After all, there will be some people who are able to have a feeling for the rightness of what is briefly described here and which cannot possibly be explained in every detail.

Now, the main social law set forth by the science of spirit,

is the following: *'The well-being of a total community of human beings working together becomes greater the less the individual demands the products of his achievements for himself, that is, the more of these products he passes on to his fellow workers and the more his own needs are not satisfied out of his own achievements, but out of the achievements of others.'* All the conditions within a total community of people which contradict this law must sooner or later produce misery and distress somewhere. This law holds good for social life with absolute necessity and without any exceptions, just as a natural law holds good for a particular sphere of natural processes. But it should not be thought that it is sufficient for this law to be held as a universal moral law, or that it should be translated into the attitude that everyone should work in the service of his fellow men. No, in actual fact the law will be able to exist as it should only if a total community of people succeeds in creating conditions where no one ever can claim the fruits of his own work for himself, but where, if at all possible, these go entirely to the benefit of the community. And he in turn must be maintained by means of the work of his fellow human beings. The important thing is to see that working for one's fellow human beings and aiming at a particular income are two quite separate things.

Those who imagine that they are 'practical people'—the scientist of spirit has no illusions about this—will only be able to smile about this 'hair-raising idealism'. But despite this, the above law is more practical than anything which has ever been thought out by 'practical people', or that has actually been introduced. If we really study life we can find that each human community that exists or has existed has two tendencies in its social set-up. One of these corresponds to this law, the other contradicts it. This has to be the case, irrespective of whether people want it or not. Every community would collapse immediately if the work of the individual did not benefit the whole. But from times immemorial human

egotism has thwarted this law. It has sought to get as much as possible for the individual from his own work. And it is just what has been produced through egotism in this way that has always led to distress, poverty, and misery. This means that the aspect of human conditions that is bound to prove impractical is the one that is introduced by the 'practical people', that reckons either with one's own egotism or somebody else's.

Now of course we are not only concerned with understanding such a law, but actual practice begins with the question: How can the law be carried out in real life? It is clear that it says nothing less than this: The smaller the egotism is, the greater the human well-being. Thus in putting the law into practice, our concern is with people who extricate themselves from the path of egotism. This is in practice, however, quite impossible if the well-being of the individual is measured according to his work. Whoever works for *himself* is *bound* gradually to succumb to egotism. Only someone who works for others can gradually become an unegotistical worker.

For this, one prerequisite is necessary. If a person works for another he must find in this other person the reason for his work; and if someone is supposed to work for the community he must be able to feel the value, the being and the significance of this community. He can do this only if the community is something quite different from a more or less undefined collection of individuals. It has to be permeated by a real spirit in which each person can partake. It has to be such that everyone says: It is right, and I *want* it to be like that. The total community must have a spiritual mission; and each individual must wish to contribute to the fulfilment of this mission. None of the indefinite and abstract ideas of progress which we normally read about are able to provide the formulation of such a measure. If only these ideas prevail, an individual will work here or a group there without seeing

that their work is of any use beyond satisfying their own needs or perhaps the interests they happen to have. This spirit of the total community must be alive right down into each individual.

From earliest times good has prospered only where such a life has been somehow permeated by a spirit common to the whole community. An individual citizen of an old Greek city, or even a citizen of a free city in the Middle Ages, had at least something of a vague feeling of such a spirit. In this respect it makes no difference that, for instance, the Greek way of life was dependent on an army of slaves who did the work for the 'free citizens', and who were not urged on by the spirit of the community, but by the compulsion of their masters. The only thing we can learn from this example is that human life is subject to development. Humanity has reached a stage today where the kind of solution of the social question practised in ancient Greece is no longer possible. Even the most noble Greek did not find slavery wrong, but a human necessity. That is why, for instance, the great Plato could put forward an ideal for the state in which the spirit of the community finds its fulfilment in the fact that the majority of workers are compelled to work by the few with understanding. The task of the present day, however, is to put people in a position where each one can do his work for the whole community out of the impulse to be found within his own being.

This is why no one should think of looking for a solution to the social question applicable to all times, but of how we must formulate our social thinking and actions in accordance with the immediate needs of the present in which we live. It is not possible today for anyone to think up something theoretical or to put it into practice so that it could solve the social question. For he would have to have the power to force a number of people into the conditions he has created. There can be no doubt that had Owen had the power or the will to force all the people of his colony to do the work appointed

them, the undertaking would have succeeded. But at the present time, such force cannot be used. It must be possible for each person to do what he is called upon to do according to his ability and measure of power, out of his own accord. Just because of this, it can never be the case that a mere point of view can convey to people how economic conditions can best be ordered—in the way that Owen in the above-cited confession thought that people should be influenced ‘from a theoretical point of view’. An economic theory by itself can never be a stimulus to work against the powers of egotism. Such an economic theory can for a while give the masses life which on the surface, appears like idealism. But in the long run, such a theory can help no one. Whoever injects such a theory into a crowd of people without giving it something really spiritual, commits a sin against the real purpose of humanity.

The only thing that can help is a spiritual view of the world which can permeate the thoughts, feelings and will, in short, the whole soul of the human being, out of what it is in itself and out of what it is able to offer. The faith that Owen had in the goodness of human nature is only partly right, the other part being a gross illusion. He is right, inasmuch as a ‘higher self’, that can be awakened, slumbers in everyone. But it can only be redeemed from its slumber by a view of the world which has the characteristics mentioned above. If people are brought together in conditions such as were thought out by Owen, the community will prosper in the best possible way. But if people are brought together who do not have such a view of the world, what is good in these conditions will sooner or later of necessity have to become worse. With people who do not have a view based on the spirit, the conditions which further material well-being must also necessarily intensify egotism and thereby produce distress, misery, and poverty. The original meaning of the saying is undoubtedly right: Only an individual can be helped by the

gift of bread alone; a community can only acquire its bread by being helped to a view of the world. It is also of no use to wish to procure bread for *each* individual in the community. After a while it would inevitably come about that many have no bread.

Knowledge of these fundamentals removes several illusions from those who set themselves up to be bringers of happiness to the people. For it makes work designed to improve the social well-being a really difficult matter. And it means too that the overall success of such work can, in certain conditions, only be pieced together out of very small individual successes. Most of what whole parties proclaim as remedies for social life loses its value and proves to be vain delusion and empty talk without sufficient knowledge of human life. No parliament, no democracy, no agitation of the masses, nothing like this can have any meaning for someone who looks more deeply, if it goes against the law mentioned above. Such things can only have a favourable effect if they conform to the intention of this law. It is a serious illusion to believe that an elected member of a particular parliament can contribute anything to the salvation of humanity unless his work is carried out in conformity with the main law of social life.

Wherever this law appears, wherever someone works according to it as far as is possible in the position which he occupies in the human community, good is achieved, even if in very small measure in individual cases. And it is only by means of such isolated examples of work which arise in this way, that beneficial progress in the whole social sphere will come about. It is also true that in some cases larger communities have a natural tendency which enables them to achieve a greater result in this direction. There are also some particular human communities where something of this sort is being prepared within their natural tendencies and capacities. They will make it possible for humanity to take a step

forward in social evolution. Such communities are known to the science of spirit, but it cannot undertake to speak publicly about such matters. And there are also means of preparing larger groups of people to take such a step forward, even within a reasonable space of time. What anyone can do, however, is to work in conformity with the above law in his own particular sphere. There is no position which a person might have in the world where this is not possible, however insignificant or without influence it may appear to be.

The most important thing is that each person seeks out the ways to a view of the world which is based on real knowledge of the spirit. The spiritual approach of anthroposophy can develop into such a view for everyone, when it evolves more and more according to its content and inherent possibilities. By means of it the human being comes to know that it is not by chance that he is born in a particular place at a particular time, but that he is placed out of necessity into the situation in which he is by the spiritual law of cause, karma. He can see that it is his own well-founded destiny that has placed him into the human community in which he lives. He can also become aware of how his abilities have not come to him haphazardly, but that their existence is dependent on the law of cause.

And he can realize all this to the extent that it does not remain just a matter of sense or reason, but gradually fills his whole soul with inner life. He will come to feel that he is fulfilling a higher purpose when he works in accordance with his place in the world, and in accordance with his abilities. The result of realizing this will not be a kind of shadowy idealism but a tremendous impulse of all his powers, and in this respect, he will regard his action just as much a matter of course as in other respects he regards eating and drinking. And furthermore, he will realize the particular significance of the human community to which he belongs. He will come to understand the relationships which his human community

has to other communities, and so the individual personalities of these communities will draw together through a unified picture of spiritual aims, a picture of the common mission of the whole human race. And his knowledge will be able to reach out from the human race to the meaning of the entire earth existence. Only someone who will have nothing to do with a view of the world tending in this direction could be doubtful that it could have the effect suggested here. Of course, it is true that today most people have little inclination to go into such things. But the right approach of the science of spirit cannot fail to attract increasingly wider circles. To the extent that it does this, people will do the right things to further social progress. One cannot doubt this, just because no particular view of the world has so far brought happiness to humanity. According to the laws of human evolution it has never been possible to achieve what is now gradually becoming possible: to transmit a view of the world to every person with the prospect of the practical result already indicated.

The views of the world that have existed so far have been available only to individual groups of people. But what good has been achieved in the human race so far, stems from the various views of the world. Only a view of the world that can inspire everyone and can kindle inner life in everyone is in a position to lead to a universal salvation. This the approach of the science of spirit will always be able to do, where it really evolves according to what is latent within it. Of course, we should not only look at the form which this way of looking at life happens to have at this moment. In order to recognize what has been said as right, it is imperative to realize that the science of spirit has still to evolve and rise to its lofty cultural mission.

Until today, for several reasons it has not been possible for it to show the countenance it will have one day. One of these reasons is that it must first gain a foothold somewhere. It has

therefore to turn to a particular group of people. And naturally this can only be one that through the particular nature of its development has a desire to seek a new solution to the riddle of the world, and which can bring to such a solution understanding and interest by means of the few people in it who have the necessary preparatory training. Of course, the science of spirit has for the moment to clothe its message in a language suited to this group of people. The science of spirit will find further means of expression to speak to wider circles of people to the extent that conditions allow. Only someone who insists on having fixed dogmas can believe that the present form of the message of the science of spirit is a lasting or even the only possible one. Just because the science of spirit is not concerned with remaining a mere theory, or merely with satisfying curiosity, it has to work slowly in this way. To its aims belong the practical points of human progress characterized above. But it can bring about this progress of humanity only if it creates the necessary conditions for it. And these conditions can be created only when one person after the other is conquered. The world moves forward only when human beings *want* it to. But in order to want it, everyone has to work on his own soul. And this can only be achieved step by step. If this were not the case, the science of spirit also would produce a lot of woolly ideas and do no practical work.

4. The Social Question and Theosophy

'The Social Question and Theosophy',³² is the text of a lecture Steiner gave on 26 October 1905. In content it parallels the prior selection in this book, 'The Science of the Spiritual and the Social Question', an essay Steiner wrote during the same period. This lecture includes a very interesting example that illustrates how Steiner hoped people would experiment with his 'fundamental social law'. He makes the radical suggestion that a group of people wishing to free itself from the negative effects of capital form a community in which each member places his earnings in a common account and that all live from this account. In this fashion, each person would free his or her self from the necessity, otherwise present in modern society, of having to work for his or her own welfare. This suggestion has been implemented to varying degrees in different anthroposophical communities, notably the Camphill Communities and the Rudolf Steiner Fellowship Community. It was also behind the experiment known as an 'income community' conducted by the late Ernst BARKHOFF and his co-workers at the first anthroposophical bank, which BARKHOFF founded in Bochum, Germany.

The social question, which is to occupy us today, did not, as will immediately become clear for everyone, arise out of a mere idea or out of the undoubted need of a few people, but is a question that confronts us with facts as strongly and clearly today as ever. Anyone who looks around just a little in the surrounding world will know what a distinct language these facts speak. It could well be that someone who does not want to hear this language of the facts will find out in the not too distant future that he has closed his ears too long to what