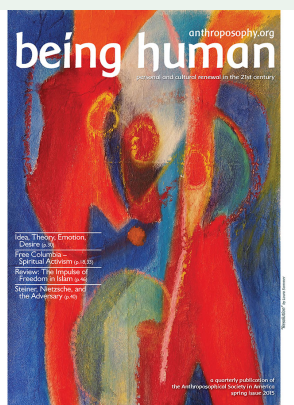


IN THIS SECTION:

Friedrich Nietzsche—as little understood as only a really great thinker can be—comes into focus thanks to Ted Roszell.



Rudolf Steiner's Meeting of Destiny with Friedrich Nietzsche and the Adversary of Our Age

by C.T. Roszell

For Armin Husemann and Peter Selg

This exposition is an excerpt from an ongoing series of seminars on Rudolf Steiner's lectures on karma and reincarnation, given together with Frederick Amrine for members of the Anthroposophical Society and their guests.

Steiner, Nietzsche and the Adversary of our Age

The canvas of however many a fine nineteenth century landscape painter to the contrary, Rudolf Steiner pointed to the year 1843/1844 as the zenith of the enemy of mankind's stealth encroachment on the earth, one that deferred the signature spectacle of its sprawling ugly face to our own time (CW 346.184). Friedrich Nietzsche was born in 1844, with a capacity to systematically expose the emerging lie and glitter of the age that has materialized since, from Auschwitz to Wall Street. Steiner knew that, and that the time's driving anti-power shadowed Nietzsche's birth, set to bend and capture the social forces that could otherwise have been unsheathed into the world, together with his friendship with the worlds of Richard Wagner's imagination—for the Nazi wave and Hitler.

Friedrich Nietzsche, an authentic Individuality

Friedrich Nietzsche remains undiscovered until one is able to recognize in him an archetypal, pivotal figure of our time, an individual utterly representative of the challenge and tragedy of our age at its deepest level; the riddle of the man focuses the mind existentially. Rudolf Steiner saw this on first acquaintance with his work, and he shared heart and soul in the adventure of the man, holding his breath, awaiting whatever conclusion it would lead to.

In the preface to his book from 1895, *Friedrich Nietzsche—A Fighter Against His Own Time*, Steiner wrote: "From the first page I read of Nietzsche (in 1889), I knew I would I read every page ... every word. He awoke my trust immediately, I understood him as if he were writing directly to me. ... The same sensibility was expressed in 1886 in my book *A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World View*. ... I had arrived at many ideas similar to his. Independently and by different means than his, I had arrived at views consonant with Nietzsche's books *Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Genealogy of Morals* and *Twilight of the Idols*."

For all the consonance, Steiner maintained his independence from Nietzsche: "One can



Nietzsche in his twenties, around 1870

speaking in this vein without being what one would call a ‘true believer’ of the Nietzsche world view. And that in fullest consonance with Nietzsche’s intent not to have any such followers! Any more than his Zarathustra could stand for any: ‘You all say, you believe in Zarathustra? You, my believers? You failed to search to find yourselves—you found me instead! That is just what believers do, and that is just why believers are so useless! I suggest you all lose me and find yourselves instead! When you have rejected me in the right way, then I will be willing to come to you.’”

Rudolf Steiner recites in his preface pronouncement after pronouncement like this, the way fine poetry begs to be spoken out and shared. Steiner goes on to say: “Nietzsche is not so much a philosopher as he is a collector of honey.” And continues: “Nietzsche’s recalcitrance was instinctive and deep seated—he was not merely put off the way someone is who notices a logical flaw in an argumentation, but more the way a color can pain the eye. The things people were saying with words about guilt, sin, bad conscience, the next world, God and country and the like were simply painful to him. . . . The free thinkers of his time had an instinct to portray human will as unfree. The contemporary instinct is rooted in a Christian orthodoxy that is completely contrary to Nietzsche’s sensibility.” (With one ear held to the ground, one can hear Rudolf Steiner and Friedrich Nietzsche both taking the Pharisees to task the way Jesus himself did. And indeed, Nietzsche’s word for Jesus was that he was the only true Christian there has ever been.)

The Age of the Consciousness Soul

“And so Nietzsche charts a different course—the will to power. The strong, authentic individual isn’t interested in being served up what to think or hold to be true—that person instead wants to be privy to their very creation and inception. Such a person’s vision of what is true is creative law, and such a person’s will for the truth is equally their will to power. . . .” For Steiner, it requires an individual as awake as Nietzsche to ask, “Are there any such philosophers today? Were there ever? Must there not finally be such ones?” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, §211.)

And so Steiner concludes: “Nietzsche isn’t a thinker in the traditional sense of the word at all. He takes the measure of things on the basis of whether or not and how they promote and unfold life potential. Whatever values might lie in truth is not something he is willing to even set out to find. He writes in *Beyond Good and Evil*: ‘How

questionable are the results for all from all this hankering after truth. Who is it that’s driving us this way?’” For Rudolf Steiner, inquiring this way existentially into the *who* behind the *what* of a matter is the essential impulse of what he characterizes as the directive of the consciousness soul, the sheer conscience of a modern intelligence.

Steiner continues: “Nietzsche takes up the fight against fashion and *fable convenue* left and right, and fights no holds barred. He fights out of the conviction that he is fighting against mindless and brainwashed tools who have damaged and devalued life in all directions, and he counts them as adversaries. . . .” The real issue is not measures and values of truth, but values of will. Nietzsche writes: “All this hankering after truth. Why not untruth in its place?” And Steiner replies: “That is an insight bold beyond its season. Fichte and the rest are superficial by comparison. Did Fichte ever even entertain the question of what kinds of truth have been damaging to life?” For Nietzsche, the test of thoughts and thinking lies in whether they unfold individual human potential that each individual is meant to find and bring out.”

How earnestly Rudolf Steiner prized Nietzsche’s moral sense of authentic individuality becomes clear when matched against the essential reservation Steiner could not hold back for the man he otherwise senses the greatest consonance with: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In a letter to Helene Richter (*Collected Works, Correspondence Vol. II*) Steiner wrote: “It seems to me that [Goethe’s] complete immersion in the realms of exact phenomena which led him necessarily to such unfettered reverence for nature, left him no room for the idea of individualized emancipation for the human being.” In a nutshell, for all the greatness of his accomplishments, Goethe failed to awaken to the essential calling of our time—where Nietzsche did. And despite Nietzsche’s ultimately tragic failure to carry it to term.

The *Übermensch*

Nietzsche characterizes one awake to the essential calling of an authentic individual living the life of an *Übermensch*.¹ For Steiner, Nietzsche became an individual capable of living out impulses of instinctive goodness. An example is Nietzsche’s answer to why one should want to refrain from activities such as lying, cheating, lusting after the other’s maid? Simple enough for Nietzsche—one

¹ German: Literally “over-man,” most frequently rendered “superman,” but perhaps better understood as “higher man.” —Editor

won't be able to sleep well! And Nietzsche lived this way and succeeded where the conformist sheep failed—he interceded against the beginnings of Nazi hate for Jews and against the man flogging his horse. This example for Steiner serves as a classic illustration of what he characterized as *moralische Phantasie*² in his essential work of philosophy, *The Philosophy of Freedom*.

Cul de Sac of Dualism for Nietzsche and Steiner

Rudolf Steiner shared also with Nietzsche the sense that modern philosophy had ended in a *cul de sac* of dualism, and the way out was to see through its errors and discover authentic monism.

Steiner agreed with Nietzsche that “the Idealists divided the human being in two, idea and reality. They exalted thinking and ideas and exiled the body to the lowest order. [Nietzsche’s] Zarathustra intervened to say: the only reality there is is the reality the body belongs to. Mind and ideas belong to the body. ... Body and spirit are a unity, the body is endowed with powers, to unfold the spirit, in concert with the way the plant flowers.” Nietzsche’s Zarathustra proclaimed that “behind your thoughts and feelings, brother, stands a powerful deliverer, the unknown wise one, that is the true Self—that resides in your body as your body.” Steiner witnessed Nietzsche reject the dualistic trend in the West that came to the fore in Plato and culminated in the resignations of Kant.

Equally for Steiner, as well as for Aristotle *contra* Plato, the realm of pure ideas manifests in the world to prove its existence, or remains without existential basis. An amusing anecdote that rises to the form of living poetic truth of this is told in a memoir by Alwin Alfred Rudolf. Rudolf visits Steiner at his residence to recruit him as a faculty member for the Socialist’s Workers School in Berlin in 1899. At one juncture of their exchange when coffee is served, a family member draws attention to a present the poet Ludwig Jacobowski had given to Steiner sometime in the past year, when the two met and became friends: a flawless woven puppet of Steiner that served as the specialty cover for a fine bottle of cognac—as a humorous celebration of the pronouncement Steiner had once made to his poet friend that “the body is indeed all spirit.”

Grasping this consonance with Nietzsche’s monism opens a door to many of the subtlest dimensions of so

much that Rudolf Steiner unfolded on his life-path of discovery, in particular, his explorations of the relationship between the realms before and after life to life in the world. At death, a person does not move off into some kind of timeless winged detachment in the clouds, but begins to move backward in time through the earth-life just completed, this time with a vision of how all one’s actions affected others, rippling across the fabric of the world and to the stars, and how the hierarchies were able to receive and build from these or were forced to reject them. One experiences the weave of the hierarchies through all the fabric of the world, its life and history, and how these reverberate through the far reaches of space. Nowhere does an afterlife appear that aims to function anywhere other than in the world of embodiment.

And this to such an extent that one discovers that even many of the thoughts and impulses in bodily life that one presumed were one’s own came in fact from kindred souls not in the body at the same time one had been. This, because all the forces of the universe tend towards embodiment, and that is monism. Steiner appreciated Kant’s ideal expressed in his words “two things move me above all else—the starry heavens above me and the moral laws within me.” But he has to wait for Kant to step out from dualism and realize that the two are not merely related phenomena, they are equal expressions of one and the same reality. (CW 140.145). The cosmos everywhere is the spirit in motion.

The phases of Rudolf Steiner’s life and the Meeting with Friedrich Nietzsche

Rudolf Steiner characterized 1899, that year he was recruited to lecture at the Berlin Socialist School, as the final year of his passage through his trial of the age’s abyss. It completed the decade of his philosopher’s brotherhood to Nietzsche, and culminated at the turn of the century in his experience of the Guardian of humanity, which stands behind the words he chose carefully in his autobiography for “having stood in most earnest, most solemn festival of knowledge before the Mystery of Golgotha.” Steiner arrived at that moment in his life the same year Friedrich Nietzsche died. The two had finally met four years earlier, in 1896, but Nietzsche was then already too gravely ill for the two to speak together.

At the turn of the century, the year of the signature spiritual event of his life, Steiner would remember Nietzsche like a brother soldier he had stood shoulder to

2 German: “moral imagination.” —Editor



Nietzsche in his final illness, 1890s.

shoulder with in combat, who had fallen on the battlefield. That is truly their relationship, and the nature of their common adversary is the key to the bond they shared.

Steiner characterizes in the preface to his Nietzsche book how the adversary of our time sidelined the leading individuals throughout the social and cultural realms, and how Nietzsche stood against the adversary alone: “Nietzsche is able to see through the instincts of his contemporaries, he can see how they have been directed and manipulated to go down this and that path without taking the slightest notice that they have been had. ... Whether one is the slave to the whims of a boss, the clergy or the latest fashion of the philosophy club, the result is rubbish—being their yes-man instead of finding out for one-self what is the right thing to do.” For Steiner, the adversary orchestrating this mass deceit is not a composite abstraction, but a spiritual power—the same fallen angel it is said that Martin Luther threw his book against. Rudolf Steiner characterizes this adversary by the same name Nietzsche’s hero Zarathustra did—Aingramanyu or Ahriman.

Steiner characterizes the keynote of Nietzsche’s life as the immense loneliness of one who sees, surrounded by countless others who cannot. Steiner writes that “no one comes to help him, and he is entirely alone in danger, hatred and storms.” Nietzsche dispensed with the unconscious hypocrisies and philosophic errors of his opponents left and right; really everyone who faced him winced before the scathing clarity of his unerringly ac-

curate critiques. He was truly alone, on the battlefield of his time, and in the most esoteric sense of the poetic metaphor, the battlefield was cleared with no one else standing but Nietzsche and the Adversary of the Age. This is truly the way to convey Rudolf Steiner’s sense of compassion and camaraderie with Nietzsche.

Nietzsche was a formidable representative of an awakened individual of the modern age, but his relentless, uncompromising, completely scathing critique of everyone he knew left him bereft of the force of love for all mankind at the moment he existentially could not afford to be without it—in the moment of direct confrontation with the adver-

sary of mankind.

Rudolf Steiner knew this, and he grieved for the failing Nietzsche when he sat at his bedside in Nauenheim. Even as Steiner saw in the spirit that he had lived himself in the Middle Ages as a Dominican, he saw that Nietzsche had lived as a Franciscan flagellant, whose punishing discipline extirpated the last vestige of hope for authentic love and companionship in his next life on earth. The decisive moment of Nietzsche’s present life was tragically also bound up with the near return of that authentic compassion he had lost through mortifications—remarkably, evoked again by the crack of the whip—in Italy, on seeing a brutal master flogging his horse. Nietzsche intervened, breaking down, crying “my friend, my friend” to the horse. The horse won the love that Nietzsche had failed to find in his heart for his fellow men. Nietzsche was essentially institutionalized from that time to his death.

Rudolf Steiner saw that the madness that Nietzsche descended into in his final years was the price of having fallen in single combat with the Antichrist, and indicated that the Adversary directed the author’s pen thereafter in much that he wrote. Nietzsche’s own words from *Ecce Homo* (“Thus Spake Zarathustra” § 3) for what had befallen him are stunning:

One could superstitiously suppose one has devolved into a mere mouthpiece, a medium of powers one has been conquered by. But such is revelation—being shaken and thrown down, with unspeakable certainty and nuance, by something visible and auditory. You no longer direct your attention, you are forced to listen and

accept without asking who it is that is at work on you. Like a flash of lightning the thought comes to impose itself. I had no choice. An ecstasy, attended by horrible tension, stormed through me... Then a total loss of self came with shudders and pricklings that ran to the toes. The ecstasy was all suffering and gloom, the colors of its overflowing light. ... This is my experience of inspiration.

In 1896, Nietzsche was unable to speak and Steiner at his bedside grieved for him. Paul's words to the Ephesians likely came to mind when Steiner remembered Nietzsche four years later at the time of his own Damascus experience, that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

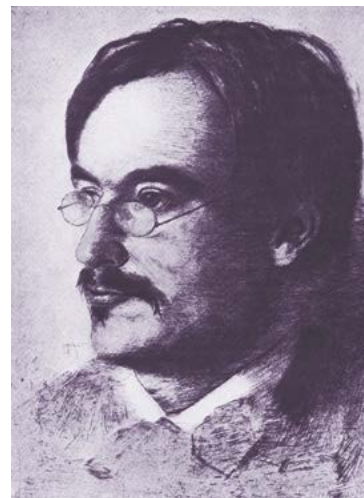
Individuality and Reincarnation and Karma

Rudolf Steiner's mission as the Dominican Thomas Aquinas was to win the battle against the philosopher Avoerres over the spiritual-cultural legacy of Aristotle for the unfolding of Western civilization. Their essential dispute was over whether the spirit of man was to be understood as a uniform mass of intellect, completely identical in the body of every individual, or whether it became individualized for good or evil in the choices and colorings of heart each individual exercised it for. If the former position were true, each person lapses back as a drop of water does returning to the ocean, unchanged and unchangeable from the sojourn in the body. But if the latter should be the truth, then there follows individual destiny as a result of good or bad, artistic or ugly, true or false application of the gifts of intelligence in the body. Aquinas stood for the latter, and a wide swathe of culture came to be built on his legacy. Rudolf Steiner's core mission was to bring the truths of karma and reincarnation in a form suitable to the modern age, the harvest of that legacy that was its *sine qua non*: without individuality, there could be no individual consequences of previous actions of previous individuals.

The riddle of human individuality and the return thereof runs deeper. Nietzsche's accomplishment was indeed a direct triumph over Avoerres, albeit tragic, for lack of authentic social love. In imagination, one returns to the time that Rudolf Steiner was at Nietzsche's bedside. The Adversary had played his hand against the would-be Zarathustra, and crushed him. But in fact at an unpleasant cost—he had showed his hand in the dreary late after-

noon room to an initiate of individuality with a full heart of love. Four years later, Rudolf Steiner would likewise meet the Adversary on the same empty field, remembering his fallen comrade, and the Adversary paid the price. What followed were twenty-five years of unrelenting losses for the Adversary on the terrain he covets most—unambiguous truths of human destiny unfolding, unhindered by obfuscation and confusion.

Rudolf Steiner took up Friedrich Nietzsche's work in 1889, the year after his initiation into the mystery of human destiny. In a journal note of 1888, Steiner had jotted down a sentence that came from the just opened door to the mission of his life: "Ah-ri-man is shipwrecked."



Rudolf Steiner, around 1891

This was the necessary precondition for the purpose of his life to begin. It was the year he realized the cultural-historical mission of Aquinas for the principle of individuality, the year he realized that the mission of reincarnation and karma on the terms of modernity was his own, and the year he first knew that the entelechy behind the two lives and missions were the same.

From Nietzsche and Steiner to the Present

Nietzsche's life ended tragically, and there would be little more Rudolf Steiner could do in the short term than say no to Nietzsche's sister's request for him to tend her brother's archive and legacy, as she fell deeply under the spell of the growing anti-Semitic movement. The Nazi wave would come with full force in 1933; Rudolf Steiner had hoped for sufficient health to still be on the earth at this time. It was the year the initiate knew would be a doorway for decades to a world-wide etheric-supersensible experience of the true Guardian of humanity, but Europe and the world failed at the threshold to stand down the Nazis. The event went by largely unnoticed in the decisive span from 1933 through 1945 and beyond, though authentic instances emerged on the periphery here and there, in lives such as those of Jacques Lusseyran and George Ritchie.

Thus Spake Zarathustra into the Future

Nietzsche's richest narrative tack was significantly his effort to regain the vantage point of an unspoiled and authentic social voice, the voice of the ancient Persian initiate Zarathustra. No Roman see or Jesuit agenda for hatred of the body had come to pillage and exploit the force of that voice in the interim, and it beckoned.

Zarathustra's narrative was the story of Ahura Mazda, the primal pure sun power, and the struggle with the power of darkness, Aingramanyu or Ahriman. In a multivalent, nuanced form, that is the spiritual-scientific narrative of Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy. His initiate research detailed how two millennia ago, at the turning point of time, a human being was born who walked for twelve years in Ahura solar purity in preparation to work a succeeding eighteen years as the vessel for the reincarnated initiate Zarathustra. As a result, the Guardian of humanity was able to walk the earth for three final further years and plant a potential deep in the earth that, if claimed by all the world, could over time unfold authentic brotherhood. When, and how widely and deeply mankind will eventually tap and unfold that potential, remains to be determined.

Zarathustra's eighteen years since the turning point of time is a spiritual-scientific organic power in the unfolding of history. 1843/1844 was the zenith of Aingramanyu; eighteen years later Rudolf Steiner was born in 1861. Eighteen years hence, in 1879, the cosmopolitan Michael age began, a time in which creative intelligence and social initiatives could emerge independently of race, creed, and nationality. The Zarathustra harvest was gathered and spent anew. At the turn of the century, Friedrich Nietzsche passed on and Rudolf Steiner took his place, on the same barren landscape where his comrade fell; alone among millions asleep, an initiate left in one-on-one conscious direct combat with Aingramanyu. He prevailed, but not for the full cycle of the twelve plus eighteen plus three years hence. Instead, 1933 was ushered in by the Nazi movement for twelve counterfeit years to 1945.

As a result, so very much of what could have come to pass on the foundation of the culture of Schiller, Goethe, and Novalis in the nineteenth century and Steiner in the twentieth came to be held in abeyance, but asks to be brought and is being brought from the periphery anew in our time. From Joseph Beuys to the initiatives of Yeshayahu Ben Aharon, Peter Selg, and many others, one could go on for hours and hours. But two characteris-

tic examples, one small and humble, one enigmatic and *koan*-like, may be sufficient to close here with, apropos of every thread of our exposition to the end.

From the periphery of all things European, the philosophy of *Thomas Aquinas* is making waves in China, for his defining role in *what it means to be human*. Oxford don William Carroll writes in the December 11, 2014 issue of the Witherspoon Institute's *Public Discourse*: "Thomas Aquinas's commitment to the importance of reason and its universal role in defining *what it means to be human* makes him an attractive thinker for contemporary Chinese scholars. The number, depth, and rapidity of changes in Chinese society over the last decade may obscure an unusual change within the academy: a markedly increased interest in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. ... I have just spent one month at four Chinese universities, speaking of the ways in which Thomas's understanding of the relationship among philosophy, theology, and the natural sciences can be used to disentangle contemporary confusion about the philosophical and theological implications of evolutionary biology and cosmology. In Shanghai, Beijing, and Wuhan, I found receptive, enthusiastic audiences." A mere niche moment in academe? Then so too Thomas' own intellectual debate with Avoerres, or Steiner's with the Weimar arbiters of Goethe's archive.

A thousand years after his passing, Thomas Aquinas gains traction in lives for the future on the opposite side of the globe. And the significant Dutch Anthroposophist Wilhelm Zeylmans, an accomplished practitioner of Rudolf Steiner's meditative discipline and friend—who Steiner was forced by ill health to leave behind much sooner than he meant to—fell ill and died in Africa (as reported by Hagen Biesantz at a conference in Chicago in 1991) with the vision of preparing to help bring new social impulses reborn as a third world witch doctor!

Nonsense? Time, and sciences of the future, will tell. Just the shape of the idea opens out new vistas on the significance of lives like those of Gandhi or Martin Luther King. Certainly life affords us invitations left and right to work together, relinquishing limiting biases and orthodoxy of every kind in the process of new science and discovery, and to work creatively, in expectation of marvelous surprises—albeit not at hours, places and in fashions of our self centered wishes and casual design.