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Education Seen as a Problem Involving the Training of Teachers

by

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Lecture given by Rudolf Steiner on August 15, 1919

From our last lectures you will have seen that the problem of education is the most important of all the questions that now occupy our minds. We have already emphasized that the whole social problem contains as its chief factor the problem of education. A week ago I gave you certain indications for the changes which are needed in the whole system of education so that you will easily understand that the most important sub-question in this problem is that of the training of teachers themselves.

If you study the character of the epoch which began in the middle of the fifteenth century, you will gain the impression that throughout that time a wave of materialistic probations swept through the whole evolution of humanity, and in the present time we must realize that it is necessary to work our way out of this materialistic wave and to find our way back to the spirit. The spiritual path was known to humanity in past epochs of culture, but in those olden times men trod this path more or less instinctively and unconsciously, and they lost it in order that they might re-discover it through their own impulse, out of their own freedom. The path leading to the spirit must now be sought consciously, in full consciousness.

The epoch of transition through which humanity had to pass since the middle of the fifteenth century is what we may call the materialistic probation of humanity. If we submit to the influence of this materialistic epoch and then observe, with the insight thus gained, the development of culture during the last three or four centuries up to our present time, we discover that the training of teachers above all has been seized and claimed more intensively than anything else by this wave of materialism. Nothing impresses us so deeply than the way in which pedagogical-didactic conceptions have been permeated by materialistic ideas.

It suffices to observe with some understanding a few details in our modern system of education in order to realize the difficulties connected with a real and fruitful progress. Consider that particularly people who believe they are authorities on modern education assert that every form of instruction, beginning with the elementary classes, should be “intuitive” or what they mean by intuitive. I have

often pointed out to you how they wish, for example, to objectify the teaching of arithmetic, namely by introducing calculators in the elementary schools! They attribute great importance to the fact that the child should see everything and form his or her own thoughts through the things s/he sees. This intuitive direction in education is undoubtedly justified in many pedagogical spheres, but it nevertheless forces us to envisage the problem: How will a child develop if s/he passes through only such an intuitive education? If the child passes through only this kind of training his/her soul will become completely parched, his/her inner soul-impulse and soul-force will gradually die and the whole being will become connected exclusively with the sphere of external observation, and the forces which should grow out of the soul's inner being will gradually perish. Modern teachers, of course, do not know that they are killing the souls of children, but they actually do this. And we see, as a result, the symptoms, which now appear in so many adults. How many modern adults have problematic characteristics? How many of them are, at a more mature age, unable to draw out of their inner being the forces which give them comfort and hope in difficult times and which enable them to cope with different life situations? We come across many shattered natures, and we ourselves may at certain moments be at a loss in regard to the way in which we must face life. All this is connected with the deficiencies of our educational systems, particularly with the deficiencies connected with the training of teachers.

What should the future aims be in regard to the training of teachers? You see, what a teacher generally knows when s/he passes through his/her examinations is of secondary importance, for generally s/he is asked things which s/he can easily read up on before his/her lessons in any manual, things which s/he can prepare beforehand whenever the need arises. But what these examinations do not take into consideration is the general soul-constitution of the teacher—that spiritual essence which must incessantly pass over from his or her own being to that of his pupils.

It is not a matter of indifference whether this or that teacher enters the classroom. When one teacher enters the room the children of his class may feel a certain connection with him; in another case they do not feel any connection with the teacher, and sometimes they may actually feel a gulf between them and the teacher, accompanied by a whole range of feelings passing from indifference to those sensations which express themselves in making fun of the teacher, in scoffing and jeering at him. There is a whole range of feelings, which lies between the pupils and the teacher, and often this can be the ruin of real instruction and education.

In the first place, there is a burning question which we must face: How can the training of teachers be changed? It can only be changed if the teachers absorb the truths concerning nature and the essence of the human being that come from spiritual science. A teacher must be filled with the conviction that the human being is connected with the spiritual world. In the growing child he should see a testimony to the fact that through conception and birth this child came down to the earth from the spiritual world, that his spiritual essence became enfolded with a physical body,

and that here in the physical world he must learn things which he cannot learn during his existence between death and a new birth. The child learns these things with the help of his teacher.

Every child should stand before the teacher's soul as a question asked by the supersensible world to the physical world. A teacher cannot read this question in a complete and encompassing manner unless he calls on the aid of the spiritual-scientific truths concerning man's being.

Over the past three or four hundred years, humanity has gradually acquired the habit of observing man in a purely physiological way, I might say, of studying him only in regard to his external bodily constitution. Such a conception of man is harmful above all to teachers who wish to educate children. It will therefore be necessary that an education of the future should be based upon an anthropology that is derived from anthroposophy. This can only be reached if we contemplate the human being from the aspects that I have so frequently explained to you, those aspects that characterize him as a threefold being. We must be willing to have a real inner comprehension of this threefold being of man.

I have often explained to you that the human being, such as he stands before us, may be distinguished first of all in regard to his nerve-sensory structure. This may be expressed by saying, in a more popular form, that he is, in the first place, head; we distinguish in him his head structure. From an external standpoint, we then take as the second part of the human being the one which is pre-eminently the seat of rhythmic processes, the thorax, and then, as a third part, the one connected with the whole metabolic system, the limbs, the metabolic structure in which the metabolic processes take place. The physical form of the active human being is comprised externally of these three parts.

Let us now observe more closely these three parts which constitute the whole human nature: the head or the nerve-sensory part, the thorax or the rhythmical part, and the limbs or, more broadly, the metabolic part.

It is now essential to grasp the different character of these three parts of human nature. For a modern scholar who loves schematic classifications this is not easy. When we say that the human being consists of head, thorax and limbs, some scholars like to draw a line dividing the head from the rest of the body and to say: everything above this line is "head." Then they would like to draw another line separating the thorax from the limbs, so as to have all these parts neatly side by side. The modern scholar does not like to consider anything that cannot be classified in this manner.

But in reality this is not possible: such dividing lines, do not exist in real life. The human being is indeed chiefly head, or chiefly nerves and senses in that part of the body that lies above the shoulders. Yet his nerve-sensory system is located not only in the head, above the shoulders, for the sense of touch, for instance, or the sense of heat, are spread over the whole body. The head, therefore, stretches over the whole body. We may therefore say: man is pre-eminently "head" in his head. The head also exists in the thorax, but there its activity is weaker. And it exists in a

still weaker form in the limbs and in the metabolic system, but nevertheless we may find also there the activity of the head. Consequently we must say: Though the activity of the head may be found in the whole human being, though the whole human being is “head,” it is the head which is preeminently head. In our blackboard drawing we would have to indicate the head-part of man as follows (indicated in white on the blackboard drawing).

The thorax-man is not only localized in the thorax, though he chiefly lives in the organs which exist in the chest, in which the circulation of the blood and the breathing rhythm chiefly find expression. Yet respiration continues in the head and in the limbs, so that we must say: The human being is pre-eminently thorax in this region of the chest, but the activities of the thorax may also be found here and here, though in weaker measure (indicated in red on the blackboard drawing). Again we find that the whole human being is thorax, though the thorax exists chiefly in this part of the body, the chest.

Similarly the limbs and the metabolic structure are chiefly located in the lower abdomen (indicated in blue on the blackboard drawing), but the limbs also exist in the thorax region in a weaker measure, and their weakest expression is to be found in the head.

Consequently, though we may say the “head” is head, we must also say that the whole human being is head. Similarly, though the thorax is thorax, the whole human being is also thorax, and so forth. In reality, these things are intermingled. Our intellect likes to differentiate these parts, to set them side-by-side. This shows us how poorly our thoughts are connected with external reality. For there, in the real world outside, things intermingle. Whenever we separate head, thorax, and metabolic structure, we must also bear in mind that these different parts must at the same time be thought of as forming a whole. In reality, we should never think only analytically, but at the same time synthetically. A thinking person who only analyses resembles one who only breathes in and not out.

This shows you to some extent what should be included in the thoughts of teachers; in the future they must absorb this inner mobile way of thinking, this way of thinking which is in no way schematic. This alone will enable them to approach the reality of the world and of man. This reality cannot be approached unless one can grasp it from a certain wider standpoint, as a phenomenon connected with our epoch. The predilection for details that has developed in the present time, whenever scientific facts are contemplated, should be overcome; we must instead reach the point of connecting these details of life with the great problems of life.

There is one question that will become more and more significant for every spiritual development in the future, and that is the question of immortality. We must bear in mind how the great majority of men now looks upon this question of immortality, particularly in view of the fact that so many people have now reached the point of denying immortality.

What is it that lives in the minds of men who still wish to know something of immortality upon the foundation of traditional religion—the impulse to know what

takes place with the human soul when the human passes through the portal of death? If we inquire what interest people have in the question of immortality, or better, in the question of the eternal kernel of man's being we find that their chief interest in man's eternal life is connected with the question: What takes place with the human being when he passes through the portal of death?

Man is aware of the fact that he is an Ego. Within this Ego live his thinking, feeling and willing. He cannot bear the thought that the Ego might perish. The question which interests him above all is whether he can carry his Ego through death and what fate awaits him after death.

This course of development is the result of religious systems speaking of eternity and of man's eternal being by bearing in mind above all the question: What happens to the human soul when we pass through the portal of death?

Now you must feel that when we thus envisage the question of immortality it has a very strong flavor of egoism. It is really an egoistic impulse that leads us to ask what happens to the human soul when it passes through the portal of death. If modern people were to practice self-knowledge to a greater extent than is actually the case, if they were to study their own selves and not fall prey to illusion, they would realize how greatly their egoism is connected with the question of what happens to the soul after death.

This soul-mood has grown particularly during the last three or four hundred years, during the time of mankind's materialistic probation. Yet theories or doctrines of a purely abstract kind cannot overcome this inner habit of thinking and feeling which has taken hold of the souls of men. We should ask instead: Can things remain as they are? Should egoistic impulses in human nature be the sole inducement to ask after man's eternal being?

If we bear in mind everything connected with this problem we must say, this soul-mood has arisen because religions have neglected the other standpoint: Namely, to consider the human being when she is born, to watch her wonderful growth from her first cry, to see how the soul gradually penetrates into the body; Religions have neglected to observe man's pre-natal essence, that essence which lived in the spiritual world before birth and which gradually comes to the fore in the child. Do we ever come across the question: What continues from the spiritual sphere in physical man when she is born? Instead, we continually come across the question: What continues when she is born? Yet few people ask: What continues in man when she is born?

For the future this standpoint must have our chief attention. We should learn to listen to the manifestation of the soul-spiritual essence in the growing child, such as it existed before birth or conception. In the growing child we must learn to discover the continuation of the spiritual being which lived in the spiritual world before birth; then our relation with man's eternal being will gradually become unselfish. For we are inwardly selfish if we are not interested in that which continues in physical life from the spiritual world and direct our attention exclusively to the question of what continues after death. The observation of that which continues from the spiritual world in physical life is, as it were, based upon an unselfish mood of the soul.

Egoistic minds do not ask whether physical life is the continuation of a spiritual pre-natal life because they know the certainty of man's existence on earth, and they are glad of this existence. What they are not sure about is whether the human being also exists after death and so they would like to have a proof for this. Their egoism leads them to this search. But true knowledge does not come from egoism, not even from that sublimated kind of egoism that has just been characterized as producing the interest in a continuation of life after death. Can it be denied that religions speculate with this kind of egoism? This attitude must be overcome. Those who have an insight into the spiritual world know that this overcoming will not only bring with it truths, but it will also change man's whole attitude towards his environment. People will have quite different feelings towards the growing child they will face a child differently if they know of that eternal essence which always continues from life to life, and which no longer remained in the spiritual world when the child was born.

Consider how the problem would change if viewed from this standpoint. One can say: The human being lived in the spiritual world before he descended into the physical world through conception and birth. The spiritual world must no longer have given him that for which his soul was striving. He must have had the impulse to come down to the physical world, to enfold himself once more with a body, in order to seek on earth what he could no longer find in the spiritual world.

Life acquires a far deeper meaning if we contemplate it from this standpoint, but feelingly. Whereas the egoistic standpoint makes us become more and more abstract and leads into theoretical conclusions, inclining us more and more to intellectual thought, the unselfish standpoint gradually induces us to understand that world through love, to comprehend through love.

This is one of the elements which must be included in the training of teachers, to look upon pre-natal man, to experience in regard to life also the riddle of birth and not only the riddle of death.

We must then learn to raise anthropology to the stage of anthroposophy by acquiring true feeling for the forms that come to expression in the threefold human being. Recently I placed the question: Is not the human head, or that which chiefly constitutes the human head, spherical and simply set on top of the remaining part of the human organization? And again, if we take the thoracic part of man, how does this appear to us? It really appears to us in such a way that we might take a piece of the head and enlarge it, so that the spinal column would be here (he pointed to a drawing). Whereas the head's central point lies in the head, the central point of thoracic man lies very far away from the thorax. And if you imagine this as a kind of large head, this large head could belong, as it were, to a man lying in a horizontal position. Thus, if we consider the spinal column as an imperfect head, we obtain a human being horizontally and one standing up vertically. Matters become still more complicated if we bear in mind metabolic man, so complicated that we could not even draw them in a two-dimensional plane.

In short, a form-study of the plastic forms of the human being's three constituent parts would show us that each one of them presents an entirely different aspect. The head is, as it were, a totality; the thoracic part is not a totality, but a fragment; this is still more the case with the metabolic part of the human being.

What makes the human head a totality, something that is rounded off and complete in itself? It has this rounded-off character through the fact that the head is, of all the parts of human nature, the one most adapted to the physical world. This may seem strange to you, for one is accustomed to look upon the human head as man's noblest part. Nevertheless it is true that the head is the part that is most adapted to physical existence. The head expresses most of all of physical existence. We may, therefore, say: If we wish to characterize chiefly the physical body, we should bear in mind the head. The human being is most of all physical body in his head.

The human being is pre-eminently etheric body in the thoracic organs, in the organs of rhythm, and he is chiefly astral body in his metabolic organs. The Ego has as yet developed no marked characteristics in the physical world.

Here we have a point of view that is of extraordinary significance. You should envisage it by saying: When I look upon the human head (indicated in white on the blackboard drawing), I see, at the same time, the chief characteristics of the physical body. The head expresses more than anything else the manifestation of the human being. The etheric body is more active in the thorax. In the head it is least active of all; in the chest the etheric body is far more active. Seen physically, the thoracic part of man is therefore less perfect than the head. From a physical aspect it is less perfect. Very imperfect indeed is man's metabolic part, because there the activity of the etheric body is very small, whereas the astral body is most active of all in that part. The Ego is the infant—as I have said—and it hardly has a physical correlate.

The human being can, therefore, be described by saying: Man consists of a physical body. If you wish to reply to the question: What has the closest resemblance with man's physical body, you will have to say: The spherical form of the head. The human being then consists of an etheric body. What resembles it most closely? The fragment of the thorax. Man also consists of an astral body. What has the greatest resemblance with the astral body? Metabolic man. As the Ego, there is not a part in man's physical body that corresponds to it.

Each one of man's three parts, the head or nerve-sensory man, the thorax or rhythmical man, and metabolic man, thus become an image for something which transcends them: The head, an image for the physical body; the thorax, an image for the etheric body; the metabolism an image for the astral body.

We shall have to learn to look upon the human being in a different way than is the case today, when one studies the lifeless human body in a clinic, by investigating a fragment of tissue, and so forth, no matter whether this belongs to the head or the thorax.

We must learn to say: The head, the thorax and man's metabolic part have different relations with the cosmos and are the images of different forces which stand behind them. Such knowledge will extend a merely anthropological way of studying things to an anthropomorphic study.

From a purely physical standpoint, the organs of the thorax and of the head are of equal value. Whether you dissect the lungs or the brain, both are physical substance, from a physical point of view. But there is a great difference between them from a spiritual point of view. From a spiritual aspect, you will find that when you dissect the brain you have before you plainly what you are dissecting. But when you dissect, for instance, the lungs, which form part of the thorax, these present a very unclear aspect, for there the etheric body plays a very prominent part while the head is asleep.

What I have explained to you just now has its spiritual counterpoint. Those who have progressed a little through meditation, through the exercises that are described in our anthroposophical writings, gradually come to the point of contemplating the human being as a threefold being.

You know that in my book, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, I speak of this threefold human being from a particular aspect, namely there, where I draw attention to the Guardian of the Threshold. But this three-partition can also be reached by a strong concentration upon one's own self; this really enables one to separate the head (indicated in white on the blackboard drawing) from the thorax (indicated in red on the blackboard drawing) and from the metabolic parts (indicated in blue on the blackboard drawing).

Then one begins to notice what really constitutes the head. You see, if you draw out of the head from the remaining part of the human organism, so that you have it before you uninfluenced by the other members of human nature, you will find that the head is lifeless, it does not have any life. Clairvoyantly it is impossible to separate the head from the rest of the human organism without perceiving that the head is a corpse.

If one separates the thorax from the rest of the body, we find that it remains alive. And if one separates the astral body from the other members, by drawing out the metabolic part of man, one discovers that one's astral being continually escapes, it never remains at the same place, but follows the movements of the cosmos, for metabolic man has within him the astral forces.

And now imagine that you are facing a human being, a child. You study its nature with sound common sense, and with the aid of truths such as those explained just now. Then you look upon the human head—it bears death within its structure. You observe the influences that go out towards the head from the thorax and notice how vivifying they are. You see how the child begins to walk and perceive that it is the astral body which is active in its walking.

Human nature now becomes clearly perceptible to you, inwardly perceptible. The head—a corpse: procreating life would come to a stop if the human being were to remain quite still. But the moment he begins to walk you can see that it is the

astral body that walks—the human being can walk because the astral body consumes substances while walking, metabolic processes take place in a certain way.

How can we observe the Ego? For we have really exhausted everything within the field of our observation. When you notice the corpse of the head, the vitalizing influence of thoracic man, and all that is connected with walking, what remains in order to observe the Ego externally? I said that the Ego hardly has a physical correlate. You can only study the Ego by observing a growing child. With one year, it is quite small, with two years it is bigger, and so on. When you watch a child growing and put together what it was like in the succeeding epochs, you have a physical perception of the Ego. You can never perceive the Ego when you merely stand before a human being; you can only see the Ego by watching a child's growth.

If people were not subjected to illusions, but if they could see reality clearly, they would realize that it is not possible to perceive the Ego when they simply meet a human being and stand before him, but that they can only perceive the Ego by studying the human being in the different stages of his life. When you meet a person again after twenty years, you have a strong perception of his Ego by noticing the changes in his expression and physiognomy, and this is particularly the case if you have seen that person twenty years ago as a child.

Please do not merely develop theoretic ideas in connection with the ideas which I have explained to you, but try to vivify your thoughts and when you observe the human being, try to consider the following: The head, a corpse; the thorax, vivifying influences walking the astral body through the growth of the child's Ego. Whereas formerly the human being stood before you like a waxen doll, the whole conception of the human being thus becomes filled with life, .

What do we generally see with our physical eyes, and even through our intellect? —A doll of wax! But this doll begins to live if you add what I have explained to you just now!

Your conceptions will, for that purpose, have to be permeated by Spiritual Science, by the forces by which spiritual science can see into human feeling, into man's whole connection with the cosmos. A running child is a manifestation of the astral body. His characteristic movements while walking and running—for every child has a unique kind of walk—depend on the configuration of the different astral bodies. And what you can see in the child's growth expresses something of the Ego.

You see, Karma exercises a strong influence on man in such cases. Let us take an example Johann Gottlieb Fichte. I characterized Fichte to you in previous lectures, once describing him as a great philosopher, and another time as a Bolshevik, and so forth. But let us now take him from quite another standpoint.

Let us suppose that Fichte is passing by while we are standing in the street; we notice that he is not very tall or husky. What does his stature reveal? Repressed growth. He plants his feet firmly while walking, particularly his heels—that is the way he walks. His walk reveals the whole Ego of Fichte. Not a shade of his character can escape to us, as we watch him walking along the street, with his broad shoulders and his way of treading firmly on his heels. One could almost hear his way of speaking, by observing him in this way, from behind!

A spiritual element may thus penetrate into the external things of life. It cannot however enter into these external things of life unless people take into their minds something which does not live in the soul-constitution of modern men. Modern people would think it indiscrete to observe their fellow men as described above. And it would not be very advisable that such a manner of observation should spread, for the great propagation of materialism has given people such a character that they refrain from opening letters which do not belong to them only because this is forbidden. So long as such a mentality exists, it is not thinkable that everything should change in regard to human connections.

With the riddle of the fifteenth century the development of the earth has reached a stage which the human being on earth could only reach through one man meeting the other spiritually, right down in the physical sphere. The more we advance towards the future, the more we must learn to grasp spiritually all the physical things around us.

A beginning must be made in this direction with the teacher's pedagogical work in regard to children. Physiognomic pedagogy is the will to solve the riddle man, through education, in each single specimen of man!

Now you may feel how strong is the influence of what I have described to you as the probation of humanity in the present time. My explanations really tend towards an ever-growing individualization, every human being considered as a separate being. The great ideal that we should bear in mind is that no one resembles another person, that every person is a distinct and separate being, with characteristics of his own. If the earth were to reach its goal before we acquire this capacity to recognize in every person his own characteristic being, humanity on earth would not attain its goal!

Yet how far distant we are today from the mentality which strives after this goal! Today we abolish distinctions among human beings, we level them. When we observe people, we do not particularly bear in mind their individual qualities. Hermann Bahr, of whom I have often spoken, once explained how the development of the times tends to the gradual abolishment of individualization. In the 1890s, when Hermann Bahr lived for some time in Berlin, he frequented the Berlin "society" and every evening at dinner had a lady to his right and one to his left. But on the next evening, at the dinner table, when sitting again between two ladies, he could only gather from the invitation cards that they were not the same of the day before—he had never looked at them carefully, for the lady of yesterday and the lady of today were more or less the same to Bahr. Social and particularly industrial civilization levels people and discourages the development of individualization.

In the present time, we are headed for a general leveling. But man's innermost goal should be that of individualization. Modern European men tend above all to cover up individuality, whereas the thing that they most need is to go in search of that individuality.

When we teach children, we must begin to turn our inner soul-gaze fully on to the child's individuality. Teachers should be trained to adopt the mentality that

they must discover the individuality in each man. This can only be reached if our conception of the human being becomes permeated with life, as described, above. We should really be conscious of the fact that man is not a mechanism that moves, but that it is the astral body that moves and draws along the physical body.

Now compare this inwardly mobile picture of the whole human being, which thus arises in your soul, with the conception of man offered by modern science! What it offers to us is a homunculus, a real homunculus! Science explains nothing concerning the human being, it only preaches the homunculus. The true essence of man is something that must penetrate above all into education. Modern pedagogy does not contain it at all.

The problem of education is therefore a question of “training teachers” and until we look upon it in this way no fruitful results can be obtained in education. Seen from a higher perspective, everything is connected, so that anything is linked up with the other.

Modern people would even like to develop side by side the human activities, the inner human activities, as subjects of teaching. One learns anthropology and then religion, but there is no connection between them. In reality our observations of the human being are connected, as you have seen, with the problem of immortality, with the problem of man’s eternal being. And the problem of man’s eternal being had to be brought into connection with a direct observation of the human being.

This mobile character of soul-experiences must above all be brought into pedagogy. From it will develop entirely different capacities than those that are now developing in teacher training centers. This is of very great importance.

With today’s lecture I wished to show you that spiritual science must really permeate everything and that it is impossible to solve the great social problems of the present without the aid of spiritual science.



Blackboard drawing by Rudolf Steiner