The Philosophical Roots of Waldorf Education

Rudolf Steiner as a Philosopher[1]

Frederick Amrine

It's surprisingly difficult to write about Rudolf Steiner as a philosopher, and I'm surprised to find myself beginning this installment on that note. My view of this aspect of his work has changed in ways that are difficult to describe. And it's doubly difficult to write about Steiner as a philosopher in the context of a journal devoted to Waldorf education.

One obvious reason why it's difficult is that, if we take the term "philosophy" in the broadest sense as meaning Steiner's worldview, then the task is overwhelmingly large. So there are obvious practical reasons for restricting this essay to works we might call "philosophy proper," even though it's much more Steiner's worldview in the broader sense that informs Waldorf education. That last point is what makes the task difficult here, but neither the scope of Steiner's work nor the mismatch between topic and context is surprising.

> Shifting attention to Steiner's later philosophical writings brings into sharp focus the realization that Steiner's philosophy is ultimately about transcending philosophy.

On the other hand, writing for an anthroposophical journal has an advantage on which I'm eager to seize, so as to make space for discussion of the surprises. I'm going to assume that the readership is familiar with the basic arguments of Steiner's "basic book," *The Philosophy of Freedom*.[2] Readers who do not know the book, or would like a quick refresher, are encouraged to consult Owen Barfield's miraculous synopsis "Rudolf Steiner's Concept of Mind," which was originally published as the lead article in A.C. Harwood's collection *The Faithful Thinker* and then reprinted as the final essay in *Romanticism Comes of Age*.[3] As it is fundamentally an exposition of Goethe's thinking rather than Steiner's own, and because we already did the hard work of rehearsing Goethe's revolutionary insights in an earlier installment of this series, I will refer to Steiner's little gem of a book on Goethe's epistemology only in passing.[4] As with *The Philosophy of Freedom*, the density of the argument precludes any quick summary. Ditto Steiner's doctoral dissertation on Fichte, *Truth and Science*.[5]

Instead, I want to focus on some later texts that are seldom discussed, even though they are inarguably central: the two lectures that Steiner gave at the International Philosophical Congress in Bologna in April, 1911[6]; the last chapter of Steiner's *Riddles of Philosophy* (1914)[7]; and lectures IV and VIII of the lecture cycle *The Boundaries of Natural Science* (1920).[8] By foregoing recapitulation of *The Philosophy of Freedom* and *Goethe's Theory of Knowledge*, we will also be able to take up the vexed questions of Steiner's relationships to Nietzsche and Kant. Let's begin there.

Steiner and Nietzsche

Shifting attention to Steiner's later philosophical writings brings into sharp focus something surprising that was not entirely clear in his early studies: *the realization that Steiner's philosophy is ultimately about transcending philosophy*.[9] It's what Nietzsche meant, I think, when he wrote about overcoming "Socratism"—philosophy as rational construction and discursive argument—and Steiner went through a phase of powerful attraction to Nietzsche for just that reason.[10]

Like Nietzsche, Steiner was a "philosopher of freedom" who sought to free himself from the limitations of his contemporaries' philosophical thinking. Nietzsche failed but Steiner succeeded.

The key to understanding why Steiner succeeded where Nietzsche failed is to recall Wittgenstein's paradoxical metaphor of climbing the ladder and then kicking it away, with which we began this entire series of essays. In an important letter to Rosa Mayreder of November 1894, Steiner describes what he felt he had accomplished in *The Philosophy of Freedom* with an archetypally Nietzschean metaphor followed by an archetypally Nietzschean assertion: it was like climbing a mountain, an "ascent" that attempts "to negotiate cliffs and precipices. …Perhaps the time for handing on theory in a manner like this is already over. Philosophy, except where it is real, individual experience, holds scarcely any further interest for me. …" (Palmer 6). There is no doubt that for both Steiner and Nietzsche, the ultimate goal was to transcend "philosophy proper" *as such*. Nietzsche's longing for transcendence, even initiation, shines through everywhere in his early philosophy, but perhaps nowhere more so than in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872):

> At present, however, science, spurred on by its powerful delusion, is hurrying unstoppably to its limits, where the optimism hidden in the essence of logic will founder and break up. For there is an infinite number of points on the periphery of the circle of science, and while we have no way of foreseeing how the circle could ever be completed, a noble and gifted man inevitably encounters, before the mid-point of his existence, boundary points on the periphery like this, where he stares into what cannot be illuminated. When, to his horror, he sees how logic curls up around itself at these limits and finally bites itself in the tail[11]—then a new form of knowledge breaks through, *tragic knowledge*, which, simply to be endured, needs art for protection and as medicine. (§15)

It is easy to understand why Steiner was initially drawn to this side of Nietzsche. *But the ladder must be climbed, and Nietzsche failed because he kicked away the ladder without first climbing it.* In the idiom of *The Birth of Tragedy*, we might say that he embraced the Dionysian principle without first having developed fully the Apollonian. The ladder is rigor; the ladder is method; the ladder teaches a thinking that is self-sustaining. It gives us a ground upon which we can stand outside the sense-world. Lacking that support, Nietzsche tumbled down into the crudest forms of materialistic scientism.

"Climbing the ladder" is the epistemological process Steiner describes in the first half of *The Philosophy of Freedom.*

In the aforementioned letter to Mayreder, Steiner confesses his great admiration for Nietzsche, but he also recognizes Nietzsche's limits: "I know the exact place where my book belongs in the current of present-day spiritual developments and can point out the exact spot where it carries Nietzsche's line of thinking further. I can make the calm statement that it expresses ideas that are missing in the work of Nietzsche." (Palmer 5)

"Climbing the ladder" is the epistemological process Steiner describes in the first half of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, which has been summarized with brilliant concision in Barfield's essay and rehearsed even more succinctly in a paragraph by Andrew Welburn:

> The "idealist" moment in the process of knowing, in which it seems that mind confronts the world and imposes upon it meaning, order, and intelligibility, is thus reinterpreted fundamentally. It emerges

> as part of a dynamic of knowledge, rooted in unconscious activity of the soul. What we really witness at that moment is not the "mind" confronting the world, but rather disentangling itself from it. We are defining for ourselves a position over against the world so as to experience our own being. Knowledge is the bringing to consciousness of some portion of our activity as part of the universe we inhabit; but in order to bring it under conscious control, we have to suppress or "benumb," actually bring death into, that active involvement with the world on which, nevertheless, all knowledge is based. (124)

Nietzsche felt the pain of this separation, of this death process, so he retreated down the ladder and reasserted a Dionysian vitalism, rejecting the ladder as "Socratism." Tragically, Nietzsche confused the sub-rational and the supra-rational; with grand rhetorical gestures, he leapt off the ladder—at the bottom rather than the top.

"Climbing the ladder" means starting with our modern consciousness that is inevitably split, and then engaging in the hard conceptual labor that Barfield terms "beta thinking."[12] Gradually we realize that the subject/object distinction itself, the innate "prejudice" (as Coleridge called it) that we are the authors of a private thinking that regards a world wholly independent of and unaffected by our subjective reflections on it, is not real, but rather an artifact of a particular moment within a larger evolution of consciousness. The kind of beta-thinking that Steiner undertook in the first half of *The Philosophy of Freedom* (and before him Spinoza, Kant, Goethe, and Fichte among others, all in their own ways) leads us inexorably to the realization that "onlooker consciousness" (as Steiner has so memorably labeled the prejudice) is not fundamental, but rather the inevitable result of our efforts to attain self-consciousness. "Knowledge sets us over against things, as interpreters; it is for epistemology to remind us of the hidden unity which connects us with the world, suppressed by our own act of becoming conscious." (Welburn 128)

But where does the ladder lead? To a different consciousness altogether, a completely new kind of thinking. Nietzsche rightly saw "onlooker consciousness" as illusory and perspectival, and he intuited that the cure was to engage our wills creatively. But not having climbed the ladder, Nietzsche failed to experience the self-sustaining, independent, creative power of Imagination. He took at face value the reductive positivism of mid-century, popular scientific literature and concluded that the world was inherently meaningless. All that was left was for him to celebrate the will of the few who are brave and strong enough to stare that meaninglessness in the face without flinching.

But where does the ladder lead? To a different consciousness altogether, a completely new kind of thinking.

Steiner and Kant

The other surprising aspect of Steiner's philosophy is the difficulty one has sorting out his relationship to Kant. An enormous amount has been written about this topic, and Steiner seems to refer to Kant on every other page of his philosophical texts, so one feels as though this should be an entirely straightforward issue. But it isn't at all. No matter how hard one tries, and no matter how strongly one might feel about Kant, Steiner's various statements on and employments of Kant just don't add up. I can't resolve this issue to my own satisfaction yet, let alone yours, but let me first try to persuade you of the difficulty and then sketch out my own attempts to resolve the apparent contradictions.

My way of persuading you of the difficulty might feel roundabout, and it might sound

critical, but I believe it's actually neither. To my mind, nobody has written better in English on Steiner as a philosopher than Owen Barfield and his worthy successor, Andrew Welburn. And yet *even these brilliant thinkers* cannot sort out Steiner's relationship to Kant, which proves to me beyond any reasonable doubt that there is something inherently unclear and unresolved there. The first edition of Barfield's early masterpiece *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (1927, reprinted multiple times since)[13] already contains an appendix (II) that begins with a strong critique of Kant. Although Barfield concedes up front it was Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) that actually inaugurated the set of dire intellectual premises Steiner would eventually term "onlooker consciousness," he claims that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) "was one of the most effective intellectual factors in finally clenching these premises upon the minds of almost the whole Western world." Barfield then notes a debt to Steiner "in detecting an unacknowledged influence far wider still." And now follows the only passage I have encountered in all of Barfield's works in which he simply loses his grip:

> How many children, I wonder, are nowadays informed at an early age by some elder brother or some guide, philosopher, and friend, that what they see and hear and smell is not "nature" but the activity of their own nerves? And though this is not Kant's doctrine, it *is* a crude physiological reflection of it. Thus, it does not require a very active fancy to see the Königsberg ghost hovering above, and intertwining itself with the ideas of minds that never even knew Kant's name…

"Though this is not Kant's doctrine" means what it says, and Barfield is right: these ideas that are ascribed carelessly to Kant, invoking the authority of Steiner, are not Kant's ideas at all. How can Kant be the ghost if we are haunted by thoughts that we never read in Kant because they simply aren't there?

So even Barfield is quick to echo what he hears as criticism of Kant in Steiner from early on. Yet when it comes time to write his masterpiece *Saving the Appearances*, Barfield constructs its whole epistemological foundation on an unacknowledged allusion to the opening chapter of Kant's *First Critique*, which is called the "Transcendental Aesthetic."[14] He borrows not just the main idea, representation, but also the specific illustration of it. (Kant B 63) Consider a rainbow, Barfield writes, and then consider a tree. The tree initially seems different, in the same way that the rainbow and the raindrops underlying it initially seemed different. But Barfield then asks us to do *exactly the same thing that Kant had done with the rainbow and the raindrops.* (16–17) What Kant and Barfield both are doing here is precisely what the essay in *The Faithful Thinker* describes Steiner as having accomplished in *The Philosophy of Freedom;* there Barfield again asserts that "[i]t is these conceptually determined percepts (he [Steiner] calls them *Vorstellungen*—representations) which make up the public world of our actual, everyday experience."[15] Steiner revealed that the "specious Given"[16] is already suffused by the activity of thinking, and distinguished it from the "net Given," which can never be experienced. What Barfield calls "the unrepresented" or "the particles" is fully equivalent to what Kant calls here the "thing in itself," and the distinction between "the specious Given" and "the net Given" that Barfield rightly ascribes to Steiner is exactly what Kant means in saying that the relation of the representation to the object "at once becomes transcendental" upon epistemological reflection. (B 63) Both the opening of *Saving*

Where Steiner sides with Kant, as he surely does, he sides with the spirit of Kant against the letter of Kant.

the Appearances and Barfield's recapitulation of Steiner on perception in his essay are recognizably Kant's melody; Barfield has merely transposed them into another key.

Similar contradictions arise in Andrew Welburn's discussion of the relationship between Steiner and Kant. He is understandably reluctant to generalize about Steiner as a philosopher, yet he does not hold back—initially—from characterizing the whole project as anti-Kantian:

> The mesmeric effect of Kantian ideas on his [Steiner's] own time led him into a rather Wittgensteinian exercise of entering the metaphysical maze, gently disentangling from their delusion those of his contemporaries who had become so strangely convinced that reality was always there but out-of-reach, unknowable but morally incumbent upon us in inexorable duty, the more intense because inscrutable. (54)[17]

But then two sentences later he concedes that "there is nothing like a detailed refutation, nor was that Steiner's aim" (55); indeed (same sentence), "the obsession with Kant obscures the real focus of Steiner's struggle—against materialism"—which was also the focus of Kant's struggle. Earlier Welburn conceded that Steiner "put his case in the (largely neo-Kantian) language of his time," (19) and later he will assert that Steiner did a better job of effecting the "Copernican revolution"—that Kant himself had of course tried to effect (241), and that his procedure is a "highly Kantian" way of disrupting Kant. (242) Steiner's Kantian anti-Kantianism is clearly a source of vexation, for Welburn sighs loudly and complains (in the sentence between pages 54 and 55 skipped above), "One sometimes feels in reading Steiner (or certain of his followers) that one almost ought first to become a Kantian in order to be liberated from his bonds." (54) By the middle of the next page, he has decided to relegate Kant to an appendix.

There we learn that history was unimpressed by Kant, and revenged itself on him by sending "many thinkers who followed Kant … as [an] intoxicating philosophical liberator." (240) And Steiner likewise followed not the letter but "the spirit" of Kant, because "Kant had indeed done the 'groundwork' for the liberation of the thinking individual, giving the philosophical issues related to it their distinctive modern form. That is why the *Philosophy of Freedom* retains so much that is Kantian." (240–241) To readers of the first three installments of this series, Welburn's hints point to an account that will sound very familiar, so I need not rehearse those earlier arguments again here.

Steiner was part of the "inner revolution" within the larger Kantian revolution, and recognized that the new "architectural principle" of the Third Critique was the right foundation for further work.

My own ways of reconciling these contradictions adduce several points that one can also find scattered throughout Welburn's book, but I draw a different conclusion from them. The first is that Steiner does not refute the letter of Kant, because the letter is irrelevant. (I believe this is the real reason why Kant ends up as an appendix in Welburn's book.) Like all the other post-Kantians we have discussed in earlier installments, Steiner was part of the "inner revolution" within the larger Kantian revolution, and, like Kant himself at the end of his life, he recognized that the new "architectural principle" of the *Third Critique* was the right foundation for further work. Where Steiner sides with Kant, *as he surely does*, he sides with the spirit of Kant against the letter of Kant. This goes a long way towards resolving the contradictions.

The second is that Steiner does not always distinguish clearly between Kant himself and Kant as interpreted by his own contemporaries writing after the middle of the nineteenth century. Late nineteenth-century neo-Kantians asserted the letter of Kant against the spirit of Kant, which led them to misread him profoundly. They first insisted that what transcends logical thought and the bounds of sense is unknowable, and then they gradually decided that it's unknowable because it doesn't exist. They used Kant to justify a passive and reductive sensualism—precisely the Humean model that Kant had set out to defeat, and believed he had defeated once and for all. Neo-Kantianism is a hideous caricature of Kant, and where Steiner seems to criticize Kant, he is almost always attacking "Kant," the Neo-Kantian caricature of Kant's deepest insights. *Steiner is deeply sympathetic to Kant, but implacably opposed to Neo-Kantianism.*[18] This is a subtle distinction, but one that is all-important if we wish to understand the deep roots of anthroposophy, and hence of Waldorf education, within German Idealism. Owen Barfield has argued persuasively that anthroposophy is "Romanticism come of age," and it is equally true—indeed effectively the same thing—to say that anthroposophy is "German Idealism come of age."

> Steiner is deeply sympathetic to Kant, but implacably opposed to Neo-Kantianism.

But the most important reason takes us back to the initial surprise: Kant is integral to "philosophy proper," and hence even he must ultimately be overcome. Yet one cannot avoid the ladder, which is to say: we must begin where we are and climb out. And the dualism of the "letter" of Kant is *precisely the overriding problem that must be solved.* Not only did Kant pose the problem more fully and acutely than any other modern philosopher: he then overcame the problem in the course of his own philosophical development. Kant climbed the ladder, saw the centrality of the creative imagination, and kicked away the ladder. Why complain about Kant's ladder, when we clearly need a ladder, and Kant's is clearly the best? The young Turks whose hair was on fire didn't complain: they scaled the ladder as fast as their legs could carry them. *It was the only reaction that made sense.*

Steiner climbed fastest. Or maybe it was just that he started near the top. His mission, which he accomplished spectacularly well, was to take the next steps on a ladder that he couldn't borrow from anyone else. He had to climb up from Kantian-Goethean-Fichtean-Schillerean creative imagination to—Imagination. The sentence in his letter to Rosa Mayreder that precedes his musing about the end of "handing on theory" asserts that "only when one reaches the goal does one realize that one has actually made it." (Palmer 6) Perhaps as he composed his earlier writings, Steiner was not yet fully convinced that "philosophy proper" could be overcome entirely, which would help to explain his ambivalences about Kant. Although there are strong hints of it in the second half of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, it is only in later lectures and writings that Steiner displays full confidence and describes that second ascent in philosophical terms. Let us turn to them.

> Steiner's mission was to climb up from Kantian-Goethean-Fichtean-Schillerean creative imagination to – Imagination.

Two Lectures in Bologna

The crude Positivists among Steiner's contemporaries mistook the "specious Given" for an ultimate, while the Neo-Kantians mistakenly concluded that the "net Given's" absence from immediate experience was

proof it lay outside any *possible* experience. The latter does not follow because it ignores the possibility that a meditatively intensified thinking might *render* it phenomenal. That had been precisely Fichte's experience, for which he felt he needed to coin an entirely new term, *Tathandlung*—literally a "made fact." And hence the title of Steiner's first lecture in Bologna, which refers to "Certain Psychologically Possible Facts."[19]

Climbing the first ladder is about strengthening thinking. "Thinking is—and strengthened thinking will be aware of itself as being—that factor in man 'through which he inserts himself spiritually into reality'."[20] Boldly, Steiner begins his first lecture at the Philosophical Congress in Bologna with a meta-philosophical description of the second ladder: ascent by way of meditative exercises.[21] Having climbed up and out of "onlooker consciousness," we intuit that all objects of knowledge are correlative to a consciousness, that perception is always already suffused with thinking. It follows that strengthened thinking will lead to *expanded perception*. Meditative work lifts us up to a direct experience of *objectively real potentials*.

Strengthened thinking will lead to expanded perception. Meditative work lifts us up to a direct experience of objectively real potentials.

But this must be a strengthened thinking, one that we have taken in hand and suffused with our wills. Meditative work is imaginative in that we are the artists of our own cognitional life, which allows us to intervene actively in the world as moral agents, employing the ethical counterpart to Coleridge's "primary imagination." Hence Steiner calls this expanded intuitive faculty "moral imagination." The holistic integration of thinking as an activity into every aspect of our experience of the world is so hard to see because it becomes apparent only when we cease doing it to step back to contemplate the results. It becomes apparent only in the labor of beta-thinking. But once it becomes conscious upon the ladder of inner work, the holism that had made this newly discoverable participation initially invisible becomes (as Barfield puts it with typical brilliance) "the very stamp upon its passport to utility."[22]

What is new in the Bologna lectures vis-á-vis Steiner's earlier philosophical writings is the idea that this meta-philosophy is limitless. It is a dynamic and evolutionary process: "Based on indubitable phenomena of the inner life, spiritual science considers it reasonable to assert that knowledge is not 'finished' and complete as such, but rather fluid and able to evolve." (113) As we climb ever higher on the ladder, eventually we realize that the seeming *limits* are only a horizon, and "that over the horizon of normal consciousness, there is another level of consciousness into which human beings can penetrate." (113) Over and over again, Steiner returns in the first Bologna lecture to the idea of *life* and *living thinking*—the pure vitality that Nietzsche had mistakenly sought at the foot of the first ladder. "In this process, concepts do not act as cognitional elements but as real forces" (115); "such images should not be considered for their value as facts in an ordinary sense; they should be seen in terms of their effectiveness as real forces in the soul. …A spiritual scientist does not attribute value to the *meaning* of the images used for psychological exercises, but to the soul's experience of their effects." (117)

Rather than eat the spiritual seeds by converting them into unreal signifiers, we *plant* them, and they germinate as nascent organs of cognition: "The more alive the symbol appears as an image and the more saturated with meaning, the better it is. Under these conditions, the symbol affects the mind so that, after a certain time … the inner life processes themselves are felt to be stronger, more flexible,

and mutually illuminating." (117) Through meditative practice, we become the sculptors of our own higher nature; our cognitional life itself becomes the object of a Schillerean "aesthetic education" that calls forth "living form." It is, after all, only a living organism that can grow and evolve.

Here we learn the most esoteric reason why Nietzsche necessarily failed and why climbing the ladder is unavoidable. "True spiritual research involves the whole mental apparatus of logic and self-aware contemplation when it seeks to transpose consciousness from the sensory to the supersensible sphere. It cannot be accused, therefore, of disregarding the rational element of knowledge… . [I]n passing out of the sensory world, it always carries and retains the rational element—like a skeleton of the supersensible experience—as an integrating aspect of all supersensible perception." (136) In our newly evolved cognitive bodies, there is no longer a physical organism or a realm of sensory phenomena to provide means of external support. We will need an endo-skeleton, and that function will be performed by the exo-skeleton of the ladder that we climbed, turned outside in.

The Bologna lectures end with "a few rather aphoristic observations" that underscore the differences between "spiritual science" and *all* "the various contemporary trends in epistemology," (136) which Steiner then proceeds to describe with unqualified praise as "immeasurably great" and "subtle." (137) This turn in his argument would surprise us greatly if we understood Steiner as a philosopher among philosophers, staking out his own philosophical position in opposition to incorrect views. But now he clearly feels no need to contend with these epistemologies, all of which are brilliant in their own way, *because he has climbed up and out of that whole arena.* Having climbed the ladder, Steiner has "overcome" philosophy as such, and he invites us all to do the same.

"A Brief Outline of an Approach to Anthroposophy"

Steiner begins the last chapter of *The Riddles of Philosophy* by situating the great questions of "philosophy proper" we have been pursuing within the meta-philosophical context of the evolution of consciousness. Evolution rooted out the "original participation" described by Steiner's contemporaries Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl so that the mind could attain self-consciousness; paradoxically, only if human thinking becomes maya can it become free. Now spiritual anthropology trumps philosophy. But that same anthropological fact has an immediate and profound philosophical consequence: it follows that "the riddles of the soul" cannot be solved out of ordinary consciousness *in principle.* If "normal consciousness" in modern times is insubstantial, then the sources of normal consciousness must necessarily lie outside of normal consciousness.

Here Steiner recalls his second lecture in Bologna, specifically his concluding analogy of modern human thought to an image reflected in a mirror. The point of logical thought-structures—insubstantial, tautologous, valid, but untrue—is precisely that of a mirror image: to enable self-consciousness. Real *thinking* is like light, invisible to normal consciousness until it is reflected from a body. But real thinking remains invisible to normal conscious for an even more profound reason: it is because we are actually not separate from it. Our higher self lives entirely within this living thinking, outside of normal consciousness.[23] It remains unconscious for the same reason we cannot see our own face: it is because we are our own face; we can't stand apart from it and confront it as an object. We become conscious of our own activity—self-conscious—only by viewing it in a mirror. Except we have become so accustomed to the mirror-image that we mistake it for real.

And now we realize the point Steiner was trying to make in writing two volumes on *The Riddles of Philosophy.* The point was

not to recapitulate a history, or ultimately even to establish the idea of the "evolution of consciousness" (although the volumes are a treasure trove in that regard as well). We realize that the whole project is one long *reductio ad absurdum*. Despite their "immeasurably great" and "subtle" epistemologies (Bologna), one brilliant philosopher after another fails utterly, as fail they must. It's not that they have chosen the wrong concepts, or put them together in the wrong sequence, Steiner claims; it's that they have remained within *a consciousness that was devised for the purpose of cutting them off from reality*.[24] The unreal thought-as-reflection that Barfield calls "alpha thinking" has succeeded brilliantly in calling forth "onlooker consciousness." And "alpha thinking" cannot solve the riddles of philosophy in principle because its very nature and "mission" is to create the very problem we are trying to solve! It is only because alpha-thinking has been so thoroughly successful, and because we lack any sense of the evolution of consciousness, that we mistake our innate "prejudice" for the way things really are.

We begin to see *The Riddles of Philosophy* for what it is: a feast of paradoxes. Nobody, not even Nietzsche, has managed to escape the trap, because no one has climbed up and out of the problem. The unsolved "riddles" are meant to send a message, but they also function like Zen koans. For example, Steiner likens spiritual knowledge to "a memory of something one hasn't experienced yet." The riddles are nuts that logic just can't crack; instead, logic breaks itself upon them, and we break out of the tautologous circle of rational thought.

And come to think of it, hasn't our whole route thus far been strewn with paradoxes? In trying to capture the nature of aesthetic experience in his *Third Critique*, Kant lays out a whole smorgasbord of oxymora such as "purposefulness without purpose" and "indeterminate concept" and "free causality." Fichte's key terms "intellectual intuition" and "made-fact" are likewise oxymoronic. Schiller: "We're most fully human [i.e., most mature] when we play," and our ultimate goal is to make ourselves (i.e., determine ourselves to be) *indeterminate*. Wittgenstein: the most important things in philosophy *can't be said*. Steiner: the best objects for meditation (which should, recall, not be taken from the real world) are the *concepts of modern natural science*. While "philosophy proper" keeps searching for the highest trump card, wisdom sees that the only way to win is by changing the game, which is why Steiner concludes his account by asserting that "[f]rom one certain point of view, this last chapter no longer belongs to the history of philosophy."

Kant may have been wrong about many things, but on my reading of *The Riddles of Philosophy*, the whole point is that the same fundamental criticism can be leveled against every single thinker since the advent of Nominalism in the High Middle Ages. *Modern philosophy keeps trying to heal patients by performing surgery on the reflected images of their bodies*. No amount of training, dexterity, or inventiveness can solve this problem short of realizing that we have been trying to operate on an illusory patient.

The Limits and the Frontiers of Science[25]

Rightly understood, *The Riddles of Philosophy* leads us up to a genuine threshold experience: a seeming limit that turns into a frontier. After climbing the upper rungs of the ladder through the meditative efforts described in the Bologna lectures, eventually we generate new forces of such vitality and strength that they lift us right off the ladder: "the soul feels as though lifted out of the physical organism." (119) The deadened reflections that had been directed outward previously have now been reoriented inward, and "as a result of the exercises, the soul feels imbued by an experience of itself." (119) The result is an immediate intuition, *a spiritual viewing*, of a thinking that is substantive activity. Looking back at *The*

Philosophy of Freedom in 1920, Steiner describes this experience now not as first glimpses from the ladder, from below looking up, but now from above the ladder, looking outward: "One experiences spirit by observing, by actually observing how moral forces flow into sense-free thinking." (*Boundaries* 48) This living thinking is imbued with will, interwoven with moral impulses; we have finally achieved the real, living union of theoretical and practical philosophy that had been the Holy Grail of German Idealism.

Here the seeds of thinking are not consumed, but allowed to germinate. Here the forces of life overcome the deadening of abstract thought. Having climbed to this level, we experience a real resurrection of thinking: "One should feel that one is being lifted out of one's usual thinking into a thinking independent of the senses, in which one is fully immersed, so that one feels free of the conditions of physical existence." (*Boundaries* 107) Consciousness undergoes a sea change: "now concepts and ideas transform themselves into images, into Imagination. One discovers the higher plane of which moral imagination is only the initial projection; one discovers the cognitional level of Imagination." (*Boundaries* 52)

The Kantian ladder led us up via beta-thinking to intuitions of the faculty of creative imagination, working at the heart of all our knowing and doing within normal consciousness. But now we have stepped off that ladder into a higher consciousness, Imagination, of which lower-case "imagination," even the "moral imagination" of *The Philosophy of Freedom*—the highest faculty of normal consciousness—is but a shadow. What force enlivens this higher faculty?

A succinct answer comes in Steiner's lecture of May 1, 1918, in Munich:

> Twenty-five years ago, I applied the term "intuitive thinking" to what I am now describing as an attribute of pure thinking born of intuition and making its appearance in moral rather than in logical concepts when a person acts in accordance with moral ideas. "Moral imagination" was the term given to what such a person perceives living imaginatively within him. When one becomes aware that an unconscious inspiration lives at one pole of his being and an unconscious imagination at the other, he becomes aware of his immortal part.[26]

This "unconscious imagination" is attained by projecting our "night-self" into our waking consciousness, mustering "all the independence we have attained while sleeping." (Palmer 49) Elsewhere, Steiner refers to this as a "night-thinking," and now we recall the chapter "Sleep and Death" in *Esoteric Science*: sleep is the "little brother" of death, because in both cases we are outside the physical body.[27] When we think with our "night-self," we are thinking with our "after-death" self. We are already beyond the threshold of immortality, while still incarnate. Forces of freedom, of liberation from the body, stream in to us from the future.

At an even higher level, a different set of revelations arrives, flowing to us from the other direction. We experience these later, just as the "baby brothers" of these same instreaming forces arrive at different moments in the development of the child, first the pole of excarnation, then the pole of incarnation:

> I have told you that from birth until the change of teeth a soul-spiritual entity is at work structuring the human being and that this then emancipates itself to an extent. Later, between the change of teeth and puberty, another such soul-spiritual entity, which dips down in a way into the physical body, awakens the erotic drives and much else as well. …[W]hen, for example, we take up the sense of love between the change of teeth and puberty, this is not something originating in the physical body but rather something that the cosmos gives us through the colors,

> sounds, and streaming warmth that reach us. (*Boundaries* 111–112)

But now it is time to step back and allow Rudolf Steiner to speak in his own words:

> Now, you see, we arrive inwardly at two poles. By proceeding into the outer world we approach the pole of Inspiration; by proceeding into the inner world of consciousness we approach the pole of Imagination. Once one has grasped these Imaginations, it becomes possible to collate them, just as one collates data concerning external nature by means of experiments and conceptual thinking. In this manner one can collate inwardly something real, something that is not a physical body but an etheric body informing the human being's physical body throughout his whole life, yet in an especially intensive manner during the first seven years. At the change of teeth this etheric body takes on a somewhat different configuration, as I described to you yesterday. By having attained Imagination one is able to observe the way in which the etheric or life-body works within the physical body. (*Boundaries* 54)
>
> And thus, ladies and gentlemen, I have led you, or at least sought to lead you, to the two poles of Inspiration and Imagination. …I had to lead you to the portal, as it were, beforehand, in order to show that the existence of this portal is well founded in the normal scientific sense. For it is only upon such a foundation that we can build later the edifice of spiritual science itself, which we enter through that portal. (*Boundaries* 55)

Imagination raying in from one portal, and Inspiration raying in from the other. We have traveled far from "philosophy proper." But we have arrived at our destination, and many of you will recognize it immediately.

I have delivered you to the doorstep of Steiner's foundational cycle on the profoundest aspects of Waldorf education: the opening lectures of *Study of Man.*[28] Welcome home.

Endnotes

1. See my previous discussions of Kant, Goethe, Hegel, Fichte, and Schiller.
2. GA 4; *The Philosophy of Freedom: The Basis for a Modern World Conception: Some results of introspective observation following the methods of Natural Science*, trans. Michael Wilson (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1964). (Alternative English translations are available under the titles *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* and *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path.*) For a variety of reasons that include sheer force of habit, I find it difficult to refer to GA 4 as anything other than *The Philosophy of Freedom.*
3. A.C. Harwood, ed., *The Faithful Thinker: Centenary Essays on the Work and Thought of Rudolf Steiner, 1861–1925* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), pp.11–21; Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), pp.241–254.
4. *Goethe's Theory of Knowledge: An Outline of the Epistemology of His Worldview*, Collected Works 2 (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2008).
5. GA 3; *Truth and Knowledge* (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 1981). On Fichte, see the second installment in this series.
6. These lectures have been published as part of GA 35, *Philosophie und Anthroposophie: Gesammelte Aufsätze 1904–1918*, an important collection of philosophical essays that remain largely untranslated. A problematical translation of the Bologna lectures was included in the volume *Esoteric Development* (Great Barrington: SteinerBooks, 2003).
7. "A Brief Outline of an Approach to Anthroposophy," GA 18 (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2009).
8. GA 322; trans. Frederick Amrine and Konrad Oberhuber; intro. Saul Bellow (Spring Valley: Anthroposophic Press, 1983). A revised translation of this volume with a new title, *The Limits and the Frontiers of Science*, has been proposed to SteinerBooks. Lectures IV and VIII were given on September 30 and October 3, 1920, respectively, and together they form one of the very best commentaries on *The Philosophy of Freedom.*
9. Steiner: "…[B]ut now philosophy has had its day. The philosophers have seen the last of their era." [GA 137; quoted in Otto Palmer, ed., *Rudolf Steiner on*

His Book The Philosophy of Freedom (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1975), p.72].

10. The clearest reflection of Steiner's early attraction to Nietzsche is his book *Friedrich Nietzsche: Fighter for Freedom* (1895; first English edition, Englewood, NJ: Rudolf Steiner Publications, 1960), which begins with a surprisingly positive exposition of Nietzsche's main philosophical development, but ends with a series of short "psycho-pathological studies" of him. Andrew Welburn's study *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2004) offers many good insights on Nietzsche and Steiner.
11. I.e., logic becomes an ouroboros—an ancient symbol of initiation.
12. Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (1957; 2nd edition, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1988), p.25. Hegel underscores the difficulty of his own heroic climb, recorded in *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807) by repeatedly alluding to it as a series of Herculean conceptual "labors."
13. Most recently by Wesleyan University Press in 1985; the 2nd and later editions contain an important philosophical "Introduction" that should not be missed.
14. Both these words have primary meanings in English that confuse the issue. Kant's title might be translated "The Epistemology of Perception" if the more literal rendering had not established itself already.
15. Again, Barfield rehearses Kant's argument, and even his term for "representation," without acknowledgment, strangely comparing Steiner instead to Susanne Langer. But Langer's mentor was of course the great neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer, and her aesthetics is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Kant.
16. Barfield coins this useful term by analogy to William James's concept of "the specious present," and then distinguishes it from "the net Given," which can only be thought but never known. "It is important to be clear that the Given is never actually experienced 'net.' Thus, the net Given is something which a philosopher is concerned with, not as knower, but as epistemologist." (*Romanticism Comes of Age*, pp.250–251).
17. Cf. my own quite different account of Kant's ethics in the third installment.
18. "One might add here that Steiner's admittedly patchy treatment of the Kantian system is basically a result of his responding not so much to the master as to the uses to which his thought was being put by the scientific neo-Kantians." (Welburn 274).
19. See note 6 above. I have silently altered the translation where necessary, and I have referenced the corresponding passages in GA 35 instead. Readers should be aware of two major errors in the English edition as they work through these important lectures. An important thinker, Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), is misidentified in the notes. More important, the Kantian term "das Transzendente" ("the transcendent") has been systematically mistranslated as "the transcendental"—a different Kantian term that means the opposite!
20. Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age*, p.254.
21. These include, as Steiner often insists emphatically, the all-important exercise of *anthroposophical study*.
22. *Romanticism Comes of Age*, p.250.
23. Kant distinguished in same way between our "phenomenal" and "noumenal" selves.
24. As Welburn and others have argued, Steiner might well have felt differently about philosophical developments such as Phenomenology that were still nascent at the time he wrote *The Riddles of Philosophy*. We know, for example, that Steiner felt drawn to the early phenomenologist Max Scheler.
25. See note 8 above.
26. The title of this unpublished lecture as described by Palmer (53–54) would translate, "Our Supersensible Nature and the Questions of Free Will and Immortality in the Light of Anthroposophy."
27. CW 13; *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, trans. Catherine E. Creeger (SteinerBooks, 1997). An otherwise excellent earlier translation by George Adams bore the unfortunate title *Occult Science*. At the time of writing, Steiner was the head of the Theosophical Society in Germany, and the word *Geheimwissenschaft* in his title was meant to echo Blavatsky's tome, *The Secret Doctrine*. Like *The Philosophy of Freedom*, GA 13 is now considered one of the four "basic books" of anthroposophy.
28. GA 293; London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 2004. The former English major in me can't resist the many attractions of A.C. Harwood's "classic" edition, beginning with the elegant allusion to Pope's *Essay on Man* in the title.

Frederick Amrine *is Arthur F. Thurnau Professor in the field of German Studies at the University of Michigan, where he teaches literature, philosophy, and intellectual history. He is a lifelong student of anthroposophy, and, together with his wife Margot, he is deeply involved in Waldorf education on a variety of levels.*