

## Who was Rudolf Steiner and what did he say ?



Helen Blavatsky

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was a self proclaimed Austrian clairvoyant, who founded a movement/religion which he named *anthroposophy* in 1913 after he split from the occult Theosophical Society founded by Helena Blavatsky\* [Left]. At the time of his departure the Theosophical Society was led by Anne Besant.

According to Steiner, anthroposophy adds to the scientific knowledge a knowledge of another spiritual world which is in the first instance invisible and lies above the senses. He maintained that through meditative training of ones organ of cognition, each individual can acquire the ability to progress to a higher universal plane. The concepts of incarnation/reincarnation and karma are fundamental to Steiner's ideas.

The Theosophical Society has its headquarters in Goetheanum (which Steiner designed) in Dornach, Switzerland. Steiner has written many books and articles and may have given as many as 6,000 lectures on issues such as education, medicine, agriculture, the pictorial arts and social care.

I have tried to grasp the essence of his vivid imagination by reading several of his books, but find many of his ideas to be virtually incomprehensible. The best descriptions I have found are presented in an article by Heiner Ullrich.

[http://www.waldorfcritics.org/articles/rudolp\\_steiner\\_by\\_Heiner\\_Ullrich.htm](http://www.waldorfcritics.org/articles/rudolp_steiner_by_Heiner_Ullrich.htm)

Some people may have the perception that Steiner's beliefs were in some way related to Christianity and the historical Jesus, but Steiner sees Jesus as a cosmic sun being and the reincarnation of the spirits of Buddha and Zarathustra, whose religious wisdom he is supposed to represent. Karma is seen as the interweaving of successive reincarnated human lives. He regards humans as having a physical body, etheric body, occult astral body and a human body which is constantly reincarnated.

He speaks of gifted people (such as himself presumably!) with special clairvoyant powers and leadership qualities that will guide the future of humanity - "The initiates are now consciously transforming the etheric body and in the future all human beings will transform the etheric body and the physical body". He talks of his occult ideas as if they were established fact. His ideas about karma have some disturbing connotations. In his book 'Theosophy of the Rosicrucian' [http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA100/English/ANS1942/ThyRsc\\_index.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA100/English/ANS1942/ThyRsc_index.html) suggests that pulmonary tuberculosis and leprosy were the outcomes of what took place in former eras and maintains that "This knowledge is yielded by occult investigation". He levels particular criticism on the Huns. "The Huns were the last surviving remnants of ancient Atlantian people; they were in an advanced stage of decadence which expressed itself in a certain process of decay in their astral and etheric bodies". Why pick on the Huns I wondered? Why not, for example, the pagan Vikings, with their mythology of continuous conflict, whose Norman descendants, by then converted to Christianity, were prominent leaders of the invasion of Britain in 1066 and the violent crusades against other

Christian groups and the Islamic world? Why not the Mongols? Why not the Greeks under Alexander?

In his book 'Atlantis' (Sophia Books, Rudolf Steiner Press 2001) Steiner enters into the world of pure fantasy. "An Atlantian took into himself water which could be used by the life force inherent in his own body in a manner quite different from what was possible in today's physical world." (P21). Atlantians could control what we call the life force... Plants were cultivated in the Atlantian period not merely for use as foodstuffs, but also in order to make the energies in them available to commerce and industry...The vehicles of the Atlantians, which floated a short distance above the ground, were moved in this way (by using the life force in plant seeds)". He also mentioned his ideas about 'root races' and a racist method of categorising different peoples in a hierarchy with Indo-Europeans at the top. "After the sun's separation from the earth, these beings pulled Venus out of the sun in order to make it their dwelling place. The inhabitants of India were descendants of Atlantians who had belonged to different human types: the Saturn humans, Jupiter humans and so on. Through super sensory teaching, they understood that a soul's position in a certain caste was not a matter of coincidence but a matter of self-determination". Need I go on?!!

Spiritual beliefs, can, unfortunately, lead to disturbing (perhaps unintended) outcomes. In relation to Steiner's suggested reasons for leprosy and pulmonary thrombosis, he maintained that "It is often not within our power to help the individual among those who are subject to general karma of this kind. It should not be our aim to promote the well being of the single egoistic self, but to work in such a way that we serve the well-being of humanity as a whole". There are apparent contradictions between this statement and one later in his book when he draws a distinction between general and individual karma where the individual can boost the positive aspects of his karma for a future reincarnation by doing good for those with disabilities."If we are to have a favourable future, we must make as many good entries as possible in the book of life".

However, is the idea of general karma a very dangerous concept? Did the Nazis apply this way of thinking when seeking to justify the holocaust, for example? Also these spiritual ideas have resonances with witchcraft and the activities of some Pentecostal preachers in Africa. A survey funded by the FIOH Fund UK to gauge the extent of child disabilities in part of the West Region of Cameroon identified suggestions that some families had handed over their disabled children to witchdoctors who maintained that the children were possessed by evil spirits and would change into serpents if thrown into a river. The witchdoctors would then return to the family with the news that this is what indeed happened. Another feature of the activities of witchdoctors in the West region are [traditional autopsies](#) in which the stomach of the dead person is opened up. In one such autopsy a young girl's viscera was removed and then pushed back in again. The witch doctor then proclaimed "The child had already died seven times. The spell had long been there, hidden under the spleen. She was possessed by evil spirits and will be reincarnated through an animal".

When in the country I was repeatedly annoyed by positive television coverage of supposed miraculous healings by so-called Christian preachers. These ceremonies were attended by large numbers of people paying for the 'privilege' of watching these bogus scams in operation. [Other activities by Pentecostal Preachers](#) in parts of Africa have devastating outcomes for children accused by the preachers of being possessed by evil spirits. The children and their parents can be ostracised or sent out of their communities and in many cases the children are physically or mentally abused or tortured.

Rudolf Steiner has been described as:

The leading esoterist of our times ( Being Human - a publication of the Anthroposophical Society of America 2011)

[A Complete nutcase](#) (Blog about biodynamics by Stuart Smith)

[Wacko of the week](#) (Brian Dunning - Skeptoid) - relating to biodynamics.

[Religious crank](#) (Ian Robinson - From The Australian Rationalist, Mar 1992)

Before considering Steiner's ideas further it is perhaps helpful to be reminded of a few word definitions which I have listed below:

Occult - Conceal; kept secret, recondite, beyond the range of ordinary knowledge; involving the supernatural; mystical; magical.

Esoteric - Appropriate to an inner circle of advanced or privileged disciples; communicated or intelligible only to the initiated.

Pseudoscience - Pretended or spurious science; a collation of beliefs about the world mistakenly regarded as being truths.

Clairvoyance - Supposed faculty of perceiving as if by seeing what is happening or exists out of sight; keenness of mental perception; exceptional insight.

Reincarnation - Rebirth of the soul in another body; a reappearance or revitalisation in another form; a new embodiment.

Anthroposophy appears to reflect many contradictions and deceptions and many of its practical outcomes do not withstand the test of rational or scientific verification. Spiritual Science is a contradiction in terms and many of the practical outcomes of Steiner's ideas and anthroposophy should more accurately be described as pseudo science. He uses the term 'spiritual science' 20 times in Theosophy of the Rosicrucion as if what he is saying is self-evident fact. Esoteric appears 8 times, occult/occultist/occultism is mentioned 63 times and clairvoyance 10 times and incarnation/reincarnation 72 times - all in positive terms. His views expressed here are at odds with his statement included in a [guide of the theosophical and anthroposophical locations in Oslo, Norway](#):

" Knowledge is achieved through the development of spiritual faculties which traditional science has no clear idea of. The training is methodical, in the spirit of traditional science. Anthroposophy has nothing to do with what is commonly called occultism, but relies upon a clairvoyance that has its basis in ordinary perception. Through it an intimate knowledge of the human being is attained, as well as a vision of the evolution of humankind, which far supersedes the information confirmed in documents".

The perception he speaks of can hardly be regarded as 'ordinary' but rather the product of his own delusional imagination. Nevertheless it is my belief that Steiner embraced a number of ideas about ethical investment, agriculture and pedagogy that are worthy of promotion and could have important applications in future human development in the light of the many failures of economics, the depletion of fossil fuels and threats to the natural environment. In the following pages of this section of the web site I have sought to describe some of the practical outcomes of his ideas with references to both positive and negative opinions of Steiner and Anthroposophy.

A [brief introduction to anthroposophy](#) in Dialogue Ireland indicates some positive outcomes of Steiner's ideas whilst acknowledging their irrational nature:

"Founded by Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925), he formed a most complex movement. He was earlier a member of Theosophy and rebelled against the anti Christian approach they adopted. His educational theories and support for those with special needs mark him out as a pioneer. His interpretation of Christianity bears little relation to Classical Christianity, as the 'Christian Community', is really Gnostic. Here in Ireland the Camphill Communities near Kilcullen, Thomastown, Wexford, Kerry and Monaghan do great work. Anthony Storr in his book, 'Feet of Clay', concludes with following comments, Steiner was undoubtedly a man of high ideals and high intelligence who inspired other people and who certainly did far more good than harm. Yet his so-called 'thinking', his supposed power of super sensible perception, led to a vision of the world, the universe, and of cosmic history which is entirely unsupported by any evidence, which is at odds with practically everything which modern physics and astronomy have revealed, and which is more like science fiction than anything else. The claims he made for himself are astonishing. He had complete confidence that his own subjective powers of 'spiritual perception' revealed the truth

about the universe in ways beyond the reach of orthodox science, and that the discoveries which he made in this way could be applied to every department of life, from medicine and agriculture to the education of both normal and handicapped children. This mild, gentle, good, kindly man had, at some level of his personality, an unshakeable conviction that he 'knew'. It was this utter certainty, so characteristic of gurus, which brought him followers, and made it possible for his disciples to believe in his spiritual science and embrace his teaching as a philosophy of life. Steiner's belief system is both idiosyncratic and incredible; but what he achieved in humanitarian terms is remarkable and enduring.

'Spotlight on Anthroposophy' published in the Cultic Studies Review by Sharon Lombard, who is a major contributor to the PLANS board, is a very good summary of Steiner theory and practice, and includes comprehensive References."

The positive view of Camphill communities is contrary to the [experience of Robert Hald Smith](#) who suffered in these communities as a result of the bogus anthroposophical treatments and misdiagnosis of an allergy which caused him much suffering over a long period of time. The cures he was prescribed worsened his condition.

Sharon Lombard's article goes into appreciable detail about Steiner's irrational ideas on a wide range of issues about which he claimed to be an infallible authority. Her research was prompted by her traumatic experience and that of her children, in Waldorf Steiner schools. Bogus 'healing prescriptions' offered by an anthroposophical doctor and a homeopath to help cure her daughter meant that the girl became progressively worse. She was eventually taken to a conventional hospital doctor and recovered after the treatment she was then prescribed.

These experiences and others I have found, plus my own reading of Steiner's ideas, throw much doubt on the comment "...but what he achieved in humanitarian terms is remarkable and enduring".

With regard to Steiner's racist ideas, a study by a Dutch Commission done under a mandate of the Anthroposophical Society, concluded that the work of Rudolf Steiner contains neither racial doctrine nor statements made for the purpose of insulting persons or groups of people because of their race, and which could therefore be called racist. That would not have been my conclusion on the basis of what I have read! However the study did also say that "sixteen of Steiner's statements, if they were in public by a person on his or her own authority, could be a violation of the Criminal Code of the Netherlands." It is perhaps irrelevant whether Steiner's purpose was to insult people of different colours or races. The question is whether or not they were racist. Also is the suggestion that such comments are downgraded by the passage of time, justifiable? Surely, if they are considered racist now, then they were also racist at the time they were made! One of Steiner's statements identified in the Commission's research was 'that by reading a novel about blacks, pregnant white women would bear a mulatto child'. Two other statements which it places only in the category of being 'either careless, problematic or seriously discriminatory', related to Asians and Jews. What these statements were, is not provided in Kerkvliet's account of the Commission's report. The Commission suggests that the meanings of what Steiner said could be misunderstood today if set outside the context of anthroposophical interpretations and society attitudes prevailing when Steiner made them. One example given is that "in Europe, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was not at all self-evident that non-European peoples and races were considered to be part of the same humanity as Europeans." This statement was made with reference to Steiner's comment that "Negroes were human beings also". This comment hardly places Steiner in the category of many social reformers in his century, or even the those of the previous century, and glosses over the statements he made about how Negro's were situated in his occult hierarchy of 'root races'. Can a Commission chaired by an anthroposophical lawyer, Dr.Th. A. van Baarda, under the mandate of the Anthroposophical Society, be regarded as either independent or objective? Leaving aside such doubts, I suggest that many reading the report would disagree with it's conclusions.

I am suspicious of the reference to [Social Darwinism](#) in the report which appears to me to be a clumsy and dishonest attempt to discredit the scientific theory of Charles Darwin. This theory has no connection with more recent ideas of Social Darwinism which has more in common with Steiner's ideas about root races. I could see no mention in the report about Steiner's own irrational occult ideas about evolution.

Despite the possibility that some of Steiner's statements could support racism today, I do not believe that racism is likely to be a general feature of the practical outcomes of his ideas. In my analysis I have focused on the irrational nature of many of these outcomes and associated human rights abuses which diminish the quality of people's lives. This analysis is not a criticism of the many people who have taken up his ideas with the intention of improving the lives of others in the spheres of education, economics and environmental sustainability. Hence I have not dwelt on the links between the ideas of Steiner and Nazism as described in [the article by Peter Staudenmaier](#). Nor have I dwelt on the opinions of Anthroposophical organisations who have sought, often rather unconvincingly, to discredit the opinions of their critics.

\* The Theosophical Society was officially formed in New York City in November 1875 by [Helena Blavatsky](#) and others. The stated objects were to:

1. to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.
2. to encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science.
3. to investigate unexplained laws of Nature, and the powers latent in man.

[Conversely, Austrian/German ultra-nationalist Guido von List and his followers such as Lanz von Liebenfels, later selectively mixed parts of Blavatsky's occult philosophy with nationalistic and fascist ideas; this system of thought became known as Ariosophy. Some researchers, tracing the links between Ariosophy and Theosophy, stated that the latter relies mostly on "intellectual expositions of racial evolution"].

Blavatsky maintained that humanity's evolution on Earth is part of the overall cosmic evolution. It is overseen by the so-called masters of ancient wisdom, whose upper echelons consist of advanced spiritual beings and that a world teacher she named the Maitreya would periodically appear to direct human evolution. Blavatsky died in 1891 and Anne Besant became the Society's president in 1896. In 1910 the occultist, C. W. Leadbetter maintained that an Indian boy, [Jiddu Krishnamurti](#), was the most suitable 'vehicle' for the coming of the Maitreya and the Society established what it named the 'Order of the Star' under his direction. However, Krishnamurti dissolved this organisation and eventually left the Society altogether.