

Aspects of Rudolf Steiner's Theory of the Senses

With particular reference to the four lower senses / will senses

GA 45 – *Anthroposophie – Ein Fragment*

(p. 31)

“Anthroposophically speaking, we can call everything a ‘sense’ that allows us to recognize the existence of an object, being or process in a way that justifies our placing this existence in the physical world.”

(p. 33)

“These three senses (of life, movement, balance – in connection with the ever-present sense of touch) let us experience our own bodily existence as a whole, which is the foundation of our self-awareness as physical beings. We could say that the senses of life, self-movement and balance allow the soul to open a gateway to its own bodily existence and to experience this bodily existence as the physical outside world that is initially closest to itself.”

(p. 38)

“The sense of touch conveys outer pressure, resistance, firmness, softness. We experience the essence of what we call “pressure”. This is not so straightforward. In reality, we do not directly perceive the body that exerts the pressure, but the fact that it induces us to withdraw this or that part of our skin, or that we have to make a greater or lesser effort to make an impression on the body.”

(This book is available in English: ***Anthroposophy (A Fragment)***. Steiner Books 1996, Tr. C. Creeger, D. Hardorp)

From: *Beiträge zu Rudolf Steiner* Issue 34 – Summer 1971

(p. 9)

“In teaching about the senses we need to get around the problem that everything related to perception is located either in the soul or outside the soul.”

(p. 16)

“The sense organs and their lawfulness are a precondition for the life processes,
The life processes for the soul processes,
The soul processes for the ‘I’.
The ‘I’ gains self-consciousness in the soul processes.
The soul processes are being experienced through the life processes.
The life processes form themselves according to the lawfulness of the sense organs.”

GA 115 – *Anthroposophie, Psychosophie, Pneumatosophie*

(p. 36 f.)

Summary: Rudolf Steiner describes how the spirit human being, or Atman, is still bestowed on us from out of the spiritual worlds because we have not yet developed it ourselves, and how it pervades

the ether body in such a way that the astral body is pressed out and gives rise to the soul experiences of the sense of life. The Buddhi has the same effect on the ether body with regard to the sense of movement, and the spirit self with regard to the sense of balance.

(GA 115 is available in English as **A Psychology of Body, Soul and Spirit**, Hudson NY 1999, tr. M. Spock, p. 22)

GA 170 – *Das Rätsel des Menschen, die geistigen Hintergründe der menschlichen Geschichte*

(p. 113)

“The regions of the twelve senses must be imagined as being at rest within the organism. But life pulsates through the whole organism and manifests in various ways.” (Rudolf Steiner goes on to describe the seven life processes: breathing, warming, nutrition, secretion, maintenance, growth, reproduction).

“If you ascribe the signs of the zodiac to the twelve regions, you have a picture of the macrocosm. If you ascribe a sense to each region, you have the microcosm. If you allocate the planets to the life processes you have the macrocosm; if you write the names of the seven life processes you have the microcosm. And as, macrocosmically, the planetary movements relate to the constellations of the zodiac as they pass through them, the living life process keeps moving and streaming through the resting regions of the senses.”

(p. 128)

“Because there is a certain association between our ‘I’ here on earth and the twelve regions of the senses, the ‘I’ lives in the consciousness of being supported by the sensory regions. Below this consciousness there is another, however, an astral consciousness, which is – in humanity today – more intimately related to our realm of life. The ‘I’ has an intimate relationship with the sensory sphere and our astral consciousness with the sphere of life.”

(p. 250-251)

“The sense of touch is designed in such a way that we can extend our ‘I’ – purely spiritually speaking – through our entire body. And the organs of the sense of touch provide us with our inner sense of self, our inner self-awareness.

(...) We would experience such collisions with the outside world in such a way that we would experience our ‘I’ without perceiving the outside world. Since Lemurian times our organism had to evolve from perceptual stimulant into an organ of touch for our inner ‘I’, capable of scanning the outside world through touch. This is a luciferic act; it is due to luciferic influences. (...)”

(p. 246-7)

Rudolf Steiner here describes how, through ahrimanic influence, speech and thoughts are now perceived from the outside; we no longer perceive them with our own gestures and express them silently. This makes it possible for our higher senses to err and misunderstand, in other words, the clarity of the revelation is lost. Similarly we lose, in our lower senses, our existential sense of security in self-experience, because we now experience ourselves relative to the outside world. Only the middle senses are free from luciferic and ahrimanic impulses and are therefore the most “Christian” senses.

(Available in English as *The Riddle of Humanity*, Forest Row 1990, tr. J. Logan

GA 183 – *Die Wissenschaft vom Werden des Menschen*

(p. 89)

Here, Rudolf Steiner assigns the zodiac signs directly to the senses, differentiating between day and night senses.

The day senses proceed from Aries to Libra:

Aries - sense of 'I'

Taurus - sense of thought

Gemini - sense of speech

Cancer - sense of hearing

Leo - sense of vision

Virgo - sense of taste

Libra - sense of smell

The night senses:

Scorpio - sense of touch

Sagittarius - sense of movement

Capricorn - sense of balance

Aquarius - sense of life

Pisces - sense of warmth

The human being's progression through his senses is comparable to the progression of the sun around the earth or that of the earth around the sun.

Available in English: *Human Evolution. A spiritual-Scientific Quest*. Forest Row 2015, tr. S. Blaxland-de Lange

GA 169 – *Toward Imagination: Culture and the Individual*. Hudson NY 1990, tr. S. Seiler

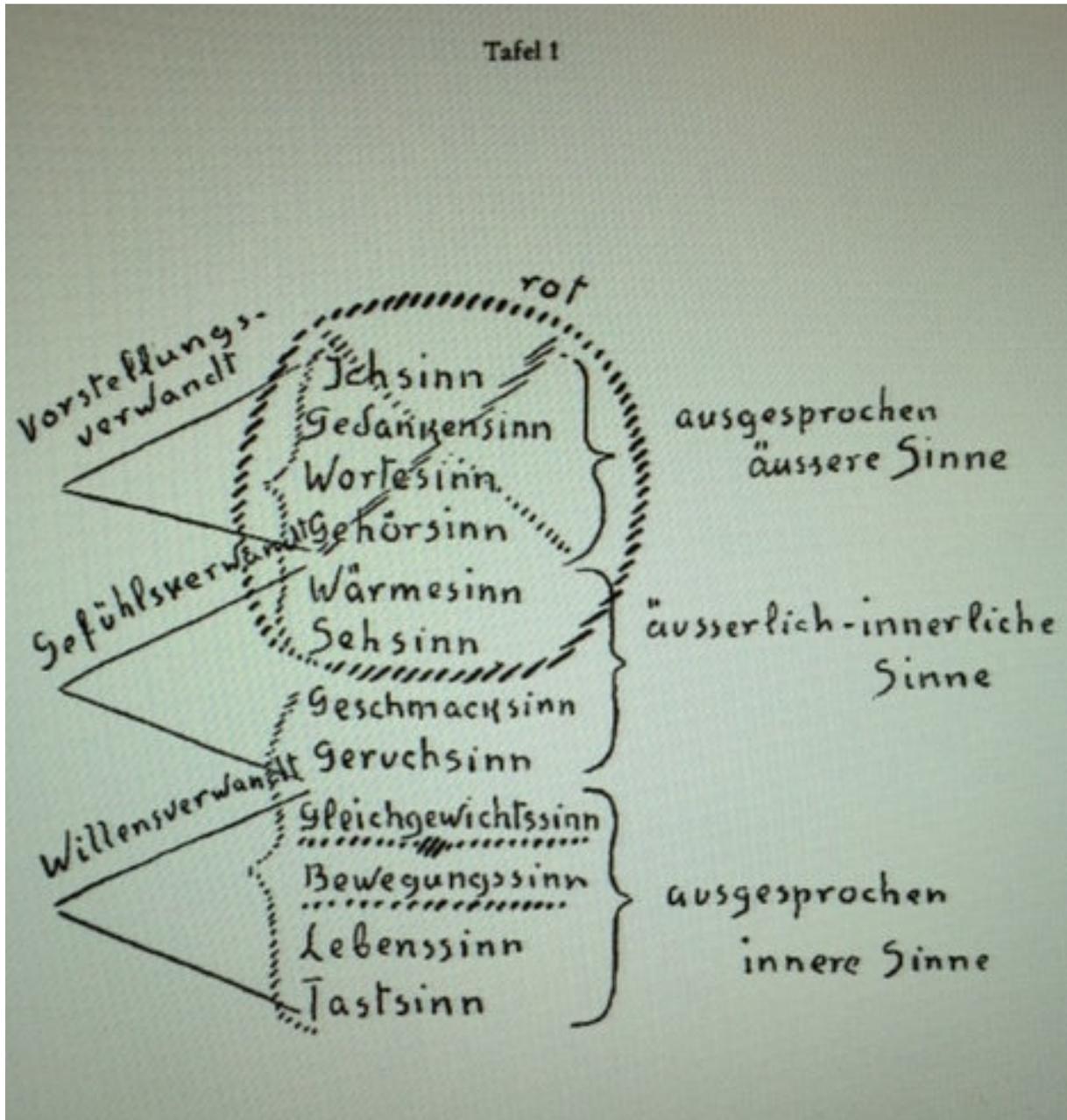
(p. 55f.)

"It is indeed true that we move through life as the sun moves through the twelve signs of the zodiac. When we begin our life here, our consciousness for the senses rises, so to speak, at one pillar of the world and sets again at the other. We pass these pillars when we move in the starry heavens, as it were, from the night side to the day side. Occult and symbolic societies have always tried to indicate this by calling the pillar of birth, which we pass on the way into the life of the day side, Jakim.

Our outer world during the life between death and rebirth consists of the perceptions of the sense of touch spread out over the whole universe, where we do not touch but are touched. We feel that we are touched by the spiritual beings everywhere, while in the physical life it is we who touch others. Between death and rebirth we live within movement and feel it the same way a blood cell or a muscle in us would feel its own movement. We perceive ourselves moving in the macrocosm, and we feel balance and feel ourselves part of the life of the whole. (...) The other pillar, Boaz, is the entrance into the spiritual world through death. What is contained in the word Boaz is roughly this, 'What I have so far sought within myself, namely strength, I shall find poured out over the whole world, in it I shall live.' (...)

These pillars each represent life one-sidedly, for life is only to be found in the balance between the two. Jakim is not life for it is the transition from the spiritual to the body; nor is Boaz life for that is the transition from body to spirit. Balance is what is essential. (...) Therefore two pillars are erected for our times also, and we must pass between them if we understand our times rightly. We must not imagine either the one pillar or the other to be a basic force for humanity, but we must go through between the two!"

GA 206 –



GA 60 – Antworten der Geisteswissenschaft auf die grossen Fragen des Daseins

(p. 38)

Es drängt sich an den Menschensinn
aus Weltentiefen rätselvoll
des Stoffes reiche Fülle.

Es strömt in Seelengründe
aus Weltenhöhen inhaltvoll
des Geistes klärend Wort.

Sie treffen sich im Menscheninnern
zu weisheitsvoller Wirklichkeit.

Surging to the human senses,
from depths of worlds, mysteriously,
is matter's rich abundance.

Flowing into soul foundations,
from heights of worlds, profoundly,
is spirit's lucid word.

It is in the human being that they meet
to wisdom-filled reality.

GA x – ?

What lies concealed in the sense of touch is revealed in the sense of 'I',
What lies concealed in the sense of life is revealed in the sense of thought
What lies concealed in the sense of movement is revealed in the sense of word...

GA 199 – Geisteswissenschaft als Erkenntnis der Grundimpulse sozialer Gestaltung
Lecture of 8 August 1920: The Twelve Human Senses and their Relationship to Imagination,
Inspiration and Intuition

(Available in English as *Spiritual Science as a Foundation for Social Forms*, Hudson 1986, tr. M. St. Goar

GA 293 – *The Foundations of Human Experience* (formerly: *Study of Man*), Hudson NY 1996, tr. R. Lathe, N. Whittaker

Lecture of 29 August 1919: The twelve senses divided into senses of knowledge, senses of feeling and senses of will; their interaction in the forming of judgments.

Lecture of 28 August 1919: Here, Rudolf Steiner describes the human senses as allocated to the will-imbued feeling and the feeling-imbued will; he also says of the nerve pathways in the human organism that they are for the soul and spirit (ether body, astral body, 'I') like cavities on which they can move and stream freely.

Then he phrases the basic principle of education as follows

“In education we are quite often concerned with the question of separating feeling from willing. When freed from willing, feeling then connects itself with thinking cognition and is concerned with it in later life. We properly prepare children for later life only when we enable them to successfully separate feeling from willing. Later, as men or women, they can connect their free feeling with thinking cognition, and, thus, fully meet life.” (p. 123)

GA 152 – *Approaching the Mystery of Golgotha*, Great Barrington 2006, tr. M. Miller
Stuttgart, 5 March 1914

(p. 70)

“We find this spiritual happening reflected in the myths of all peoples, for example in the myth of St George and of the Archangel Michael defeating the dragon. In the post-Atlantean cultures we see a lively awareness of the interventions of Christ accomplished in the spiritual world through that spirit being.”

Rudolf Steiner describes how, in Lemurian times, Lucifer and Ahriman brought the human sense organization into disarray and how, through the sacrifice of the archangel being that had devoted itself fully and selflessly to the workings of the Christ, the human sense organization could be formed so as to allow the senses to selflessly convey impressions without having a life of their own, or “self-experience”. This is the reason why it is possible for us to “sense” what the senses convey, to develop feelings as a result of this sensation, and to think about these feelings.

At the beginning of the Atlantean era a similar sacrifice was made for the organs, at the end of the Atlantean era for the reorganization in thinking, feeling and will. The Mystery of Golgotha is the sacrifice made by the Christ in a human body (without the mediation of the archangel), by instilling the capacity of selflessness into the human ‘I’. This sacrifice needs the help of human beings, however.

(Dictated by Michaela Glöckler)

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