

What is Public Opinion?

*A Consideration from exoteric and spiritual scientific perspectives*¹

Dear friends,

We have before us a very contemporary theme, as Frau Bider emphasised in her introduction: what is public opinion?

I propose to deal with the topic in two parts. The first will be exoteric and the second will be from a spiritual scientific perspective. I do not want to go about it in an abstract and theoretical way, but rather introduce some symptomatic examples of what one can understand by the term “public opinion”.

I.

Very approximately one could say to begin with: public opinion is the sum of countless private lacks of judgment. – Rudolf Steiner once quoted someone who said that it was the sum of private errors. Both of these would be to put it rather too tersely. For public opinion is, as I shall show, much more than, or rather, something very different from, a mere sum; it is a real power, a real being in itself. Two questions arise here: what kind of power? And: how do we, as individuals capable of judgment, relate to this?

Let’s begin with a definition of what “public opinion” is supposed to be, a definition, which even has something of a public opinion character to it, for it can be found in *Wikipedia*. (German) There it states:

“Public opinion – a loanword from [the French] *opinion publique* – refers to prevailing views on matters in any society. Contrary to individual opinion, it is supposed to designate those ideas prevailing in the consciousness of the public with regard to particular (political) issues.” So, public opinion is related mainly to political issues and is differentiated from individual opinion.

In this contrast an expression may be put forward, which has been taken from Rudolf Steiner’s drafts for his first Mystery Drama. A man is preparing to give a public lecture; his wife, who supports a spiritual movement, is not impressed. In response to the “pressure” from his wife, the man says: “I only know that the best men in our time agree on this: public opinion only looks with pity on these activities or even considers them outright dangerous.” So public opinion considers a spiritual movement, such as the

anthroposophical movement as pitiable if not even as dangerous. The woman then says: “Public opinion is quickly ready with a judgment, even when it is miles away from understanding an issue.”

We can find a basic characteristic in contrasting these two quotes. The *understanding*, the question of truth, as it were, which the woman speaks of, plays no role at all in the Wikipedia definition. The only thing that is considered there is what is *prevalent*, in other words, what has *power*.

Let us be clear here: public opinion has to do with power, even though it may be far away from the truth of a matter. Of course, it claims to be true, but its truth is spread by its fiat. Individual judgment can be directed to understanding and discovering the truth; in every spiritual movement it must have this orientation. So we have a basic polarity of knowledge on the one hand and power on the other. That Steiner has *the woman* represent the element of knowledge in his draft and not the man honours the female sex...

A number of examples will now be presented which relate to what the prevailing “truths” of public opinion are and what individual seekers for truth, often in starkly contrasting ways, have to say about the relevant issues, showing that their judgment is perhaps not “miles away” from the truth of the issue. We shall begin with a very recent example from recent news.

The shooting down of the Malaysian Boeing on 17 July 2014

The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* newspaper, which is regarded by some as belonging to the “quality Press”, carried the following report on 17 November 2014: “Putin shows the West the cold shoulder. No relenting at the G-20 summit in the deepening Ukraine conflict.”

At this G-20 summit in Brisbane, Australia the topic of Ukraine was officially excluded and only discussed one-on-one at the margins of the summit, as also happened between Putin and Merkel. The headline gives a very different impression, and the following report was similarly misleading: “At the G-20 summit Russia’s President Putin has again denied any participation by his country in the conflict in East Ukraine.” That can therefore only have happened in an unofficial form, if at all. Now comes an especially important sentence

¹ Lecture at Scala, Basel, 19 November 2014; revised for publication.

for the issue at hand – who is stirring the conflict in East Ukraine?: “Meanwhile, it is now almost certain that separatists shot down flight MH-17.” You will recall that on 17 July this year the Malaysian Boeing, en route from Holland to Singapore, was shot down in a terrible attack over East Ukraine. Almost 300 people, including the crew, lost their lives. The Western “quality media” were immediately at one in blaming Russia, which, it was said, had either directly or indirectly supported the so-called “Separatists”, who had shot the plane out of the sky with ground-to-air missiles. That, in short, is what public opinion gave out via the quality media in almost every country in the world as the truth about the incident.

However, there are notable inconsistencies all over this version of events. A former Lufthansa pilot with 30 years’ experience and great technical know-how by the name of Peter Haisenko set himself the task of investigating the incident. Haisenko gave interviews and published articles on the case.² On examining images of the wreck of the cockpit – it was found many kilometres from the rest of the plane wreckage – something occurred to him that would hardly have occurred to a layman, namely, that both sides of the cockpit must have been shot through, and in a horizontal direction. This is evidenced by the deformations in the metal at the points of entry and exit in the cockpit walls caused by the shooting. This contradicts the claim that the plane was hit by a ground-to-air missile and points to a shoot-down from the air. An airborne attack was also confirmed from another direction, namely, by a Spanish air traffic controller in the Kiev Control Tower.³

Unreported in the “serious” media was the fact that on 17 July a 10-day NATO exercise in the Black Sea came to an end. Its main purpose: “electronic surveillance of freight traffic and reactions to asymmetrical threats, warnings, anti-submarine defence and artillery attacks.”⁴ Are NATO or the US authorities steering NATO supposed to have had no insight into the air tragedy that was going on over East Ukraine at the same time?

A priori cover-up instead of investigation of a crime

On 8 August – so only a few weeks after the tragedy – a strange, secret agreement was concluded. Yuri

Boychenko, spokesman for the Ukrainian Attorney General’s Office, described it as follows: “In accordance with the decisions reached in the Four-Party Agreement, which was concluded on 8 August between the Ukraine, the Netherlands, Belgium and Australia [these countries are allies of the USA and cooperate with it closely against Russia - TM], information on investigations in relation to the Malaysian 777 catastrophe will not be made public.” These four parties formed the investigation commission into the crash!

Finally, why did the USA not publish a single satellite photograph of the crash, if this would really prove where the shots against the aircraft came from? The Russians, on the other hand, published footage which shows a military jet flying towards the Malaysian civil aeroplane. And finally, it was recently made known in the Netherlands that the wreckage had been scrapped.⁵

In short, it is itself a crime to accuse another State of a crime without oneself bringing forward evidence, to set up a commission of inquiry that is obliged to maintain silence and to get rid of the wreckage prematurely. And it is frivolous to take part, as the *NZZ* does, in the smear campaign and the absurd sanctions against Russia by claiming that Russia’s alleged responsibility for the incident was “almost certain”. It bears reflection that on the Internet one can find various reports offering different explanations of this crime – though some of them do include, of course, a lot of nonsense – from the one in the columns of the “serious” media.

9/11 – Public opinion versus individual search for truth

Let us go back a decade and more to an event that shaped the beginning of this millennium like no other and which revealed a glaring discrepancy between the public opinion about this event and the individual judgment of relatively few people : 9/11 – the attacks of 11 September 2001.

What did the “public opinion” that was first created by the US media and then parroted by the media of the entire western world and a large part of the eastern media have to say about this event? A gang of fanatical Islamists had conspired against freedom-loving America, had flown two planes into the World Trade Center, one into the Pentagon and one (unsuccessfully) against the US Capitol Building and had taken

2 See, for example <http://www.stein-zeit.tv/mordfall-mh17-peter-haisenko-im-gespraech-mit-robert-stein/>

3 www.geschichteinchronologie.ch/as/asien-allg/2014-07-19-flug-MH-17-Boeing777-teil003-fluglotse-Kiew-D.html

4 <http://www.wsws.org/de/articles/2014/09/11/mh17-s11.html>

5 <http://www.anderweltonline.com/wissenschaft-und-technik/luftfahrt-2014/schockierende-analyse-zum-abschuss-der-malaysian-mh-017/> Ferner: <http://quer-denken.tv/index.php/1016-seltsame-vorgaenge-um-mh17>

the lives of over 3000 victims. We followed this event critically at *Der Europäer* from its first moments, commented on it and also published a book on it.

I shall not roll out here the whole spectrum of objections and critical investigations into this monstrous crime. A number of them are presented in the book *Der 11. September – Das neue Pearl Harbor, Fakten Fragen Perspektiven* [Reality, Truth and Evil – Facts, questions and perspectives on September 11. 2001, Temple Lodge, 2005] and in the *Der Europäer* web archive. I shall just mention here only the most obvious discrepancy between visual reality and official explanation: the collapse of the buildings in New York, including that of the Solomon Brothers Building (WTC Building 7), which was hit by no aircraft: the three building collapses cannot be explained by planes flying into them; the collapse of WTC 7 bears the signature of a conventional controlled demolition.⁶ The vertically and laterally ejected clouds of smoke and pieces of debris of the Twin Towers resembled far more pyroclastic ejections of the kind that can be seen in volcanic eruptions.

Further inconsistencies in the official version of events: the BBC broadcast live from New York against the smoking backdrop of the city with the two destroyed towers reported that Building 7 had now also collapsed. Every observer could recognise that while the BBC reporter was reporting the collapse of Building 7, the building was still standing in the background. A broadcaster's script error! The clip was not shown again.⁷

An even more grotesque *faux pas*: Fox News, one of the largest US news channels, showed on 11 September 2001 live footage of the second plane crashing into the South Tower. In a clip which I myself saw, the flying object penetrated the tower on the one side and *its nose came out on the other side* – this clip too was not repeated in this form. A computer animation inadvertently slipped in! An embarrassing error by the broadcaster. There have been notable investigations by Collin Alexander on YouTube into this live clip.⁸

In her book *Where did the towers go?* the American physicist Judy Wood has investigated what made the towers collapse or rather, could pulverise them in the air. She points to what is known in specialist circles as “free energy”, but which is still unknown energy

technology to the public; it is based on the researches of Tesla.⁹

It is obvious that the “quality media”, especially with regard to 9/11 but also as a rule only peddle things of which it can be said that: “Public opinion is quickly ready with a judgment, even when it is miles away from understanding an issue.”

I have given a good deal of space here to the crime of 9/11 because it represents the most serious crime at the beginning of this century and because its international effects continue to play into current events, for example, the present “Ukraine Crisis”.

Those who, when faced with facts and questions raised by the alternative media and intrepid individual researchers, speak of “conspiracy theories” should keep two things in mind: firstly, there have always been real conspiracies throughout the course of history, from Catiline in Rome before Christ, the conspiracy against Julius Caesar, and on up to the conspiracy against John F. Kennedy which killed him on 22 November 1963.¹⁰

“Conspiracy theorist”: a concept nurtured by the CIA

The question is not: conspiracy theory or not, but: does a conspiracy really exist here or there and which is the best theory in the sense of a rational explanation of events? That 9/11 too was the result of a conspiracy, namely, that of an Islamist terrorist group, is blatantly maintained by the US government itself. That the official theory proclaimed by the government and repeated worldwide by the “quality media” actually explains nothing, but rather has covered up the facts, is revealed by the evidence adduced thus far.

The third of the above-mentioned historical conspiracies is the one which subsequently gave rise to the disqualifying distraction concept of “conspiracy theory” which has been used to discredit or silence opinions which diverge from those of the “quality media”.

It happened like this: the Warren Commission, which was formed to examine the Kennedy assassination, was steered largely by Allen Dulles, the CIA boss whom the Kennedys had dismissed. Dulles' dismissal was one of the driving factors which made it seem opportune to the military-industrial complex and the CIA to eliminate the peace-loving President who had become unwilling to go to war, as his behaviour

6 See Richard Gage: <http://www.ae911truth.org>

7 See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=677i43QfYpQ>

8 [https://www.youtube.com/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rml2TL5N8ds&index=7&list=PLEA05F393EC843D80)

[watch?v=Rml2TL5N8ds&index=7&list=PLEA05F393EC843D80](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rml2TL5N8ds&index=7&list=PLEA05F393EC843D80)

9 See, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udDkMP4MF6A>

10 See James W. Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable – Why he died and why it matters*, New York 2008.

towards Krushchev during the Cuba Crisis had shown. After the publication of the Warren Commission report, independent readers came upon various inconsistencies which made the official conspiracy theory of Lee Harvey Oswald as the single crazed killer seem unbelievable. Dulles was unconcerned about the vacillations of public opinion *in its entirety* – “the American people don’t read!” he said –, but he and leading circles within the government nevertheless wanted to bring under control any possible influence of critical writings upon this “opinion”.

So in 1967 the CIA produced an internal directive (it was subsequently made public) which was titled “Countering Criticism of the Warren Report”. This literally stated: “The aim of this paper is to gather material to discredit the conspiracy theorists and make them seem unbelievable.”

We see at the ‘baptism’ of this concept ‘godparents’ who had an interest in covering up the conspiracy which they themselves had conceived and executed. This should be realised by all those who throw this label of “conspiracy theorist” uncritically against those of their contemporaries who do not sing along in the chorus of “public opinion”.

This example enables us to gauge directly and concretely the truth of what Rudolf Steiner once said in 1920, when he described “mendacity as the fundamental characteristic of the entire public life of our time”¹¹.

We can see precisely from this example that influential shapers of “public opinion” are concerned with power and not with truth.

The First World War - is public opinion in decline?

In relation to the First World War, a certain limited transformation seems to be occurring within public opinion. The recent publication of Christopher Clark’s book, *The Sleepwalkers*¹², has led to a loss of currency for the account of the outbreak of the war that was peddled for decades, namely, that “Germany was solely responsible”. Although this thesis had long been contradicted by serious researchers – among them also Rudolf Steiner, who was under no illusions about the driving powers within Anglo-American elites – it has held fast within public opinion for a whole century. It has been used for political as well as economic purposes. We only have to think of the enormous reparations

payments that were demanded from Germany, or of the advance programming of the Second World War by means of the ‘war guilt clauses’ of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Or we can think of the economic dependence on the West and the complete political insignificance which Germany was forced to accept in the second half of the 20th century.

One can be grateful to Clark for the main effect of his work – even if the actual warmongers still remain in the shadows in his book – because he apportions blame to all the leading Powers in 1914. The two authors Gerry Docherty and Jim Macgregor go even further in this direction; in their book *Hidden History* (2013) they identify the above-mentioned elites, and with commendable acknowledgment of the work of the important American historian Carroll Quigley.

We can at least now see that public opinion with respect to the First World War has begun to shift. But there may be many years ahead before researchers such as those I have named achieve a general break-through...

Who shapes public opinion?

At the end of the first part of these considerations, let us put the question: who shapes public opinion? For the media are not its actual creators; they are only the *instruments* for the information and above all for the disinformation, which is instilled into media consumers.

That there were and are influential people who strive to shape public opinion is evident from the following quote on the website of Markus Osterrieder. He speaks of particular personalities who planned to shape the destiny of Europe in accordance with their own intentions – people around Cecil Rhodes, Alfred Milner et al. Osterrieder describes them in detail in his book *Welt im Umbruch* [*World in Upheaval*. An English translation is underway] These people knew that they could only achieve their goal if they could gain control over public opinion, so as to steer it in the desired direction. I shall quote from Osterrieder’s website:

“Those who were working to establish the Atlantic Imperium were faced in the following decades by the problem of how to overcome the strongly isolationist and conservative attitude of the American population, the problem of the undetermined central position of Germany within the Euro-Atlantic structure and at the same time how Russia could be kept out of this region. One of Milner’s pupils, Lionel Curtis, said in a speech: *‘Public opinion must be led onto the right path.*

¹¹ 21 August 1920, GA 199.

¹² see book review by Andreas Bracher at page 22 of this issue of TPA

(...) *That is the task for a few people who are in actual contact with the facts'.*" (<http://www.celtoslavica.de/bibliothek/atlantic.html>) (transl. TPA)

By the "actual facts", people like Curtis, and there are of course still such people today, mean those facts which they or their interest groups have in mind to advance or develop. Facts which do not lie within their field of interest should naturally not be allowed access to public opinion. Such facts are, for example, the knowledge that the Roman/Latin element has passed the peak of its development, that the Slavic element is something for the future and is still in the process of being formed, and thirdly, the gigantic extent to which the Anglo-American element dominates the present age, not least due to the exclusion of the "middle position". It is with such large-scale and partly entirely arbitrary viewpoints that those who shape the Anglo-American cause act; and in accordance with such viewpoints, to which natural resources also belong, public opinion is shaped. The current demonisation of Putin, the attempt to bring about regime change in Russia aims, along with the enforced acquisition of economic gains, to take control once again of the destiny of the Russian and Slavic East. Policies of such group egoism could not be carried out without controlling public opinion.

Today, however, a certain welcome change in the field of information and how it is mediated is showing itself. The "serious quality media" are faced with competition from the still unfettered Internet, competition which they have to take seriously. One can of course say many negative things about the Internet, one could say: it is all ahrimanic. But that is not the question; rather it is: how can we learn to act freely with this ahrimanic medium? Thanks to the Internet, we can, for example, follow the daily broadcasts of the 24 hour broadcaster RT (*Russia Today*) – which sometimes presents very interesting news and analyses that do *not* appear in the western media – for example, on the background to the Maidan putsch or on the Russians being blamed for the shooting down of the Malaysian Boeing, which was very publicly used in the West to "sanction" western sanctions against Russia. John Kerry, the Skull and Bones-initiated US Secretary of State, publicly criticised and defamed RT a few months ago, which the Russian Foreign Minister remarked upon as "a compliment" to the broadcaster. And already a few years earlier, Hilary Clinton had expressed the fear that the USA could lose "the information war" against broadcasters such as RT. The US

monopoly on information today is as unsure as the monopoly power of the US dollar.

Anyone today who really wants to can, by doing his own research online, create for himself a picture of world events that complements the public opinion presented by the mainstream media. That would simply not have been possible in 1914. Many knowledgeable sources can be found today - for example in the "CrossTalk" show on RT - which comment on the grand geopolitical lines of US policy which are found, for example, in the books of Zbigniew Brzezinski. The western media, by contrast, never seem to observe the strategies of their own policymakers with sufficient distance.

Against public opinion, therefore, which certainly exercises great power, there stand today an ever growing number of individuals seeking to form their own views. And it is a welcome sign of how many people are prepared to risk even their public positions for the sake of finding the truth, as I have found repeatedly, for example, within the 9/11 Truth Movement. Certainly, their numbers are quantitatively still small. But a grasping of the facts that is in accord with truth is nevertheless of significance and has a kind of homeopathic fertility. For the spiritual world, quantity is never of importance but rather, the quality of the act of judgment. Rudolf Steiner once said that it has a great meaning for the spiritual world when the truth is thought and he added: "Thoughts are dynamic forces. There is no *counting* in the spiritual world."¹³

I will leave the spiritual scientific aspects of the topic for the second part of these considerations.

T.H. Meyer

[Part 2 of this article will appear in the July issue of The Present Age – Ed.]

¹³ See *Der Europäer*, Vol 8, No. 8 (June 2004), p. 27.

What is Public Opinion?

*A consideration from exoteric and spiritual scientific perspectives (part 2)*¹

Rudolf Steiner gave the most profound spiritual scientific indications about the nature of public opinion on 14 January 1913 (GA 141). I can only present the key thoughts here. Public opinion, he says, will confront individual judgment ever more strongly in the future, as I mentioned in the first part of this lecture. Public opinion is a historically recent phenomenon. In the Middle Ages it did not exist. The actions of *individual human* beings were much more intense in forming people's opinions in those days. Public opinion emerged especially in the wake of printing, when everyone was able to access writings and information that was previously kept to small circles. What then is public opinion, *in essence*? Quote:

*“These living currents swirling around among human beings are usually referred to as ‘public opinion’ — and prompted the saying from philosophers: ‘Public opinions are mostly private errors.’ To realise this, however, is not as important as it is to be aware that public opinions exert tremendous power upon the life of an individual. ...Such things must be regarded as realities, for a world of swirling thoughts does indeed exist”.*²

Behind these “thoughts swirling around” are very specific spiritual beings. Steiner already showed in his book *The Spiritual Guidance of Man and Humanity* (GA 15) that there is also development among spiritual beings. But not all beings reach the developmental goal that is set for them; some remain behind. Such beings are among the hierarchies of the Angels or Archangels, which were already active in the Egyptian cultural epoch (and at that time not as retarded beings) but which later did not participate in the impetus of the Mystery of Golgotha. To return again to the Berlin lecture: *“But it is possible for these Spirits too to remain behind in their evolution. Not all the Spirits who participated in the leadership of humanity have acquired through the Mystery of Golgotha the power to guide and lead men while ensuring their freedom.”*

The Mystery of Golgotha is not least associated with the impulse of freedom, and a spiritual leadership of humanity which is to be appropriate for the age must reckon with freedom. *“Among these Beings of the higher*

Hierarchies there are some who remained backward and have become Luciferic spirits. What we call ‘public opinion’ is an example of the way in which some of them are active. Public opinion is not created by human beings alone” — though it is also created by them, as we have already seen (see Part I) — “but also by a certain category of Luciferic spirits of the lowest rank — retarded Angeloi and Archangeloi.” We learn later that *“these spirits are only beginning their Luciferic career and have not yet risen very high in the ranks of the Luciferic spirits, but they are definitely Luciferic in character.”*

As they did not go through the Christian development, they cannot have a direct spiritual effect on human beings, but *“manifest their activity in the muddled, turbulent thinking that comes to expression as public opinion”*. One who reflects on what is said here will realise that public opinion can never have anything directly to do with truth — an essential element of the Christ Impulse. This raises the question: how can the individual who seeks truth become independent of public opinion?

It is obvious that this is impossible as long as one remains under the spell of public opinion or is afraid of being unpopular when one puts forward a different opinion that one has worked out individually. This is also why one becomes immune to a basic technique of public opinion: its continuous, undifferentiating *repetition*. Here we have to do with questions of individual development and individual decisions. The development of such individual judgments will become ever more important in the future. For, says Steiner, *“we must clearly understand that the future of the Earth’s evolution cannot be assured simply by rectifying phenomena such as public opinion and the like which are inevitable in the course of evolution.”*

As an anthroposopher, one should not therefore be under the illusion that one could shape public opinion about Anthroposophy — that it is scurrilous, mystical, airy-fairy, racist, un-Christian, to name only a few of the extreme charges laid against it by public opinion — that it would suddenly give a truthful picture of Anthroposophy. Steiner even says once in order to counter such illusions: if we get a good Press, we should ask ourselves what we have done wrong... A movement which seeks to build on the striving for truth can never regard public opinion about it as decisive; it can never orient itself towards it. Any chasing after the favour of public opinion can only undermine serious spiritual scientific work. One

¹ Lecture at Scala, Basel, 19 November 2014; revised for publication with the first part published in *The Present Age* Vol.1 No.3.

² All translations of quotes from the lecture of 14 January 1913 are from <http://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0141/19130114p01.html> with grateful acknowledgment.

can of course be glad if something positive comes from somewhere, but one should not believe one has gained any viable territory from it. What is praised today can be torn away tomorrow. While it would also be an illusion to assume that public opinion could improve sometime and that means become more truthful, Rudolf Steiner emphasises what can really be improved: “*Men can, however, become better in their own inner nature, therefore the process of evolution must take root more and more deeply in their inner life so that, in the future, men will be much more confronted by the pressure of public opinion*” – that is the prospect with regard to the outer development – “*but his inner life will have become stronger. That can only occur through spiritual science.*” The power of public opinion therefore, which will grow ever greater, will confront the inner, free judgments of individuals who will also become stronger and will be able to hold the balance to it.

Steiner describes in this lecture that everything that one takes of public opinion with one into the spiritual world becomes worthless in that world, but that one can gain capacities in the spiritual world which can make one more disposed to form really individual judgments in one’s next life.

It will be even better if we already seek to gain such individual judgment here and now. Every page of the study of spiritual scientific writings promotes this.

Finally, Steiner characterises public opinion and individual judgment as follows: “*Thus what develops on Earth had to undergo a process that lies below the level of progress. Public opinion is of less value than the judgements which an individual can reach on a path of progress. Public opinion is subhuman...*” Over against this subhuman nature stands the individual’s ability of judgment, which can be stimulated by the life after death or before birth.

Steiner’s words quoted here from 14 January 1913 had a short prelude. Two days earlier, in Leipzig, he also spoke about the phenomenon of public opinion. This lecture only exists as excerpts written down by those who heard him and is not in the GA. Nevertheless, I would like to quote a few sentences to complement what has been said about the spirits behind public opinion. “*These luciferic spirits stand behind editors’ desks.*” Not the editor’s desk at *Der Europäer* of course! Only the chief editor stands there. Steiner characterises these luciferic spirits in the Leipzig lecture almost humorously as “*squirts*”, “*whipper-snappers*”. But we’ve already heard that these squirts grow, perhaps even into giants.

The task therefore is to live with public opinion and yet at the same time to strive to develop one’s own individual judgment. We have good examples of this right here

in Middle Europe. I shall quote from a Middle European spirit who was highly estimated by Steiner, a man who also said much that can be directly rendered in spiritual scientific concepts. This individual once appealed to all culturally creative spirits: “Live with your century, but do not be its creature. Provide your contemporaries with what they need, not what they praise.” So said Friedrich Schiller in his *Aesthetic Letters*. The first sentence could be altered to read: “Live with public opinion, but do not be its creature.”

And something very positive was written by a spirit from the Anglo-American sphere, that is, that sphere from which so much that is untrue often pours into the world. There are of course also people in America who do not lose themselves in the stream of power which controls public opinion but who move in the stream of truth.

I shall cite some words from an individual who wants the human being, when necessary, to learn to stand against all public opinion. First I shall read the original, for it is in fine, pregnant English: “*In every work of art, of genius, we recognize our own rejected thoughts. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good humoured inflexibility.*” And now comes a phrase which touches on our theme very deeply: – “*when the whole cry of voices is on the other side*” – we could also say ‘when the whole cry of public opinion is on the other side’. These are the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay *Self-Reliance*. Emerson, the great individualist, also the great friend of Middle Europe, here characterises a task for Middle Europeans: the forming of one’s own individual judgments. The title of a certain small essay can show that such an endeavour is not superfluous in the anthroposophical movement either – I do not want to name the author or the magazine – but it was not in *Der Europäer*, which qualifies, according to an “anthroposophical public opinion” that is not supposed to exist, as the anthroposophical rightwing, whatever that may mean. The essay bears the title “Who has the humility to refrain from judgment?” That sounds fine and modest; the writer recommends it in the context of the controversy over the “Steiner Critical Edition” (SKA). Literally: “Who has the humility to refrain from making a judgment of true or false assessments [of Steiner. - TM]?” That can seem very “Christian” (modest, tolerant etc.), but in reality it is extremely convenient and comfortable, and rather the opposite of what Rudolf Steiner expected from his pupils. It is not only comfortable, it also reveals a certain cowardice, a fear perhaps of making a mistake in one’s search for truth. But it is a hundred times more fruitful to err independently than to leave things undecided in supposed modesty. Or as Rudolf Steiner once put

it with regard to Haeckel: “*One who is too cowardly to make a mistake cannot be a fighter for the truth.*”

I shall close with a quote from Rudolf Steiner which can add a very serious perspective to what has been said here about the need for individual judgment. It’s from a lecture in 1909, to which he had himself given the title “On the Right Relationship to Theosophy”. Steiner makes clear that the earnest forming of cognitive judgments is what the gods expect of us. Referring to Goethe’s Fairy Tale, he calls the transformation of the world of appearances into *thoughts* – and that is what is accomplished in every cognitive judgment - a minting of the “coin of this earth”, a transformation, which can only be done in this way *by human beings*. With regard to the many cases, then as now,

of the blooming of spiritualistic-mediumistic nonsense he says, and I quote: “*One falls into this [such nonsense] (...), when one does not train in oneself the will to examine things, and as soon as one wants arrive at convictions **in comfortable ways**. One should not make it easy for oneself. One should take into consideration that **to come to a conviction is one of the most sacred human acts**. When one takes that into consideration*” [rather than apparent “humility”, one neglects this most sacred act by forming **no** conviction – TM] *then one will spare no effort in really working and not merely pay attention to sensational communications.*”

T.H. Meyer

The Luciferic Beings behind “Public Opinion”

Notes from a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, Leipzig, 12 January 1913

Our life must present, so to speak, what we can become through Theosophy. This requires a free view of life and healthy judgment of it. In our time life is more complicated than in previous epochs. Even periods that lie only a short way behind us were much less complicated than today. That was the case in simple relationships. In those days the life of feeling (*das Gemüt*) and qualities related to it was more widespread among people than today. But many other things have essentially changed too. And we all live within this altered lifestyle and have to try to penetrate the spheres of life within which we stand as far as is required. It belongs precisely to the life of the present that despite the splitting of modern life, we strive to acquire harmony in the soul and inner mental cohesion.

In one lecture one cannot go into this exhaustively; we can only pick up single points. – We find materialism everywhere, a materialism that permeates the whole of practical life, developed by machine production. This has made relationships in business life and life in general far more complicated; it has stimulated haste and bustle, in which humanity has to live and does not come to its senses. – People often do not notice at all how their whole energy in work, all their feeling and thinking from morning to evening, is devoted to material needs. – It is only natural that in the epoch in which we are whipped about by machines that the human being begins to think materialistically about

everything. – It would truly have been impossible for a materialistic and monist worldview to have spread in another epoch.

We Theosophists stand within a new worldview. Think of the difficulties which confront us, think of them as small despite their large dimensions. Let us compare how outside in the world religious confessions prevail which should be regarded as remnants of past ages.

We find much religious striving. We should really look at that. We find there a very intellectual grasp of religion. There are preachers, Christians, who no longer believe in Christ in human form, who do not believe in immortality. People are glad when a Jatho movement¹ and the like appears and is spoken of in the most rationalistic manner. None of the old authorities can prevail any longer against the blind faith in what science has *proven*. - These phenomena again are all related to moral ideas. One who works in business will confirm how little place there is for truth in today’s exchange between buyer and seller, Indeed many who have a sense of responsibility suffer in this situation. Do the cobweb-thin concepts spun by intellectual preachers have any moral force within them?

Public opinion too, which people are so proud of nowadays, did not exist in the 13th and 14th centuries, the Press for instance. Great philosophers used to say: public opinion is private errors.² Who could get an

Ostwald³ etc. to see that spiritual beings have something to do with him?

He may deny it, but he calls up very particular spiritual beings. Behind an Ostwald is an army of very particular spirits. There is spirit in all matter. There is a spirit who has every interest in denying his existence – that is Ahriman.

When someone only looks to material principles, he does not drive away the spirits, he conjures them forth; they creep into the minds of materialists. Mephistopheles sends Faust into the realm of the Mothers and says: There you will find nothing. Faust answers: In that Nothing I hope to find the All. – But people today do not answer like Faust; for the materialist people are possessed by Ahriman.

In the religious-rationalist direction on the other hand another spirit is at work, namely Lucifer. By means of abstract cobweb-thin concepts he separates people from what is really spiritual. “Ideas should live in history now”; that is about as clever [as saying that] a painted painter should paint pictures.

This amalgamation with matter was prepared a long time ago and has reached a preliminary climax. Heraclitus diluted theosophy to philosophy through the influence of Lucifer. That is expressed in pictorial form in the saying that he offered up his book as a sacrifice to Diana of Ephesus.

Now we shall look at public opinion. This arises from the principle that Lucifer and Ahriman had to interfere with the image of the world. In earlier times, instead of public opinion there were people whose soul life reached into spiritual secrets. Influences went from such people into the life of the world for good or for ill.

One understands that when, for example, one studies the history of Florence between 1100 and 1500. Today this influence corresponds to those people who strive to gain a connection to what is spiritual.

But this point has not been reached by those Luciferic beings who remained behind on the Moon, and which control public opinion. As a result this has remained about a thousand years behind. It is only, as it were, the slightest recruits to the luciferic army who work in public opinion. Among them, beings train themselves who will later become mighty. They sit behind the editor’s desk, they stand behind public orators etc. In their art are luciferic spirits just starting out, still squirts actually.

Familiarity with life belongs to practical Theosophy.

With his reason the human being forms his image of the world. What springs from this knowledge of the

mind and the senses? – There is an old saying here. It’s never the ones appointed who put it together. The serpent says: You will be like God and know good and evil.

All knowledge based on the mind and the senses is luciferic, it’s his actual emblem. The insistence on external experience, which denies any other explanation than atoms, is a phantasy idea. Behind maya are not atoms, but spiritual realities. All phenomena which are described there are not realities, the realities are spiritual beings. Monads do not exist unless we conceive of them in reality as higher hierarchies. There are many hierarchies; among the highest are also the divinities of the Trinity. Philosophy only speaks of a unity. There are many spirits, however, and the unity exists only in the souls of the spirits. One who has become accustomed to think in this way so that he knows himself to be in the community of spirits - he has the moral laws. Ahriman lets people sink into the morass of matter; Lucifer draws them away from truth, does not let them suspect that they are lost in a world of illusion. Maya has its own justification, if it is understood as an expression of the reality that stands behind it.

[Typescript titled “Das Wirken Ahrimans und Luzifers im gegenwärtigen Geistesleben. Die ‘öffentliche Meinung’” [“The Activity of Ahriman and Lucifer in the Spiritual Life of the Present. ‘Public Opinion’”] The lecture is published in GA 150, with slight variations.]

Notes

- 1 *Jatho Movement*: Karl Jatho, evangelical pastor, 1851-1913. His free teaching style led to an ecclesiastical trial, in the course of which the collegium decided to dismiss him. “Sermons” 1903 (5th ed. 1906), “Personal Religion” 1905.
- 2 Public opinion is private errors: The origin of this has not yet been resolved. It perhaps stems from a saying by Friedrich Nietzsche: “Public opinions – private lazinesses”, from *Human – All-too human*, Vol I, Aphorism No. 482.
- 3 *Wilhelm Ostwald*, 1853-1932, Chemist. Founder of the ‘Energetic philosophy’.