



THE ESSENCE OF ANTHROPOSOPHY

A LECTURE GIVEN DURING THE FIRST GENERAL MEETING OF THE  
ANTHROPOSOPHICAL SOCIETY AT BERLIN

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by

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My dear theosophical friends.

When in the year 1902, we were founding the German Section of the Theosophical Society, there were present, as most of our theosophical friends now assembled know, Annie Besant and other members of the Theosophical Society at that date - members who had been so for some time. Whilst the work of organization and the lectures were going on, I was obliged to be absent for a short time for a particular lecture of a course which I was at that time - more than ten years ago - delivering to an audience in no way belonging to the Theosophical movement, and the members of which have, for the most part, not joined it. Side by side, so to say with the founding of the Theosophical movement in Germany, I had during these days to deliver a particular lecture to a circle outside it, and because the course was a kind of beginning, I had used, in order to describe what I wished to say in it, a word which seemed to express this still better than the word *Theosophy* - to be more in keeping with the whole circumstances and culture of our time. Thus, whilst we were founding the German Section, I said in my private lecture that what I had to impart could best be designated by the word *Anthroposophy*. This comes into my memory at the present moment, when all of us here assembled are going apart, and alongside of that which - justly of course calls itself Theosophy - are obliged to choose another name for our work, in the first place as an outer designation, but which at the same

time may significantly express our aims, for we choose the name *Anthroposophy*.

If through spiritual contemplation we have gained a little insight into the inner spiritual connection of things, - a connection in which necessity is often present, even if to outer observation it appears to be a matter of mere *chance* - feeling may perhaps be allowed to wander back to the transition I was then obliged to make from the business of founding the German Section to my Anthroposophical lecture. This may be specially permissible today when we have before us the Anthroposophical Society as a movement going apart from the Theosophical Society. In spite of the new name no change will take place with regard to what has constituted the spirit of our work, ever since that time. Our work will go on in the same spirit, for we have not to do with a change of cause, but only with a change of name, which has become a necessity for us. But perhaps the name is for all that rather suitable to our cause, and the mention of feeling with regard to the fact of ten years ago, may remind us that the new name may really suit us very well. The spirit of our work - will remain the same. It is really that which at the bottom we must call the essence of our cause. This spirit of our work is also that which claims our best powers as human beings, so far as we feel ourselves urged to belong to this spiritual movement of ours. I say, 'our best power as human beings' because people at the

present time are not yet very easily inclined to accept that which - be it as Theosophy or Anthroposophy - has to be introduced into the spiritual and mental life of progressive humanity. We may say "*has to be introduced*" for the reason that one who knows the conditions of the progressive spiritual life of humanity, gains from the perception of them, the knowledge that this Theosophical or Anthroposophical spirit is necessary to healthy spiritual and mental life. But it is difficult to bring into men's minds, in let us say a plain dry way, what the important point is. It is difficult and we understand why. For people who come straight from the life of the present time, in which all their habits of thought are deeply connected with a more materialistic view of things, will at first naturally find it very difficult to feel themselves at home with the way in which the problems of the universe are grappled with by what may be called the Theosophical or Anthroposophical spirit. But it has always been the case that the majority of people have in a certain sense followed individuals who make themselves, in a very special way, vehicles of spiritual life. It is true the most various gradations are to be found within the conception of the world that now prevails; but one fact certainly stands out as the result of observing these ideas, - that a large proportion of contemporary humanity follows, - even when it does so unconsciously - on the one hand certain ideas engendered by the development of natural science in the last few centuries, or on the other hand a residuum of certain

philosophical ideas. And on both sides, - it may be called pride or may appear as something else, - people think that there is something 'certain', something that seems to be built on good solid foundations, contained in what natural science has offered, or if another kind of belief has been chosen, in what this or that philosophical school has imparted. In what flows from the Anthroposophical or theosophical spirit, people are apt to find something more or less uncertain, wavering, - something which cannot be proved. In this connection the most various experiences may be made. For instance, it is quite a common experience that a theosophical or Anthroposophical lecture may be held somewhere on a given subject. Let us suppose the very propitious case (which is comparatively rare) of a scientific or philosophical professor listening to the lecture. It might very easily happen that after listening to it he formed an opinion. In by far the greatest number of cases he would certainly believe that it was a well founded, solid opinion, indeed to a certain degree an opinion which was a matter of course. Now in other fields of mental life it is certainly not possible, after hearing a lecture of one hour on a subject, to be able to form an opinion about that subject. But in relation to what Theosophy or Anthroposophy has to offer, people are very apt to arrive at such a swift judgment, which deviates from all the ordinary usages of life. That is to say, they will feel they are entitled to such an opinion after a monologue addressed to themselves, perhaps unconsciously, of this

kind, "You are really a very able fellow. All your life you have been striving to assimilate philosophical - or scientific - conceptions; therefore you are qualified to form an opinion about questions in general, and you have now heard what the man who was standing there, knows". And then this listener (it is a psychological fact, and one who can observe life knows it to be so) makes a comparison and arrives at the conclusion, "It is really fine, the amount you know, and the little he knows." He actually forms an opinion, after a lecture of an hour's length, not about what the lecturer knows but very frequently about what the listener thinks he does not know, because it was not mentioned in the hour's lecture. Innumerable objections would come to nothing, if this unconscious opinion were not formed. In the abstract, theoretically, it might seem quite absurd to say anything as foolish as I have just said, - foolish not as an opinion, but as a fact. Yet although people do not know it, the fact is a very widely spread one with regard to what proceeds from theosophy or anthroposophy. In our time there is as yet little desire really to find out that what comes before the public, as Theosophy or Anthroposophy, at least as far as it is described here, has nothing to fear from accurate, conscientious examination by all the learning of the age; but has everything to fear from science which is really only one-third science, - I will not even say one-third, - one eighth, one-tenth, one-twelfth, and perhaps not even that. But it will take time before mankind is induced to

judge that which is as wide as the world itself, by the knowledge which has been gained outwardly on the physical plane. In the course of time, it will be seen that the more it is tested with all the scientific means possible and by every individual science, the more fully will true Theosophy, true Anthroposophy be corroborated. And the fact that will also be corroborated that Anthroposophy comes into the world, not in any arbitrary way, but from the necessity of the historical consciousness.

One who really wishes to serve the progressive evolution of humanity, must draw what he has to give from the sources from which the progressive life of mankind itself flows. He may not follow an ideal arbitrarily set up, and steer for it just because he likes it; but in any given period, he must follow the ideal of which he can say, "It belongs to this time." *The essence of Anthroposophy is intimately bound up with the nature of our time;* of course not with that of our immediate little present, but with the whole age in which we live. The next four lectures, and all the lectures which I have to deliver in the next four days, will really deal with the "essence of Anthroposophy". Everything which I shall have to say about the nature of the Eastern and Western Mysteries, will be an amplification of this "essence of Anthroposophy". At the present time I will point out the character of this "essence", by speaking of the necessity through which Anthroposophy has to be established in our time. But once again I do not wish to start from definitions or abstractions, but from

facts, and first of all from a very particular fact. I wish to start from the fact of a poem, once at first I will only say 'once' - *WRITTEN BY A POET*. I will read this poem to you, at first only a few passages, so that I may lay stress on the point I wish to make.

*"The god of love speaks softly to my inmost heart in deep words of yearning. He speaks of marvelous things, which throw my thoughts into a whirl; so flattering is everything he says. And as I hearken and delude myself, I strive to repeat what I hear; it is but a lost labour. It is beyond my power."*

After the poet has enlarged further on the difficulty of expressing what the god of love says to him, he describes the being he loves in the following words: -

*"At the sight of her, breezes from Paradise seem to fan me gently. Love itself gives her that smile, and what her eyes say is no lie"*.

It appears to be quite obvious that the poet was writing a love poem. And it is quite certain that if this poem were to be published somewhere anonymously now - it might easily be a modern poem by one of the better poets - people would say, *"What a pearl he must have found, to describe his beloved in such wonderful verses"*. For the beloved one might congratulate herself on being addressed in the words: -

*"At the sight of her, breezes from Paradise seem gently to fan me. Love itself gives her that smile, and what her eyes say is no lie".*

The poem was not written in our time. If it had been and a critic came upon it, he would say, *"How deeply felt is this direct, concrete living relation. How a man who can write poems as only the most modern poets can, when they sing from the depths of their souls, how such a man is able to say something in which no mere abstraction, but a direct, concrete presentment of the beloved being speaks to us, till she becomes almost a palpable reality."* A modern critic would perhaps say this. But the poem did not originate in our time, it was written by Dante. Now a modern critic who takes it up will perhaps say, *"The poem must have been written by Dante when he was passionately in love with Beatrice, or something of the kind; and here we have another example of the way in which a great personality enters into the life of actuality urged by direct feeling, far removed from all intellectual conceptions and ideas"*. Perhaps there might even be a modern critic who would say, *"People should learn from Dante how it is possible to rise to the highest celestial spheres, as in the Divine Comedy, and nevertheless be able to feel such a direct living connection between one human being and another."* It seems a pity that Dante has himself given the explanation of this poem, and expressly says who the woman is of whom he writes the beautiful words: -

*"At the sight of her, breezes from Paradise seem to fan me gently. Love itself gives her that smile, and what her eyes say is no lie".*

Dante has told us, - and I think no modern critic will deny that he knew what he wanted to say, - that the "beloved one", with whom he was in such direct personal relations, was none other than "Philosophy". And Dante himself says that when he speaks of her eyes, that what they says is no untruth, he means by them the evidence for truth; and by the "smile", he means the art of expressing what truth communicates to the soul; and by "love" or "amour", he means scientific study, the love of truth. And he expressly says that when the beloved personality, Beatrice, was taken away from him and he was obliged to forego a personal relation, the woman "*Philosophia*" drew near his soul, full of compassion, and more human than anything else that is human. And of this woman *Philosophia* he could use these words: -

*" At the sight of her, breezes from Paradise seem gently to fan me. Love itself gives her that smile, and what her eyes say is no lie" - feeling in the depths of his soul that the eyes represent the evidence for truth, the smile is that which imparts truth to the soul, and love is scientific study.*

One thing is obviously impossible in the present day. It is not possible that a modern poet should quite honestly and truly address *Philosophy* in such direct human language. For if he did so,

a critic would soon seize him by the collar and say; "*You are giving us pedantic allegories.*" Even Goethe had to endure having his allegories in the second part of '*Faust*' taken in very bad part in many quarters. People who do not know how times change, and that our souls grow into them with ever fresh vitality have no idea that Dante was just one of those who were able to feel as concrete, passionate, personal a relation, directly of a soul-nature, towards the Lady Philosophia as a modern man can only feel towards a lady of flesh and blood. In this respect, Dante's times are over. For the woman Philosophia no longer approaches the modern soul as a being of like nature with itself, as a being of flesh and blood, as Dante approached the Lady Philosophia. Or would the whole honest truth be expressed (exceptions are of course out of the reckoning), if it were to said today, deliberately that Philosophy was something of going about like a being of flesh and blood, to which such a relation was possible that its expression could really not be distinguished from ardent words of love addressed to a being of flesh and blood? One who enters into the whole relation in which Dante stood to Philosophy, will know that that relation was a concrete one, such an one is only imagined nowadays as existing between man and woman.

Philosophy in the age of Dante appears as a being whom Dante says he loves. If we look around a little, we certainly find the word "Philosophy" coming to the surface of the mental and spiritual life of the Greeks, but we do not find there what we now

call definitions or representations of Philosophy. When the Greeks represent something, it is "*Sophia*" not *Philosophia*". And they represent her in such a way that we feel her to be literally a living being. We feel the "*Sophia*" to be as literally a living being as Dante feels *Philosophia* to be. But we feel her everywhere in such a way - and I ask you to go through the descriptions which are extant - that we, so to say, feel her as an elemental force, as a being who acts, a being who interposes in existence through action. Then from about the fifth century after the foundation of Christianity onwards, we find that "*Philosophia*" begins to be represented, at first described by poets in the most various guises, as a nurse, as benefactress, as a guide, and so on. Then somewhat later painters etc. begin to represent her, and then we may go on to the time called the age of "Scholasticism" in which many a philosopher of the Middle Ages, really felt it to be a directly human relation when he was aware of the fair and lofty Lady *Philosophia* actually approaching him from the clouds; and many a philosopher of the Middle Ages would have been able to send just the same kind of deep and ardent feelings to the Lady *Philosophia* floating towards him on clouds, as the feelings of which we have just heard from Dante. And one who is able to feel such things even finds a direct connection between the Sistine Madonna, floating on the clouds, and the exalted Lady *Philosophia*.

I have often described how in very ancient periods of human development, the spiritual conditions of the universe were still

perceptible to the normal human faculty of cognition. I have tried to describe how there was a primeval clairvoyance, how in primeval times all normally developed people were able, owing to natural conditions, to look into the spiritual world. Slowly and gradually that primitive clairvoyance became lost to human evolution, and our present conditions of knowledge took their place. This happened by slow degrees, and the conditions in which we are now living, which as it were represented - a temporary very deep entanglement in the material kind of perception - has also come by slow degrees. For such a spirit as Dante, as we may gather from the description he gives in the "*Divine Comedy*", it was still possible to experience the last remnants of a direct relation of spiritual worlds, - to experience them as it were in a natural way. To a man of the present day it is mere foolish nonsense to expect him to believe that he might first, like Dante, be in love with a Beatrice, and might afterwards be involved in a second love affair with Philosophy, and these two were beings of quite similar nature, the Beatrice of the flesh and blood, and Philosophy. It is true I have heard that it was said that Kant was once in love, and someone became jealous because he loved "*Metaphysics*", and asked "*Meta what*"? but it is certainly difficult to introduce into the modern life of the spirit enough understanding to enable people to feel Dante's Beatrice and Philosophy as equally real and actual. Why is this? Just because the direct connection of the human soul with the spiritual world has gradually passed over into our

present condition. Those who have often heard me speak, know how highly I estimate the Philosophy of the nineteenth century; but I will not even mention it as possible that anyone could pour forth his feelings about Hegel's "Logic" in the words,

*"At the sight of her, breezes from Paradise seem gently to fan me. Love itself gives her that smile, and what her eyes say is no lie."*

I think it would be difficult to say this about Hegel's "Logic". It would even be difficult, although more possible, with regard to the intellectual manner in which Schopenhauer contemplates the world. It would certainly be easier in this case, but even then it would still be difficult to gain any concrete being in the way in which Dante here speaks of it. Times have changed. For Dante, life within the philosophic element, within the spiritual world, was a direct personal relation, as personal as any to other which has to do with what it is today called the actual or material. And strange though it seems, because Dante's time is not very far removed from our own, it is nevertheless true, that for one who is able to observe the spiritual life of humanity, it results quite as a matter of course for him to say, *"People are trying nowadays to know the world; but when they assume that all that man is, has remained the same throughout the ages, their outlooks does not really extend much further than the end of their noses."* For even as late as Dante's time, life in general, the whole relation of the human soul to spiritual worlds, was different. And if any

philosopher is of opinion that the relation which he may have with the spiritual world through Hegel's or Schopenhauer's Philosophy, is the only possible one, it means nothing more than that a man may still be very ignorant.

Now let us consider what we have been describing: namely, that in the transition from the Graeco-Roman civilization to our fifth period, that part of the collective being of man which we call the intellectual soul, or soul of the higher feelings, which was specially developed during the Graeco-Roman period, was evolved on into the self-conscious soul, during the development which has been going on up to the present. How then in this concrete case of philosophy does the transition from the Graeco-Roman to our modern period come before us i.e. the transition from the period of the intellectual soul to that of the self-conscious soul? It appears in such a form that we clearly understand that during the development of the intellectual soul, or soul of the higher feelings, and obviously still stands in such a relation to the spiritual worlds connected with his origin, that a certain line of separation is still drawn between him and those spiritual worlds. Thus the Greek confronted his Sophia, i.e. pure wisdom, as if she were a being so to say standing in a particular place and he facing her. Two beings, Sophia and the Greek, facing each other, just as if she were quite an objective entity which he can look at, with all the objectivity of the Greek way of seeing things. But because he was still living in the intellectual soul, or soul of

the higher feelings, he has to bring into expression the directly personal relation of his consciousness to that objective entity. This has to take place in order to prepare the way gradually for a new epoch, that of the self-conscious soul.

How will the "self-conscious soul" confront Sophia?

In such a way that it brings the ego into a direct relation with Sophia, and expresses, not so much the objective being of Sophia, as the position of the ego in relation to the self-conscious soul, to this Sophia. "*I love Sophia*" was the natural feeling of an age which still had to confront the concrete being designated Philosophy; but yet was the age which was preparing the way for the self-conscious soul, and which, out of the relation of the ego to the self-conscious soul, on which the greatest value had to be placed, was working towards representing "*Sophia*" as simply as everything else was represented. It was so natural that the age which represented the intellectual soul, or soul of the higher feelings, and which was preparing the self-conscious soul, should bring into expression the relation to Philosophy. And because things are expressed only by slow degrees, they were prepared during the Graeco-Roman period. But we also see this relation of man to Philosophia developed externally up to a certain point, when we have before us pictorial representations of Philosophia floating down on clouds, and later, in Philosophia's expression (even if she bears another name), a look showing kindly feeling, once again expressing the relation to the self-conscious soul.

It is the plain truth that it was from a quite human personal relation, like that of a man to a woman, that the relation of man to Philosophy started in the age when Philosophy directly laid hold of the whole spiritual life of progressive human evolution. The relation has cooled: I must ask you not to take the words superficially, but to seek for the meaning behind what I am going to say. The relation has indeed cooled, - sometimes it has grown icy cold. For if we take up many a book on Philosophy at the present day, we can really say that the relation which was so ardent in the days when people looked upon Philosophy as a personal being, has grown quite cool, even in the case of those who were able to struggle through to the finest possible relation to Philosophy. Philosophy is no longer the woman, as she was to Dante and others who lived in his times. Philosophy nowadays is so that we may say of the shape in which it comes before us, "The very form in which it confronts us in the nineteenth century in its highest development, as a Philosophy of ideas, conceptions, objects, shows us that part in the spiritual development of humanity is played out." In reality it is deeply symbolic when we take up Hegel's philosophy, specially the "Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences", and find as the last thing in this nineteenth century book, a statement of the way in which Philosophy interprets itself. It has understood everything else, at last it understands itself. What is there left for it to understand now? It is the symptomatic expression of the fact that

philosophy has come to an end, even if there are still many questions to be answered since Hegel's days. A thorough-going thinker, Richard Wahle, has brought this forward in his book, "The Sum-Total of Philosophy and its Ends", and has very ably worked out the thesis that everything achieved by Philosophy may be divided up amongst the various separate departments of Physiology, biology, aesthetics, etc., and that when this is done, there is nothing left of Philosophy. It is true that such books overshoot the mark, yet they contain a deep truth, i.e. that certain spiritual movements have their day and period, and that, just as a day has its morning and evening, they have their morning and evening in the history of human evolution.

We know that we are living in an age when the "*Spirit Self*" is being prepared, that although we are still deeply involved in the development of the self-conscious soul, the evolution of the Spirit Self is preparing. We are living in the period of the "*self-conscious soul*" and looking towards the preparation of the age of the Spirit Self, in much the same way as the Greek lived in the epoch of the "*Intellectual Soul*, or soul of higher feelings, and looked towards the dawning of the "*self-conscious soul*". And just as the Greek founded philosophy, - which in spite of Duessen and others first existed in Greece, just as the Greek founded it during the unfolding of the intellectual soul, or soul of the higher feelings, when man was still directly experiencing the lingering influence of the objective "*Sophia*", just as Philosophy

then rose and developed in such a way that Dante could look upon it as a real concrete, actual being, who brought him consolation after Beatrice had been rent from him by death, so we are living now in the midst of the age of the self-conscious soul, are looking for the dawn of the age of the Spirit Self, and know that something is once more becoming objective to us, which however is carrying forward through the coming times that which man has won while passing through the epoch of the "self-conscious soul".

What is it that has to be evolved?

What has to come to development is the presence of a new "Sophia"? That man has learnt to relate this Sophia to his self-conscious soul, and to experience her as directly related to man's being. This took place during the age of the self-conscious soul. Thereby this Sophia has become the being who directly explains man as he is. After she has entered into man, she must go outside him taking with her his being, and representing it to him objectively once more. In this way did Sophia once enter the human soul and arrive at the point of being so intimately bound up with it, that a beautiful love poem, like that of Dante, could be made about her; she will again become objective, but will take with her that which man is and represent herself objectively, - now not merely as "Sophia", but as "ANTHROPOSOPHIA", as the Sophia who, after passing through the human soul, through the being of man, henceforth bears within her that being, and thus stands before

enlightened man as once the objective being "*Sophia*" stood before the Greeks.

This is the progress of the history of human evolution in relation to the spiritual facts under consideration. And now I leave it all those, who wish to examine the matter very minutely, to see how it may also be shown in detail from the destiny of *Sophia*, *Philosophia* and *Anthroposophia*, how humanity evolves progressively through the soul-principles which we designate the intellectual soul, or the soul of higher feelings, the self-conscious soul and the Spirit Self. People will learn how deeply founded in the collective being of man is that which we have in view of our Anthroposophy. What we receive through Anthroposophy is the essence of ourselves, which first floated towards man in the form of a celestial goddess with whom he was able to come into relation which lived on as *Sophia* and *Philosophia*, and which man will again bring forth out of himself, putting it before him as the fruit of true self-knowledge in Anthroposophy. We can wait patiently till the world is willing to prove how deeply founded down to the smallest details is what we have to say. For it is the essence of Theosophy or Anthroposophy that its own Being consists of what is man's being and nature of its efficacy is that man receives and discovers from Theosophy or Anthroposophy what he himself is, and has to put it before himself because he must exercise self-knowledge.