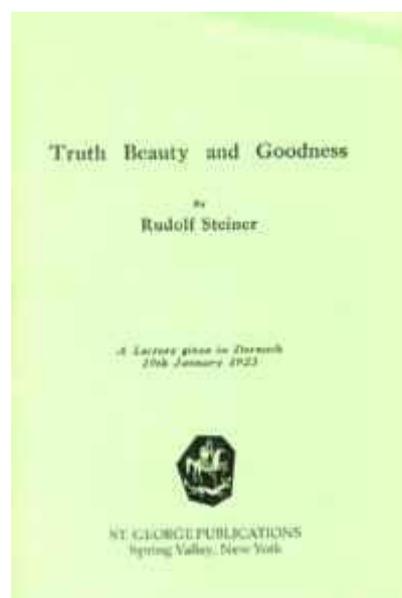


# Truth Beauty and Goodness

A lecture by  
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THE True, the Beautiful, the Good — through all the ages of man's conscious evolution these words have expressed three great ideals: ideals which have instinctively been recognized as representing the sublime nature and lofty goal of all human endeavour. In epochs earlier than our own there was a deeper knowledge of man's being and his connection with the universe, when Truth, Beauty and Goodness had more concrete reality than they have in our age of abstraction. Anthroposophy, or Spiritual Science, is able once again to indicate the concrete reality of such ideals, although in so doing it does not always meet with the approval of the times. For in our age men love to be vague and nebulous whenever it is a question of getting beyond the facts of everyday life.

Let us try to understand how Truth, Beauty and Goodness are related, as concrete realities, to the being of man.

As the human being stands before us we see, in the first place, his physical body — nowadays the object of purely external observation. How the single organs, the form and functions of the body have been built up in pre-earthly existence — of this people are wholly unaware. In his pre-earthly existence man lives in a world of pure Spirit, where, in communion with higher Beings, he is engaged in building up the spiritual prototype, the spirit-form of his physical body. The physical body here on earth is but an after-copy of the spirit-germ that is elaborated, in a certain sense, by man himself in pre-earthly existence.

In earthly life the human being is conscious of his physical body, but does not know what this implies. We speak of Truth, little realizing that a feeling for truth is connected with our consciousness of the physical body. When man is confronted by a simple fact, he may either form an idea that harmonizes strictly with it and thus is true, or, from inaccuracy, laziness or positive aversion to truth, he may evolve an idea that does not coincide with the fact. When he thinks the truth, he is in harmony with the feeling he has of his physical body, nay also with his sense of the connection between this physical body and pre-earthly existence. If out of laziness or untruthfulness he forms an idea that is not in accordance with the fact, it is as if he cut the thread that binds him to pre-earthly existence. Untruth severs this thread. In pre-earthly existence a delicate spiritual woof is spun, and this is concentrated into an after-copy — the physical body. Many threads connect this physical body with pre-earthly existence, and they are severed by untruthfulness. The purely intellectual consciousness that is a characteristic quality in the early stages of the epoch of the

Spiritual Soul (see [Note 1](#)) does not realize that such a severance takes place. And that is why man is subject to so many illusions as to his connection with cosmic existence.

For the most part to-day, man regards his bodily health from a purely physical point of view. But when, through untruthfulness, he severs the threads that bind him with pre-earthly existence, this works right down into his physical body, and especially into the constitution of the nervous system. The feeling he has of his physical body gives him his “spiritual sense of being” in the universe. And this spiritual sense of being depends upon maintenance of the threads proceeding from the physical body to pre-earthly existence. If they break, man must create a substitute for his healthy sense of being — and he does so, unconsciously. He is then led, unconsciously, to ascribe to himself a sense of being “out of the common.” But even here he has fallen into an inner uncertainty that makes itself felt even in the physical body. For this purely spiritual sense of being that we find existing with greater and greater intensity the farther we go back in history — is it strongly present in man to-day?

How often it is the case that a man would like to be a person of note not by virtue of his own spiritual life, but by virtue of some profession or title. He likes to have some such title as “Secretary” or “Notary,” and then imagines he is of importance when convention thus describes him. The essential thing, however, is that he shall be able to realize his existence inwardly, apart from all externalities.

What is it that can strengthen man in this sense of being? In earthly existence we live in a world that is but a copy of true reality. Indeed, we only understand this physical world aright when we realize it to be this copy of reality. It behooves us, however, to feel the true reality within us; we must be aware of our connection with the spiritual world. And this is only possible if the bond that links us with pre-earthly existence remains intact.

This bond is strengthened by a love of truth and Integrity. Nothing establishes man's true and original sense of existence so firmly as a feeling for truth and truthfulness. To feel himself in duty bound first to “prove all things” he utters, to set due restraint on all his words — this helps to consolidate the sense of existence that is worthy of his being. To be aware of the spirit within the physical body — with this, indeed, the sense of being is connected. There is, in effect, an intimate kinship between the physical body and this ideal of Truth.

We acquire the etheric body (or body of “formative forces”) only a short time before the descent from pre-earthly to earthly existence. We draw the forces of the etheric world together, as it were, to build up our own etheric body. Now in earlier epochs of evolution man had a better understanding of the etheric body than he has to-day. Indeed, instead of feeling the reality of the etheric body, he is nowadays apt to scoff at the very idea.

The sense of the reality of the etheric body is strengthened by the experience of Beauty. When truth and truthfulness enter the realm of real experience, we are, in a sense, living rightly in the physical body. A highly developed sense of beauty gives us a right relation to the etheric body of formative forces. Whereas Truth is connected with the physical body, Beauty is connected with the etheric body.

This will become clear if we think of the significance of beauty as manifested in art. If we have before us a human being of flesh and blood, we know that he is one among many. Yet the one has no meaning without the many who live around him. Slender indeed are the roots that bind man to physical existence, without the others around him.

If we try either through sculpture, painting, or drama — indeed, through any art — to portray a human being, we endeavour to create a figure that is sufficient and complete in itself — one that contains a whole world, just as man contains the whole universe within himself in his etheric body. For he draws together the etheric forces from the whole universe to mould his etheric body within earthly existence.

An intense feeling for beauty — as it was then conceived — existed in earlier ages. Nothing of the same kind is present in modern civilization, Man cannot be truly man if he has no sense of beauty. It is so, indeed; for to possess a sense of beauty is to acknowledge the reality of the etheric body. To have no sense of beauty is to disregard, to disown, the etheric body.

Of this modern man is all unconscious. When the Greek approached his temple, or beheld within the temple the statue of the god, he was conscious of an inner, glowing warmth, of a kind of inner sunlight. It was as though forces streamed into his being and into his different organs. Gazing at the statue of the god, his whole heart cried out: “Never do I feel the peripheral structure of my hands and fingers so vividly as when this statue stands there before me! Never have I such an inner sense of the arch of my brow as in the temple!” Inwardly warmed and irradiated — god-inspired — thus did the Greek feel in the presence of beauty. And this was nothing else but an experience in the etheric body.

In the presence of ugliness the Greek's feeling was quite different from that of modern man. The latter at most expresses his very abstract feelings in regard to ugliness by his features—he makes a grimace! Ugliness cast a chill through the whole body of the Greek, affecting even the very pores of his skin. In ancient times men were vividly aware of the reality of the etheric body, and in the course of evolution a part of human nature has, indeed, been lost. All these things of which I have been speaking — and which were actual experiences in earlier times — remain unconscious in man to-day, for with his rationalistic intellect and love of abstraction he tends to view everything from the head — the organ belonging to these qualities.

Enthusiasm for truth and truthfulness can kindle in man — in the unconscious depths of his soul at any rate — a feeling for pre-earthly existence. An epoch of civilization in which this feeling is absent can possess no real sense of truth and truthfulness. But when this sense is highly developed, it binds man strongly to the pre-earthly past, and his more immediate experience of the earthly present must needs cause a certain sadness to arise within him. It is a sadness that can only find consolation if the sense of beauty is awakened in the soul. Beauty gives us joy once more, even in the presence of a sadness that must always accompany great enthusiasm for truth. In a delicate, subtle way this enthusiasm tells us: Truth, alas, is only really present in pre-earthly existence. Here in this earthly world we have but her echo. Having left the pre-earthly life, we no longer stand within the essential substance of truth. Only enthusiasm for truth can help us to maintain intact our relationship with pre-earthly existence.

A genuine feeling for beauty forges a link that binds us here, in earthly life itself, once again with pre-earthly existence. We ought never to undervalue the significance of beauty in education and in outer culture. A civilization that is filled with ugly machines, with chimneys and smoke, and dispenses with beauty, is a world that makes no efforts to forge a link between man and pre-earthly existence; indeed, it tears him asunder. Not by way of analogy, but in very truth we may say: A purely industrial city is a fitting abode for the demonic beings who would like to make man forget his pre-earthly existence in the realm of spirit.

Yet delight in beauty must be paid for at the cost of realizing that the beautiful, in its essence, is not rooted in earthly reality. The more perfectly we represent the human form, say, in sculpture or painting, the more must we admit that this does not correspond to an outer reality in earthly

existence. It is but a consolation afforded by beautiful semblance, and hence lasts only until the moment we pass through the gate of death.

The world of spirit in which we live during our pre-earthly existence is always present. We have but to stretch out our arms, as it were, to this pre-earthly world of spirit. Although it is always there, a link can only be forged in the depths of unconscious life when man glows with enthusiasm for truth and truthfulness. And when his heart thrills with love for the beautiful, this too forms a bond with pre-earthly existence.

If man is to be true in a higher, this means spiritual, sense, he must not forget that he has lived in the spirit in pre-earthly existence. To glow in response to beauty means that in his soul man must create in a picture, at least, a new link with pre-earthly spirituality.

How can man develop an actual power that will lead him directly into the world he left because he has descended to the earth from pre-earthly existence? The answer is, when he is filled with Goodness — the goodness that flows to other men and is not confined to self-interest, conscious only of what is living within his own being. Such goodness can lead the soul into the qualities, nature and experiences of others. It embraces innumerable forces of soul; and these forces are of such a nature that they actually instill into the human being elements with which he was wholly permeated only in pre-earthly existence. Through his sense of Beauty he links himself, by means of a picture, to the spirit he has left because of his descent to earthly existence. If he is truly good, he links this earthly life itself to pre-earthly existence. A good man is one who can bear his own soul over into the soul of another. Upon this all true morality depends, and without morality no true social order among earthly humanity can be maintained.

When this true morality develops into momentous impulses of will which then pass to reality in moral acts, it begins to be a quickening, all-pervading impulse in the soul, inasmuch as a man can then be moved to real sympathy at the sight of care on the face of another — his own astral body feels pain at the sight of suffering in others. For just as the sense of Truth manifests in man's right relation to the physical body; just as a warm enthusiasm for Beauty expresses itself in the etheric body — so does Goodness live in the astral body. And the astral body cannot be healthy, or maintain its true position in the world, if man is not able to pour through it the forces proceeding from Goodness.

Truth, then, is related to the physical body, Beauty to the etheric body, Goodness to the astral body. Here we have the concrete reality of the three abstractions of Truth, Beauty, Goodness. In short, we can relate to the actual being of man all that is expressed instinctively in these three ideals.

These ideals show us how far man is able to fulfill his whole human nature, when, to begin with, as he lives in his physical body, he is filled with a real sense of truth instead of conventional opinions. Again, full “humanity” is only afforded a worthy existence when a man can quicken his etheric body into life through his feeling for beauty. Indeed, he who is incapable of being moved at the sight of beauty to somewhat the same degree as the Greek, does not possess a true sense of beauty. One can merely gaze at beauty or one can experience it. To-day it is the case that most people only gaze, and this does not necessarily energize anything in the etheric body. To gaze at beauty is not to experience it. The moment we experience beauty, however, the etheric body is quickened.

A man may do good because of some convention, or because punishment is in store for serious wrong-doing — or, again, because other people will respect him less if he does wrong. He can, however, also do good from sheer love of goodness. I spoke of this years ago in my book, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. Such an experience of goodness will always lead to a recognition of the reality of the astral body. Indeed, only this recognition will teach man anything about the

essence of goodness. There can only be abstract knowledge of and inconsequent chatter about goodness, if loving enthusiasm for goodness in its essence does not lead to actual experience of the astral body.

Now to realize the good is not, as in the experience of beauty, merely to create a link with pre-earthly existence that ceases when man passes through the gate of death. To experience goodness is, indeed, to unite oneself with the world of which I said, it is ever present. We have but to stretch out towards it. Yet man is separated from this world in material existence. Experience of goodness is a link, leading directly to the world he enters after death.

Forces that endure beyond the gate of death are present in men's actions here on earth, if he lives a life of goodness. The sense of truth is a heritage from pre-earthly existence. The sense of beauty will create an image, at least, of pre-earthly connection with spirit. And the impulse exists within us not to cut ourselves off from spirit, but rather to maintain the bond intact by the goodness we develop as inner power.

To be true is to be rightly united with our spiritual past. To sense beauty means that in the physical world we do not disown our connection with spirit. To be good is to build a living seed for a spiritual world in the future.

Past, present, future — these three concepts, as they play their part in human life, assume far-reaching significance when we understand the concrete reality of the other three concepts — Truth, Beauty, Goodness.

The man who is untruthful denies his spiritual past; the liar severs the threads between himself and his spiritual past. He who disregards beauty is building himself an abode on earth where the sun of spirit never shines, where he wanders in spiritless shadow. The man who belies the good renounces his spiritual future; and yet he would like this future to be bestowed on him, may be by means of some outer remedy.

It was, indeed, out of a profound instinct that Truth, Beauty and Goodness were held to be the greatest ideals of human striving. Yet they have faded away into shadowy words, and it is only our present age that can bestow concrete reality upon them.

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**Note 1:**

**Note by Editor.** — Dr. Steiner divides history into epochs and calls our present epoch, that of the Spiritual Soul. An explanation of the term Spiritual Soul is found in other of his works.