

## Transmittable Diseases, Transmitted Remedies

*The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.* ~ Muriel Rukeyser

*Viral Illness and Epidemics in the Work of Rudolf Steiner.* Selected, edited, and translated by Daniel Hindes. Paperback: 123 pages. Aelzina Books, Longmont, CO (9 June 2020). \$19.99/19.94 €; Kindle \$10.73/9.50 €. ISBN: 978-1-60757-010-3.

When I was twenty-two years old [...] I taught a pupil whose mother was lying in the immediate vicinity with hemorrhagic smallpox, separated only by a folding screen from the room where I gave my lessons. I did not take any precautions and continued the lessons the whole way through until the mother recovered. But I was quite happy to do this because I also wanted to see how you can protect yourself if you take the smallpox patient, including those suffering from hemorrhagic smallpox entirely objectively like any other object, like a stone or a bush, against which you have no further feelings of fear or other psychological impulses but take it as an objective fact. Thereby you do indeed counter the risk of infection to a high degree. [...] I have never been afraid of exposing myself to the possibility of infection and have never been infected, never suffered an infectious disease. [p. 118]

English-language readers who seek guidance in Rudolf Steiner's perspectives on the origins, treatment, and especially the prevention of infectious disease can now find that Daniel Hindes, creator of the website [Defending Steiner](#) and curator of [Rudolf Steiner Web](#), has assembled all available passages into a single accessible volume. In addition to its compactness, its evident and thorough underlying research, and its fluid translations, what makes this slender book particularly attractive is the paucity of its technical material, despite multiple concrete references to features marking the complex topic, with those few necessary medical details glossed by clear and succinct explanatory biological and historical footnotes. What additionally makes the collection especially lively is the effort that went into detailing the circumstances of each excerpt's transcription and transmission, labeling which texts were reconstructed from professional vs. amateur stenography, and which were assembled from multiple sources vs. direct from the pen of their author. This heretofore generally bypassed editorial feature that traces the paths through which primary anthroposophical material has reached us proves an incisive one: The rare attention paid here to the subtle in-betweens of dissemination weaves a kind of etheric garment that, providing a living context for these collected documents, compensates for the uneasiness that readers of anthroposophy's primary sources might sometimes derive from the pre-conscious sense that they are in fact not reading Steiner at all:

Especially before 1913, these [passages] are based on personal notes made by audience members. The notes have been reconstructed by various editors into a coherent text. In published form these texts appear deceptively authoritative [so that] the text we are reading today is a complete fabrication, a reconstruction of the themes into sentences and paragraphs that have, at best, a general correspondence with the words Steiner spoke on that day. [Foreword, p. 2.]

It might seem odd to call *delightful* an anthology that addresses extended episodes of widespread and unpredictable physical suffering and their consequent social uncertainty, confusion, and resultant demoralization, but human beings are so constituted as to be able to find solace through understanding even the greatest calamities. Each fallen self that seeks restoration into the world-order must initially proceed intellectually; our true communion with even tragic reality is to be found through the activity of identifying the ideas that live within it, an achievement whose value was noted already in Virgil's classic formulation: "Happy is he who knows the causes of things."

## Expanded Reductionism

Modern spiritual science arose to address the inner needs of individuals unsatisfied by the explanations and directives that mainstream civilization provides for navigating the riddles that the world presents. The technologically suffused life that we now enjoy and the habits of thinking that have been emerging from it are outgrowths of a movement sparked in early modernity by a successful focus on analyzing the material processes in our physical surroundings. Through refined physical instruments, beginning with the microscope and telescope, scientific progress gained observations and negotiated calculations that extend human sensing into realms previously understood to be the domains of wholly other, i.e., supra-physical and primary, orders of forces and beings. That focus has conduced to increase our daily safety, comfort, and convenience as well as enhancing, for better and for worse, each individual's consciousness of self.

When the bodies of stars and planets, which for millennia had been consigned to the province of the gods, were discovered to consist of elements familiar to our terrestrial life and to operate according to the same principles, it was but a short step to conclude that the heavens must consist of nothing *but* such material entities—an assumption that has come to seem self-evident to every conventionally acculturated individual today; likewise concerning the displacement of elemental beings formerly understood to be primal causes for biological activities, as mechanistic descriptions seemed to grow ever more sufficient also to explain those. As a result, in the service of a uniform explanation for the dynamics of all phenomena in the solar system, vitality, sentience, and self-consciousness all came to be viewed as merely complex manifestations of mechanics. Facilitated by the newly acquired knowledge, geographic explorations that unified the globe, an increasing mastery over natural processes in the service of industrial production, and concurrent social, political, and economic redistributions in the direction of human equality likewise worked to exact a compressing and leveling tendency in our thinking about our world, of which the latest iteration is the inescapable World Wide Web.

The magnificent advances in understanding and technical accomplishments generated by the scientific revolution began with the new (now termed “classical”) physics in the seventeenth century, extended to chemistry in the eighteenth, to biology in the nineteenth, and to psychology in the twentieth centuries, as the laws understood to govern each discipline were assimilated to the mathematization of each discipline prior, through which materialist expansion came at the price of metaphysical reduction. With all their salutary liberating effects—widespread deliverance from ignorance and superstition, emancipation from drudgery, release from arbitrary class and economic restrictions on human potential—these linear advances have at the same time fostered a kind of cognitive myopia; for their very successes have placed conventionally trained analysts pursuing causality somewhat in the position of the proverbial fool—lucid, logical, but context-oblivious—who, having lost his housekey near his door at night, seeks for it instead beneath a distant streetlight because he expects its illumination to ease his search: The elegant convenience that mathematization provides for uniform mensuration, calculation, and prediction brings computing observers but a small step short of concluding that celestial and micro-organismic mechanics provide an exhaustive ontological account of all possible phenomena under investigation; just as stars and planets as well as vegetal and animal organisms are

understood to consist only in the matter that they contain rather than serving as vehicles for divine and elemental beings, so too with the entirety of human existence.

This metaphysical move has come now to appear unambiguously, because empirically, justified through the pragmatic confirmation of uniformly material conditions throughout the knowable universe, encompassing realms even beyond the earth: By successfully extending day-waking consciousness also into the night sky, material explorations of the formerly dark reaches of outer space in the last century seem conclusively to have confirmed the legitimacy of eclipsing the supersensible by homogenizing all dimensions of reality. Hence the allegorical lost “key” to the self and its surroundings is conventionally sought no longer by orienting its seekers to “night”-consciousness near their home, that is, to the life-world, as that is the very sphere eliminated as such from contemporary mainstream investigation. For the latter ascribes vital processes to lifeless mechanisms, whereas re-attunement to transcendent loci requires effort of a different kind than that to which we have become comfortably and complacently habituated in our dealings within and control over the material world. So too, genetic engineering seems to be effecting an analogous, microcosmic extension and appropriation, not to say invasion, of the yet more proximate and tangible phenomena that earthly life comprises; yes, passing minute empirical examinations, but leaving open the question of whether the ingenuity that can fashion Pygmalion simulacra can adequately displace the invisible in-betweens of Nature’s formative forces.

### **A Man of Quality**

Although earlier instinctive intuition has dimmed, contemporary spiritual training as inspired by Goethe’s historically heterodox scientific approach seeks to rehabilitate *quality* as an objective factor in the constitution of observed realities. This has made supersensible phenomena again humanly accessible, not to physical but to cognitive instruments, through extensions of objective introspection by unprejudiced intellects—although this lack of prejudice tends to be more elusive than is commonly appreciated. Thus at the apex of scientific materialism, which bore a paradoxically imprisoning liberation by sinking the search for causes to the historical nadir of sensitivity for spiritual reality, Rudolf Steiner as “scientist of the invisible” posited both method and content that, over the intervening century, we have come to know as anthroposophical spiritual science and the antidotes that it offers to epistemic imprisonment. Nor is this development of capacities either a mere retrieval or ultimately wholly discretionary, whence:

A person of the 16<sup>th</sup> century would not have had any understanding of our Theosophy today. It is now up to the archangel Michael, successor of the archangel Gabriel, to encourage people to use the newly acquired organ. Whoever does not use it, lets the organ perish, decay. Such a person then comes under the influence of Michael’s opponent Mammon or Beelzebub. This is the God of obstacles who wants to prevent mankind from progressing. Under his influence bacteria and germs also develop. As a result, terrible epidemics can arise in the future, including strange nervous diseases; children could be born with a destroyed nervous system ... [p. 40]

... to whose symptoms and implications we will return below. In the passages collected, Steiner explains how, by neglecting the development of organs for supersensible cognition and the ethical maturity that such development requires, human beings unwittingly yet fatally invite bestial impulses to govern by default each individual’s “middle sphere”—the realm of the heart with its loves, passionate affinities, and ideals. To forestall this:

“... our scientific-medical studies should include what could be called going back to the true origins of pathological phenomena. In recent times there has been a growing tendency to abandon the real origins and to look at the things that happen on the surface. [so] And it is connected with [...] this getting stuck on the surface, that today in most of ordinary medicine, in common pathology [...] you are taught what kind of pathogen actually causes this disease, what has entered the human organism. [...] for the simple reason that it is no longer difficult to demonstrate that these microorganisms are indeed present. [...] [But] our attention is distracted from the actual origin of the disease. For every time microorganisms find suitable conditions in the body for their development, these suitable conditions have already been created by the actual primary cause. It is to this area of primary causes that our attention must be directed.

[...]

When [in the human body] the tendency toward the animalistic becomes too strong then a sphere is created [...] in the upper part of the organism, which should not be there [...] in which the organs of the upper body are embedded as in an etheric sphere. And in this sphere is favorable that which should not be favorable in the human body: conditions for the life of small plant-animals—microorganisms. [...] Where they come from need not interest us at all. We must be interested in what creates a favorable sphere of life for them. [...] [If instead of extending over the whole human body, this sphere] functions as a sphere of containment, it creates the conditions, the living conditions, for small plant-animals, which we can then prove are present in everything, or at least in many things that make the human being ill. [pp. 89-90]

What Steiner here calls “this getting stuck on the surface” in the individual clinical case operates also historically, such that we would do well, as in the case of the microcosmic individual human organism, so also in macrocosmic societal phenomena, to:

... see much of history as a symptom for some things that lie much more deeply behind it. You have to look for the spiritual stream that carries these symptoms. And then you can see how that which lies in the deeper development of humanity also appears symptomatically in this or that disease of the times. [...] [for] there are impulses in historical development that escape the notice of those who do not employ such a symptomatology. [...]. Diseases, whether they occur in individuals or epidemically in human society, are often reactions to other forms of disease, which may be considered less serious from the point of view of health but which are nevertheless considered very serious from a moral or spiritual point of view. [p. 102]

One symptom of this myopia is the inverse proportion between historically reduced morbidity and contemporaneously expanded pathology, whereby “mortality rates have decreased undeniably in recent times, but [...] disease rates have increased in a frightening way” by lowering resistance “through an unreasonable way of life.” [p. 44]

### **Karmic Etiology**

In the present age, the search for the deeper causes of the events that we encounter has come to consist most comprehensively, however rarely undertaken, in karmic study, which requires the daring to discern the sum of impressions that individuals incur as representing that personality’s accumulated but occluded sides. Karmic discernment teaches us that this normally overlooked portion of every individual character arrives to meet and accompany each subject as the developed consequence of moral excesses and deficiencies deployed over a series of intellectually and volitionally fallible past earthly lifetimes. Each wiser, deeper self therefore steers toward its own realization in communion with his or her compensatorily sought new surroundings: Karmic study traces our impressions of present encounters to the ways in which we had met circumstances in our own earlier lifetimes and that now approach us from outside.

For karmic law revives—as it were pedagogically—instantiations of our failings that, guided by tutelary spiritual custodians, promise through their sometimes harsh purification the unimaginably productive, creative future blessing to which, as Christianity teaches, each human being is appointed to find in freedom. Thus the late-twentieth-century satiric comic-book character Pogo’s wry revelation that “We have met the enemy and he is us” carries redemptive valence when recognized in the moral expressions of our own prior lives; karmic perspective reveals that within the context of a providential destiny, our derelict past selves serve only apparently as our present enemies and lastingly as our teachers:

Everything that confronts us in the world as a continuous evil to humans coming from outside, as illness and death, is there so that we human beings remain bound to earthly existence until we have the opportunity to make amends, so that we have an education in order to adapt to our human organization. We suffer so that we may draw from our suffering the experience to find the balance between our Lucifer-filled ego and our divinely infused organization. Our organization falls away from us as many times as we need until we have progressed to become completely imbued by the laws of divine evolution in our ego. Every death is thus the starting point for something else. Man cannot die without taking with him the opportunity to overcome death in his successive incarnations. All pain is there so that we can draw from the suffering the experience of how to adapt to our ongoing divine organization. [p. 64]

However counterintuitively, this therapeutic character of karmic progress is made evident in mass illnesses as depicted in this book. Its central lesson, spanning some thirty-plus years of observations by Rudolf Steiner on the topic of infectious disease, is that epidemics are anthropogenic and as such preventable, though neither of these features in any conventional sense: Communicable illnesses are here characterized as culminating products, now embodied, of vagrant human departures from morality, dishonesty in particular, appearing generations and lifetimes later; conversely, both mass prevention and individual inoculation can be achieved through individually practiced virtues, chiefly truthfulness, courage, and love, emphatically including the compassionate treatment of animals, and by resisting temptations to materialism: “... people create, so to speak, through lies, slander, and hypocrisy, an army of spiritual beings ...” [p. 39] that occasion disease. In the ever more complex, veiled, and demoralizing tangle of dishonesties that condition our interdependence, and in particular their foundation in the pandemic<sup>1</sup> self-deceit that has beset the human race since Lemuria (the Fall from Paradise), it is bracing to read that truthfulness is not only possible, but the only ultimately feasible, and remedial, path through our earthly existence. Whence, despite the burdensome message of human responsibility for the catastrophes under discussion, the overall message of these descriptions is reassuring, in that cleaving to truth will indeed set us free. We are reminded that focused enthusiasm derives first from *cognitive* appreciation (“Thought is father to the feeling.” *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (GA 4), Ch. 1; “Idealists *revel*, spiritually, in translating their ideals into reality.” [Id., Ch. 13] [Emphasis in the original.]

This ascription of material consequences to moral attitudes will be familiar to students of Rudolf Steiner’s path of cognition as formulated in the book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* (GA 10), that “thoughts are real things.” That such a principle need be enunciated at all, and moreover controversially, indicates its diametric opposition to the dominant and increasingly prevalent assumption in our culture since early modernity. One year following the publication of that book, Steiner concretized the societal implication of the maxim: By assuming a broader ontological perspective than that fixated on material causality, we “can see how

[physically pathogenic] spiritual entities were engendered” in the example of earlier populations terrorized by foreign armies:

... during the Middle Ages, when the Mongols clashed with the European peoples and spread fear and terror before them. [...] If you look at these masses of people who invaded, of which the Mongol hordes were the final wave, and imagine yourself into the mood of the entire medieval European peoples, you can see how [physically pathogenic] spiritual entities were engendered, created by the last tribes of the fourth era, and the Europeans who were terrified and frightened and fighting to save their lives. Let us suppose that such an onslaught had been met with courage and love, so that the [aggressors’] declining [cultural] forces would be dissolved. But fear, hate, and terror preserve such spiritual entities made of decaying forces, and creatures like germs find a fertile ground. These spiritual entities later incarnate in such material forms as [...] into medieval leprosy. ...

[for]

the moral life of a people determines the outer life of the future. It is in the hands of a people to provide for the physical future through a corresponding life of the present. ...

[and]

... all the infectious diseases of modern times have a similar origin. [p. 12-13]

“Gradually, as result of the horror caused by the hordes invading from Asia, these demonic entities developed into what appeared as a plague in the Middle Ages, as disease: leprosy. This disease was nothing other than the consequence of the states of terror and fear of the people,” for which St. Francis supplied the antidote through the impulse of love that he brought to renew Christendom. [p. 68] Here, as usual, Rudolf Steiner neither admonishes nor prescribes, but merely relates the consequences attendant on our choices, leaving his listeners freer for being so informed. Nor need one await armed conflict in order to engage such moral prophylaxis, as individuals can generate immunity also in the personal encounters of which the fabric of social life is woven.<sup>2</sup> Cognition itself in fact derives its life from moral impulses, in that objectivity is won by applying selflessness to the realm of thinking.

### **Cultivating Immunity**

While the emphasis in these accounts is on very long-term spiritually effected immunization, Steiner also offers an example that could not be more immediately and intimately tested, as was related at the beginning of this review, which:

... shows that the psychological factor can also play a pronounced role in infection. I have never been afraid of exposing myself to the possibility of infection and have never been infected, never suffered an infectious disease. [p. 118]

And conversely: “The strong consciousness of an illness can, from the astral body, become the cause of the illness.” [ibid.] On the other hand, “This is not to say that one should encourage germs, or that it is a good thing to live with them. That should not be said at all.” [p. 71] Considered in the light of esoteric science, determining which practical measures to effect in the service of disease-prevention leads us into complex and sometimes paradoxical considerations, for “... many things that are created as a predisposition to moral excesses dig themselves so deeply into the organization of human beings that reactions occur which then appear as certain diseases. The disease is then the suppression of a moral excess.” [p.103] But:

... on the one hand when we next look at the situation we see that beneficial forces can cause damage to an organ so that we do not fall prey to the effects of Maya, and on the other hand to become aware of the effects we produce when we ourselves avoid the effects of such beneficial influences by taking sanitary and hygienic measures against diseases. [pp. 47-48]

A fair assessment of the various factors leads to recognizing the value of both freedom and prudence within the context of recognizing a beneficent destiny that makes use of adversarial influences<sup>3,4,5,6,7</sup>: "... in an earlier period mankind needed the epidemics that are now to be eliminated by public health measures," [and] "There is no possibility of taking such measures before they can be of significance and benefit for the whole of humanity. For such measures do not come from the fully conscious, rational, sensible life which a person can acquire between birth and death, but they come rather from the collective spirit of humanity" [p. 52]; whence the book includes subtle discussions pursuant to vaccination.

The selection from which the above excerpts are taken, titled "The Ethics of Intervention," consists in a profound, closely reasoned meditation on the tension subsisting between a rational impulse to implement prudent measures in the face of epidemics and an appreciation for their value as operations of cosmic wisdom. If, *per impossibile*, quality were indeed reducible to quantity, for readers prepared to grapple with the prospect of subsisting as "the bridge between two worlds" this chapter alone, dwarfing the range of significance that delimits current public controversies, would be worth many times the price of the book.

Looking ahead from 1913 [i.e., five years before the Spanish Flu, which infected some 500 million people] Steiner reported that:

Certain epidemics are already preparing themselves [...] We see death, untimely death, and so we also see diseases and epidemics coming, that will spread over the earth. And the seer sees souls who exist there between death and a new birth helping those spirits who carry such forces from the supersensible worlds into the sensory world. Such forces bring epidemics and diseases, which in turn bring untimely deaths, It is among the most terrible impressions to perceive human souls in certain times of their life between death and a new birth, who have become servants of the evil spirits of sickness and death, and who have condemned themselves to become such servants of the evil spirits of sickness and death.

When one now tries to go back to the life of such people before the time when they crossed the gate of death, then one always finds with those who have prepared this fate for themselves that they lacked conscientiousness, lacked a sense of responsibility in their life on the physical plane. This is a permanent law which shows the seer that souls who pass through the gate of death and who previously had unscrupulous soul dispositions or lived in unscrupulousness, at a certain time between death and new birth, make themselves the servants of those who must cooperate in bringing epidemics, diseases and untimely deaths into the physical-sensible world. There we see natural events to which these souls are subject [...] [for] in the higher worlds that which acts as natural law is entirely entangled with the moral world order. How things occur in the higher worlds depends on entities to which one or the other thing happens depending on how they have placed themselves morally in the world. [pp. 69-70]

And:

All sickness, infirmity, illness, and death are admonitions that humanity would move away from the continuity of divine evolution if, in addition to the possibility of luciferic freedom, we were also health and powerful. Thus, sickness, infirmity, and death are not gifts of Lucifer, but gifts of the good, wise divine powers, who have thus put a dam in front of the influences of Lucifer. [pp. 63-64]

The measured, elegant tone of these selections is refreshing to encounter amid the jumble of expressed passions reacting to the current pandemic; one is recalled to the paradoxical esoteric maxim that tranquility provides the best response to evil.

### **Looking Forward**

The primary requirement for the discernment for which our epoch longs, however inchoately, is a willingness to probe behind material appearances in a disciplined, object-appropriate manner, even, and perhaps especially, when those appearances seem to offer sufficient explanations for our experiences. As mentioned, the chronological progression through this volume forms its chapters into a storytelling drama through its editor's contextualizing linkages and reporting also what is *not* known about transcriptions and transmission. The intertwining of archival elements and their enumerated lacunae provides an etheric mantle in which physical phenomena—both the facts depicted and the fact of the lectures themselves—are embedded; that is, a garment of thought woven in the realm from which Christ's healing forces are to be found working today. Extending the search for causes to this invisible venue will take us toward realms excluded from contemporary common discourse but to which confounded minds might fruitfully be driven to consider in the absence of alternatives to nihilism provoked by apparently random epidemics.

Such investigation requires the development of cognitive organs that are generated first in thought-life, which in turn requires certain moral development to transcend the emotional security, and indeed epistemic complacency, that materialism has granted us. This step into the unfamiliar and conventionally discredited entails a confrontation with death-forces, that is, each with one's own concrete, personal mortality. Such a move in turn requires the virtues of humility and courage, characterized by Rudolf Steiner as the attributes necessary for meeting, respectively, the lower and higher guardians at the threshold of consciousness that protectively delimits daily awareness from accessing the deeper mysteries of existence. Because human beings do not embark on this transition effortlessly, and sometimes not willingly, its spiritual guides sometimes intervene with "tough love."<sup>8</sup> Here, as always remarkable in Rudolf Steiner's expositions, is his consistent handling of the admonitory task pointing to our moral vocation through the objectivity of consciousness-soul observation.

Looking past material appearances, leads to even dramatic, not to say perilous, instructive apprehensions, and Steiner's assessments of the shadow-side to technological advances can seem like bitter medicine:

By giving people greater physical comfort through a healthier life, by making the physical life easier for them, the soul is influenced in the opposite direction; it is influenced in such a way that it will gradually feel a certain emptiness, a dissatisfaction, an unfulfilled feeling. And if it were to continue in such a way that the outer life would become more and more pleasant, more and more healthy—as people would prefer according to the general ideas in purely materialistic life—then such souls would have less and less incentive to progress in themselves. A parallel desolation of souls would arise. [p. 54]

Anyone who takes a closer look at life can already notice this today. In hardly any other age have there been so many people who live in such pleasant external conditions, but who are accompanied by dull, unoccupied souls, as is the case today. [...] the soul [...] remains bored, and in the end no longer knows what it should seek out in the world to achieve meaning. In particular living in purely external, physically pleasant physical conditions creates a tendency to think only about the physical. [...] So souls endure more suffering while outer life is made healthier. ...



Steiner brings his analysis of this alienation, amply intuited by artists and poets<sup>9</sup> since Blake's critique of the Industrial Revolution's "dark Satanic Mills," down into biological terms when describing how modern education produces human beings whose

... soul is distant from the activity of their heads. Now there is hardly anything worse for the whole of your being than to keep your heart and soul away from what your head must do. This is not only something that contradicts a finer, more sensitive human nature, but something that influences the strength and energy of the human etheric body to the highest degree. Especially the etheric body. The etheric or life body becomes weaker and weaker under such activity because of the thin connection that exists between the core of the human soul and what you are undertaking in life. The more you have to do something that does not interest you, the more you weaken your etheric or life body. [p. 60]

Speaking in 1911, Steiner characterizes in particular the consequent plight of the "mental fidgeter [...] who is unable to hold on to a thought properly and follow it in its logical conclusion, who always jumps over from one thought to the next [...] A haste of the soul life: that is often the mildest form of nervousness" which will in time develop into "all kinds of illnesses for which one cannot actually give organic causes" [...] and will worsen "epidemically," [p. 58-59] as cited in the passage from p. 40 on our page 3 above.

Only those who can penetrate spiritual science know in what mysterious way health and illness develop. When you walk through the streets of a city and are confronted with the atrocities on the billboards and in the shop windows, it exerts an appalling influence on your soul. Materialistic science has no idea how many seeds of illness there are in these abominations. They only look for the pathogens in the germs and do not know how health and disease are brought into the body by way of the soul. [p. 41]

This was spoken in 1908; how would the prognosis apply to [our commercial centers today](#), whether physical or virtual? In any event, this assemblage of pithy but brief selections makes them well suited for readers with the aforementioned short attention-spans.

### **Discontent as Content and Deformation as Form**

An organism, whether natural or composed of thought, shows optimal health to the extent that it maintains balance by incorporating death into life: Accordingly, while the physical layout of this book is limpid and eloquent, thus matching both its selections and its annotations, its shell is imprinted by a portrait of matted chaos selected for the cover art as painted by the author-publisher's then-nine-year-old son James A. Hindes. Its composition of variegated pointed flecks suggests to this viewer the ahrimanic reflection of statistical distribution that has fixated and perhaps distracted public attention during the current epidemic: Just as unformed matter stands in want of a catalyzing, and it were pedagogical, free I to fructify its potential lest the latter degenerate into parasitic menace, this depiction of chaos tacitly receptive to creative organizing seems reminiscent of the New Music that anthroposophy has inspired. In its performances the listener, or in this case the viewer, is delegated the task of inwardly providing harmonizing resolution to unresolved dissonances. The visual provocation seems entirely appropriate to the karmically suffused lessons of the book's contents: In both, we are met by a graphic representation of contagious illness as a clashing, discordant, inchoate force that disrupts our accustomed patterns of being in this world and calls on us to activate initiative in order to avert tumbling into nihilism and its lethal sequel, cynicism. The artwork thus recalls this reviewer to a

suggestion once heard, concerning storing a home computer—a instrument analogously susceptible to “viruses”—aesthetically yet truthfully: Rather than disguising its function and the means that it employs, by, say, draping the machine in pastel silks, one might instead decorate it in angular, spiky horn-shapes, thus paying tribute to the Ahrimanic nature of its invisible operations. Like its content, the book’s packaging is made attractive by candidly supporting the penetration of its topic, confronting our redemption-thirsty world with Michaelic consciousness. For when the search for “the causes of things” is prepared to circumvent the distracting surface clutter produced by materialism, it can uncover a profound, esoterically immunizing truth, immanently contradicting conventional assumptions that prove to be the fruits merely of inattentiveness: “It is in the hands of a people to provide for the physical future through a corresponding moral life in the present,” [p. 13] so that “What you think today, you will be tomorrow.” [pp. 14-15] Such a truth equips each of us to become not merely karmic prophets, but karmic executives, as it not only satisfies intellectual curiosity but charges each of us with liberating ethico-cosmic responsibility, in that “What is striven for on the physical plane as moral law is natural law in the spiritual world.”<sup>10</sup>

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*At the time of this writing, the publisher, who is also the book’s creator, is offering a [generous free sample](http://www.aelzina.com) of the text online at [www.aelzina.com](http://www.aelzina.com).*

1. “All men are liars.” Psalm 116:11.

2. “The human individual is the source of all morality and the center of life on earth.” ~ Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (GA 4), Ch. 9., translated by William Lindeman.

“A moral misunderstanding, a clash with each other, for morally *free* people is out of the question. Only the morally unfree person, who follows nature’s drives or a commandment he takes as duty, thrusts aside his fellowmen if they do not follow the same instinct and the same commandment as he himself. *To live* in the love for one’s actions, and *to let live* in understanding for the other’s willing, is the basic maxim of *free human beings*. [Id.] [Emphases in the original.]

3. Thus, when Heaven is about to confer a great office on any man, it first exercises his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil. It exposes his body to hunger, and subjects him to extreme poverty. It confounds his undertakings. By all these methods it stimulates his mind, hardens his nature, and supplies his incompetencies. Mencius (4<sup>th</sup> century BC China).

4. “For God allows evils to happen in order to bring about a greater good; hence it is written in Romans 5:20, ‘where sin increased, grace increased all the more.’ Hence, too, in the blessing of the Paschal candle, we say: “O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, 1, 3, ad 3.

5. “I am part of that power which eternally wills evil and eternally works good.” Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*, Part I.

6. “Where there is no evil, there is in the strictest sense no good. Evil must grow to its entire greatness and terror, so that good may through them raise itself to complete power and greatness. If one can inwardly and deliberately oppose to evil the power of good, then it is possible to transform evil. And then the force of opposition is transformed into so much the greater force of divine goodness. [...]. In him, who has borne within himself the full force of evil’s rebellious opposition, undreamed-of powers of doing good can be released. Thus evil in the strictest

sense acts in the development of man's mind, feelings and will." Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Meditation: Letters on the Guidance of the Inner Life*, p. 179.

7. "We have the right to defend ourselves against every illness. But true insight knows also that every illness is meant to bring its own blessing into the house, for the soul and, as Anthroposophical Science conclusively shows, for the body also. We ought to let no illness depart from us without our having wrung from it its blessing. One can apply to it exactly the old saying: 'I will not let thee go except thou bless me.'" Rittelmeyer, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

8. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 91.

9. Sensitivity to this self-alienation as the shadow-side of technological progress and the societal *anomie* and *ennui* that it has spawned has been richly thematized by existentialists, absurdists, and other stylists of modernist art and literature. We hear their laments in the apparently inescapable futility suffered by the "quiet and meaningless" voices of Eliot's hollow men, the frustrations occasioned by Beckett's perpetually elusive Godot, the terminal misfortunes suffered by Kafka's victims of insensate bureaucracy. The ambiguity of the gifts furnished by material progress has been succinctly intimated by American poet James Agee in his 1934 prose-poem-prayer "Dedication," in tribute, *inter alia*, "To all scientists and inventors of convenience and rapidity, and ways of health: in thanksgiving for their reductions of human pain, and labor, and unhealth; and in scorn for the same: since in the right end of their busyness we would all be healthful and undesiring as animate stones." Such despair was expressed still more radically by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry in a letter that he penned a year before he disappeared during a flying mission in 1944: "I hate this century with all my heart. A man can die of thirst in it [...] Man is a desert." It fell to Rudolf Steiner to take the step of clinically articulating just how human metabolisms eventually manifest medical pathologies *en masse* as concrete metaphors of sustained collective spiritual aberration.

10. Rudolf Steiner, *Rosicrucian Esotericism* (GA 109), Lecture 2, Budapest, June 4, 1909, "Soul in the World Around Us."