

The Emanations of the Hierarchies

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What is the nature of creation? Have we arisen by 'chance' in the sense of the 'blind watchmaker', through an ordered evolution that is not blind, or through a transcendent deed of creation? The modern debate on creationism *versus* evolution exhibits both views as one-sided and at least partially specious. Materialistic Darwinism ignores the existence of our inner life and its importance, relegating it to a mere epiphenomenon, while creationism ignores the possibility that evolution may be a part or technique of the creative process itself rather than a mere mechanistic crutch serving to avoid ultimate questions. Rudolf Steiner carried out extensive research into those aspects of existence inaccessible to the senses by means of spiritual science, and found that we have arisen from a long process of spiritual evolution. There is no antithesis between evolution and spiritual creation, only between 'creationism' and 'evolutionism' which like all 'isms' are partial and specious. So where and how did it all begin? Far, far back beyond even our own beginning there was existence and evolution, but for us it makes most sense to look to our own origins. They coincide with a crisis, when the very existence of the universe was threatened by extinction. We will take up the story at that point, necessarily aphoristically as Steiner's research is reported in nearly 6,000 lectures and over 50 written works.

Our life on Earth has been wrested from universal death¹, the Earth being the seed-bed of a new cosmos. This can perhaps be approached by an analogy with the case of a person who is so wise that every action appears foolish. That is of course a one-sided wisdom which must be transcended, but may illustrate the situation at the very beginning of our evolution when the firmament would have vanished through the universal death wrought by such an attitude. This is not intended as a criticism of the divine Hierarchies, but a characterisation of the point to which universal evolution had then progressed. It was imperative that something new should take place to avert it. What, then, transcends wisdom? In the divine order of things *will* does, followed by *harmony* and then *love*. The reason for this is that the spiritual world is 'peopled' by beings at various graded stages of evolution and development, referred to as the divine Hierarchies. All religions (to the author's knowledge) speak of such beings, examples being Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva in ancient Indian lore; the Amshaspands, Izets and Fravashi in ancient Persian lore; in the Jewish and Christian tradition: Angels, Archangels, Cherubim and Seraphim; not omitting the rich ancient Greek pantheon of Uranus, Zeus and so on. The Amshaspands, Izets and Fravashi are respectively the Angels, Archangels and Archai. Based on the English translation of the *Divine Names* of Dionysius the Areopagite the Hierarchies have been named in ascending order as: Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Authorities, Powers, Lordships, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim, which correspond in the Bible to Angels, Archangels, Principalities, Powers, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim (e.g. St. Paul in *Colossians* 1:16). The Greek names are Angeloi, Archangeloi, Archai, Exusiai, Dynameis and Kyriotetes. Rudolf Steiner employed names relating to their essential nature, translated as Spirits of Twilight, Fire, Personality, Form, Motion, Wisdom, Will, Harmony and Love. He also frequently used the Greek names together with Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim.

So *will* comes above *wisdom* in the sense that the hierarchy of beings bearing that name and quality transcend those of *wisdom*. A new creative deed of divine creation to overcome the problem of universal death was the emanation of *will* in the primordial deed of the Thrones, who sacrificed their very being by emanating *will* to create the beginning of the Earth as we now know it, initially in the form of heat. Such a deed was repeated three more times when the Kyriotetes poured out *wisdom*, the Dynamis *motion* and the Exusiai *form*. These sequential deeds are the most major landmarks in our evolution, as we have only had any kind of existence since the deed of the Thrones when the foundation for our physical body was laid. At that stage *time* began and our body consisted only of differentiated heat. We acquired a *life body* composed of wisdom at the second stage, a *sentient body* composed of pure movement at the third, and lastly an *ego organisation* at the fourth, which happened during the course of our present Earth. The previous stages occurred prior to the existence of our present planet².

These mighty sacrifices each represent a summit in the evolution of the beings concerned, which Rudolf Steiner illustrated³ by imagining that one regards mirror images that have no intrinsic reality, and then imparts to them reality (of being) by giving oneself entirely to them: sacrificing ones own being to give them being. Such a prospect may make one tremble! But that is a reflection of one's own stage of evolution, below that of the Angels. The entire company of the First and Second Hierarchies, then, have passed this stage, the Archai being the next to reach it. If these beings have given of themselves entirely and without reserve, it seems puzzling that Steiner reported their continued - and very essential - activities to this day.

The sacrifice of the Thrones produced will in a *chaotic* form. By this is meant chaos in the Greek sense, not mere disorder as may be found in my office on a bad day, but rather a state open to being formed into something new. Thus was brought about the possibility of new life arising in the firmament, albeit over aeons of time. Now ungoverned will can be ugly, but on the other hand it is just the agent that can go beyond a sterile wisdom. The chaos had to be given new form, which the lesser hierarchies participated in bringing about. This raises the question "What is it to be human?", for the Archai at that time were at a hierarchical stage equivalent to ours, which lies behind Steiner's name *Spirits of Personality* for them. All manner of answers have been given to this question, but to penetrate to its essence we find in spiritual science that it is characterised by having to go through a state of chaos. To reflect upon the present situation on Earth perhaps illustrates that rather well, although the matter goes deeper than that as we shall see. At least it indicates that instead of bemoaning chaos, we may view it as a necessary condition within which we may grow spiritually. Positivity is, after all, one of the qualities aspired to by a spiritual pupil, everywhere, at all times and in all conditions.

Thus the Archai went through their human stage in the powerful environment created by the Thrones, and this underscores that 'frailty' and 'weakness' may accompany our human stage but they are not its essential ingredients. This is why spiritual science finds that our *will* is closely related to the work of the Archai. When our life body was added through the sacrifice of the Exusiai, the somewhat paradoxical notion of 'chaotic wisdom' arises. But we have only to contemplate the life manifest in ourselves and the beings around us to appreciate its wonderful wisdom, which is explained by the fact that the life body is 'made of wisdom' as it were. It is not physical, which is why the Medawars wrote in the last century⁴ that there is no such thing as 'life', thinking as they were exclusively within the current materialistic paradigm. Now a new form of non-sterile wisdom thus arose which was 'chaotic' in the sense that it was open to new possibilities, and the Archangels went through their human stage then. The wonderful rhythms characteristic of wisdom that live in the life body relate today to speech and the sense we all have - albeit dimly - of the harmony of the spheres. The Archangels work into the non-petty aspects of our life of feeling based on such rhythms, especially in the vowels of our languages, for they are the spirits of national groups. In the Lord's Prayer we find "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", which is a prayer for a healthy social life, which in turn is mediated by the Archangels as the group spirits of social forms. They are two stages of spiritual evolution above us which explains the power and importance of social life.

The sacrifice of the Dynameis or Spirits of Motion gave us our sentient body, which accordingly is composed entirely of movement. Within our materialistic paradigm it is perhaps difficult to imagine movement which is not movement of something. We find the notion in some Eastern traditions, popularised in books by Fritjof Capra⁵ and Gary Zukav⁶ among others, and indeed the more mystical side of quantum physics leans towards this notion. The polarities of sympathy and antipathy in the sentient body provide a direct experience of it in the life of feeling, and it can be experienced more lucidly when contemplating the activity of thinking, for it may then be observed that an inner movement occurs when something actually happens in that realm. The initially chaotic state of the out-poured movement provided the scene for the Angels to go through their human stage, who today have moved on to that inner movement in thinking, which is why spiritual science finds them to be active in our thinking. Where does the content of your thoughts come from? Meditation on this reveals that materialistic thoughts draw their content from the

senses, while spiritual thoughts clearly cannot do that. The angels give that content, living also in that subtle form of feeling that lies behind our thoughts as a karmic predisposition. Hence some people are predisposed to materialism karmically because materialistic thoughts 'feel right', while others are given a spiritual content by their angels, which also 'feel right'. We are tempted by our ordinary feelings, and hence in the Lord's Prayer we have "Lead us not into temptation" as the prayer for protection of (or from) our sentient body. It is noteworthy in this respect that the sentient body provides the bridge between the outer world and the soul via sense perception, so when the senses tempt us we can see why, and thus pray not to be led into undue dependence upon them. It should be noted that in spiritual science the term 'astral body' refers to the union of the sentient body with a corresponding aspect of the soul.

The logic of all this inevitably leads us to our present life underwritten by the sacrifice of the Exusiai or Spirits of Form. What, then, is chaotic form? Apart from the banal, it may be approached by noting that the fourth member of our being given to us by this sacrificial deed is our ego. So our ego starts off in a chaotic state, the transformation and ordering of which is our allotted task as human beings. But that is chaotic form, which can be comprehended by comparing a person with a weak ego and someone with a strong one. Psychologists (e.g. Jung) describe how we have different personalities in diverse situations: kindly and caring at home, ruthless and dynamic at work, uncouth and juvenile in some sports, and something else again when driving a car! This may be described as the 'chameleon' stage of ego development, where the form is in a sense 'chaotic', conforming to prevailing circumstances rather than bringing consistent ideals into them as would a strongly developed ego. Rudyard Kipling wrote "If you can keep your head when all about you Are losing theirs and blaming it on you ... you'll be a Man, my son!"⁷. Then you have brought form into your ego, although this should not be confused with the inflexibility of a one-sided idealism. Spiritual science defines 'body' as 'form', so that a physical body is a form in space, a life body is a form in time, a sentient body is a form in movement and an ego is a form reflecting the spirit. Initially the difficulty in finding the latter leads some psychologists to regard the ego as an illusion, and they are partially correct. Whether their judgement remains correct depends on us! The development intended here is that of 'ego strength' rather than 'egoism' which readily accompanies it. "But deliver us from evil", pleads the Lord's Prayer. Evil becomes possible with spiritual independence, which a developing ego provides ever more poignantly. A form that denies or acts against itself is an anachronism, but unfortunately it is possible.

"Give us this day our daily bread", omitted above, refers of course to the physical body. The first part of the Lord's Prayer refers to the mighty stages of evolution sketched at the outset as related to the Godhead, so we see how such a wonderful prayer is anything but arbitrary. So it is in all religions.

If we observe the consciousness attending each of our members, then the sharpest fully-awake consciousness is that of our ego (at least on a good day!) while in the realm of feeling associated with the sentient body we have a more dream-like consciousness. That the consciousness when dreaming is distinct can readily be appreciated by noting that what was patently illogical under review after we have awoken did not seem so at the time! We have no discernable consciousness of the life body, but spiritual science distinguishes it from the first two as a very dim one with a wide reach, as enjoyed by the plant kingdom. The nearest we can approach it in ordinary circumstances is through the feelings that may arise of well-being or the reverse, given to us by a kind of sense of life. Associated with the physical body is the lowest level of all, akin to a machine-like somnambulistic state.

This brings us to spiritual alchemy, for the Angels have a higher consciousness than ours, the Archangels higher still and so on. In evolutionary terms we may think of the evolution of consciousness as the highest level of evolution, the physical serving that or providing a foundation ('Throne') for it. Evolutionary theory describes 'residual remains' such as the appendix as evidence for past stages of evolution when that organ still had a manifest purpose. Presumably it still does in some obscure way, or it would have vanished. The dreamlike and other lower levels of consciousness may perhaps be regarded as 'residual remains' in an analogous way, relating us back to the previous stages of *motion*, *life* and *will*. The next stage, that of the Angels, is described by spiritual science as a transformation of the rich dream-like state into a higher equally

rich pictorial state that has all the lucidity of our present-day waking consciousness. It is known as Imaginative Consciousness, a powerful state of being where pictures have life and efficacy. The transformation occurs through an inner spiritual 'alchemy'. The resulting consciousness has a much wider 'reach' than ours, confined as the latter is to the time and place we are in. The transformation of the plant-level of consciousness into Inspiration is even more magical, giving a wider reach through time, having the qualities of sound and the 'inner word' rather than pictures. The transformation of the somnambulistic state into Intuition is so wide that it encompasses the entire universe, but an immensely strong ego sense is required to 'carry' it. Its quality is higher than either picture or sound, being of a more artistic nature difficult to describe or grasp at present.

The consciousness of a guardian angel reaches back through all the past lives of an individual, that of an archangel encompasses a whole folk but not its individuals, while that of an archai encompasses an entire developmental period both in space and time. An exusiai does for a planet what an angel does for an individual, and so on upwards. The highest we can postulate would encompass every individual in all places at all times. A truly awesome consciousness! That is the consciousness of He who, as the gnostics expressed it, descended through all the Aeons, namely the Christ. The sacrifice made to incarnate on Earth into one albeit lofty individual is then perhaps more readily comprehended, quite apart from the crucifixion. This closes the circle on the subject of sacrifice. The beautiful French carol *Tomorrow will be my dancing day* puts this in a moving perspective, for that day was the day of His crucifixion ...

Our question remains: if the divine Hierarchies are active today, did they after all 'hold back' during their supreme sacrifice? An approach to resolving this is provided by a meditation Rudolf Steiner gave that may be done for those who have gone through death:

Angels, Archangels and Archai
In the ether weaving
Receive thy web of destiny,

In Exusiai, Dynameis and Kyriotetes
In the astral feeling of the Cosmos
The just consequences of thy earthly life
Die into the realm of being.

In Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim
As their deeds of being
The justly transmuted fruits of thy earthly life
Are resurrected.

The First Hierarchy resurrects that which may go into the future. So it may be that the Holy Trinity resurrected the Hierarchies after their supreme sacrifice.

References

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2. *Occult Science, and Outline*, Rudolf Steiner.
3. *The Lords Prayer*, lecture by Rudolf Steiner.
4. *The Life Science*, P.B. and J.S. Medawar.
5. *The Tao of Physics*, Fritjof Capra.
6. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, Gary Zukav.
7. *If* by Rudyard Kipling.