

# Author's Foreword

The readers of the works of Sergei Prokofieff fall into three categories. The first (and most numerous) is convinced that his writings accelerate the process of acquiring knowledge in Anthroposophy and, thanks to a more effective method, deepen one's understanding more than does the reading of Rudolf Steiner's own works. In addition they view Prokofieff as being surrounded by a certain aura of spiritual presence.

A second, less enthusiastic, group (numerically smaller) analyzes the texts of Prokofieff, compares his writings with those of Rudolf Steiner, to whose perception reference is continually made.

And finally a third (likewise small) category analyzes in his works the inner structure, the logic, the style, the manner of presentation, the attitude adopted by the author, etc.

In the last two cases the Student makes surprising, nay, shattering discoveries, as a result of which he feels the urge to communicate these discoveries to the readers of the first group and also to those who are still beginners in the study of Prokofieff's works. This was the initial reason why the author decided to write this book.

A second reason was the passage in Herbert Wimbauer's book „The Case of Prokofieff“ (1995), in which Wimbauer speaks in connection with Prokofieff of the danger that threatens, from the East, the mission of Middle Europe (Ch. 8), and where he characterizes Prokofieff as, above all, a representative of „this Eastern, Russian Theosophical mysticism“ (p. 173).

Without wishing to embark on a discussion of fundamentals with Herr Wimbauer, we would like to affirm that in this particular case neither the East nor Russia itself is to blame, as the Prokofieff phenomenon with its significance as „science“ and for the „Society“ is a pure product of the West and only of the West. It is there that he was cherished and – with every possible means – supported. His „fame“ was – to our great misfortune – re-imported into Russia. This fact cannot be challenged.

Regarding the first motive, the author would like here to raise a central question which she hopes the reader will not overhastily dismiss as a paradox. If that were to happen, then a book of this kind would not need to be written. Nonetheless the reader will be able to observe quite frequently that many obvious and self-evident facts are not regarded as such within Anthroposophical circles.

Our question is the following: In what we call Anthroposophical „secondary literature“ do the sense and content of a work have central significance, or are these only secondary, the essential factors having to be sought elsewhere?

If the latter were to be so, then we would have to confess that in this case we have nothing of real importance to say – indeed, we would feel disinclined to start such an investigation at all. But we are convinced that in the books that are written in the name of Anthroposophy, above all the study of the content is fundamental. If, however, one wishes to form a judgment regarding the content, then the criteria for this must be drawn from the traditional scientific quest for knowledge. And here we have arrived at the point where we would like to make known to the reader our fundamental point of departure, the scientific procedure, with the help of which we wish to analyze the work of Prokofieff.

The path of development of Anthroposophy is usually said to have begun in the year 1902, when the German Section of the Theosophical Society was founded. However, one needs to bear in mind that the foundation for the entire subsequent development of Anthroposophy was laid by Rudolf Steiner in his writings on the theory of knowledge, such as: „Outline of a Theory of Knowledge of the Goethean World-Conception“ (1886), „Truth and Science“ (1892), „Philosophy of Freedom“ (1893), etc.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that, at the time when he was writing these works, Rudolf Steiner had supersensible experience of his own. Before his inner eye the spiritual world stood as a reality that was raised above all doubt. And in spite of this he began his scientific activity not with a description of his occult experiences, but turns his attention to the universal human question of his epoch – that concerning the crisis of knowledge. The essential nature of this crisis – which continues into our own time – consists in the fact that the human powers of cognition, as they have developed in the last few centuries, prove to be unable to answer the question pertaining to the realm of soul and spirit. The consequence of this was that all aspects relating to soul and spirit existence were, on the ground that they were unknowable, consigned to the sphere of religion. The individual thinking consciousness of man was ever more restricted to narrow, purely material interest, leading

finally to the complete denial of spiritual reality, which in its turn has resulted in the universal triumph of the materialistic world-view.

For this reason Rudolf Steiner began with a theme that is entirely lacking in interest to popular mysticism – namely, with an investigation of the laws of cognition, in the hope of opening up a possibility of indicating means whereby they can be extended, thus enabling the boundaries of the sense-perceptible world to be crossed. Not until this task had been fulfilled in its most essential elements, did Rudolf Steiner join the Theosophical Society and set up its German Section. The conditions for this step lay in the fact that the Theosophical Society had to fulfil the same task as Rudolf Steiner's theory of knowledge, and this is not surprising, for in both undertakings one and the same spiritual impulse was at work, the same initiators stood. This common task was to overcome the dichotomy between the spiritual world and the consciousness of the civilized man of today, which is sinking ever deeper into materialism.

In the real cultural-historical process, however, things developed in such a way that all that stood at the beginning of the Theosophical activity was taken up by the contemporary mode of thought as something external. This was the Theo-Sophia, the primordial divine wisdom, which had been entrusted at the beginning of Earth-evolution to the leading representatives of the human race, which was guarded in the occult schools, the Mystery centres, and was transmitted by the pupils from one generation to the next. The founder of the Theosophical Society, H. P. Blavatsky, undertook the task of spreading and popularizing this occult knowledge.

In contrast to this, in Anthroposophy the starting-point was taken in what every human being can recognize and observe within himself. For Anthroposophy, from the very beginning, the Anthropos, the human being, stood in the focus of attention – first and foremost the man of the present day; and thereafter the Sophia, that wisdom which he can attain in the process of his becoming an 'I'. In this way, from the moment of its emergence, Anthroposophy is membered organically into the living stream of the general development of mankind. It begins at that point where the human being of today seeks a path into the spiritual world – with respect both to his inner soul-spiritual constitution and to the world around him.

For a while Anthroposophy developed in connection with the Theosophical movement. Later, as a result of Rudolf Steiner's withdrawal from the Theosophical Society, the Anthroposophical movement broke away and became independent; at the same time it represented a direct continuation of the Theosophical Society. But we would again stress that Anthroposophy began, not with the Theosophy of Blavatsky, but with the theory of knowledge of Rudolf Steiner which in its turn has deep roots in European Christian esotericism.

What we have just said has significance not merely as history, but rather with regard to basic principles. Were one to sever Anthroposophy from its actual foundation – the writings of Rudolf Steiner on the theory of knowledge – one would risk losing sight of that most important aspect which distinguishes it from other spiritual streams of the past and present, namely the special method of cognition which is peculiar to it alone. Thanks to this the human being has the possibility of knowing the spiritual world just as reliably and objectively as is the case in the physical world with the methods of natural science. When stressing the possibility of an exact knowledge of the spiritual, Rudolf Steiner characterized Anthroposophy also as spiritual science or science of the spirit.

Of course there is also a fundamental difference between the spiritually and the materially-oriented science, which lies not so much in the object as in the method. The difference becomes particularly noticeable in our time, when scientists are forced, under the pressure of evidence, to acknowledge the existence of the spiritual and to try to approach it with methodical research; for this purpose special branches of science, such as parapsychology, extra-sensory research, have been developed. As science enlarges its field of research and tries to advance into the world of the invisible it follows the „extensive“ path through the invention of new technical means of observation which can be employed as a kind of extension of the human sense-organs, but possess an enhanced reliability. Through the technology of the electronic calculators (computer technology) single functions of human thinking can be carried out more effectively than is possible to the human being. In this way science perfects both sides of human cognition: perception and also thinking. However, this is done in an entirely external way, without affecting the human cognitive capacity itself. It merely improves the technical procedures. Materialistic science is therefore condemned, despite its sometimes fantastic achievements, to gather knowledge solely within the limits of the physical plane; the kaleidoscope of so-called paranormal phenomena so far recorded also belongs in this sphere.

Anthroposophy or spiritual science follows a different path. Of almost central importance for it is the development of the cognitive faculty of the human being himself as a subject and object of science. Whereas to materialistic science it is a matter of indifference what inner path of development a scientist is pursuing up to the moment when a scientific discovery is made, this is quite different in spiritual science. The path of cognition here is, at the same time, the spiritual path of development of the researcher. Rudolf Steiner said that spiritual science „strives ... through the strictly-controlled development of purely psychical perception, to obtain objective, exact results with respect to the supersensible world ... [and] recognizes the validity of only those results which are won through a psychical perception in which the soul-spiritual organization is surveyed as clearly and exactly as a mathematical problem. Thus for the [spiritual researcher] ... the scientific method is first applied to the preparation that lies within his spirit-organs” (GA 25, p. 7-8).

The Anthroposophical method of research into the spiritual world comprises the indications given by Rudolf Steiner concerning the esoteric development of the pupil, and is founded wholly on the epistemological principles of his philosophy, in which the nature of human cognition as such is revealed. It consists in the uniting of the percept with the corresponding concept by means of thinking, an activity of the ‘I’ which is given in experience. In the course of esoteric schooling the human being develops within himself new, spiritual organs of perception, whereby the range of his perceptions reaches beyond the boundaries of sense experience. From the intellectual ability to link together concepts and make logical inferences, thinking rises to a direct beholding of the idea and now begins, in the steadily expanding sphere, to include concepts which can grasp the essence of what is beheld spiritually. Though percept and thinking may qualitatively change, the cognitional character itself permits of no alteration. As the central point of the cognitive process there always remains the self-conscious ‘I’, in which the percepts – whether they be sensible or supersensible – enter into a union with the concepts that correspond to their essential being.

Thus objective knowledge in the spiritual world has its foundation in the cognitive faculty developed by the human being in the physical world. It is therefore understandable that so stringent demands are made, with respect to his thinking and his general state of psychical health, of the person who wishes to tread the Anthroposophical path of knowledge. And these demands must be met before the student begins the esoteric exercises which lead to the unfolding of the organs of supersensible perception. Thus we see clearly now how misguided is the view of those who believe it is possible to carry through serious, independent, spiritual-scientific research without the capacity of logical, consequential thinking that remains true to reality, and of objective knowledge in the physical world, but based only on some other kind of soul-spiritual disposition. Hence practical training in the power of thought that is built upon reality is „important, especially for those who are working on the basis of Anthroposophy“, Rudolf Steiner stresses (18.1.1909, GA 108).

The Anthroposophical path of training is structured from its very first steps in such a way that the student who wishes to follow it can obtain reliable and objective knowledge of the spiritual world. On the Anthroposophical path occult experience as such is not an end in itself, and the satisfaction of curiosity and the leaning of individual personalities towards mystical experiences and irregular states of consciousness do not belong to the tasks of Anthroposophy. These tasks stand in connection to the objective knowledge of the spiritual world, and supersensible experience is merely one of the preconditions for this knowledge. The question in what way this experience is attained is of crucial importance in this connection.

A thorough study, a grasp of and strict adherence to all the conditions of the Anthroposophical method of cognition, is thus the prime task (not a matter of personal taste), and is the basic condition to be met if Anthroposophy is to be able to fulfil its mission in the world. Its method was elaborated by Rudolf Steiner in exact correspondence to its task. In Anthroposophy the cognitive process itself becomes a Mystery bearing universal human significance; through it the way is paved for the upward development of human culture as a whole, and this path must be laid correctly and all the laws of the evolution of the World and Man must be observed.

The study of spiritual scientific content on the basis of the cognitive faculty that is the possession of the human being in his ordinary consciousness is the starting-point of the Anthroposophical path and the first stage of esoteric practice. The knowledge that is acquired through thinking, prior to supersensible experience, concerning the beings and lawful structure of the spiritual world, is an absolute precondition for an entry into that world that is rightful and without danger for the human being; while errors on the path of occult development, arising from insufficient or incorrect knowledge, can have the most far-reaching consequence for his destiny, not only with

regard to the psychic health of the human being in his present incarnation, but for his entire future destiny. Therefore it is especially important to avoid all distortion of Anthroposophical knowledge. Anyone in the Anthroposophical movement who lays claim to the status of an independent researcher in the spirit-realm, and passes on to other people the spiritual knowledge he has acquired, must first state clearly what method of spiritual research has been applied.

Just as in any other science, not everything can become content of spiritual science without first being tested. Spiritual-scientific research must, in order to be recognized as such, meet certain requirements with respect to method and content. Thus there can be neither internal contradictions nor anything contradicting the communications of Rudolf Steiner or generally accepted and indisputable facts in the outer world; to satisfy this demand alone would substantially reduce the amount of Anthroposophical secondary literature, with its tendency to multiply beyond all proportions, and heads would thereby be less overloaded with all kinds of false and meaningless conceptions. A body (dedicated to this task) would in no way place a limit on individual freedom, any more than this is the case with the activity of scientific panels and adjudication committees. The purpose of such institutions is to protect the branches of science for which they are responsible from false conceptions, distortions, malpractice, wrongful accusations etc., and to guard the scientific associations concerned against the activity of dilettantes and charlatans.

Finally, one must recognize how problematic it is that in the Anthroposophical Society, where people are seeking for the truth in not only practical, but also spiritual matters, the question concerning the credibility of different spiritual contents has, to this day, scarcely ever been asked!

When a false or non-proven assertion appears in the scientific press, this is taken as a signal for the opening of a scientific debate, which continues until the matter is resolved, even if further research has to be carried out. It is quite a different situation in the Anthroposophical media. There one can write whatever one likes, provided no interests are put at risk and the familiar terminology is used. Any attempt to criticize such printed assertions is condemned out of a false ethical principle: tolerance towards a person is confused with tolerance of his mistakes. The ideal of brotherly love comes to mean little more than the maintaining of „diplomatic relations“ with one’s neighbour, while remaining indifferent to his spiritual destiny.

This situation is, in our opinion, by no means a sign of irresponsibility – this is only secondary – but is rather the expression of a materialism that is deeply rooted in the unconscious, inclining one to experience inter-personal relations in the present as absolutely real, while the working of the counter-forces which stand behind every lie is ignored or is at best passed off as an abstract theory, about which one can hold clever discussions, but which, as soon as one returns to the reality of life, will be forgotten. „An incorrect result of research in the spiritual world is a living being. It is there; it must be resisted, it must first be eradicated“ (22.10.1915, GA 254).

Variiegated hosts of beings of this kind threaten to engulf the Anthroposophical movement if the contents of books and lectures of the Anthroposophists active today continue to be received in so uncritical a way. Spiritual science risks being overrun by phantasms, personal opinions, subjective experiences and other undigested contents of the conscious and unconscious mind of its present-day „adepts“, and thereby losing its scientific character. The 1997 „Easter Conference“ in Berlin was a clear illustration of this.

Those people who harbour consciously or unconsciously the desire for an infallible spiritual teacher, those who are lacking strength in their ‘I’ and who do not have the courage to stand on their own feet; those who are waiting for an opportunity to place the responsibility for their own development on another’s shoulders – all these create an atmosphere of devotion and blind trust which surrounds those personalities in the Anthroposophical Society who know how to achieve celebrity and step into the limelight.

The content of this book will demonstrate that these words of criticism addressed to the Anthroposophical Society are not empty and without foundation. We will concern ourselves with a single example only, but one which is weighty and revealing enough to justify what we have said above, and to prompt the members of the Anthroposophical Society to reflect seriously upon the following question: Do they wish to turn their attention to some other content? If the latter is the case, then the Society should be given a different name and the portraits hanging on their walls should be exchanged for others. But if the members wish to remain faithful to Anthroposophy and fulfil their task, then it would now be time to lay aside pseudo-moral prejudices, spiritual passivity and suggestibility, and sentimental impressionability of soul, and ask oneself the serious question: What is the meaning of „truth“ from the spiritual-scientific standpoint, and how can it be attained, developed,

safeguarded for ourselves and future generations, for at the present time an extremely vigorous and subversive campaign against it is taking place?

In this book we are attempting a critical exploration, minimal in length, (an extensive one would require too many years of work and fill shelves of thick volumes) of the idea-world of Prokofieff – a man whose literary creations have already made him into a kind of Anthroposophical classic, whose lectures attract numerous listeners throughout the world, and whose reputation in certain circles is such that many people see in him the „Guru“ and condemn any criticism of him as sacrilege. Finally, his activity determines also to a significant degree the destiny of Anthroposophy in Russia.

We will try to understand what methods he applies in his research, what is the internal logic of his views, and how far these correspond to the facts known to us. We will, as far as is possible, avoid judgments of a personal nature, and try to compare what he presents as spiritual-scientific content with that which is known to us from the communications of Rudolf Steiner. In our study we will only make use of the power of ordinary logic, the hallmark of a healthy human faculty of judgment. We find our standpoint confirmed and corroborated in the following words of Rudolf Steiner: „The healthy human understanding, if it is not misled by erroneous natural or social ideas of today, can judge for itself whether there is truth in what someone speaks. Someone is speaking about spiritual worlds; one only has to take everything together: the way of speaking, the seriousness with which things are considered, the logic that is developed, and so on – then one will be able to judge whether what is brought as knowledge of the spiritual world is charlatanism, or whether it has a foundation. This anyone can decide“ (14.12.1919, GA 194).

Our wish is that this work may serve the reader as a stimulus to inner activity, to an independent search for truth and vigilance of thought, to alertness of consciousness and to a further development and strengthening of the sense for truth; that it may also help justice to prevail – that false authorities may be thrown down from their pedestal. We cherish the hope that we may come to a real mutual understanding and productive co-operation with those, in East and in West, who seek with the help of Spiritual Science to make a healing contribution to human development.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Translator's Note:* In the following the author I. Gordienko quotes from the original Russian text of a number of published works of Prokofieff:

- I Rudolf Steiner and the Founding of the New Mysteries
- II The Cycle of the Year as a Path of Initiation ...
- III The Twelve Holy Nights ...
- IV The Spiritual Origins of Eastern Europe ...
- V The Occult Significance of Forgiveness
- VI The Karma Research of Rudolf Steiner and the Tasks of the Anthroposophical Society
- VII The Cycle of the Year and the Seven Liberal Arts
- VIII The Spiritual Tasks of Middle and Eastern Europe
- IX The Case of Tomberg

We refer to them by means of the Roman numerals. Words, phrases etc. contained in the Russian, that were omitted in the German translations [together with their page numbers in the original text], are here printed in square brackets [...]. Where there is no indication to the contrary, all that is contained in (round) brackets within the quotations is a comment by Irina Gordienko.