

Man's Twelve Senses in Their Relation to Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition

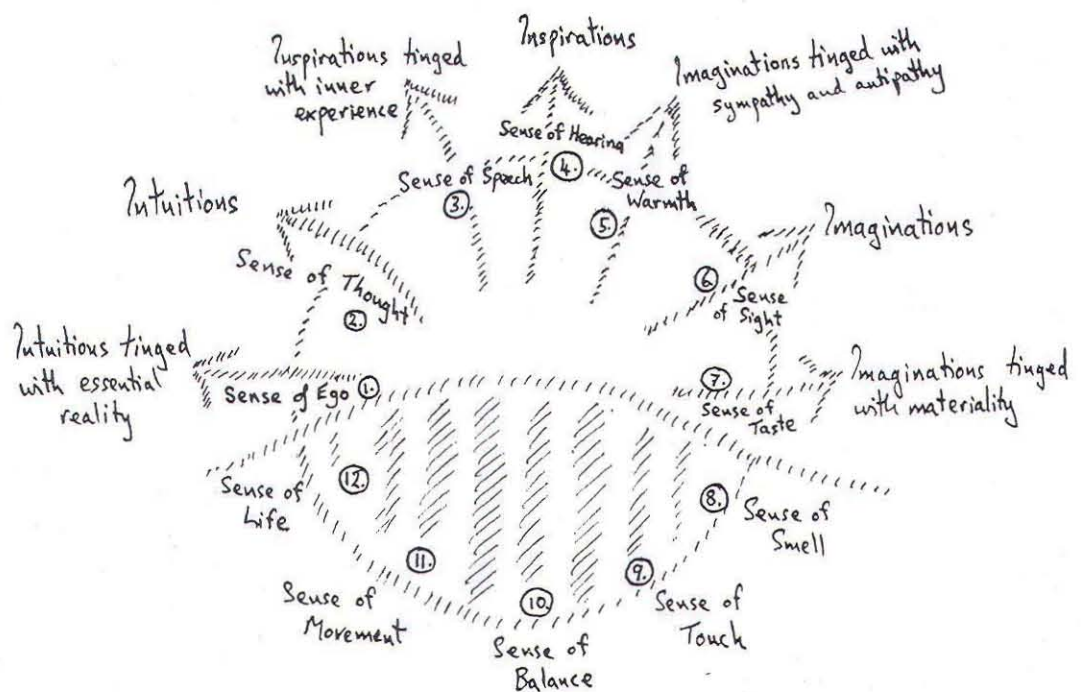
by Rudolf Steiner

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Today I should like to add depth to what has been recently discussed by linking it to a previous theme already familiar to some of you. Once, years ago, I described the world of the human senses.* You certainly know of the human senses. You certainly know that in speaking of the senses it is customary to reckon the sense of sight, sense of hearing, and the senses of smell, taste and touch. In more recent times, it is true, some scientists have nevertheless been driven to refer to other senses found, as it were, further within man; a sense of balance, for instance, and so forth. But this whole conception of the human senses lacks coherence on the one hand, and above all lacks overall unity. When we have in mind the senses as they are customarily enumerated, we are actually always dealing with only part of man's sense-organisation. We arrive at a comprehensive account of the sense-organisation of man only when we take twelve

senses into consideration. For today, we wish just to consider these twelve senses, merely enumerating them and describing them briefly.

To enumerate and describe the senses we can begin anywhere. Therefore let us begin by contemplating the sense of sight. We will first consider its nature in a quite external way that everyone can substantiate for himself. The sense of sight is our mediator concerning the surface of external matter as it confronts us in colour, brightness or darkness. We might describe these surfaces in the most various ways and would then arrive at what the sense of sight mediates. If now through sense-perception we penetrate to some extent into the interior of the external matter, if we allow our sense-organisation to mediate that which does not simply stay on the surface but, rather, continues into the interior of the body, this must happen through the sense of warmth. On the other hand, qualities drawn closer to us, more closely united with us, inclined towards us from the surface of the body, are perceived through the sense of taste. In a way this lies on the other side of the sense of sight (see diagram 1). When you consider colour,



brightness and darkness, and when you consider taste, you will say to yourself that what confronts you on the surface of a body is something mediated by the sense of sight. What meets you in the interplay with your own organisation, what in your sensation frees itself, as it were, from the surface and goes towards you, is mediated by the sense of taste.

Now let us imagine that you go still further into the matter than is possible by means of the sense of warmth; that you dwell for a moment not only on what permeates a body from the outside and then penetrates through-out, as warmth does, but something which is an inner quality of the body by virtue of its own nature. For instance, you hear a metal plate that you strike; you then perceive something of the substantiality of this metal plate, that is, of the inner being of the metal; whereas on perceiving warmth, through the sense of warmth, you perceive only what in a certain way permeates the body as general warmth but is certainly then inside. Through the sense of hearing, therefore, you perceive what is already connected with the inner being of the body. If you now go towards the other side you get something that the body does to you, something much more strongly inward than anything perceived through the sense of taste. Materially, smelling is much more inward than tasting. Tasting comes about by bodies just touching us, and our secretions then uniting superficially with our interior; smelling is definitely an important change with us, and the nasal mucous-membrane is organised in a much more inward way—materially speaking, of course—than the organs of taste.

Let us now penetrate still further into the internal nature of an external body, where the external body partakes more of the nature of soul. When you press through into the being of the metal through your sense of hearing, you arrive at what is in a way the soul of the metal; but you penetrate still further into something exterior, when you perceive not only with the sense of hearing, but with the sense of words, with the speech-sense. It is pure misconception to believe that with the sense of hearing, what the word-sense contains is exhausted; we might have heard, but we need not have sufficiently perceived the content of the words thoroughly to understand them. Even where organic organisation is concerned, a difference exists between the mere hearing of the sounds and the perception of words. The hearing of sounds is mediated through the ear; the perception of words is mediated through other organs, just as much of a physical nature as those through which the sense of hearing is mediated. And we penetrate even

deeper into the being of something external when we understand it through the word-sense, than when we listen to the mere sound of its inner being.

Even more inward and definitely far more separated from things than is the case with the sense of smell, is that mediation we may call mediation through the sense of touch. When you touch objects you actually only perceive yourself. You touch an object and the object, because it is hard, presses forcibly upon you, or its pressure is only slight because it is soft. Of the object, however, you perceive nothing, you perceive only the effect upon yourself, the change in yourself. A hard object pushes the organ in you far back; you perceive this pushing back as a change in your own organism when you are perceiving by means of touch. You see, when we move with our senses in this direction, we go outside ourselves. We are at first, in our sense of taste, only to a slight degree outside ourselves: we are further out onto the surface of the object in our sense of seeing. We press right into the object with our sense of warmth, penetrating its being still more with the sense of hearing, and being entirely poured out into the interior of the being in our sense of words. On the other hand, we penetrate our own interior also with the sense of taste, something of this penetration is already present here; it is more so with the sense of smell and still more where the sense of touch is concerned. When, however, we press still farther into our interior, a sense arises in us that generally receives no actual name, or at least is not often called by name—a sense by which we distinguish whether we are standing or lying down, through which we perceive how to balance ourselves on our two legs. This feeling oneself in balance is mediated by the sense of balance. Thus here we penetrate right into ourselves, we perceive the relation of what is within us to the world outside in which we feel ourselves in a state of equilibrium. We perceive this, however, quite in our interior being.

If we press still further into the outer world, farther than we can by means of the word-sense, this happens through the sense of thinking. And to perceive the thoughts of another being, again it requires another sense organ different from the mere word-sense. On the other hand, if we penetrate still farther within ourselves we find a sense that inwardly tells us whether we are at rest or in movement. Through it we perceive whether we are remaining still or moving, not only by the passing of external objects. We can inwardly perceive to what extent we have moved, and

so on, by the elongation or contraction of our muscles and, in so far as this is changed when we move, the configuration of our body. This happens through the sense of movement.

When we confront men we do not perceive only their thoughts, we also perceive the ego itself. For the ego is not perceived when merely the thoughts are perceived. On exactly the same grounds upon which we establish the separation of the sense of hearing from the sense of seeing, if we enter into the more subtle membering of the human organisation, we have also to establish a special ego-sense, a sense with which to perceive the ego. When with our perception we penetrate the ego of another man, we go outside ourselves to the greatest extent.

When are we most within ourselves? This is when, in the universal feeling of life, we perceive what in the waking condition we have in our consciousness, we perceive that we *are*, that we inwardly feel ourselves, that we are we. This is mediated by the life-sense.

Thus, I have given you here the twelve senses which form the complete system of the sense organs. From this you can straightaway see that a certain number of our senses are directed more towards the outside, are adapted more to penetrate the outer world. When we look upon the whole (see diagram 1) as the total extent of our sense-world, we can say: ego-sense, sense of thinking, word-sense, sense of hearing, sense of warmth, sense of sight, sense of taste—these are the senses that are more outwardly directed. On the other hand, where we perceive ourselves rather in the things, where we perceive more the effect of the things upon us, we have the remaining senses: life-sense, sense of movement, sense of balance, and the senses of touch and smell. They form rather the sphere of man's interior being and are senses which open themselves in an inward direction, and mediate our relation to the cosmos through perception of what is within (see shaded area in diagram 1). Thus, when we have the complete system of the senses we can say: We have seven senses directed more towards outside. The seventh sense is already uncertain, namely the sense of taste which stands right on the boundary between what has to do with external bodies, and the effect the external bodies have upon us. The other five sense are those which show us completely inward processes playing a part in us, which however are the effects the outer world has upon us. Today I should now like to add the following to this systematic arrangement of the senses which is familiar to most of you.

You know that when man rises from the ordinary knowledge of the senses to higher knowledge, he can do this by going out of his physical body with his soul and spirit. Then the higher kinds of cognition arise—Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition, pictured already in my *Occult Science* and in my book *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*. You will easily be able to imagine that just when we have the senses thus organised before us, we may be able to arrive at a special description of the perception of the higher worlds. We press outside ourselves. And what boundary do we then pass over? When we are, and remain, within ourselves, the senses form our boundary; when we press on outside ourselves, we do so by going out through the senses. It goes without saying that when our soul and spirit leave the bodily sheath, they go through the senses. We go through the external senses therefore in an outward direction, through the sense of taste, sight, warmth, hearing, speech, thinking and ego. Later we shall see whither we go when we penetrate the other boundary where the senses open themselves to what is within, press inwards. Thus we penetrate through the senses to the outside, with our soul and spirit, by leaving to some extent the boundary of our body. Here, towards the outside, we pass by our sense of sight for example; in other words we press outwards with our soul and spirit by leaving behind our instrument of sight. When leaving behind our physical eyes and seeing with our eye of the soul, we move into the world, we come into that region where Imagination holds sway.

And when through initiation we are truly able to penetrate through the eye itself into the spiritual world, then we have pure Imaginations, Imaginations that are pictures, just as a rainbow is a picture—pure picture-Imaginations weaving and living in the soul-spiritual.

When through the organs of taste we press outwards, the pictures appear still tinged with the last remnants of material existence. Then the Imaginations are tinged, unmistakably touched here and there, by the material. We do not then have pure vaporous pictures as with the rainbow, but we get something tinged, containing in the picture something like a materialistic residue; we get actual ghosts on leaving the physical body through our sense of taste. Leaving our physical body through our sense of warmth we again have pictures that are tinged. The pictures that like the rainbow are otherwise pure, appear so that they affect us in a way through the soul. This is the kind of tingeing that takes place now. In the case of the organ of taste the picture is as it were condensed to what is ghostly. When

however we go outside through our sense of warmth we certainly also get Imaginations, but Imaginations working in a way that has to do with soul, sympathetically, antipathetically, with warmth of soul or coldness of soul. Thus the pictures do not appear objectively in the same way as the others; they appear warm or cold—but this is in terms of the soul.

When now we leave our body through our ear, through the sense of hearing, we come into the world of soul and spirit and experience Inspiration. Thus previously we experienced Imagination tinged by what affects our soul, and when we leave our body through the sense of hearing we press on into the sphere of Inspiration. Whereas otherwise these senses go more towards the outside, what now when we leave the body comes over from the sense of warmth to the sense of hearing, penetrates more into what is within us of a soul and spirit nature. For Inspirations belong more to the inward nature of soul and spirit than do Imaginations. We are more nearly touched, not only emotionally, but we feel ourselves permeated by Inspirations; as in our body we feel ourselves permeated by the air we breathe in, so we feel our soul permeated by Inspirations in the regions we come to on leaving the body through the sense of hearing.

When the body is left through the word-sense, through the sense of speech, here again the Inspirations are tinged. For anyone who acquires an initial feeling for what the sense of speech is, it is of particular importance to learn to know this organ, which has just as real an existence in the physical organisation as the sense of hearing. When with soul and spirit the physical body is left through this organ of speech, Inspiration is tinged with inner experience, with a feeling of oneness with the foreign being.

When we leave our body through the sense of thinking, we then press into the sphere of Intuitions. And when we leave the body through the ego-sense the Intuitions are tinged by the reality of the external world of the spirit.

So we penetrate more and more into the reality of the outer world of the spirit as soon as we leave the body with our soul and spirit; and increasingly we can show how all that is around us is actually the spiritual world. Man, however, is in a way forced out of the spiritual world. He only perceives what is there behind the senses when he leaves the body through his soul and spirit. But this is moulded through the senses: Intuitions appear to us through the ego-sense and the sense of thinking, but only by the impressions they leave; Inspirations appear through the word-sense and sense

of hearing, but also only as impressions; Imaginations, through the sense of warmth and sight and in a lesser degree through the sense of taste, but toned down, carried over and changed into the physical. The matter could be shown diagrammatically thus:



On the boundary is the perception of the world of the senses (red); if one arrives outside with the soul and spirit one penetrates into the spiritual world (yellow) through Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition. What gives rise to Imaginations, Inspirations, Intuitions, is without. By penetrating us, however, it becomes our world of the senses.

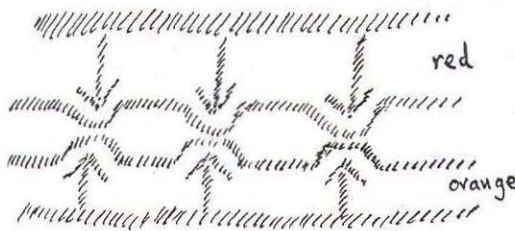
Just consider. Atoms are not there outside, as materialists fancy them to be. There outside is the Imaginative world, the Inspiration world, and the Intuitive world; and by this world working upon us, its impressions arise in the outer perceptions of the senses. From this you see that when through the skin that encloses our sense-organs we press outwards in the various directions in which our senses work, we then reach the objective world of soul and spirit. We penetrate to the outer world through the senses which we have recognised as opening outwards.

Thus you see that when man presses into the world outside through his senses, when he

passes over the threshold—which, as you perceive from all this, is very close—towards the outer world, he comes to the objective world of soul and spirit. It is this we seek to reach through Spiritual Science, namely, to penetrate within this objective world of soul and spirit. We come to a higher sphere by penetrating through our outer senses into the world that, within the world of the senses, is covered from us by a veil.

Now how is it when through the inner senses, the life sense, the sense of movement, the sense of balance, the sense of touch and the sense of smell, we penetrate to what is within us, into ourselves, just as through the outer senses we press outside? Here the matter takes on a quite different character. Let us note down once again these inner senses of smell, touch, balance, movement and life. It is not perceived what actually takes place in us there. In ordinary life we do not actually perceive what goes on in the realm of these senses; it remains subconscious. What we do perceive by these senses in normal life is already rayed upward into the soul element.

Now look! The outer spiritual world of Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition, sends its beams, as it were, on to our senses (red in diagram 3), and through the senses the world



of the senses is represented before us, it is actually produced. Thus the outer world of spirit is pushed a stage further in. What surrounds these senses, however, and what stirs down beneath in the body (orange), is not directly perceived. Just as the objective outer world of spirit is not perceived directly but only in so far as it is pushed into our senses, neither is all that stirs in our body directly perceived until it makes its appearance in the region of the soul. The effects in the soul of these inner senses is perceived to a certain extent. You do not perceive the life processes themselves, but you perceive by the life-sense what is present as a feeling deriving from

them; which is unperceived, in sleep. It is this we experience on waking as a feeling of well-being which is only disturbed within us when we are in pain. Then the life-sense, which otherwise radiates out as comfort, is disturbed; just as one of the outer senses is disturbed when, for instance, we hear badly. As a whole, however, when men are well the life-sense is experienced as comfort. This feeling of well-being throughout, heightened after a spicy meal and rather lowered by hunger, this general inner feeling of oneself, is the effect of the life-sense radiating into the soul.

The sense of movement, that which is taking place in us when by the contraction and elongation of the muscles we perceive whether we are walking or standing still, whether we are jumping or dancing—that is, by which we perceive whether and how we are in movement—when radiated into the soul, gives that feeling man has of freedom which allows him to feel himself as soul—the experience of being free in one's soul. Your experience of yourself as a free soul is the radiating out of the sense of movement and the radiating into your soul of muscular contraction and elongation, just as inner comfort or discomfort is the radiating into your soul of the results and experiences of the life-sense.

When the sense of balance sends its beams into the soul nature, this latter is strongly detached by us. Just think how little we are accustomed really to experience directly that we are placed in the world in equilibrium; if we do not actually faint, we know nothing about it. How then do we feel in our soul the raying-in of experiences of the sense of balance? This is now entirely a matter of the soul; we feel it as inner rest, as the inner rest that causes me on going from one place to another not to leave behind what is set into my body, but to take it along with me; it remains at rest just the same. Thus, I might fly through the air but remain just the same, and at rest. This is what makes us appear as independent of time. Neither do I leave myself behind today but am just the same tomorrow. This being independent of the body is the radiation into the soul of the sense of balance. It is the feeling of oneself as spirit.

Still less do we perceive the inner processes of the sense of touch. We project these quite outside. We feel whether bodies are hard or soft, rough or smooth, whether they are of silk or wool. We project the experiences of the sense of touch entirely into outer space. What we have in the sense of touch is actually an inner experience, but what takes place there within remains completely in the subconscious.

Of this there exists only a shadow in the properties of the sense of touch ascribed to the body. The organ of this sense, however, causes us to *feel* the objects to be silky or woollen, hard or soft, rough or smooth. This too sends its beams within, this rays into the soul. But man does not notice the connection of his soul experience with what is touched by the outer sense of touch, because the two things—what is radiated inside, and what projected outside—are very different. What radiates within, however, is nothing but a permeation by the feeling of God. Without the sense of touch man would have no feeling of God. What is felt in the sense of touch as roughness and smoothness, hardness and softness, is what rays outward. What is turned back into a phenomenon of the soul is the being permeated with universal cosmic substantiality, permeation with Being as such. It is precisely through our sense of touch that we prove true the being of the outer world. When we see anything, we do not immediately believe that it also is present in space; we convince ourselves of its spatial existence when we can touch it with our sense of touch. What permeates everything, what permeates us ourselves, what holds and carries you all, this all-permeating divine substance, enters consciousness and is the inwardly reflected experience of the sense of touch.

The sense of smell: you know its outward radiation. But when the sense of smell radiates its experience in an inward direction, man no longer takes note of how these inner and outer experiences coincide. When a man smells anything, this is the raying outward of his sense of smell; he projects the pictures outside. But this effect is also projected within; man however notices this less frequently than the outer effect. Many people take pleasure in smelling things that smell pleasant, and observe in this the radiation outwards of the sense of smell. There are also people, however, who surrender themselves to the inner effect of the sense of smell which grips what is within very intensely and permeates man not only as feeling of God but so plants itself into him that he experiences it as mystical oneness with God.

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| 5 Sense of smell | —Mystic union with God |
| 4 Sense of touch | —Permeation by feeling of God |
| 3 Sense of balance | —Inner rest, feeling oneself as spirit |
| 2 Sense of movement | —Experience of the freedom of soul |
| 1 Sense of life | —Feeling of comfort |

Thus you see, if we are to penetrate to the heart of things as they really are in the world, we must free ourselves from a great deal of sentimental prejudice. For many people will feel quite strange when wishing to become mystics, and then discovering what this mystic experience actually is in relation to the world of the senses; it is the experience of the sense of smell sending its beams into the interior of the soul.

There is no need to be alarmed by these things, for we shape our experience also merely in the conventional outer world of appearance that is *maya*. For why should you go on holding this *maya* opinion about the sense of smell even though you do not immediately recognise it as pertaining to what is highest? Why should we not be capable of considering the higher aspect of the sense of smell where it becomes the creator of man's inner experiences? Yes, indeed, mystics are very often arch-materialists who condemn matter and want to lift themselves above matter because it is so lowly; but they raise themselves above matter by their willing surrender to the effects of the sense of smell within them.

Those who have a finer susceptibility and perception for these things, just from what is said by mystics of a sympathetic kind, like Mechthild of Magdeburg, St. Theresa or John of the Cross, when describing their inner experiences—for such personalities describe very vividly—will smell the experience of things in this special way. The mysticism of Master Eckhart, too, or Johannes Tauler, is just as good for smelling, even more effective, than sniffing up sensuously through experience of the soul. For example, if we take the description of mystic experiences by St. Theresa or Mechthild of Magdeburg, if one understands things occultly, inwardly, one has a sweet smell. But take Tauler's mysticism, or Master Eckhart's and you get a smell suggestive of rue—tart but not unpleasant.

In short, the peculiar and striking thing here is that on withdrawing outward through the senses, we enter a higher world, an objective spiritual world. When we descend through mysticism, through permeation by the feeling of God, through the inner peace of feeling oneself as spirit, through the experiencing of oneself as free soul, and through inner comfort, then we come into what is of the body, into the material. All this I have already shown you during what we have been considering. Speaking in terms of *maya*, in our inner experience we always come to more and more lowly regions than those of ordinary life; lifting ourselves outwards over the senses we

come to higher regions. By this you see also how important it is that we should not be deluded about these things, that above all we should not allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that we penetrate into a special kind of spirituality when we go down within us through the mystic feeling of being united with the divine. No, there we descend only into what our nose radiates down within. The mystics who are most loved give us their descriptions of what they feel through the continuation of what the nose radiates within them.

Now reflect: if we speak about what is beyond the threshold, if we speak out of the spiritual world about the conditions of that world, we have to use quite different words to those conceived by men about this physical world. You are only able to experience such a replica in descriptions of the higher world in Islamic esotericism, or when you read what is written by Mr. Leadbeater about Devachan. There you have fundamentally, with little alteration, duplicates of this world. That is very comforting to people, particularly to those who in the physical world lead a society life in elegant clothes, with the means to satisfy the rest of their appetites. In their case it is easily seen that they also experience the Devachan salon to be met with after death, in which they can then behave just as they do in drawing-rooms down here, just in the way described by Mr. Leadbeater. One who has to describe the *truths* about the spiritual world is not in this comfortable situation. He must tell you, for example, that permeation with the God-feeling leads to smell being projected within, and that what the mystic actually betrays to the bona fide occultist is nothing other than how he smells inside. There is no place for sentimentality in true observation of the world from the spiritual viewpoint. I have often mentioned that if in reality we penetrate to the spiritual world, we begin to take things so seriously that everything has to be given a different word from that given to it here, and words themselves acquire quite contrary meanings. Penetrating into the spiritual world does not mean simply describing ghosts of the present world, but we have to become clear that much of what is experienced is the reverse of the physical world, above all the reverse of what is pleasant.

I have wanted to put forward this point of view to you that you may have a more universal feeling for what is really necessary for our time. You see, if one listens to what sounds towards us today from the west (in the east, and the farther east one goes, it is somewhat different), when a thought in western

form is repeated, it is often a case of saying: One cannot express oneself thus in French, one cannot say it like that in English. The farther west we go the more one meets this opinion. But what does this opinion imply other than a clinging to the physical, a becoming rigid in the physical, as opposed to reality in the world? Of what consequence are words? It is much more important to come, over and above words, to a mutual understanding of the things. Then, however, we must also be able to free words from the things, and we must indeed be able to free the feelings, the subjective feelings, acquired in the world of the senses. When the sense of smell is looked upon as a lowly sense, this judgement is arrived at out of the world of the senses. And when we look upon the inner correlate, the mystic, as being higher, this is also a sense-world opinion. Looked at from beyond the threshold, the organisation of the sense of smell is of extraordinary significance, and when regarded from there the mystic is not anything sublime. For mysticism is entirely a product of the material physical world; it represents only the manner in which those wish to penetrate to the spiritual world who actually remain materialistic, since they look upon everything down here just as pure matter. This is all too lowly, too materialistic for them. Were they to penetrate to what is without, they would then come right into the spiritual world, into the Hierarchies. Instead of this, however, they press into their inner being and fumble about in pure matter inside their own skin! This appears to them, it is true, as the higher spirit. But it is not a question of our penetrating mystically into our body through our soul and spiritual phenomena; rather it is a matter of our penetrating into the world of spirit, into the world of the Hierarchies, into the world of essential spiritual Being, through our material phenomena of the sense-world. We shall never come to impulses that lead us upwards again, until the world suffers its tune to be changed, until the world allows itself to be spoken of in different terms from those of the last four hundred years, until the world tolerates the forming of our social judgements out of these completely transformed concepts. If we wish to hold to what is customary and direct our social action out of this, then we shall set our course for the increasing depths of the decline of the western world.

Upon what does such a thing as Oswald Spengler's† judgement rest? It rests on the

†See *Oswald Spengler*—three lectures and four articles by Rudolf Steiner from the years 1920 and 1922.

fact that he is a very gifted man who however can only think in the ordinary western concepts at present accepted. These he analyses. Thus, he reckons (and this is absolutely correct for these concepts) that by the beginning of the third millenium barbarism will have taken the place of our civilisation. If one

speaks to him of Anthroposophy, he gets red in the face because he cannot stand it. Were he to understand what can enter men through Anthroposophy, how it can give fresh life to men, he would then see that it is the one and only way to prevent downfall, the one and only way by which it is possible to ascend.