Aesthetic Knowledge as a Source for the Main Lesson

Peter Guttenhöfer

The main lesson of the Waldorf school is different from a double period. It is a unity of three parts, composed like a sonata.

The classical sonata form is comprised of three movements. The first movement, the "head movement," presents the theme, lays it out, turns it around or mirrors it, submits it to many dismemberments and distortions (Verrückungen), and through the variations makes the listener once more aware of the drama of these transformations. The second movement brings a totally new atmosphere, in a slower tempo and a changed key, however, still totally related with the musical "substance" of the first movement. Here, the task is less a working-through of the theme and more a direct touching of the inner space of the soul. Finally, in the third movement, the restrained drive for movement is released. Quickly, the rhythmically accentuated, thematically light-footed final movement plays itself out. Here, too, it arises from what was laid down in the first movement, but it still has something of its own. Just as something freshening, the playful scherzo (joke) often slips into this movement; likewise no main lesson should come to an end without the weight of its content at least once being lightened and relaxed by laughter.

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The main lesson and the sonata are both artistic compositions in which the three sections go out from a middle point. They are not simply put together in an additive way, but arise out of a transformation of the foregoing. Between the sonata movements are small pauses, but without interruption of the musical flow; rather these pauses come in the form of a deep drawing in of breath, a short repositioning of oneself, a thoughtful clearing of the throat. Applause and coughing come only after the final movement. There lies recess.

We begin to realize that these three parts, which build a whole, are somehow related to the three parts of the human organism, which is why the sonata is so healthy. The main lesson too should be not only instructive but health-giving. We can understand it as an aesthetic phenomenon, like the sonata. Rudolf Steiner spoke of the 'art of education,' and practice shows that the main lesson must be artistically formed. With this the question is raised about a kind of 'aesthetic' concept for school teaching. The concept 'aesthetic' is used for a process which is artistic and which has, as a product, a piece of art. How do I teach artistically?

The three sections of the main lesson are determined by the threefold constitution of the human being, in which the bodily division into the nerve-sense system (head), rhythmic system (chest), and metabolic-limb system are related to the differentiation of the soul in thinking, feeling, and willing. This threefoldness is also related to the three steps of the logical process—conclusion, judgment, and concept—which Steiner (1919) presented in his ninth lecture in *Study of Man*. Here, he reversed the usual Aristotelian logic and put the word *conclusion* in a provocative way, at the beginning of the logical operation. It does not mean 'conclusion' in the sense of 'end' and also not in the sense of *conclusio*. It does not mean that a thought process has come to an end and a deduction is being made. It refers more to the process wherein the

human being and the world encounter each other, where phenomenon and sense perception meet or where the phenomenon appears through the world colliding with the human being without swallowing her or carrying her away in a sleep condition. 'World will' pushes up against the dark 'self will,' which the human being carries out in his embodiment. The 'I' touches through the sense perception those deeper levels of being, from which all phenomena press into appearance. And the human being does not fade away in that great fire; instead, because she experiences herself so closely connected to the world, she closes herself off, protects herself from becoming one with the world in the act of conclusion. Goethe expressed it thus:

> When I at last come to rest with the archetypal phenomenon, it is still only resignation; but there remains a great difference, whether I resign at the limits of humanity or within a hypothetical limitation of my narrow minded individuality.[1]

Yes, the conclusion is the amazing moment of phenomena emergence, before defined representation (mental picture), before the wandering judgment, before that 'hypothetical limitation.' Steiner states laconically: "The lion is a conclusion."[2] The judgment links itself to the conclusion, or the act of the conclusion awakens the movement of judging. And at the end of the judgments—weighing up, comparison, affirmation, and so forth—stands the concept, which created the quiet in Goethe's soul. The fiery seconds of the conclusion stand in polarity to the constancy of the worked out word formulations of the thought form. Now that the long practiced, joyfully suffered syllogism has been overthrown, and so that the old meaning of *conclusio* does not shadow the 'conclusion,' the conclusion stands in the middle of the main lesson. Something new from the content of the main lesson is presented, in the most various ways.

A physics experiment is demonstrated, a historical event is described, a botanical drawing is observed, a new problem type from trigonometry is presented, or a literary text is read, and so forth. The teacher is active, the students take it in, silently. They do not write, they are totally sense organ. In this moment the pure inner will activity of the students prevails. The emerging appearance of phenomena is prioritized above all understanding. No questions are allowed. The world touches the student, who lets himself be touched. The student becomes 'world' and not only an 'observer' of the world. The student forgets himself and is totally immersed in the topic (with interest). The total absorption in the archetypal phenomena sets up in us a kind of anxiety: "We feel our inadequacy."[3]

This does not mean that there is always something of the archetypal phenomena in the teacher's presentation. However, the emergence of a phenomenon has about it something fundamentally numinous, and the feeling of inadequacy awakens the need to judge, to take a position, to reject, or to become enthused. So, after the teacher has completed his presentation, there begins the judgment, and the third section of the main lesson 'sonata' is played. It ends open-ended and the students go with the opened-up and unsolved problem into the recess. The Waldorf teacher tries to take into account that in the coming night the noticed riddles are taken into sleep. What that means is 'withdrawn from our usual consciousness' and not further explained at this juncture. What matters here is that, when the students appear in class the next morning, they are in a completely changed relationship to the content of the previous day. With quiet, almost serenity, they now go with the teacher into the thoughtful business of working the concept to the phenomenon. That is the first movement of the new main lesson, which is followed by the conclusion event and the third movement of judgment. Each main lesson begins, therefore, with the concept part, which works with that which has arisen from the previous day. This gives the sequence: Concept – Conclusion – Judgment.

This threefoldness is also related to the three steps of the logical process—conclusion, judgment, and concept.

The logical cognition process on a topic, however, runs with the structure: Conclusion – Judgment – Concept. In this way there are always three days of main lessons following each other that belong together. When the teacher forms the main lesson with this in mind, there lies within it a spiritual dynamic of Conclusion – Judgment – Concept. The night is taken in between Judgment and Concept.

Whence comes the nourishment arising from this process? It comes from the event in the middle part of the main lesson, from the student's encounter with the reality of the world, not from hearing the teacher speak about a somehow imagined reality. Everything depends on whether or not an actual 'conclusion' (*schliessen*) happens for the student. Out of this insight arises the task of furthering the concept of 'aesthetics' in relation to the main lesson. That it is related in its structure to the musical sonata makes it, when successful, a work of art. However, the actual aesthetic process is grounded in the essentials of the conclusion.

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To understand this it is necessary to free the concept of the aesthetic from its traditional frame of meaning. There has been a series of researchers who have tried to do this in the last few years in connection to A.G. Baumgarten's *Aesthetica*.[4]

Wolfgang Welsch (1990) described how, in the time after Baumgarten, "there was a restriction of the concept of aesthetic predominantly to art or even to only what was beautiful. That, in my opinion needs to be turned around today."[5] The work of Hans Rudolf Schweizer bestowed broader recognition of Baumgarten's original aesthetic concept and paved the way for an understanding of aesthetics, not as a theory of beautiful art, but as a philosophy of sense experience. He formulated Baumgarten's fundamental principles into the language of our time in the following way:

1. Aesthetics is not a specialized area within the whole of life's process, but the basis for the experience of reality.

2. Aesthetics brings the unbroken phenomenality of 'things' to validity. It is, as 'pure phenomena,' the unrepeatable, individual happening in time.

3. Aesthetic cognition is purely intuitive cognition, which at first remains without conceptual treatment. It is that knowing on which one must rely in daily life.

4. Aesthetics is a field of relationships between the human being and the world, subject and object. If one denies it having any objective meaning whatsoever and ascribes to it a simple subjective feeling or a subjective 'forming power,' then one has lost its content and its being.[6]

With this we understand that the 'conclusion' is the moment of aesthetic experience.[7] Here there is no limitation to a specialist area; this is not only about the observation of art! Here we glimpse the existential moment of world encounter in pure perception. We are standing at the wellspring for all teaching.

In reality, can there be such a moment in the course of a school day? Is not each pedagogical activity narrowed to the discursive symbolism of a science-oriented theoretical cognition that squeezes 'the life' out of school—something that all students experience when they are older than twelve years? To the contrary, the notion of 'conclusion' as the moment of the aesthetic condition, in which the world and the human being stand before each other naked, really means that precisely in the center of the lesson, 'life' touches the student in the deepest way, much more strongly and purely than in ordinary existence.[8] Generally, the everyday person goes on his way in a fog in regard to the meaning of things. Actually, more than that, he does not even know the names of the plants that grow in front of his door. So then, this center of the main lesson is always a special 'space' in which the essence of things can show itself: the shiny silver pearl of molten tin, a quince leaf, the description of the sea battle of Salamis, or the sudden illumination of the connection between the pentagram and the Golden Mean. The objects of teaching are not drawn from conventional canon of general education, but from a sense for the 'symbolic meaning' of things or processes.[9]

If such a demand is hard enough to fulfill in a natural science lesson, then lurking in the humani-

ties subjects are even more awful conditions, which threaten to throw the teacher off track. Chief among these conditions is the opinion and the longing that everything must be 'interpreted.' What is the meaning of *Hamlet*? To this question, there can be as little a satisfying answer as to the question of the meaning of a mountain stream after a thunderstorm.[10] Yes, but how can we then read one of the greatest tragedies of antiquity with our students and allow them to experience directly what Hölderlin tried to express in the words:

> The presentation of the tragic depends mainly on the unspeakable, of how God and the human being are paired, and the boundless nature power unites in rage with the most inwardly human, thereby understanding that the boundlessness becoming one, purifies itself through boundless separation.

The heart-center of our 11th grade main lessons, Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival, reveals most clearly what is actually demanded. Parzival is not a book about the Grail. In fact, it is not a 'book' at all, as the author emphasizes: "Who wishes to hear of further adventure, should please not take it as a book."[11] The reading of this book is itself an approach to the Grail.

Rudolf Steiner said: "No one gets near to the Grail with words or indeed with philosophical speculation. The Grail is approached if one allows all these words to be transformed into sensibilities (Empfindungen)."[12]

The transformation of words into sensibilities in the soul of the teacher during his or her preparation allows a process to begin, which allows reality to emerge for the student. The student communes with this reality in the 'conclusion' of the main lesson. Then finally comes the scene, in which Parzival redeems the suffering of Amfortas, with the question: "Uncle, what ails thee?"[13] This question is the archetypal phenomenon. To it there is no answer. It heals directly.

Translated by Peter Glasby in consultation with Georg Maier

Endnotes

1. Goethe, 1817, Verse 138.
2. Steiner, *Study of Man*, 1919.
3. Goethe, 1817, Verse 137.
4. Baumgarten, 1750-58.
5. Welsch, 1990, p. 9.
6. Schweizer, 1976, p. 74.
7. Barth, 1999, p.111.
8. Cassirer, 1982, p. 235.
9. Schiller, 1793/94, Letters 20 and 21.
10. cf. Schadewald, 1974, p. 206.
11. Von Eschenbach, verse 115, 25–116, 4.
12. Steiner, 1914, p. 109.
13. Von Eschenbach, verse 795, 29.

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