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RUDOLF STEINER

(1861-1925)

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A neo-romantic thinker and reformer

Rudolf Steiner's reforming ideas still have an exceptionally strong, practical impact today in many spheres, especially in education, medicine, agriculture and the pictorial arts. On the other hand, his theoretical scientific and philosophical writings have so far met with little interest and still less acceptance in academic circles. When his thinking does attract attention it becomes the subject of passionate controversy. Uncritical identification by his followers contrasts with polemic and sweeping criticism by the representatives of academic research. There seems to be no golden mean in the appraisal of Steiner's conceptual world.

One reason resides in the extraordinary variety and scale of his literary and rhetorical output.[3] His often strange and esoteric diction places practically insurmountable obstacles in the path of scientific and philosophical analysis. What is more, few critical biographies have been written about Steiner as yet. Attempts to do so tend to resemble more the nature of hagiography.[4] To avoid diminishing Steiner's prestige, these works gloss over his frequent borrowings from other writers as well as any mediocre traits of his own character, and attempt to create harmony out of the evident discontinuity of his life's work. In this article, we shall confine ourselves to a brief consideration of the established facts about his life and the readily understandable concepts of his approach to the problem of education.

Rudolf Steiner was born on 25 February 1861 in Kraljevec (Croatia), the son of an Austrian railway official. After attending the higher secondary school (without Latin and Greek), he went on to study mathematics, natural history and chemistry at the Technical University in Vienna between 1879 and 1883 with the intention of becoming a grammar-school teacher. However, he failed to complete his course of study and preferred to devote himself to the pursuit of his literary and philosophical interests. After his scholarship had run out, he earned his living between 1884 and 1890 as a house tutor and educator of the handicapped child of a prosperous Jewish bourgeois family in Vienna.

As a self-taught dilettante in philosophy, and acting on the recommendation of Schroer, his university teacher of literature and his spiritual mentor, he embarked upon a critical edition of the natural scientific writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) in the years between 1882 and 1897. From 1890 onwards, he worked as an unpaid assistant in the Goethe and Schiller Archives in Weimar (Germany). His endeavors to define a systematic philosophical basis for Goethe's objective, but at the same time idealistic, mode of thought led on to Steiner's early writings, including his main work, the *Philosophie der Freiheit* (1894) [Philosophy of Freedom]. A preliminary study for that work (subsequently) entitled *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft* [Truth and Science] enabled Steiner to graduate as a doctor of philosophy in 1891 as an external student of Rostock University (Germany). After completing these publications, Steiner moved to Berlin in 1897. As an editor, author, orator and teacher, he gravitated round the avant-garde literary Bohemia, the workers movement and the reforming religious thinkers. In 1900, Steiner delivered a series of lectures in the occultist Theosophical Library where he also met Marie von Sivers, who was later to become his second wife.

From 1902 to 1913, he served as general secretary of the German section of the Theosophical Society, which was represented internationally by Annie Besant. As the leader of a movement of spiritual renewal,

Doctor Steiner now embarked upon intensive lecturing activity and traveled widely. The stenographic record of over 6,000 of his lectures, and his thirty or so monographs, bear impressive witness to that work.

In 1913, Steiner parted company with Annie Besant, above all because of their conceptual differences in regard to the esoteric interpretation of the life of Jesus Christ. With the majority of his German followers, he went on to found the Anthroposophical Society. The Goetheanum at Dornach near Basel (Switzerland), the architecture of which was designed by Steiner himself, remains the center of the society today. As the charismatic founder of a philosophical community that was entirely focused on his own personality, Steiner gave countless courses and lectures throughout Europe, setting out his program for spiritual reform of life in the areas of art, education, politics, economics, medicine, agriculture, and the Christian religion.

The revolutionary mood in a defeated Germany in the 1918 and 1919 brought Steiner the opportunity to try out his ideas on education in a new school. On 7 September 1919, he ceremonially opened the first Free Waldorf School as a combined co-educational primary and secondary school for 256 children drawn mainly from the families of workers at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart (Germany). Steiner's educational reform must be seen against the background of the radical, political utopia of a tripartite structure of the social body proclaimed by him at the time. The spontaneous foundation of new educational establishments (kindergarten schools and colleges), each with its own autonomous constitution, and the co-operative organization of business ventures, was intended to distinguish between appropriate forms of governance in the three areas of the cultural life, economic activity, and political administration.

Steiner's political program of a free spiritual life and associative economic activity failed. On the other hand, his school became a success. When he died on 30 March 1925 in Dornach, while still working on his autobiography, the first Waldorf pupils were about to take their school-leaving examinations.

Goetheanism

The central theme of Steiner's work is the inner perception of the spiritual world and the spiritualization of every area of human activity. As early as the age of nineteen, Steiner suffered from the demystification of the world brought about by economic progress, technology, natural science and critical philosophy. In the innermost depths of his being, he still perceived the certainty of a spiritual universe that had been current in earlier days. At the outset of his studies, supposedly of natural science, he wrote to a friend:

> Last year my endeavor was to find out whether Schelling's words are true—namely that a marvelous hidden power resides in each one of us enabling us to withdraw from the turmoil of the immediate present into our innermost self and to observe the eternal within us in its immutable manifestation. I believed, and still do believe, that I have certainly discovered that innermost power within myself. Long ago, I had already suspected this to be the case.[5]

In his pre-theosophical writings, Steiner attempts to justify this mystic solitary experience by the theory of cognition, in deliberate opposition to the critical attitude of Kant that led to the limitation of objective experience. Instead, he starts out from the premise that everything necessary to explain the world is accessible to human thought beyond the boundaries of cognition drawn by Kant. Steiner believes thought manifested in ideas is the essence of the universe. A deliberate effort of cognition results in constant progression closer to the foundation of the world. Spiritual being is an emanation of an organism of the world. Human thought is its highest and most perfect manifestation. Eternal ideas are exteriorized through thought. Through intellectual perception man is able to experience ideas directly and therefore become selflessly reunited with the foundation of the universe. The cognitive theory of the young Steiner is at one and the same time an ontology and a cosmogony—a regression to the pre-modern naive movement of universal realism. Its aim is to show man his task and position in the universe through a process of self-reflection and to ensure that through the thought process [...] man is able to achieve something which he once owed to a belief in revelation, namely the satisfaction of the mind.[6]

The reintroduction of an objective and idealistic world-view also explains Steiner's interest in the natural research conducted by Goethe. In contrast to experimental natural science based on causal analysis,

Goethe sought the universal unity of nature in his idealistic morphology. In the original phenomena of nature or in the archetypes of the vegetable and animal world, he discovered the sequence of manifestations of a spiritual content to which man is capable of giving deliberate expression in his own microcosm.

This metaphysical Goetheanism, with its implicit anthropomorphism, is Steiner's first response to his fundamental romantic question: how can we transcend the intellect, using our own intellect, in order to give expression to the invisible spiritual dimension?

Like the early romantic writers, Steiner's critique of modernity seeks the reconciliation of science, religion and art—a new cultural mythology stemming from the enhancement of the thought process until it becomes the intuitive experience of original knowledge.

His second answer, which takes the form of esoteric theosophy rather than systematic philosophy, resides in anthroposophic moral science. This was also the principal foundation of his educational anthropology.

Anthroposophy

Steiner understands anthroposophy as an extended form of scientific cognition that leads from the spiritual in man himself to the spiritual dimension of the universe—as a kind of rationalized mysticism. To the normal scientific knowledge of the physical world it adds the knowledge of another spiritual world which is in the first instance invisible and lies above the senses. Steiner's cardinal premise is the existence behind the visible world of an invisible world which is hidden in the first instance from the senses and from thinking which is bound to those senses; man is capable of penetrating into this hidden world by developing abilities which are dormant.[7]

Steiner's second premise is that through meditative training of ones organ of cognition, each individual can acquire the ability to progress to a higher universal plane: Man acquires knowledge of the higher worlds when he attains a third mental state, in addition to the states of sleeping and waking.[8] In this new state, all the impressions of the senses are eliminated, although full consciousness is retained. In the course of his training, the spiritual pupil lays aside the paralyzed conceptual form of everyday thinking and moves on beyond the imaginative and inspirative phase to the intuitive stage of precise and clear vision. After the soul has become an empty vessel, it experiences a fusion with the whole universe, a state of oneness with the world, but without losing its own essence.[9] The organ of cognition is now able to experience the living logic of the spiritual world and its cosmic order.

The basic laws of this occult spiritual world are the processes of reincarnation and karma, and the correlation between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Steiner uses these laws to arrive at a complete explanation of the development of the universe and the life history of each individual. In the view of Steiner and his followers, the universe and man originate from a single primeval spiritual foundation. On the path to physical incarnation in seven planetary ages of the world or reincarnation in countless individual lives, the world and man reunite again with the spiritual.

Steiner's cosmogony takes the basic form of the gnostic myth: man must lose his worldliness and slavish dependence on material things so that the soul and the world can rise up to self-redemption and fuse once again with the divine spiritual origins which both bear within them. Modern man lives on the fourth planetary phase of development of the earth that entails an experience of individuation and the respiritualization of the individual. Belief in Jesus Christ can be helpful at this developmental phase. Jesus is not seen by Steiner primarily as a historical figure but rather as a cosmic sun being. As a joint reincarnation of the spirits of Buddha and Zarathustra, he represents their religious wisdom. His sacrificial death caused these forces to flow into the world. Since that event, they have made it easier for man to find the path back into the world of the spirit in his secularized and materialistic civilization.[10]

Thus each individual has a spiritual nucleus which comes down before birth from the spiritual worlds to unite with the physical and mental envelope; at death, it detaches itself from man to be manifested again in his next life on earth. In the next reincarnation, and as a consequence of karma, i.e. the interweaving of successive human lives, the soul picks up on its thread of activity from the previous life. Steiner sees Karma as a question of individual development and thus follows up on the ideas first voiced by the German idealist E.G. Lessing.

In Steiner's anthroposophy, the law of reincarnation leads to a fundamentally changed understanding of death and birth, of historic and social experience. In the newborn infant, the parents encounter a primeval individual being with unknown dispositions that it is so far unable to express in its new physical incarnation. Education becomes an aid to incarnation, to assist and harmonize the growth of the spiritual being into its physical form determined by genetic and moral factors and defined by karma even before the act of birth itself.

Where the concept of chance had hitherto been used to describe the events of life, there exists in reality a network of unsettled debts and relationships brought forward from earlier existences.

The second fundamental law of the spiritual world is the microcosmic analogy: man is the world in microcosm, while the world is man on a vast scale, i.e. the macranthropos. The hierarchy of the natural kingdom—minerals, plants, animals and human beings—represents an ascending order towards spirituality. As the crowning manifestation of creation, human beings combine all four forms of existence or active cosmic forces within themselves. The doctrine of being also leads on to a theory of evolution (or more precisely emanation): animals, plants and minerals have gradually split off from their union with the human being but remain intimately related to him. The world of minerals is in a sense the solid part of man that has remained fixed in the Saturn stage of universal development. Plants were created out of the ethereal vegetative part of man that has not progressed beyond the sun stage. Finally, animals are manifestations of the human body that was already endowed with an animal soul in the moon stage; they merely failed to follow the process of incarnation of the spiritual component of man thereafter.[11]

These natural kingdoms ejected from the process of creation of man today stand opposite man, not as alien things but as beings that are intimately related to him. Steiner's homeopathic medicine and art of natural healing, and the natural scientific and ecological teaching dispensed in the Steiner schools, are based on this primeval, pre-modern theory of a cosmos in which all things are one.

In the anthroposophical approach, human nature is presented as a genetic combination of four cosmic forces or elements: the physical body which alone is visible and in which the mechanical laws of the mineral kingdom apply; secondly, the hidden ethereal or living body in which the forces of growth and propagation are active just as they are in the vegetable kingdom; thirdly, the occult astral or sensitive body which bears the animal forces of instincts, desires and passions; and, fourthly, the individual human body which is constantly reincarnated and refines and explains the other elements through its own essence.[12]

These four bodies, essences or force fields hold the most important key to the anthroposophic understanding of man and the world. Many phenomena are attributed by anthroposophy to the action of the four and therefore seemingly explained, e.g. the four elements, the four seasons, the four temperaments, the four stages of knowledge, etc.[13] In his later writings, Steiner adds a tripartite structure of human nature that is guided by the old spiritual triad of thought, feeling and will.

Looking back, Steiner's romantic thought process began as a theory of knowledge—drawing heavily on Fichte and Schelling—with the intellectual self-perception of thought. It ended as an occult anthroposophical world-view with a new mythology. The thought process has now been transformed into the heterogeneity of a magic mythical world relationship in which the human body becomes a factor in the history of salvation.

The paradox of anthroposophy resides in the fact that something that is in reality a myth of the second order is proclaimed in the name of science. The universal presence of the soul, symbolic numbers, magical analogies, Steiner's living logic of images, are an attempt to rehabilitate mythical thinking[14] and ritual life in a civilization ruled by science.

The anthropological foundation of education

Steiner's basic ideas on education were conceived in the period between 1906 and 1909 in a manner which to begin with had naturalistic overtones: Out of the essence of the developing individual, ideas on education will grow, as it were, of their own accord.[15] However, in contrast to the path taken by Dewey and Montessori, who sought to establish their New Education on recent ideas of empirical child psychology, Steiner based his

educational plan entirely on his cosmic spiritualistic anthropology: If we wish to detect the essence of the growing individual, we must set out from a consideration of the hidden nature of man as such.[16]

For the Goethean Steiner, man is a microcosm in which all the forces or ideas that determine the maturing phases of nature are manifested. The development of the child and adolescent is understood as a process of growth and metamorphosis in which the vegetative, animal and intellectual cosmic forces develop in successive phases. In Steiner's scheme of things, the drama of crisis, transformation and rebirth is revealed in the changing manifestations of the child, following the cosmic rhythm of seven-year periods.

At the end of the first seven years, the structure of the child's organism has been completed by the ethereal forces of growth from the tips of the toes to the new teeth. These physical growth forces are now born, i.e. they are metamorphosed into forces of learning; the child develops its inner senses and is ready for school.

In the second seven-year period, astral spiritual forces that are still hidden shape the world of drives, passions, and feelings. These astral forces are liberated at sexual maturity and transformed into abilities of conceptual thinking and human judgement. They help the hidden ego forces to attain intellectual and social maturity that is achieved with the birth of the individual personality at the end of the third period of seven years. In this perspective, Steiner therefore understands development in the platonic sense as a strictly successive process of upward movement. First the outer senses are formed by active imitation, and then the inner senses are formed by imitative imagination. Following this, the categories of reason are developed through personal thought, while the ideas of the universe are finally reflected in the individual personality.

Steiner as a theosophist sees the educational development of the child as something resembling a process of reincarnation. An eternal spiritual ego moves down into a new body and shapes it—in a seven-year cycle—from the head via the heart to the hands. When the third seven-year period begins, this spiritual ego will have taken over the whole body down to its extremities. The spiritualization of the soul and conceptual world can now begin.

The concepts of development and personality are the two cornerstones of Steiner's educational theory of man. His personality concept also stands in opposition to contemporary psychological research that followed an empirical trend: against the background of his spiritual world-view, he joins forces once again with the old European doctrine of the four temperaments. The unique character of an individual human being must be capable of clear definition by one of the four types of humor defined by Galen: melancholic, phlegmatic, choleric and sanguine. Each of these four temperaments represents a total psycho-physical type recognized psychologically by the kinds of stimuli to which the individual is most receptive and physically by the shape of the body. Steiner believed that a particular temperament is shaped by the dominance of one of the four cosmic forces (physical, ethereal, astral, spiritual) in the process of reincarnation.[17] One important task for education is therefore to harmonize and balance out the biased tendencies of the temperament.

In short, Rudolf Steiner's concept of education has neither an ethical-philosophical foundation (as was the case with Kant and Herbart) nor a socio-cultural dimension (as in Durkheim and Dewey) and also no empirical psychological origin (as in Claparède and Montessori). It is deduced from anthroposophical neo-mythology and has a metaphoric character. In the light of his interpretation of the microcosm, education takes the form of growth and metamorphosis—the educator is a gardener and a person who moulds others. From a belief in reincarnation stems the image of education as an aid to incarnation and spiritual awakening—the educator becomes a priest and a leader of people's souls. The theory of the four temperaments leads on to the educational task of harmonization—the educator then being understood as a master of the healing art. With these organological metaphors of leaving the child to grow and to heal, and with the religious metaphor of awakening with these *vérités à faire*, Steiner built the levers that are still being actuated by teachers and educators in his schools and kindergartens today.

The physiognomy of the New Education

For a decade, Steiner's ideas on education remained no more than abstract rhetoric. It was not until the year of the German Revolution in 1919, at the height of the international movement in favor of a New Education, that

the self-taught specialist in pedagogics came to prominence as the founder of a new school. Steiner's educational anthropology now absorbed—sometimes contrary to his own ideological concepts—many contemporary ideas based on the reality of education that could not be arrived at merely through an abstract formula.

- In the historical and systematic perspective, the practical work of the Rudolf Steiner schools (and kindergartens) shows particularly close links with other trends of the New Education. This holds well in the first place for its structure and organization which have remained practically unchanged to the present day:
- They are establishments that maintain their own financial and curricular autonomy and are characterized by a child-centered educational tendency. Parents and children work together in the interest of developing the child.
- The Rudolf Steiner kindergarten has the atmosphere of a living room with a maternal educator. The guiding aims are to develop the senses by imitation and the experience of community life with a rhythmic progression. Factors that contribute to this are the two-hour period set aside each day for free play with natural materials and the particular emphasis placed on artistic creation and a natural religious outlook.
- The Rudolf Steiner schools are continuous establishments in which the pupils learn together in stable year-groups from the first to the twelfth year of schooling, without any interruptions or repeat years. Instead of official reports containing marks, the teachers write annual character portraits or learning reports in their own free wording. The syllabus and method of teaching are supposed to be guided in the first instance by the genetic and organic development of the child.
- The all-round personality of the pupil is supposed to be shaped through placing the equal weight on cognitive, artistic-affective and technical-practical activities in both tuition and school life. Practical training—through agricultural activities in the school garden, handicrafts and industry—are intended to develop a practical outlook on life.
- In the first eight years of school, the teachers see themselves in the first place as educators. They remain in charge of the same class for eight years as the class tutor. The teacher gives a two-hour daily period of epoch teaching that covers one of the traditional main subjects during a four-week cycle. Teaching takes place without standardized textbooks; the most important learning material consists of the epoch notebooks prepared by the pupils themselves. Two modern foreign languages are learned from the first year of schooling in play-conversation and recitation.
- Rudolf Steiner schools have no headmaster. They administer their own organizational and educational functions at weekly conferences arranged in a collegial manner. In most countries there are national associations of Steiner Waldorf schools. The German association has its headquarters in Stuttgart.[18]
- These structural features of the Waldorf School generally cause all observers—be they parents, educational scientists or politicians—quite rightly to regard these schools in the first place as a practical model of the New Education. In terms of the history of these schools, as is already apparent from 1919, the year of their foundation, a close relationship exists with the model of the living community school that developed simultaneously with the experimental schools in Hamburg in the 1920s. Their synthesis is in Peter Petersen's Jena Plan School in Germany. As autonomous unified co-educational schools motivated by the children themselves, the Steiner and Jena Plan Schools are characterized by a school atmosphere which resembles that of the home, intensive attention to school life, the continuation of the classrooms by gardens, workshops and practical courses, attention to the physical and spiritual well-being of the pupils, an emphasis on musical education, and a rhythm of school life marked by festivals and ceremonies. Parents are closely involved in school life. The teachers see themselves primarily as persons who accompany the development of the child. All forms of compromise with bureaucratic selection criteria and state policies are outlawed.

Among the other schools founded on the ideas of the New Education, the specific profile of the Rudolf Steiner schools and kindergartens emerges from the strong emphasis: (a) on educational leadership (class teacher, frontal teaching); (b) artistic and religious experience (fairy tales, sacred texts, eurhythmics, etc.); and (c) the systematic and ritually-based organization of education and teaching.

Education as incorporation into the cosmos

In the practical implementation of Steiner's educational scheme nothing is left to chance. All the dimensions of the educational reality—space, time, social community and objective world—are deliberately given a rhythmic structure. As in a ritual event, all forms of educational action are thus incorporated into a cosmic order.

The architecture of Rudolf Steiner schools reflects the striving to create a fully integrated learning environment. In many European schools one finds different expressions of the school of organic architecture initiated by Steiner. Here the ground plan of the school attempts to create a space in which the various architectural elements—proportions, acoustics, colouring, themes of the pictures, light effects and orientation—combine to stimulate the spiritualization of learning. Outside of Europe one finds schools in a variety of settings—in former Soviet public school buildings, in refurbished construction sheds or in shanties in the townships of South Africa.

In the classrooms, for example, the color of the walls develops from the first to the eighth school year following the colors of the spectrum, from red via yellow, green and blue to violet. The themes of the pictures in the classrooms are also oriented schematically by the sequence of narrative material used in the Waldorf syllabus, from the fairy tale to modern literature. In the primary section, the order in which pupils are seated in the class is determined by their temperament: phlegmatic and choleric characters sit on the outside with melancholy and sanguine temperaments in the center. During the teaching process, each group is addressed in turn with balancing impulses.

Like the premises themselves, the temporal dimension of the educational process is also structured rhythmically. The outlining frame is formed by the seven-year periods of development, or hebdomads that are marked by the birth of the new essential forces, e.g. when the adult teeth begin to grow and sexual maturity is reached. As we have already seen, education during each of the seven-year periods is addressed to a different part of the personality of the pupil, moving as it were from the outside inwards. Each seven-year period is dominated by a different method of learning and teaching, from the external activity of imitation via the internal process of emulation to formal and abstract independent thinking. (Unlike his model, Comenius, Steiner also subdivides each hebdomad into three further sections of two years each.)

In the course of the year, the beginning of the four seasons is marked by special celebrations harmonized with the Christian church year for which the pupils are prepared by learning relevant legends. Rhythms corresponding to the month are created by structuring tuition in the main subjects into four-week periods and by the monthly assemblies in which pupils present the results of their learning to the whole school audience. The weekly rhythm is punctuated by the recurrent recitation of the dedication. Each child in the lower grades (first to eighth years) must recite to the whole class the dedication contained in his class teacher's report when morning classes begin on the day of the week on which he/she was born.

Painting classes always take place on Saturday and the teachers' meetings on Thursday afternoon and evening. The rhythm of each single day is created in that the subjects oriented more towards theoretical knowledge are taught in succession before the artistic and practical activities. Each hour of teaching is generally structured in such a way that the first rhythmic phase appeals to the will of the child, the central phase to its feelings and a quiet concluding phase to thought.

The social world of the pupil is sharply divided into the ever-present proximity of the educating class-teacher and the specialized teachers who move in a more remote zone. The class-teacher is perceived as an authority that dispenses teaching in all the traditionally important school subjects; this is the shaping tuition in the Herbartian sense of the word. The basic form of this teaching is the moralizing narrative intended to serve as an example and the reproduction by the pupils in paintings or in writing of the pictorial and linguistic world with which they have been familiarized. Based on an intimate view of the essence of the child, the class-teacher prepares the annual educational character report.

At the start of the third hebdomad, a four-year secondary stage begins abruptly with a changeover to the principle of specialized subject teaching—from the primacy of the person and picture to the primacy of the subject and concept.

In the world of specialized subject teaching, we once again encounter an ordered cosmos. This systematic order results from the concept of educational concentration and genetic classification of the themes or contents. Here, Steiner's pedagogics link up with the cultural phases of Herbart and of the Herbartians, while placing this scheme in its own anthropological context. In this pedagogical syllabus, the development phases of the child are genetically synchronized with epochs in the history of mankind.

At each age level, specific narrative material is intended to form the general focal point for all the other contents of the school year. This process begins in the first school year with fairy tales, fables and legends and moves on through tales from the Old Testament, local stories of gods and sagas, the mythology and history of the Greeks and Romans, the medieval period and the age of discovery to modern cultural history in the eighth school year. These organic structures will be found in all the subjects taught in Rudolf Steiner schools, including musical and handicrafts training.

The example of teaching the natural sciences clearly shows that a modern ecological education can be founded on this genetic principle. Teaching about nature begins for the six to nine year-old child, who is still living in a state of magical-animist union with nature, by appealing to its feelings; through pictorial forms of narrative, a basic mood of sympathy with the manifestations of nature is to be preserved for as long as possible. From the third school year onwards a physiognomic view of nature is imparted to the child who now thinks in naive-realistic concepts: on the basis of the anthroposophical notion of an all-embracing unity, the animal world is viewed as an extension of man or man as a compact manifestation of the animal kingdom, while the plant world is seen as the soul of the earth made visible and active in man. The sensation of cosmic unity and the observation of the morphological relationship between all living things is supplemented by caring action—from the planting and tending of the school garden through tuition in gardening to practical experience of biological and dynamic agriculture and forestry. Rather than a mere theoretical concept, co-responsibility for nature must become a matter for active participation so that the deep-rooted links between man and nature can be experienced personally by the pupil.

From the seventh school year onwards, starting out from the world of solid matter, a gradual introduction is made to the abstract causal-analytical dominant knowledge of modern physics. Natural scientific training in the Rudolf Steiner school is thus all-round environmental education. It attempts to keep the bond between man and nature alive in pupils for as long as possible and to restore that bond in their later thought process through educational knowledge of nature. With that aim in view, systematic points of contact certainly exist with contemporary natural philosophical contributions to the problem of ecological education.

To sum up, the external form of practical pedagogics in the Rudolf Steiner schools (and kindergartens) shows a manifest fellowship with the initiatives of the New Education which were adopted at the same time. All educational goals and measures of education and tuition are intended solely to promote the growth of the child and adolescent personality. The Steiner school stands out among the New Education schools primarily through its particularly high degree of spatial, temporal, social and conceptual systematization and the ritualization of educational and teaching practice. Unlike the situation which prevails in the largely demystified and plural world of the state schools, education and tuition regain the character of a ritual, i.e. at one and the same time an aesthetic, moral and—last but not least—religious dimension. This metaphysical impulse of Steiner's pedagogics stems directly from the anti-modernist world-view of anthroposophy.

An overwhelming success

One of the most striking trends on the educational scene is the constant growth of international demand for Rudolf Steiner schools and kindergartens. In the past two decades, they have developed from the role of an outsider to become the leader of the international movement for a New Education. Since its inception in 1919, the Steiner school model has made its way from Germany via the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa and Australia to the great cities of Latin America and Japan. Today, it is moving back to the reform-oriented states of Eastern Europe. This astonishing history of success is reflected in the statistics given in Table 1.

TABLE 1. The number of Rudolf Steiner schools functioning between 1919 and 1992[19]

	Germany	Europe	Overseas	Total
1919	1	0	0	1
1925	4	3	0	7
1938	8	8	0	16
1955	25	8	8	41
1971	32	42	21	95
1983	80	154	76	350
1992	144	289	149	582

In parallel, the number of Steiner kindergartens and Waldorf teacher-training establishments has also risen. Against the background of this impressive wave of newly founded establishments, particular emphasis must also be placed on the fact that Rudolf Steiner schools are not planned by the school administration or organized by a single person. On the contrary, they grow out of an independent initiative by parents and educators who must sometimes make considerable sacrifices of time and money (monthly school bills paid by the parents and donations of the parents or voluntary reduction of salary by the teachers and educators).

The main reasons given by many parents and teachers for taking part in the foundation and development of Rudolf Steiner schools are the following: (a) a rejection of the constant selection of pupils through marks and scales of marking; (b) a criticism of the unilateral emphasis on cognitive, scholastic learning; (c) an aversion for the bureaucratic straightjacket; and (d) the lack of transparency coupled with pluralist anonymity in the major school complexes under state administration. The parents of children attending Rudolf Steiner schools are for the most part drawn from child-oriented, academically trained circles of the upper middle class. This group encounters a new form of community in the Rudolf Steiner establishments and hence that social prop which the traditional institutions of the church, local parish and relatives can no longer give them.

The Rudolf Steiner schools are not only successful in themselves. The educational results of the pupils who have attended them in Germany are also impressive. This is already reflected in the fact that in 1990 almost twice as many pupils of Rudolf Steiner schools (57.5%) attained the qualification necessary for university studies than pupils of the same year attending state schools;[20] and this despite the fact that their work had not been sanctioned for twelve years by marks. An earlier quantitative survey of former German pupils of the Rudolf Steiner schools (born in the year 1940/41) revealed significant differences between this group and a control group in the following areas: higher geographical and social mobility; more pronounced leisure activities in the areas of reading, interest in art, practice of a musical instrument and ability in craftwork; and an interest in further training.[21] A recent qualitative study of the educational biographies of former pupils of a Rudolf Steiner school with a double academic and professional curriculum (Hibernia School at Herm, Germany) also showed that these pupils were better equipped to face the challenge of life and, in particular, more capable of dealing with technical tasks. They showed greater self-confidence and a wider range of interests, were open to new ideas and were particularly willing to accept social responsibility.[22] The Rudolf Steiner school investigated in that case revealed all the central characteristics of a good school: (a) child-oriented and methodically competent teachers; (b) a harmonious school style guaranteed by agreement on the basic pedagogical principles; (c) permanent reflection on the teachers own action at educational conferences and advanced training courses; and (d) an awareness of continuity through the creation of a school tradition.

This profile is typical of the schools based on the principles of New Education and holds good for many other Rudolf Steiner schools. However, the educational successes of these schools do not result solely from their particular educational slant and from the strong identification of the parents with the school that they have chosen for themselves, but also from the privileged social status of their clientele. Since they are private schools at which attendance is an act of free school choice by the parents, the Rudolf Steiner schools have, even if unintentionally, taken upon themselves the role of perpetuating certain social distinctions. They therefore automatically escape many problems that inevitably arise in the environment of a normal state school open to everyone.

A contradictory balance sheet

Discussion of Rudolf Steiner's pedagogics in educational circles has remained marked until the present by the paradox of practical acceptance and theoretical ignorance. While educational scientists, with few exceptions, failed to take note of Steiner's educational work and that of his successors until the 1980s, leading program specialists and practitioners of the New Education in Germany noted on a visit to the first free Waldorf School in Stuttgart in the 1920s that this creation of Steiner was inspired by the same reforming spirit. The international union of the New Education, founded in 1921 as the World Education Fellowship, only admitted the Rudolf Steiner schools as members of the German language section in 1970, thus putting an end to fifty years of splendid isolation. In the meantime, they have become increasingly visible among the schools of the New Education in Germany as the true alternative to state-run or denominational schools.

In view of this development, intensive study and discussion of Steiner's pedagogics have been in progress in educational circles in Germany for the past ten years or so.[23] However, positions are highly controversial: they range from enthusiastic support to destructive criticism. One side emphasizes the meaningful practice of all-round education designed to meet the needs of the child and overlooks the extra-sensory anthropology of Steiner. The other side directs destructive criticism at this occult neo-mythology of education and warns against the risks of resulting indoctrination (in a world-view school); in the process, it loses an unprejudiced view of the varied practice of the Steiner schools. This position of ideological criticism is further confirmed by the assertion of the anthroposophic educationalists that all the norms and forms of their educational practice are systematically deduced from the cosmic anthropology of the master.

Can any solution be found to this fundamental paradox of Steiner's pedagogics—the creation of a beneficial practice on the foundation of a dubious theory? We assume that the systematic basis for the surprisingly stimulating and effective educational practice of the Steiner establishments must not be sought in the simple truths of anthroposophic doctrine, but rather in the versatility of the related educational views, metaphors and maxims. Steiner's pedagogics hold firmly to the principal perceptions of modern common sense educational theory since Comenius and Pestalozzi. The concept of genetic teaching and learning (in the developmental phases of education once the child's abilities have been formed and in the unfurling of cultural knowledge), the postulate of an all-round educational syllabus (appealing to the head, the heart and the hands, and the principle of joint learning and action (involving the concept of a heterogeneous class in each year throughout the school system and also in the organization of a varied school life) are examples of this.

This classical educational dogmatism is an area of consensus between the teachers, educators and parents involved in the practical aspects of education in Steiner establishments. Unlike the more manifest forms of dogmatism of other pedagogical experts of the New Education (Montessori, Neill, Geheeb, etc.), the educationalists in Steiner schools and kindergartens show an unmistakable resolve to adopt an orthodox, personalized and non-sectarian aim of self-improvement or development. It is therefore significant that a number of leading Steinerites in Germany have opened a dialogue (always an agreeable event) with educational scientists in the course of which their pedagogical anthropology and the norms and forms of their education are compared with the concepts and models of the human sciences and with their research standards.[24]

As a consequence of the broader worldwide expansion of Steiner education, even outside the European cultural area, and as a result of the dialogue which has recently been opened with educational scientists, new forms of more depersonalized further development and implementation of the elements of Steiner's educational thinking may be possible. In the last resort, the practice of this system of education with its broad spectrum of artistic and handicraft learning potentials, a caring attitude to children and the many opportunities for conscious participation in community tasks is far too important to be left to the unquestioning adepts of Rudolf Steiner.

Notes

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instruction, the history of education, and the Waldorf schools. Recent publications include: *Kinder am ende Ihres Jahrunderts: Padagogische Perspektiven* [Children at the End of Their Century: Educational Perspectives] (edited with F. Hamburger, 1991); and *Die Reformpadagogik* [Educational Reform] (1990).

2. The Editors would like to express their gratitude to John McAlice of *Freunde der Erziehungskunst Rudolph Steiner* for his comments and suggestions on the originally published version of this article (June 2000).
3. Publication of the complete edition of the writings and lectures of Rudolf Steiner began at the Rudolf Steiner Verlag in Dornach (Switzerland) in 1955. At present, 350 volumes are available. A systematic survey will be found in Hella Wiesberger, *Rudolf Steiner: Das literarische und künstlerische Werk. Eine bibliographische Übersicht* [Rudolf Steiners Literary and Artistic Works. A Bibliographical Overview]. Dornach, 1961.
4. The following works are essential reading: Rudolf Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang. Eine nicht vollendete Autobiographie* [The Story of My Life: An Incomplete Autobiography], ed. by Marie Steiner, 1925. Dornach, 1983. (Bibl. No. 28); Christoph Lindenberg, *Rudolf Steiner. Eine Chronik. 1861-1925* [Rudolf Steiner: His Life Story, 1861-1925], Stuttgart, 1988; and Gerhard Wehr, *Rudolf Steiner. Leben-Erkenntnis-Kulturimpuls* [Rudolf Steiner: Life-Perception-Cultural Stimulus], Munich, 1987.
5. R. Steiner, *Briefe I: 1881-1891* [Letters, Vol. 1, 1881-91], p. 63, E. Froboese and W. Teichert, 2nd ed., Dornach, 1955.
6. Rudolf Steiner, *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Schiller* [Main Lines of the Epistemology of Goethes World-view with Special Regard to Schiller], 1886. 2nd enlarged ed., 1924. Dornach, 1960, p. 17. (Bibl. No. 2)
7. Rudolf Steiner, *Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriss* [Occult Science: An Outline], 1910. Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 41. (Bibl. No. 13)
8. Ibid., p. 299
9. Ibid., p. 393
10. Ibid., p. 291 et seq.
11. Ibid., p. 189
12. Rudolf Steiner, *Die Erziehung des Kindes vom Gesichtspunkte der Geisteswissenschaft* [The Education of the Child from the Perspective of the Scholar], 1907. 9th ed., Berlin, 1919, p. 16.
13. See Heiner Ullrich, *Waldorfpädagogik und okkulte Weltanschauung* [Waldorf Education and the Occult World-view], p. 163, 3rd ed., Weinheim/Munich, 1991.
14. See Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Zweiter Teil: das mythische Denken* [The Philosophy of Symbolic Form. Vol. 2: Mythical Thought], 7th ed., Darmstadt, 1977.
15. Steiner, *Die Erziehung des Kindes* . . ., op. cit. p. 7.
16. Ibid., p. 8.
17. Also headquarterd in Stuttgart is the International Association of Waldorf Education in Eastern Europe, an organiyation offering training and mentoring support for the eastern European schools. Headquartered in Berlin is an organiyation named Freunde der Erziehungskunst (Friends of Waldorf Education) offering financial aid and advisory services to Waldorf schools, kindergartens, and other initiatives worldwide. The European school associations met three times a year in the European Council of Steiner Waldorf Schools with an office in Forest Row, England. In addition to these organizations, there are a number of international research groups working under the aegis of the Pedagogical Section of the Goetheanum in Switzerland.
18. See Rudolf Steiner, *Das Geheimnis der Temperamente* [The Secret of Dispositions], 1908/09. Basle, 1980, p. 20 et seq.
19. According to statistics published by the Union of Free Waldorf Schools, Stuttgart, Germany, 15 December 1992.
20. See Bundesministerium für Bildung und Wissenschaft, *Grund- und Strukturdaten 1991/92* [Basic Facts and Figures], p. 84, Bonn, 1991.
21. See Stefan Leber, *Die Waldorfschule im gesellschaftlichen Umfeld. Zahlen, Daten und Erläuterungen zu Bildungslebensläufen ehemaliger Waldorfschüler* [The Waldorf School in the Societal Context. Figures, Dates and Explanations concerning the Educational Career of Former Waldorf Pupils], Stuttgart, 1981.
22. See Luzius Gessler, *Bildungserfolg im Spiegel von Bildungsbiographien. Begegnungen mit Schülerinnen und Schülern der Hiberniaschule* [Educational Success Reflected in Educational Biographies: Encounters with Female and Male Pupils of the Hibernia School], Frankfurt am Main/Berne/New York/Paris, 1988.
23. See, for example, Otto Hansmann (ed.), *Pro und contra Waldorfpädagogik. Akademische Pädagogik in der Auseinandersetzung mit der Rudolf-Steiner-Pädagogik* [For and Against Waldorf Education. Academic Education compared with Rudolf Steiners Education], Würzburg, 1987.
24. Heiner Ullrich, Kleiner Grenzverkehr: Über eine neue Phase in den Beziehungen zwischen Erziehungswissenchaft und Waldorfpädagogik [Light Border Traffic: On a New Phase in the Relations between the Educational Sciences and Waldorf Education], *Pädagogische Rundschau* (Frankfurt/Main), No. 46, 1992, p. 461-80.

Works by Rudolf Steiner on education

With the exception of a few essays, Rudolf Steiner's statements on education will be found in his lectures on education and schools contained in the complete edition (see Note 1 above, Bibl. No. 293-311). The main individual publications are as follows:

1907. *Die Erziehung des Kindes vom Gesichtspunkte der Geisteswissenschaft* [The Education of Children from the Point of View of the Humanities]. Dornach, 1978.
1919. *Allgemeine Menschenkunde als Grundlage der Pädagogik* [General Anthropology as a Foundation of Education]. Dornach, 1975. (Bibl. No. 293.)
1919. *Erziehungskunst. Methodisch-Didaktisches* [The Art of Teaching: Methodological and Didactical Aspects]. Dornach, 1975. (Bibl. No. 294.)
1919. *Erziehungskunst. Seminarbesprechungen und Lehrplanvorträge* [The Art of Teaching: Seminar Discussion and Lectures on Curricula]. 1919. Dornach, 1985. (Bibl. No. 295.)
1922. *Die Geistig-Seelischen Grundkräfte der Erziehungskunst* [The Basic Forces of the Spirit and the Soul in the Art of Teaching]. Dornach, 1972.

Works about Rudolf Steiner's educational theories

Bohnsack, F.; Kranich, E.-M. (eds.). *Erziehungswissenschaft und Waldorfpädagogik. Der Beginn eines notwendigen Dialogs* [Educational Science and Waldorf Education: Starting a Necessary Dialogue]. Weinheim/Basel, 1990.

Leber, S. (ed.). *Die Pädagogik der Waldorfschule und ihre Grundlagen* [The Education of the Waldorf School and its Foundations]. Darmstadt, 1983.

Prange, K. *Erziehung zur Anthroposophie. Darstellung und Kritik der Waldorfpädagogik* [Education for Anthroposophy: Outline and Review of Waldorf Education]. Bad Heilbrunn, 1985.

Schneider, p. *Einführung in die Waldorfpädagogik* [An Introduction to Waldorf Education]. 2nd ed. Stuttgart, 1985.

Schneider, W. *Das Menschenbild der Waldorfpädagogik* [The Human Image in Waldorf Education]. 2nd ed. Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1992

Ullrich, H. *Waldorfpädagogik und okkulte Weltanschauung* [Waldorf Education and the Occult World-view]. 3rd ed. Weinheim/Munich, 1991.

——. Wissenschaft als rationalisierte Mystik. Eine problemgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Grundlagen der Anthroposophie [Science as Rationalized Mysticism: A Historical Problem-oriented Inquiry into the Foundation of Anthroposophy]. *Neue Sammlung* (Stuttgart), No. 28, 1988, p. 168-94.