

Bellow and Anthroposophy

In the spring of 1987, I began attending lectures and reading sessions at the Anthroposophical Society in Chicago, then located two blocks from Oz Park on the North Side of the city. The Society was in a lovely part of Lincoln Park, on Grant Place, a high-rent neighborhood near Lake Michigan, and the surrounding streets had some of the oldest surviving residential buildings in the area. For about a year I had tried to track down the society--it proved oddly difficult--and only succeeded when I learned of an architectural exhibit at the Graham Foundation that included pictures and perhaps models of the Goetheanum, the world center of Anthroposophy in Dornach, Switzerland. Not surprisingly--it was one reason I visited the exhibit--I met others active in the society, learned about the office on Grant Place, and shortly thereafter began attending the Friday night discussion groups. These were led by a teacher who worked for the Chicago Public Schools, a learned, highly intelligent man of about forty who, I later learned, came from a wealthy North Shore family. N. lived some blocks from the Society in a modest cottage with his wife and two daughters, walked to Grant Place every Friday around 6:30, and sat smoking outside the two-story residence on its small, chipped cement stoop, carefully extinguishing his cigarette before entering the place for the 7 o'clock discussion. N. was not a modest man, but he never mentioned what I was told were his wealthy North Shore origins, and when asked about his college years made a vague reference to attending school "back East" (which turned out to be Harvard).

We were a small group, and on Friday evenings in the summer hardly filled a half-dozen seats. We gathered in a circle and took turns reading esoteric texts about Anthroposophy by the founder of the movement, Rudolf Steiner. They included the basic introductory text, *Knowledge*

of the Higher Worlds, The Philosophy of Freedom, an Outline of Occult Science, and the countless Steiner lectures that were published by the hundreds. After reading a page or so, N. would stop, take questions from the often-baffled listeners, and begin a brief discussion; I remember his style as dry, cerebral, unemotional, informed, perhaps a bit emphatic when making points. At times intense, youthful yet balding, he was an excellent instructor with a thorough command of the subject; N. allowed himself a bit of playfulness, and if he had any flaws, it was a tendency to disregard alternative interpretations of the text--alternative to his own, that is. After ninety minutes, we broke up, but a few sometimes continued the discussion over coffee at an old delicatessen that used to stand in a strip mall a few blocks away on Clark Street. That whole stretch disappeared in the building boom of the nineties.

I left the Society in 1995. The Friday night discussion group had disbanded, and that left the occasional lecture and other programs of the Steiner disciples, many of whom were humorless, abrasive, and strange. The group in Chicago was never very large, and while I cannot cite a figure, I doubt that the active members, the ones I saw at the meetings, programs and lectures on Grant Place, could have numbered more than a few dozen. It is true that large conferences scheduling well-known speakers from elsewhere in the country could draw a few hundred people, but these were rare. Some were attached to the Waldorf School, the educational program pioneered by Steiner, and other groups, often tiny, were involved with Anthroposophical initiatives in medicine, religion, or farming. The political orientation of the members that I knew, to the extent they had one, was similar to mine--liberal and pro-conservation; N. in particular was said to hard-left. But it is also true that many Anthroposophists were unpleasant and tactless, socially marginal people who eked out a living, holding onto their small piece of the local Anthroposophical pie, and inclined to spend most of

their time with other members of the Society. The general tone seemed to resemble Christian Fellowship sessions where the members practiced a kind of silent self-celebration, their eyes having been opened to esoteric secrets denied to the benighted masses. Among themselves they often disputed the interpretation of a text, conceding that their brethren understood the words, perhaps, but not their "deeper meaning." The teachers at the Waldorf School, not all of whom were members of the Society, were more conventional; they had to raise funds and work with the parents of the children who attended it. Still, it was a fairly in-bred group, and when I went to a meditation conference in New Mexico in the summer of 1990, I found that Anthroposophists from elsewhere in the country were not very different from the ones I knew in Chicago. The parties, such as they were, were sedate affairs--milk, iced tea and cookies. There was never any alcohol on the premises, and after I left I was told that one wealthy, elderly woman active in the Chicago chapter felt it necessary to downplay the fact that her money came from a brewery, quite as though she'd been dealing in drugs.

In the mid-nineties, the headquarters of the American branch of Anthroposophy was abruptly moved from Chicago to Ann Arbor, and the two-person staff on Grant Place was summarily dismissed. When they remonstrated over the speed of the decision, they were told, in effect, to accept the decision of higher authority and shut up. The story as it reached me seemed characteristic of the Society. I had been attracted to Steiner's books, less so to the people who were also attracted to them, and leaving the Society behind (if not the books) was not a difficult decision. Rereading Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* last winter, I came across his celebrated remark that "the worst advertisement for socialism is socialists." To make a similar point, all one need do is substitute Anthroposophy and Anthroposophists .

Which is regrettable. During his day and after his death in 1925, Steiner's books attracted gifted people. One of the most famous, who introduced the subject to many readers who would have otherwise known nothing of it, was of course Saul Bellow; when *Humboldt's Gift* was published in 1975, a year before he was awarded the Nobel Prize, his readers and critics were undoubtedly surprised by the emergence of the obscure Austrian thinker Rudolf Steiner--and Anthroposophy, the movement he founded--as an important influence in the life of the narrator, Charlie Citrine, and, clearly, in the life of the author as well. To have the lives of his characters confused with his own was an issue Bellow confronted for much of his professional life, but even before the publication of *Letters*, there was little doubt that he had developed a deeply felt interest in Steiner and his texts. A *Newsweek* cover story on Bellow in November 1976 makes a passing reference to his ties to Owen Barfield, the English lawyer-scholar and leading interpreter of Steiner in the English-speaking world, whose books may have led Bellow to Anthroposophy. The letters Bellow wrote to Barfield are keenly interesting, but their publication in the collected correspondence is not their first appearance in print, a point I will return to in a moment.

It is not possible to offer more than the most summary description of Anthroposophy, which Steiner developed at extraordinary length in countless books and lectures. He worked in the Goethe Archive in Weimar in the 1880s, preparing a collection of Goethe's scientific writings, which seems to have had a large impact on his thinking. In 1899 he joined the Theosophical Society under Annie Besant, and became the "General Secretary" of the German branch, though his relations with the English-speaking theosophists grew frayed in the years before the Great War; he finally broke with Theosophists in 1913, and drew his followers into a new movement that he called Anthroposophy. A central cause of the rupture was the disputed status of Krishnamurti, the young Indian boy whom Besant and other leading members of

Theosophy considered the return of the Messiah. Theosophy sought to treat all religions as equally valid expressions of spiritual yearning, but for Steiner, the descent and Incarnation of Christ was a central experience in human history, unique and unrepeatable. This event allowed for the birth of individuality in the species and led to the development of what Anthroposophists call "the Consciousness Soul," the current state of human development that we are, they would say, trapped in. In "From East to West," from the essay collection *Romanticism Comes of Age*, Barfield remarks that "through the incarnation of Christ, in a human body, there was born into the world...what can only be called a legitimate *self*-consciousness. Steiner has described how in the Christ...the human Ego, the true Self, of man descended from the purely spiritual heights, where it had dwelt, to the earth. Had Christ not come to the earth, human beings would never have been able to utter the word 'I' at all."

But this independence, or separateness, comes with a penalty. Barfield describes this condition as "man's gradual emergence into sharp, narrow, and detached self-consciousness which he enjoys today (if 'enjoy' is the word)." The antithesis is a vastly older form of consciousness--now called "mentality"--associated with ancient Greece, pre-classical and dating back to the Homeric age, which involved a uniting of the inner and the outer. The older "Greek thinking," as Barfield calls it, is "more alive," in an active state of becoming, or "coming-into-being." Contemporary forms of thought are more logic-bound, and deal with "the become, the finished product" ("Thinking and Thought").

Hamlet is modern. He is the personification of the consciousness soul, Barfield claims in his essay on the character, suffering from "loneliness, isolation, materialism, loss of faith in a spiritual world, above all--uncertainty." In "The Philosophy of Coleridge," Barfield asserts that previous epochs identified "an older type of consciousness," which he calls "a clairvoyant

condition in which man and nature, or man and the spirit in nature, were still united..." And later, in "Of the Intellectual Soul," describing other soul states or conditions, he says that "sense perception" becomes "spiritual perception":

And this is precisely the dramatic choice which lies before Imagination, as the Romantics understood it. Either it must go boldly forward and turn itself into clairvoyance (for clairvoyance is a partial reunion with the macrocosm)--or it must fall back and become at best an idle fancy, at worse sensuality.

A core belief linking Steiner with Goethe is a refusal to accept the subject-object distinction, the assumption that there is an outer world independent of the self and from which the self looks on in isolation and over which he has no control. For Anthroposophy, the observer and the observed are united. Erich Heller, in *The Disinherited Mind*, describes the process of modern science as the accumulation or piling up of detail, of discreet facts about "natural processes," the doctrine that "any kind of knowledge, as long as it supplies us with correctly ascertained facts, is worth teaching and learning...We have become so democratic in our habits of thought that we are convinced that Truth is determined through a plebiscite of facts." Later in the same chapter, Heller identifies what he terms the "core" of Goethe's science and spiritual existence: "the faith in a perfect correspondence between the inner nature of man and the structure of external reality, between the soul and the world."

Anthroposophy is highly schematized and remarkably detailed, a characteristic that appeals to some and drives others into doubt and dismay--when they don't find themselves rejecting it outright. Just as Steiner identified three soul states--the consciousness, intellectual and sentient soul--he identified three different bodies: the physical, astral and etheric. The first is clear enough, the second refers to emotions and feelings, the third to physical transformations within the body which lead to its changing shape. The human person himself in turn has three

forms: body, soul and spirit. Overseeing the evolution of the species is a spiritual hierarchy, which, however, is often thwarted by the figure of Ahriman, a satanic figure who has been turning the species toward materialism--a central term of anathema in Anthroposophy that is seen as the fullest possible antithesis of the spiritual. But the spiritual hierarchy of angels needs our help, depend on our spiritual development to help move the race in the proper direction, and people on the earth are treated as co-creators of the planet, even the cosmos. "The kernel of anthroposophy," writes Barfield, "is the concept of man's self-consciousness as a process in time." A number of meditative exercises are recommended for the practitioner's inner development, along with a number of personal qualities, including evenhandedness, tranquility, respect, detachment and equanimity. Extremes of feeling and action are always shunned by Steiner.

Readers who have only heard of Theosophy and Anthroposophy are aware that both schools borrow liberally from eastern religions and posit reincarnation. Steiner makes an even greater claim, elaborating a scheme which involves successive incarnations of the earth itself, which once included the moon (which later detached itself to form an object with an orbit of its own). Steiner has discerned three previous incarnations of the planet, which he has called Old Sun, Old Saturn and Old Moon, and when its current "phase" has ended, the Earth will pass through three more; the human form changes as the Earth passes through these various stages. The earth in turn, in its current form, has experienced several different "epochs," one of which involved the legendary and vanished civilization of Atlantis.

These are the central terms of Anthroposophy. "Imagination" means the ability to see into invisible (spiritual) worlds, a condition understood as clairvoyance. "Materialism," forever identified as the arch-enemy, is the conception that, in Barfield's words, "matter is the only

reality, and spirit is an illusion, a nothing." Anthroposophy stands as a scientific method for something like personal salvation, a means of breaking through the world of appearances, making contact with a deeper reality and even renewing--I don't think it is an exaggeration--the spiritual life of the cosmos. In his essay on Coleridge and Goethe from *Romanticism Comes of Age*, Barfield identifies

the arch fallacy of their age and our own, the fallacy that mind is exclusively *subjective*, or, to put it more crudely, that the mind is something which is shut up in a sort of box called the brain, the fallacy that the mind of man is a passive onlooker at the processes and phenomena of nature, in the creation of which it neither takes nor has taken any part, the fallacy that there are many separate minds, but no such thing as Mind.

Bellow calls this in *Humboldt's Gift* "the fatal self-sufficiency of consciousness."

Bellow was attracted to criticism of this kind, and at some point in the early 1970s, began to attend a reading group that met at the home of Peter DeMay, apparently an engineer who lived near the intersection of Belmont Avenue and Sheridan Road on the North Side of Chicago. A small number of men--I am not aware that any women came--gathered weekly, and mostly listened to discussions between DeMay and Bellow about the difficult texts and subjects Steiner treated--karma, reincarnation, the interval between death and rebirth, techniques of meditation, the evolution of human consciousness and of the cosmos itself. The group would consider well-known Anthroposophical books, including *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, and Steiner's innumerable lectures. Quite possibly, essays by Owen Barfield entered these conversations as well, and by the summer of 1975, the year *Humboldt's Gift* was published, Bellow wrote the older man and appealed for a private meeting. "I'd be very grateful for the opportunity to talk to you about the Meggid and about Gabriel and Michael," he wrote, referring to figures that appear in Barfield's *Unancentral Voice*. "I'm afraid I don't understand the

account you give of the powers of darkness. I assure you I am very much in earnest." The two established contact during a trip Bellow took to London shortly thereafter, but as the letters make clear, the attachment, which lasted for about seven years, did not have a happy conclusion.

The letters that Bellow and Barfield exchanged actually came into public view first in 2006, when Simon Blaxland-de Lange published a biography with the straightforward title *Owen Barfield: Romanticism Comes of Age*. This volume, along with Blaxland-de Lange's commentary, has the great advantage over the more recently published *Letters* of providing a context for the conversation, of including at least some of Barfield's letters in reply, thereby letting readers know what subject Bellow is responding to when he writes. To Blaxland-de Lange's credit, the chapter he devotes to their relationship includes an unflattering note in which Barfield readily concedes that envy of Bellow's reputation provoked an unfriendly remark he offered either in a letter that has not been published or, more likely, in a conversation between the two during one of Bellow's trips to London. Bellow wrote a pained note dated August 1979, commenting that "I am troubled by your judgment of the books I have written. I don't ask you to like what you obviously can't help disliking, but I can't really accept your dismissal of so much investment of soul. It may have come out badly but none of it was ever false." Soon thereafter, according to Blaxland-de Lange, Barfield wrote back in apology and admits: "I told you quite truly that I could not help envying your success. Possibly that feeling was a more serious factor in my unconscious than the passing ripple of it that appeared in my conscious mind...."

In the same letter, Barfield offers in self-defense, not entirely aware, perhaps, of how unflattering the concessions are. "If what I read had been sent to me in MS or otherwise by a relatively unknown author to whom I owed something and who might conceivably get some help out of me, I should (a) have taken a lot more trouble in reading and reflecting on it and (b) have

worded whatever I had to say with much greater care." The implication, of course--also stimulated by envy?--is that Bellow's published work did not justify close and attentive reading.

"Your letter," returned Bellow, after a delay of several months, in a letter dated November 1979, "Moved me by its warmth, kindness and candor....Four or five years of reading Steiner have altered me considerably. Some kind of metamorphosis is going on." The correspondence then seems to have come to a halt entirely. It was resumed three years later, after Barfield made his disapproval of Bellow official, so to speak, by publishing a harsh review of *The Dean's December* in the Spring 1983 issue of *Towards*, the Anthroposophical quarterly edited by Clifford Monks. In the summer of 1982, several months before the review was published, Monks sent Bellow a copy of it, suggesting that he respond in print to the criticism. Bellow declined the offer, and in a longish note to Barfield, the last he wrote, defends the novel, faults him for having misunderstood it, and concludes, rather graciously, that "I'm quite sure that I haven't changed your mind about anything. I wasn't really trying. I esteem you just as you are." And at that point the exchange of letters comes to an apparently definitive end.

What is it exactly that Bellow--to drop into the vernacular--"got out" of Anthroposophy? Other than the generalization cited above, the letters offer some clues. The doctrines cannot be reconciled with any of the western religions, certainly not with Bellow's own, and around the turn of the century, Steiner's books were placed on the Vatican's Index *Librorum Prohibitorum* (Forbidden Books). Of course, Steiner did not himself consider Anthroposophy a religion. In his words, so often repeated by his interpreters and disciples, he was a scientist of the invisible, an investigator of the spiritual world, the one that transcends the visible one." That the suggested Christianity of Anthroposophy may have troubled Bellow is indicated in a passage in *Humboldt's Gift*. While meditating, Charlie Citrine, the narrator, turns

his mind toward a childhood image of a lamppost battered by wind and snow in a Chicago winter. "Steiner recommended the contemplation of a cross wreathed with roses," Charlie says to the reader, "but for reasons of perhaps Jewish origin I preferred a lamppost."

"Steiner sometimes makes matters easier, sometimes much harder," Bellow tells Barfield in a letter of February 1977. "This is not because of the new perspective he gives me; in some ways I'm drawn to him because he confirms that a perspective, the rudiments of which I always had, contained the truth." I think Bellow believed in some form of immortality that allows one to transcend biological termination. The trance-like vision Victor Wulpy has in "What Kind of Day Did You Have," when he conceives of generations of his family, long dead but also somehow "alive"--this, Bellow once said, reflects his own experience. This might include reincarnation, though remarks from a 1995 interview at Skidmore College remain open to interpretation:

There's one benefit to pushing eighty, and that is that you begin to understand what makes you tick--in some respects, anyway. Of course, you'll never die whispering "Eureka! I have it at last." From a very early age I was aware that the world was a strange place, and that I might possibly have waited thousands of years to enter it. Death would be my definitive exit from it. There's an odd glory about it that's too elusive to express, which has some metaphysical significance, although you don't know what that metaphysical significance is. And you never did know. All you know is that as you do grow older and more sophisticated, you lose more and more of this original sense.

How are we to understand the meaning of "definitive exit"? Is this an echo of Plato and Wordsworth, implying reincarnation? Or annihilation *tout simple*? Or is the soul passing into another state? In a letter to Barfield from June 1975, early in their attachment, Bellow laments the conflict between imagination and science, using the word (imagination) in a more Anthroposophical sense. "But it wasn't until I read your book on Romanticism that I began to understand something about the defeat of imaginative knowledge in modern times," Bellow says. "I don't want to labor a point which you yourself have brought to my attention. I only want to

communicate something in my own experience that will explain the importance of your books to me." Scattered but crucial sentences appear in the 1990 short story, "Something to Remember Me By"; a few brief but important references can be found in *More Die of Heartbreak*, the 1987 novel; and of course it receives extensive treatment in *Humboldt's Gift*, published in 1976. This last novel introduced readers and critics to Bellow's interest in Anthroposophy, and although the enthusiasm and the occasional doubt are attributed to the novel's narrator, Charlie Citrine, there is evidence that the subject had become an important part of the author's life. In *More Die of Heartbreak*, Bellow turns to what he calls "the disturbed sexuality of the present age," a subject which received attention in the more comical *Humboldt's Gift*. In *Heartbreak*, Kenneth Trachtenberg, the young narrator of the novel, remembers his early years when he lived with his parents in Paris, when they had engaged a Russian emigre named Yermelov to serve as a language tutor for their son. Anthroposophy had a following in Russia by the turn of the twentieth century, and one of its better-known proponents was the novelist Andrei Biely, who wrote *Petersburg*, a novel set in the Russian capitol that is often mentioned in *Heartbreak*. (No more than a coincidence, I am sure, but Biely means "white" in Russian, and is related to what Bellow's name would have sounded like in the original Russian, which is something like *byelo*. The family emigrated from Petersburg to Canada in 1913.) Yermelov "told me," says Kenneth, "that each of us had his angel, a being charged with preparing us for a higher evolution of the spirit." He explains:

At present we were essentially alone, first in the sense that recognition of angels was forbidden us by the prevailing worldview, and secondly in our shadowy realization of others and consequently of our own existence....We must assist the angels by making the necessary preparations. Here the difficulty is that waking consciousness is nowadays very meager. The noise of the world is so terrible that we can endure it by being coated with sleep. We can give the angels little help from within when they try to instill warmth into us--the warmth of love. And

the angels are also fallible. They were human themselves once; that's why they are subject to confusion. And, said Yermelov, they goof. Our waking consciousness louses up their efforts, and since they have orders to transmit their impulse at all costs, they send it when we're sleeping. What happens then is terrible. Denied access to the soul, the angels work directly on the sleeping body. In the physical body this angelic love is corrupted into human carnality. Such is the source of all the disturbed sexuality of the present age.

Bellow distances himself from this argument by omitting any explicit reference to Anthroposophy and attributing the explanation to a minor character in the novel. The idea has a distinct Anthroposophical ring, and Blaxland-de Lange traces it to an October 1918 lecture Steiner gave in Zurich, "The Work of the Angels in Man's Astral Body." Anthroposophy also forms a recurring presence in the 1990 story "Something to Remember Me By," when the elderly narrator, looking back on his Depression-era boyhood in Chicago, recalls a mysterious, unnamed book he had been reading. Tattered, missing its spine and also the cover boards, the text is ultimately lost by the narrator when his possessions are stolen. Quotations from the volume flicker throughout the story, and make a final appearance at its very end. "The anonymous pages" of the missing book, says the narrator, "interpret" the dangerous, spiraling whirlpool that his life on this winter afternoon had become:

They told me that the truth of the universe was inscribed into our very bones. That the human skeleton was itself a hieroglyph. That everything we had ever known on earth was shown to us in the first days after death. That our experience of the world was desired by the cosmos, and needed by it for its own renewal.

An undated introduction to a collection of Steiner essays on science, *The Boundaries of Natural Science*, produced in the early 1980s, offers what I believe is Bellow's only nonfiction contribution to the subject. He begins the piece with a reference to a late-nineteenth century student of anatomy and physiology, Du Bois Reymond, who had asked "how consciousness arises out of material processes. What is the source of the consciousness with which we examine

the outer world?" Bellow says that Du Bois Reymond replies that we shall never know. He then reaffirms Steiner's claims, in the face of many detractors, that his method is indeed scientific.

"The scientific examination of the external world," writes Bellow, "awakens consciousness to clear concepts and it by means of clear conceptual thinking that we become fully human.

Spiritual development requires a full understanding of pure thought, and pure thought is devoid of sensory impressions." Bellow goes on to introduce the example of Goethe, unavoidable in these discussions, and says that both he and Steiner refused to stop at the "boundaries of the material world." Super-sensible consciousness is acquired "by finding the path that leads us into Imagination." Something more is required to break free of the limits of science. In a letter of July 1975 to Barfield, Bellow writes that all science has achieved is "to make the phenomena technically (mathematically) inaccessible, leaving us with nothing but ignorance and despair."

But is it really science? How much of this exactly is even a sympathetic reader supposed to believe? These remain the predictable questions for students of Anthroposophy. Bellow himself seems only half-persuaded and expresses doubts about the seer and his teacher, Dr. Scheldt, the stand-in for Peter DeMay throughout *Humboldt's Gift*. It is possible that Bellow chose to keep these references indirect in order to avoid the accusation of having become an unofficial proselyte for Steiner. He was a novelist first, of course, and never more (I believe he would claim) than a student of Anthroposophy. Gary Lachman, who took sufficient interest in Steiner to write a biography, describes the experience of reading pages of Steiner that seems to open fresh worlds of thought. "Yet I could turn to another lecture," adds Lachman, "and there Steiner would tell me about reading to the dead or about the work of Buddha on Mars, and my response would be either patient acceptance, in which I gave him the benefit of the doubt or a

kind of 'Tilt' sign would light up somewhere in my brain....How could he, or anyone, possibly *know* these things?"

Steiner's detractors point with satisfaction to Kafka's experience of meeting the visionary in Prague in the spring of 1911, when he came to address his Prague circle of disciples and readers. In his biography of Kafka, Ernst Pawel cites a long, sharply ironic description of the conference in the writer's journal. He includes Kafka's reference to a personal consultation with Steiner in which he described his insomnia, tormented relations with his father, the difficulty of reconciling his writing interests with his work for the insurance company, and other matters. Steiner listened very attentively, Kafka notes, but at the same time worked a handkerchief emphatically in his nostrils to clear away the effects of a cold. Charlie Citrine, who has read the diaries, confesses that "Kafka's description of Steiner upset me." In his letter to Barfield from February 1977, part of which I have already cited, Bellow concedes that, regarding the esoteric claims, "I keep my doubts and questions behind a turnstile and admit them one at a time, but the queue is long and sometimes life is disorderly."

In "The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man," an essay from 1928, C.G. Jung has even sharper things to say about Steiner and the movement he founded around the turn of the century. Steiner started with Theosophy, broke from its ranks in a doctrinal dispute, and began a new movement he called Anthroposophy. Jung calls them both "Gnosticism in Hindu dress....The passionate interest in these movements undoubtedly arises from the psychic energy which can no longer be invested in obsolete religious form." Efforts by Steiner and others to identify Anthroposophy as "spiritual science," says Jung, "changes nothing." "These attempts at concealment simply show that religion has grown suspect....The fact that all movements I have mentioned give themselves a scientific veneer is not just a grotesque caricature or a masquerade,

but a positive sign that they are actually pursuing 'science,' i.e., *knowledge*, instead of *faith*, which is the essence of the Western forms of religion." In other words, the spreading success of the scientific revolution is generating doubt about meaning and value that Nietzsche explored at the same time Steiner was making his first steps towards his "science of the invisible world."

Bellow probably wrestled with his doubts until the end. It is possible that he chose to keep these references indirect, in order to avoid the accusation of having become an unofficial proselyte for Steiner. He was a novelist first, of course, and would claim to be nothing more than a student of Anthroposophy. Unless more documentary evidence becomes public, his final word on the subject comes in a letter from August 1979 that he penned for his boyhood friend Hymen Slate, with whom he discussed such matters.

We are the survivors of a band of boys who were putting something of their own together in cultureless Chicago forty years ago. Now we drink tea together on a Sunday afternoon, and I feel the touch again. It would be merely sentimental if we weren't really *talking*. As you yourself have observed, we *talk*, the subjects are real. Even when you send an amusing note it has to do with matter and consciousness--a certain arrangement of matter resulting in consciousness. And then I say, yes, but does the arrangement arrange itself by the hit-or-miss method of what the fellows like to call "emergent evolution," or is it a supervised arrangement directed by some power or spirit which uses the physical brain as its instrument? You know which side I favor.

David Cohen © April 2011