

FOREWORD

WAS THE FIRST WORLD WAR of 1914–1918—and the subsequent history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—an inevitable event, or series of events? Is it permissible to consider an alternate sequence of world history (or European history) where this gruesome, mechanized initiation into modern technological warfare (advances in the “art” of killing by explosive, chemical, airplane, tank) was side-stepped, and where another impulse, humane and thus preferring peace to war, prevailed, not only in 1914 but also prior to that fateful year, and beyond it?

The details and “lived” realities of human history (the experiences, deeds, decisions, and motivations of individuals and groups both prominent and “ordinary”) are, as a rule though not without exception, generally flattened and forgotten by the grander narratives of rear-facing explanations, official or otherwise, that are, whether true or skewed or, as is most common, a bit of both, nevertheless necessary in order to orient humankind to *what has happened* as it relates to *where we are today*. As a historiographer,* Rudolf Steiner was keen to awaken and encourage a science of history (and consciousness of current events) that did not demur from deviating from the “lies agreed upon” of the narrative explanations of past events. For him, from the first, the unprejudiced pursuit of truth was paramount,† and much in accord with the serious sentiment of earnest historians such as W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote in 1935 in a chapter entitled “The Propaganda of History”:

Somebody in each era must make clear the facts with utter disregard

* See, for example, *From Symptom to Reality in Modern History* (CW 185).

† See all his late nineteenth century epistemological works, especially *The Philosophy of Freedom* (CW 4) and *Goethe's Theory of Knowledge* (CW 2).

to his own wish and desire and belief. What we have got to know, so far as possible, are *the things that actually happened in the world*. Then with that much clear and open to every reader, the philosopher and prophet has a chance to interpret these facts; but the historian has no right, posing as a scientist, to conceal or distort facts; and until we distinguish between these two functions of the chronicler of human action, we are going to render it easy for a muddled world out of sheer ignorance to make the same mistakes ten times over. One is astonished in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over. . . .*

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The lectures contained in this volume of *The Collected Works of Rudolf Steiner* are of particular interest for a number of reasons, not least as a key text in understanding Steiner's spiritual approach as a foundation for peaceful relations among nations and diverse peoples, given prior to the advent of atrocity and hateful nationalistic propaganda that manifested in and helped sustain the (World) War of 1914–18.

The subject of “folk souls,” or individual archangelic beings associated with and in some sense “presiding over” different “language groups” of human beings (or “nations” but meant *not* in the sense of modern political states, but cultural, ethnic, *folk* with their particularized customs, traditions, languages and dialects, music, art, expression, and general way of being in the world, unique unto itself but not unrelated to all the other particularized, unique cultural ways of being in the world) is one that Rudolf Steiner returned to repeatedly in the war years and afterwards, almost always with reference to these lectures and what he had intended to convey with them.† What was this intention? Steiner points to it in his 1918 Preface to the publication of these lectures: *a psychology of peoples, or folk*.

What Steiner means by this is difficult, perhaps, though hardly impossible, to fathom without a grasp of the world conception that

* W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Oxford, 2017).

† See, for example, *Architecture as Peacework* (CW 287), lectures given at the beginning of the war; or *Dying Earth and Living Cosmos* (CW 181), given towards the end of the war, in 1918, particularly the lecture of March 30, 1918, “Folk Souls and the Mystery of Golgotha.”

he took great pains to introduce to the world through his fundamental spiritual-scientific writings, notably *Theosophy* (CW 9) and *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13), the latter published in the same year that these lectures were given in Norway. As with all of Steiner's spiritual-scientific writings and lectures to some degree, these lectures ask for an unprejudiced reading in order to discover the source from which they originate and what they intend—which is nothing less than an authentic, practical, and spiritual foundation for peace and understanding among the diverse peoples of the world, through self-knowledge and an enhanced consciousness of our common humanity.

The Editors

INTRODUCTION

THE SO-CALLED “folk souls cycle” begins by developing an overarching and complex spiritual-scientific concept of “folk” and of the “ages” of history in relation to the beings of the spiritual hierarchies (lectures one through three). This is followed by an excursus on the unity of humankind and the geographical conditions underlying the emergence and aftereffects of prehistoric race formation, presented as a tapestry of higher hierarchies working from the cosmos upon Earth as the “planet of love” (lectures four through six). Finally, Steiner discusses the configuration of the spiritual dispositions of the European peoples and their history in the present fifth age of the post-Atlantean cultural period (lectures seven through eleven). In the final lectures, in keeping with the Norwegian setting, Steiner interweaves a consideration of folk themes from the European north as they are reflected in ancient Norse mythology. Finally, the lecture series ends with a call to take up one of Europe’s future tasks—the harmonious coexistence of all peoples and the further development of a spiritualized Christianity.

The lecture cycle deals with subjects that Steiner developed from many angles in the lectures of this period, culminating in early 1910 in the publication of one of his principal works, *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13). The themes include a study of the world of the spiritual hierarchies and an exploration of religious traditions in the light of spiritual science (the Gospels, the Apocalypse, Genesis, and the mythologies of various cultures). In fact, Steiner devoted entire lecture cycles to these themes during this period. Building on the concepts and motifs developed in the preceding years, this present cycle comprises a coherent, systematic exposition on the effects of “folk spirits,” the formation of the “principal races” of humanity, and the evolution of “time spirits” in history. In many respects, it can be regarded as Steiner’s definitive exposition of these themes.

As is often the case in Steiner's lecture cycles, unique content is interspersed throughout. For example, the cycle features remarks about the philosophy of Solovyov (which occur only occasionally in the lectures of these years), the announcement of the reappearance of the Christ in the etheric (which was presented in various cities in 1910), and indications about the previous configuration of the Gulf Stream (which occur only here). Steiner—who in 1910 was working on the manuscript for his book about the human senses, *Anthroposophy, a Fragment* (CW 45), which he never completed—observed in retrospect that this cycle belongs to the “second phase” of anthroposophy in which he worked out his spiritual science in many directions and in different areas of life (see Selected References, p. 171).

Methodologically, the cycle is founded on the perspectives developed in his book *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13), in which he presents evolution as the result of a complex interaction of spiritual beings. Steiner assumed that his audience was familiar with the basic concepts of theosophy as it was understood at that time. In the lectures, he often refers explicitly to his writings on the akashic chronicle (later published as *Cosmic Memory* [CW 11]) and to his *Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13), both of which present the results of the spiritual research he had undertaken between 1904 and 1909 into the evolution of Earth and humanity. Whoever would like to understand the presuppositions of the lecture cycle in a methodical and objective way will have to refer to and work through the prerequisite concepts concerning cosmic evolution as presented in *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13). There exist hardly any thorough studies of the above-mentioned central themes of the cycle—nor are there any pending—in regard to the conceptual development of these themes in Steiner's work as a whole, or their relationship to the wider literature of the theosophical movement of the time, or in relation to the sciences of the time. The only exception to this broad statement is the question of Steiner's understanding of race, which had previously been of rather little significance to anthroposophical authors or practitioners. But beginning in the 1990s, discussions of possible racist content has led to several comprehensive collections and studies from various perspectives that are now available.*

* See Peter Selg, *Anthroposophy and the Accusation of Racism* (SteinerBooks, 2022).

Martin Barkhoff has rightly pointed out in an interesting essay[†] that the lectures of this volume constitute one of Steiner's great cycles on the spiritual hierarchies. The lecture cycles on the work of the hierarchies, presented between 1909 and 1912,[‡] defy any schematization and present many different aspects and approaches to understanding the work of the hierarchies. What they all have in common is that in each case a very concrete and complex interaction—including the antagonism of regularly advancing and retarding spirits—is described, and that the hierarchies are conceived as a ladder of exalted spiritual beings rising above the kingdoms of nature from the human being upwards. They are depicted as being active in spirit and nature across the whole cosmos, including the solar and planetary systems. Already before the folk souls cycle, Steiner had described how the third hierarchy (angels, archangels, archai) is especially active in peoples and in the historical development of culture,[§] while the higher hierarchies work comprehensively in cosmos, in humanity, and in nature. In this volume, Steiner develops this aspect—that is, the work of the third hierarchy in cultural evolution—in detail as the main subject in the lecture cycle. Barkhoff has also aptly characterized how Steiner traces

† Barkhoff, “Hierarchienlehre der abnormen Geistwesen und germanische Mythologie. Was leisten die Kristiana-Vorträge von 1910 zum Aufbau der Anthroposophie?” [The doctrine of the hierarchies of abnormal spiritual beings and Nordic mythology: What do the Christiania (Oslo) lectures of 1910 contribute to the development of anthroposophy?], in *Archivmagazin. Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, no. 2, (December 2013), pp. 193–206.

‡ Besides the folk souls cycle, these are: *The Spiritual Hierarchies and the Physical World*, Düsseldorf, April 1909 (CW 110); *Inner Experiences of Evolution*, Berlin, October–December, 1911 (CW 132); *Spiritual Beings in the Heavenly Bodies and in the Kingdoms of Nature*, Helsinki, April 1912 (CW 136); also, the lecture cycle from the same year as the folk souls cycle, revised by Steiner and published under the title *The Spiritual Guidance of the Individual and Humanity* (CW 15), 1911; it begins with the hierarchies and the antagonisms reigning in them, in this instance, above all in relation to the world of the angels and our time.

§ The whole program of the folk souls cycle with regard to the active working of the hierarchies is contained, for example, in the following lectures: Berlin, April 20, 1908, in *Good and Evil Spirits and Their Influence on Humanity* (CW 102), and Düsseldorf, April 15, 1909, in *The Spiritual Hierarchies and the Physical World* (CW 110).

the contrasts—of cooperation and antagonism, uniformity and exclusivity, advancement and retardation, normal and abnormal, “good” and “evil” powers—in the hierarchies and sees social coexistence, juxtaposition, and potential antagonism of groups of people as rooted in this state of affairs.

The taxonomical distinction of these “normal” and “abnormal” spirit beings is unique to the folk souls cycle, but comparable distinctions among spiritual beings frequently occur in Steiner’s work. In fact, according to Barkhoff’s analysis, the cycle is “sociological” in the sense that Steiner, building on his foundational writings—which have from the beginning presented the universal nature of humanity—describes not the human being as such, but rather the relationships within the human environment: the status of the human being as occasioned by place, time, heredity, folk, language group, race, and humanity in general, with all their identities and differences. Barkhoff argues that because Steiner made very few concrete statements about any actual “missions” of individual folk souls, he abandoned his original topic in favor of other perspectives. Of course, this can also be seen differently. Certainly, the cycle is non-political throughout. Except for some very revealing hints in the form of examples, he does not even go to the level of ordinary historical events and personalities. In fact, the only historical examples he employs are the painful speech of a Choctaw Indian and statements by the philosopher Solovyov, both brought as testimonies to particularly significant points of cultural development. Nevertheless, the idea of folk souls is the key concept that forms the red thread of the entire cycle. In the first lectures, a spiritual-scientific concept of *folk* is developed, then the effect of a *folk* is embedded in the comprehensive unfolding of time and history as well as the natural foundations of Earth and cosmos, until finally the predispositions of European peoples are presented as consisting of certain soul abilities, to which, in the subsequent lectures, Steiner refers again and again.

When the twenty-five-year-old Steiner outlined his philosophy of freedom, in which he acknowledges no guiding principles for an individual other than the ideas on which the individual’s action is based, he radically rejected, for the spiritual, cultural, and social

sciences—such as ethnology and history—all constructions of “external influences” on human action, of “ideas that lie in time,” of “a plan” on which history might be based.* As a member of an ethnic group in the course of history, the human being belongs to a greater whole. But in ethics, the independent human spirit interacts with the spiritual. Objecting to the view of Gustav Freytag that sees “the power of folk-ethnicity working unceasingly with the dark compulsion of primal force,” Steiner instead asserts as a method:

Historians must always bear in mind that the causes of historical events are to be found in the individual intentions, plans, and so on of individuals. It is always a mistake to interpret historical events according to underlying plans. One must always ask about the goals of certain individuals, what path they followed, and so on. History must always be based entirely on human nature. Human nature’s will, human nature’s tendencies are to be fathomed.†

Later in the folk souls cycle—and it is not the only place—there are contradictory references to the “necessity” in human evolution (p. 12), to the “great laws of humanity” (p. 60), to the “wise guidance of Earth’s humanity as a whole” (p. 86), to spiritual beings as “the leaders of the collective culture of humanity as it unfolds” (p. 136), and so forth. That is, a constant reference to a spiritual plan in evolution and history. Nevertheless, Steiner remains true to himself. The folk souls cycle contains a plea against “blind faith” in authorities and an appeal to freedom in spiritual matters (p. 162). Only the horizon has expanded by many layers; the later Steiner speaks about largely unconscious, higher conditions of human life lying in the supersensible in the sense he had already demanded as a young philosopher: “The human being must know the spiritual world in order to determine his share in it according to this knowledge. . . . The spiritual sciences are therefore, in the most eminent sense, sciences of freedom.”‡

Soon after the beginning of his theosophical activity and the publication of his initially historically-oriented books on mysticism and

* *Goethe’s Theory of Knowledge* (CW 2), chap. 19, “Human Freedom.”

† *Nature’s Open Secret* (CW 1), chap. 10, “Knowledge and Action in the Light of Goethe’s Ideas.”

‡ *Goethe’s Theory of Knowledge* (CW 2), chap. 17, “Spirit and Nature.”

Christianity in 1903, Steiner describes a planned undertaking of gigantic proportions. The themes of the first two parts of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, "Cosmogenesis" and "Anthropogenesis," are to be continued in a third part, which he calls "occult historical research." The deeper laws of world history are to be investigated according to body, soul, and spirit up to the "whole spirit of the universe," which flows into leading individualities in the history of humanity and communicates itself from them to the broader population—their "brothers"—from incarnation to incarnation. For this purpose, at the first stage, you have to "see how physical existence is conditioned in the broadest sense by the great cosmic forces of nature, which take a certain form in racial and national characters, and in what is called the 'spirit' of an age." Steiner then followed this outline, including his reworking of the first two parts of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*, over the next seven years, elaborating the project in writings and lectures that culminated in his description of cosmic evolution in *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13). However, Steiner left untouched for a long time the concepts of a "spirit of a folk" and a "spirit of the age," leaving only general indications in this regard—for example, the brief statement in *Theosophy* (CW 9) that merely says that behind the peoples and the ages there exist real spiritual beings. Only in the folk souls cycle does he devote himself to a concrete explication of these concepts. These must be taken as results obtained from the sources of spiritual research that can, however, be tested against reality by means of concepts.

In the first lectures, Steiner analyzes the structure of the concept of a *folk* as constituting the differentiated components of the workings of various spiritual beings. *Folk* is only the nebulous conception of a totality. The reality is the temporal configuration of certain spiritual-soul dispositions of folk temperaments in the human organization in a particular geographic region (archangels) in their combination with a certain language as an order of an entirely different kind (abnormal spirits of form) as well as with particular thought tendencies of a still different order (abnormal spirits of personality). These three factors

* "Okkulte Geschichtsforschung" [Occult historical research], in *Luzifer-Gnosis. 1903–08* (GA 34).

in various constellations, and interacting with the respective spirit of the time (normal spirits of personality)—i.e., their placement in history—constitute the *folk* concept for Steiner and can be empirically traced on this level back to external reality. It could easily be shown that all of Steiner's later remarks on the folk spirits are additions to the foundations laid in this folk souls cycle. Steiner later developed an essential expansion of his view of the knowledge of *folk* when, using the concepts gained from his discovery of the threefold nature of the human organism and of social organization, he presented the dispositions of human beings in the West, in Central Europe, and in the East as essential conditions for the present and future organization of society and history.[†]

Around the turn of the century, Steiner participated, as a man of letters and in his public theosophical lectures in Berlin, in the numerous anthropological debates of the time—above all, those concerning the evolutionary ideas of Darwin, Haeckel, and others. The fields of anthropology and ethnology were at that time embedded in the fields of philosophy, psychology, philology, biology, and geography, and were then still in a nascent phase before their establishment as specialized social sciences. In his 1918 preface to the folk souls cycle, Steiner claims that a true basis for a “psychology of peoples” cannot be given by “ordinary anthropological, ethnographical, and even historical studies,” but requires a “basis . . . in a spiritual reality.” While Steiner's position on the basic anthropological questions of his time would require an extraordinarily extensive study, at least a few clues about Steiner's references to the concept of *folk* in the sciences can be sketched here. In a personal retrospective that forms the introduction to a public lecture,[‡] Steiner describes what he considered to be the ideal prerequisites for studying *folk*: a broad-ranging view of the field, extended over all areas of the life of a *folk*, as exhibited, for example, in the work of Jacob Grimm in the areas of research into

† Public lecture in Stuttgart, March 10, 1920, entitled “The Peoples of the Earth in the Light of Anthroposophy” (in GA 335), published in English in *The Golden Blade*, 1980. In countless lectures in 1920, Steiner presented the main aspects of social cooperation on Earth.

‡ Berlin, April 13, 1916, in *Aus dem mitteleuropäischen Geistesleben* [From Central European spiritual life](GA 65).

language and folk mythology, to the level of the laws of the evolution of sounds in language; a trained natural-scientific thinking; and a “modern spiritual research” of the kind he himself had tried to build up. With respect to the first point, he explicitly remarks that he naturally “could not boast of such a science,” and in modest understatement, he calls his further elaborations “naturally bumbling.” At the same time, he reports how he had personally become familiar with *folk* research through two figures from his youth. One is Karl Julius Schröer (1825–1900), the friendly teacher from his Viennese period and a linguistic specialist on the Austrian dialect, as well as a prominent Goethe researcher. Steiner later revived the popular Oberufer Christmas plays collected and published by Schröer, arranging them for performance. The other figure was Ludwig Laistner (1845–1896), with whom he was on friendly terms during his time in Weimar. Laistner attempted to explain how legends and myths are produced by states of consciousness present in dream. We should also note Steiner’s close friendship with the poet Ludwig Jacobowski (1868–1900), who was a notable modernist literary figure in Berlin. Jacobowski’s studies on the emergence of the poetic element included poetry from African and other non-European cultures. After Jacobowski’s early death, Steiner inherited his library, which contained significant volumes on cultural anthropology and ethnology. Steiner memorialized all three friends in his autobiography.

While Steiner had a broad education with regard to the scientific directions of his time, he had only selective exposure to individual researchers in the field of ethnology. Surprisingly, he was able to compare, for example, fairy tales from the Northwest American Indians and the Melanesian peoples, both from Wilhelm Wundt’s so-called “Völkerpsychologie” (folk psychology), with personal findings from his *Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13).^{*} Finally, it should be noted that in 1900, in the *Magazin für Literatur* of which he was the editor, Steiner reviewed a work by the ethnological writer Thomas Achelis about the philosopher and psychologist Moritz Lazarus. Steiner drew

* Berlin, February 6, 1913, (GA 62), published in English under the title “Fairy Tales in the Light of Spiritual Investigation” in *The World of Fairy Tales* (SteinerBooks, 2013).

attention to the project of “folk psychology,” which Lazarus pursued for many decades in collaboration with the linguist Heymann Steinthal and which contained “the most fruitful seeds for our cultural-historical, psychological, and ethnological outlook.”†

Like Schröer and Laistner, Lazarus and Steinthal belonged to the waning phase of philosophical idealism, which was displaced in the second half of the nineteenth century by the emerging materialistic positivism and the worship of science. Their folk psychology, still based on Wilhelm von Humboldt’s ideas, had an influence on Franz Boas, the later founder of the American school of cultural anthropology. It was probably the last current in the nineteenth century that saw in an ideal “folk spirit” the real object of *folk* knowledge. Lazarus and Steinthal belonged to the German-Jewish emancipation movement, and it is interesting to note that Steiner’s presentation of the monotheistic stream in human cultural history represented by the Semitic *folk* and Judaism in the folk souls cycle corresponds to their ideas about it.‡

Introducing his cycle in the first lecture, Steiner, referring to occultism, describes the lectures as a special venture because they required a “higher degree of impartiality” (p. 1). Indeed, his description of the very concrete activities of the hierarchical beings in history and in the life of peoples must have contained shocking aspects. Although speaking to a small, select audience, he points again and again to possible misunderstandings and dangers when interpreting the content of the lectures. He emphasizes the idea of reincarnation, familiar to his audience, which allows an individual to participate in a wide variety of cultures, peoples, and “races,” but at the same time notes that the content can also be used to stir up “dissension and disharmony” (p. 64). Steiner himself states that he should be evaluated regarding the extent to which he presents objective descriptions without value judgments. Soon after the beginning of the First World War, he was confronted

† Steiner, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Literatur* [Collected essays on literature] (GA 32).

‡ Regarding Lazarus and Steinthal, see Matt Bunzl, “*Völkerpsychologie* and German-Jewish Emancipation,” in H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl, eds., *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 47–85.

with simplifications, clichés, and gross political distortions of his remarks, which he sharply criticized (see, for example, the Selected References in the present volume, p. 171).

His explanations about “races”—leaving aside spiritual-scientific concepts for the moment—refer, from a scientific perspective, to concepts of hereditary and geographic conditions within a spectrum of variation of the universal human form. Such factors are significant in the modern field of molecular population genetics, which employs statistical methods to investigate the hereditary relationships within a variety of population groups, including cultural groups, language groups, migratory population, population blends, and so forth. These studies of the evolution of humanity through its genetic variation should be interpreted with great caution, given the long history of jumbled biological and cultural concepts, misunderstandings, and oversimplified questions of identity, to say nothing of the scientific, cultural, commercial, and other interests that come into play. The historian George L. Mosse, who explored a variety of mystical-racialist streams in his wide-ranging study of German race ideologies and anti-Semitism from the eighteenth century to the mass murder in Nazi concentration camps, concluded: “Theosophy itself was not racist. . . . But eventually racism allied itself with theosophy. Theosophy could, in fact, also support a new humanism. Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society, founded in Berlin in 1913, linked spiritualism to freedom and universalism.”* The problem is the use and misuse, the conflation and instrumentalizations, of scientific ideas. Steiner’s intentions at that time are clear; he emphasized in the first lecture, and stated again in his later preface, that what he considered essential was the knowledge of peoples in the name of freedom and in the service of a “common mission of humanity” that would bring people of the present day together more and more.

The folk souls cycle was held at a moment in history when the dark shadows of imperialism, nationalism, and racism had long since been called forth, but Europe still had ahead of it the shattering events of

* George Mosse, *Towards the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 96.

the First World War and the abysses of the National Socialist German racial mania that was to lead to the Second World War. The attentive reader of this cycle may easily notice that Steiner, who after the First World War was to condemn the partitioning of the world into nation-states as something “perverse to the folk-idea,”[†] warned towards the end of his Christiania (Oslo) lectures of the “terrible” danger of an ascendant, chaotic, and misleading return of the atavistic spirit of Germanism, which could only be countered by the strongest forces of level-headed spirituality (pp. 158f.). Even today, we cannot guard too strongly against oversimplified understandings and misleading conflations involving the all-too-familiar stereotypes and tendencies of nationalism, racism, and other power dynamics.

In the folk souls cycle, Steiner dealt with factual explanations, without addressing the methodological cognitive presuppositions of his spiritual science, which he had presented elsewhere in his foundational books. Two years later in Helsinki,[‡] he combined his presentation of the spiritual hierarchies with explanations of the forms of cognition and their higher states of consciousness. In Oslo, Steiner remarked at the beginning that he did not intend to speak “about the path of knowledge” (p. 2). His brief remarks about it are nevertheless of great interest. Overcoming culturally determined prejudices is a fundamental concern of the Enlightenment and is the cognitive principle underlying the entire field of ethnology. Steiner points out the overlap between the experience of other cultures and the spiritual path of cognition, both of which involve the difficult loss of previous identities. The experience of other cultures and its overlap with the experience of spiritual growth has also been pondered by ethnologists, who have presented the phenomenon in terms of consciousness theory.[§]

However, cultural anthropology and ethnology have historically also followed a one-sided fixation on the otherness of so-called

† Basel, May 6, 1920, in *Vom Einheitsstaat zum dreigliedrigen sozialen Organismus* [From the unitary State to the threefold social organism] (GA 334).

‡ *Spiritual Beings in the Heavenly Bodies and in the Kingdoms of Nature* (CW 136).

§ See Hans-Peter Duerr, *Traumzeit. Über die Grenzen zwischen Wildnis und Zivilisation* [Dreamtime. On the boundaries between wilderness and civilization] (Frankfurt a. M., 1978).

“primitive,” aboriginal cultures.* Steiner charted a wider course when, on the eve of the First World War, in the context of his cultural-historical perspective on the evolution of humanity, he turned to a knowledge and a self-knowledge of the European folk souls of our age as they exist between East and West. Tracing the origins of distinct peoples back to higher spiritual beings and cosmic forces at work on Earth will appear to the science of today every bit as “paradoxical” as Steiner assumed it would in his preface a hundred years ago. However, it will also have to be said that, with Lessing’s idea of repeated lives on Earth as stages of revelation in history, and with Herder’s ideas on the infinite variety of cultures on planet Earth as a workshop for higher spiritual forces and states, these two great thinkers of the Enlightenment are the forerunners of Steiner’s view of folk and history.†

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* See, for example, Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society. Transformations of an Illusion* (London, 1988).

† Steiner references both Lessing and Herder in a series of lectures on history held that same year. See the lecture in Stuttgart, December 28, 1910, in *Occult History* (CW 126).

PREFACE

Written more than seven years after these lectures were given.

IN THESE LECTURES in Christiania in June 1910, I ventured to describe the psychology of the development of peoples. The lectures were based on what I have written concerning anthroposophically oriented spiritual science in my books *Theosophy* (CW 9), *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (CW 13), *The Riddle of Man* (CW 20), *Riddles of the Soul* (CW 21), and others.[†] I was able to build on this foundation because my audience was familiar with the scientific view presented in those books. To the external reason for my choosing this viewpoint must be added another, more inward consideration—namely, that ordinary anthropological, ethnographical, and even historical studies are unable to provide an adequate basis for a genuine psychology of the characteristics displayed by different peoples. These sciences can take us no further than can anatomy and physiology in our search for knowledge about the soul life of human beings. Just as we have to look beyond the body and seek the soul in order to reach an understanding of the inner life of an individual, so must we explore the soul-spiritual element that underlies the characteristics of different peoples if we wish to understand these characteristics. *This* soul-spiritual element stands above the mere interaction of individual souls with one another, and the sciences of today do not concern themselves with it. From their point of view, it is paradoxical to speak of folk souls as real beings in the same way as one speaks of the individual's real thinking, feeling, and will. And they find it equally paradoxical to link the development of peoples on Earth with the forces of the heavenly bodies in space. But this ceases to be paradoxical when we remember that we are not likely to inspect a magnetic needle in

the hope of finding within it the forces that determine its north-south orientation. We ascribe this to the effect of the earth's magnetic field. We seek the reasons for the needle's orientation in the cosmos. So why should we not look in the cosmos rather than within the peoples themselves for the reasons why they develop certain characteristics and embark on migrations and so on?

Apart from the anthroposophical view as such, which anyway regards higher spiritual beings as a reality, there is something quite different that is also relevant to the content of these lectures. The development of peoples is seen as being founded on a higher spiritual reality, and it is in this reality that the forces which direct this development are sought. We then turn to the facts that are manifested in the life of the peoples, and these facts become intelligible on this basis. The life conditions of the various peoples and also their mutual interactions become comprehensible, whereas without such a basis, there can be no *true* understanding in these matters. Either one must seek a basis for a psychology of peoples in a spiritual reality or one must abandon any such folk psychology.

I did not hesitate to refer to those higher spiritual beings with names that were customary during the early centuries of Christianity.[†] A person from the Orient would use other names. Although the use of such terminology might appear "unscientific" nowadays, this is no reason to shy away from it. In the first place, it takes account of the essentially Christian character of our Western culture; and secondly, it will be more helpful for comprehension than would be the use of entirely new names or of the oriental equivalents, which would only be understood by those who are attuned to the relevant culture. It seems to me that someone who wishes to investigate these spiritual matters—assuming he does not reject our whole approach—will not object to names such as angels, archangels, thrones, and so on any more than physical science objects to terms such as positive and negative electricity, magnetism, polarized light, and so on.

Those who relate the content of these lectures to the painful trials facing civilized humanity at this time will find that what I said then throws a good deal of light on what is taking place now. If I were giving these lectures today, one would find that the present state of

affairs makes them entirely relevant. Thus, in the first lecture, you may read: “It is particularly important . . . especially at the present time, to speak about the mission of the individual folk souls . . . because *the destiny of humanity in the near future* will bring people together in far greater measure than has hitherto been the case in order to fulfil a mission common to the whole of humanity. But the members of the individual peoples will only be able to offer their proper, free, and positive contributions if they have, above all else, an understanding of their own native origin, an understanding of what we might call the self-knowledge of their people, their folk.”† The time has surely come when the destinies of humanity are demonstrating the truth of this view.

Perhaps the topic of “folk souls” is precisely the one that can demonstrate how spiritual investigation into the real supersensible nature of existence can at the same time give truly *practical* perspectives and shed light on diverse questions posed by life itself. This cannot be done by a view of life that uses only ideas about the development and nature of peoples that are quite rightly appropriate for external science. Mechanistic, physical science has been highly successful in bringing into being mechanistic, physical, and chemical resources for the benefit of civilization. But in order to promote the spiritual life of humanity, we need a science orientated toward the spirit. Our time is sorely in need of such a science.

Rudolf Steiner

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