

The Encyclopedia of Religion
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ANTHROPOSOPIHY ("knowledge of man" or "human wisdom") is the name given by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the Austrian philosopher, educator, and spiritual master, to his teaching. Steiner also referred to his teaching as Spiritual Science, thereby signaling what he considered to be the empirical character of his research concerning the spiritual world. In his early years as an author and lecturer on spiritual topics, Steiner was associated with the Theosophical Society, but in 1912, after a disagreement with president of the society Annie Besant concerning her claim that Jiddu Krishnamurti was the reincarnated Christ, Steiner founded the Anthroposophical Society. [See the biography of Besant.] As a spiritual movement, Anthroposophy is rooted in the Rosicrucian stream of the Christian esoteric tradition. [See Rosicrucians.]

Steiner's clearest explanation of Anthroposophy is to be found in the opening paragraphs of *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts*, which he wrote during the last months of his life:

1. Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge, to guide the Spiritual in the human being to the Spiritual in the universe. It arises in man as a need of the heart, of the life of feeling; and it can be justified only inasmuch as it can satisfy this inner need.

2. Anthroposophy communicates knowledge that is gained in a spiritual way. . . . For at the very frontier where the knowledge derived from sense-perception ceases, there is opened through the human soul itself the further outlook into the spiritual world. (Steiner, 1973, p. 13)

From his first systematic work, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (1896, translated as *The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1916; and also as *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, 1922), until his last writings, Steiner sought to exemplify (and enable others to attain) spiritual, or sense-free, knowing. Anthroposophy may be understood as the discipline of seeing the inner, or spiritual, core of every reality, even those realities that seem to be grossly material. Although it is ordinarily understood as a teaching, Anthroposophy is essentially a discipline by which to see directly into the spiritual world. Employing the anthroposophical technique, Steiner was reportedly

able to track the souls of the deceased and to read the "Akasha Record," which can be thought of as a transcript of human and cosmic history available to accomplished psychics and spiritual seers.

It is one of the key claims of Steiner's Spiritual Science that knowledge of the higher, or spiritual, world is made possible by the principle of the self that he refers to as "Spirit," "Ego," or "I." According to Steiner, each of four levels of knowledge corresponds to a level of human nature (though the lowest of the four levels, the sensory, is technically below the level of knowledge). *Sensory perception* is made possible by the physical body; *imaginative knowledge* is made possible by the etheric body; *inspirational knowledge* is made possible by the soul, or astral body; and *intuitive knowledge* (also called *spiritual knowledge*) is made possible by the I, Ego, or Spirit.

One of the reasons why Anthroposophy is difficult to summarize is that Steiner prescribes methods for growth on all four levels of apprehension (or, correspondingly, the four levels of the self). Techniques for the increase of knowledge and the growth of the self include study of natural sciences, projective geometry, sculpture, and painting; as well as speech formation, music, "eurythmy" (a method of disciplined movement to sound), interpersonal relations, experience of scriptures, and religious rituals. Steiner himself worked in these and other areas as a way of showing the varied possibilities for the cultivation of imaginative, inspirational, and intuitive knowledge.

According to Steiner, the supersensible knowledge that lies behind his discoveries and disclosures is a distinctive capacity of the present age—as, earlier, the thinking capacity of the classical Greek philosophers or early Christian thinkers was significantly different from that of more ancient seers, whether the *ṛṣis* of India, Moses, or Homer. In Steiner's elaborate account of the evolution of consciousness, thinking has evolved in direct relation to the devolution of clairvoyance. Steiner seeks to show that the supersensible mode of perception that he espouses combines conscious thinking with a spiritual or intuitive penetration akin to the clairvoyance characteristic of ancient times. At the center of this double evolution, Steiner sees the descent of the Christ, which made possible a reversal of a downward, materialistic trend in favor of an ascent toward an increasingly free, spiritual mode of thinking.

Although few if any of Steiner's many thousands of followers have attained to the kind of supersensible perception he apparently exhibited, they have nevertheless creatively applied his spiritual discipline and insights. The most conspicuous of the works arising from Steiner's teachings is the Waldorf School movement, pres-

ently the largest nonsectarian independent school system in the world. Steiner's followers, called Anthroposophists, are also responsible for the Camp Hill movement, which consists of villages for children and adults who require special mental and emotional care, farms that use Steiner's "bio-dynamic" method of soil cultivation, and laboratories and studios where innovative work based on Steiner's spiritual, scientific research is performed.

Steiner intended Spiritual Science to supersede religion, but, in response to a request from Protestant pastors and seminarians for help in fostering Christian renewal, he generated the sacramental forms and organizational structure of the Christian Community, a modern church that is not formally part of the Anthroposophical Society but nevertheless lives in the same Johannine esoteric Christian stream and clearly draws its inspiration and much of its teaching from Steiner's spiritual life and revelations.

As a way of advancing each person's cultivation of the path to knowledge of the supersensible, Steiner founded the Anthroposophical Society in 1913, and in 1924 he reestablished it. In 1924 he also established the School of Spiritual Science; the members of this organization commit themselves to representing Anthroposophy, or Steiner's Spiritual Science, in and to the world and to cultivating imagination, inspiration, and intuition in both the supersensible and sensible realms.

[See also the biography of Steiner.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Steiner's published writings total more than 350 volumes, most of which consist of cycles of lectures. Approximately twenty volumes were written as books, three of which are regarded as essential for an understanding of his thought: *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* (New York, 1947), *Theosophy*, rev. ed. (New York, 1971), and *Occult Science: An Outline* (London, 1969). Steiner's *Anthroposophical Leading Thoughts: Anthroposophy as a Path of Knowledge—The Michael Mystery* (London, 1973) is his most authoritative description of Anthroposophy, but it assumes a thorough familiarity with his teachings. Background for these and other works by Steiner can be found in Stewart C. Easton's *Man and World in the Light of Anthroposophy* (Spring Valley, N.Y., 1975) and in *The Essential Steiner*, edited by me (New York, 1984).

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ANTICHRIST. The final opponent of good, known as Antichrist, has haunted Christianity since its beginnings. With roots in Hellenistic Judaism, and an Islamic echo in the figure of al-Dajjal, the Antichrist myth has had a potent influence on belief, theology, art, literature, and politics.