The Spiritual Dimension of Waldorf Education

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The spiritual dimension of Waldorf education seems in many ways to be a touchy subject. Why should this be?

In Practice: Success

During its more than ninety-year history, Waldorf education has developed into one of the most successful forms of progressive education. It has attained worldwide recognition as a model of educational practice which—as shown in a recent survey by Heiner Barz and Dirk Randoll[1]—performs extraordinarily well, even according to the criteria of empirical educational research.

Briefly, the survey found that Waldorf pupils enjoy a schooling free of competitive pressure and grades in which they are more self-motivated, happier, and, when it comes to their final exams, do better than pupils at other kinds of school. Within this context they also develop a high degree of social responsibility and tend to value their school as a place of living community building.

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In terms of our practical performance, therefore, Waldorf education can claim to have earned society's stamp of approval. That is the one side of Waldorf education, its practice, which seems to go from strength to strength in its innate ability to deliver. We, of course, know just how much there is still to do before our own ideal of "good quality (Waldorf) education" can be realized. We know only too well about our own shortcomings: we know the difficulties of finding new teachers and the problems surrounding many a "conservative" college of teachers stuck in outmoded administrative forms. And when we look into the future, we know that the problems attendant upon a radical generational change are increasing rather than decreasing. Nevertheless, Waldorf education, as a form of schooling centered upon the developing child, can say with confidence that it commands general respect.

In Theory: Criticism

Notwithstanding the results of this survey, critics have homed in on the worldview behind Waldorf schools, i.e., on anthroposophy. This more theoretical side of Waldorf education does not command respect to anything like the extent of its practical side. Quite the contrary: according to presumably well-meaning critics, it would be a good idea—as was suggested a few years ago in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*—to set up "Waldorf schools without Steiner." From the actual situation found in Waldorf schools today, it would seem that this advice has been followed to a greater extent than many a critic would imagine. The available figures show that 50% of teachers in Waldorf schools have had no Waldorf training. And the most recent study (also by Dirk Randoll[2]) shows that only 30% of Waldorf teachers are actively working with anthroposophy.

However one sees it—whether Waldorf schools are considered as being purged of, or overloaded with, anthroposophy—the fact

remains that the position of anthroposophy is chief among the problems facing Waldorf education today.

Critical Aversion to Spirituality

What is the reason for this? If the widely shared prevalence of current Western values is anything to go by, we live in an anti-spiritual age. Since the time of the Enlightenment, any spiritual view of the world or of the human being has come to be regarded as obsolete. If the defenders of the Enlightenment still had to fight against the all-powerful churches and their mechanisms of political control, today it is the voices of science that, regardless of what discipline they belong to, advance the ideal of scientific empiricism against any spiritual line of thinking. (Interestingly enough, the churches unquestioningly lend their voices to this chorus, perhaps hoping that in this way they may avoid having to share with anyone the spiritual leftovers of civilization. It is also worth remembering in this connection that it was the Christian churches of old that, through political maneuvering, either abrogated to themselves or exercised sovereignty over all forms of spirituality—they held sovereignty over interpretation, opinion, and, unfortunately, processes of law as well.)

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Even though the common aversion to all forms of spirituality is founded upon their lack of conformity to scientific reason, there remains beyond this a basic cultural attitude, which has much less to do with scientific argument than with a socio-historical habit of thought. From the current spectrum of shared values there are a number of arguments that carry much more weight than any ethos of scientific objectivity. Here are some of them:

Exclusiveness: Spiritual knowledge is initiate knowledge, and as such is the property of a select few. In the history of mystery schools, there are many examples of abuse of power and oppression associated with this exclusive spiritual sovereignty. Thus spirituality is always under suspicion of being anti-democratic. It is thought to undermine the ideal of general participation in the process of knowledge acquisition. Anthroposophy, as a "one-man science," is felt to be a prime example of spirituality's basic problem of undemocratic non-transparency, regardless of Steiner's own desire for and practice of full public disclosure.

Devotion: The devotion of pupil to teacher or master, which is a feature of many spiritual paths and can sometimes involve forms of personal subjection, contradicts the modern human being's feeling of individual autonomy. It is particularly the experience of blind, fanatical devotion to the Führer during the Third Reich that has caused such general distrust of devotional attitudes.

Dogmatism: Spiritual doctrines often take the form of statements of ultimate wisdom, which—as is sometimes maintained—are not of human origin, but have merely been communicated by human beings, and as such their truth cannot be doubted. Spiritual literature is therefore not susceptible to scientific scrutiny and critical discussion.

Sectarianism: The charge of sectarianism encompasses all the previous points. Difficult as it may be to describe sectarian behavior definitively, it is widely perceived as being a sort of conglomerate of the features listed above. An essential characteristic of the behavior of a sect is the restriction of freedom, or even the complete suppression of the individual in favor of the spiritually justified aims of the group. Also particularly strong is the assumption that the main motivation

behind any sect, whatever spiritual "spin" may be put on it, is financial exploitation.

The key arguments against spirituality set out here, arising as they do more from a basic social attitude combined with negative historical associations than from any scientifically plausible argumentation, have already been trained upon many a questionable mode of action or expression in the Waldorf and anthroposophical worlds. I think, however, that today we find ourselves in a time when anthroposophists and Waldorf teachers are seeking to divest themselves of the last remnants of a rather old-fashioned, arrogant spirituality. (From among the points listed above we should, in this connection, make an exception of devotion, since in its capacity as an essential aspect of spiritual training, it cannot be equated with a denial of individual freedom.)

Be that as it may, we are still faced with the question of how to conceive of a modern form of spirituality that can provide the foundations of education without appearing "medieval." In spite of his admiration for anthroposophy in practice, the education theorist Heiner Ullrich has unceasingly drawn attention to the problematical nature of its whole philosophical basis. His diagnosis runs like this:

> In contrast to the conscious, self-restrained pluralism and open-endedness of the modern scientific method, Steiner and his disciples desire certain (dogmatic) knowledge or even direct experience of the world as a well-ordered whole, an unchanging eternal truth. …Their way of thinking is degenerate philosophy, mere worldview. …With the creation of his anthroposophical "occult science," Steiner became the victim of all the dangers inherent in such a way of thinking. In it the pre-modern, dogmatic-metaphysical speculation of neo-Platonism turned into the contrived re-mythologising of theosophy.[3]

One could hardly put it more strongly!

Thus we can be in no doubt that spirituality is key among the central issues in Waldorf education today. And when we look at the different facets of the question, we see that it relates both to basic cultural attitudes and to the need to meet modern scientific standards—these two, of course, being very closely connected. Does this mean that we must abandon all notion of a spiritually-based education? Or is it possible to develop a new and modern understanding of spirituality, one that is based not upon a pre-Enlightenment sensibility but that builds upon the insights and ideals of the Enlightenment without thereby barring the way to a spiritual view of the world?

To help us find a way forward here, we will take a look at what Rudolf Steiner meant by the term.

Steiner's Concept of Spirituality

In my experience many of those involved in anthroposophy and Waldorf education do not define the distinguishing features of Rudolf Steiner's approach to spirituality sharply enough. Because of this a misleading impression can arise that anthroposophy is a body of teaching about a separately existing spiritual world equipped with angels and demons who exert their influences upon a hapless humanity.[4] Based on this misleading impression, the concept of destiny is then taken pretty much to be the same as predestination, with the ultimate implication that, lacking individual autonomy, all that human souls have to do is simply follow to the best of their ability the injunctions of an all-wise initiate, namely Rudolf Steiner. By keeping their efforts as servants of civilization true to what he said, they thus have reliable recipes for the practical application (in agriculture, education, medicine, and so forth) of the higher knowledge they have received from him.

Accusations of this kind can all too easily be leveled at anthroposophists, and unfortunately they may not be entirely unjustified. What gets left out of account on all sides is the fact that at

the unshakable center of anthroposophy stands the principle of human freedom: freedom as an innate human capacity and as something capable of development. The compass of anthroposophical thinking points to the pole of freedom. What is special about Steiner's anthroposophy, therefore, is not its spiritual "system," for such systems have long been a part of world history. Historically spirituality is nothing new. Quite the contrary. Virtually all the cultures of past epochs were spiritually organized in one way or another. If one wished to emphasize this aspect of anthroposophy, it would appear—and it has, of course, been painted in this way[5]—to be nothing more than badly camouflaged eclecticism.

What is special about anthroposophy is, rather, that for the first time it has managed to combine the idea of human freedom with a spiritual conception of the world and the human being. Historically speaking, all cultures up to the Enlightenment were based in essence upon spiritual worldviews. The Enlightenment discovered human autonomy, in the human being's exercise of independent reason. However, the price it paid for humanity's autonomy and freedom was the loss of its spiritual orientation. Since then the stark choice has been between freedom and spirituality. In anthroposophy Steiner combined the two. How did he manage this?

Anthroposophy was the first to combine the idea of human freedom with a spiritual conception of the world and the human being.

Steiner's Epistemology

The cornerstone of Steiner's philosophy, on the basis of which he later developed anthroposophy, is his theory of knowledge. He formulated a concept of knowledge that was creative and dynamic. It involved the rejection of what he viewed as "naïve realism," the notion of reality as a form of existence completely independent of and external to human consciousness. This view assumes that the phenomena exist by and for themselves, and that the mind is simply there to form reflections of this thoroughly external world. These mental reflections are, of course, different in nature to the self-existent phenomena they reflect, but they represent a relatively close approximation. In principle, according to this view, mind and world are completely different entities.

In contrast to this, Steiner draws attention to the participation of consciousness in the formation of reality. This is surely in keeping with Enlightenment thinking, for one of the main features of Immanuel Kant's philosophy of consciousness is that it addresses cognition not only in terms of its content, but also in terms of the conditions which render its occurrence possible. This constitutes a common point of departure for Steiner's epistemology and for that of Kant's transcendental philosophy.

As things develop, however, their approaches to the concept of knowledge diverge considerably. While Kant makes a sharp distinction between ontology, i.e., the theory of being, and epistemology, the theory of knowledge, concluding that the act of knowing is, in principle, separate from the world's being (which he calls "things-in-themselves"), Steiner regards human cognition as, in principle, capable of development and therefore also of ontological concreteness. He envisions the possibility of human consciousness overcoming its initial apparently dual relationship to being and creatively uniting itself with the world and its phenomena. The reality which then arises in the mind is no mere reflection of an ontologically independent world; rather within the context of human consciousness the world's being comes to itself in a new form of existence, namely that of freedom. It could be said that a union of epistemology and ontology thus occurs, in that the act of human knowing is deeply involved in the ontological foundations of the world. This

is the aspect of Steiner's epistemology that has such far-reaching implications for education. But how does Steiner arrive at this concept of knowledge?

Thinking

In 1918, in the preface to the new edition of his basic philosophical work, *The Philosophy of Freedom* (now retranslated with the title *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*), Steiner formulates two key questions around which his thinking turns. The first is how the modern human being, faced with a world of uncertainty and doubt, is to arrive at anything resembling knowledge. Disconnected phenomena impinge upon our consciousness willy-nilly, and our power of apprehension is incapable of finding any secure footing. Steiner now asks whether such security might have some inner basis, "whether it is possible to conceive of the human being in such a way that this conception could serve as the support for everything else which comes towards him through experience or science and which is felt to lack any support in itself."[6]

This is quite clearly a post-Enlightenment type of question, since Steiner assumes that no ultimately valid basis of truth is to be found in our conscious experience. This would be the hope of a belief system based on revelation, or indeed of any kind of conventional spirituality. The main distinguishing feature of modern consciousness is that it conceives of knowledge not as a quasi-objective event, but as something predicated upon human involvement. Thus, for instance, Karl R. Popper speaks of falsification as the criterion of human knowledge, issuing in this way a protest against the assertion of any kind of ultimate knowledge and pointing to its essentially provisional nature.[7]

When Steiner describes the human being acting as a support for conscious experience, what exactly does he mean? As *The Philosophy of Freedom* proceeds, Steiner places the special quality of thinking at the center of his deliberations. It turns out that for Steiner the central element of spirituality is his concept of thinking. Thinking leads the human being beyond himself and connects him to the content of the world. In addition to a number that follow on from them, Steiner characterizes two distinguishing features of thinking:

- Individual executive function: Thinking is, through and through, an activity carried out by single human individuals. This activity is completely under their personal control, and as such is not executed by any external agent (for instance, by the brain) but by the self as an act of pure will.
- Universality: Although thinking must be brought about by an individual, it is nevertheless not purely subjective, but in its individual execution displays an inherent lawfulness, which, in contrast to the executive subject, is universal. Upon this rests the possibility of human insight and communication.

These are the two central characteristics of thinking: for it to happen we have to do it, and it occurs according to its own inherent laws. Thus, thinking involves a dynamic interplay between the individual and the universal, a constant reciprocal interaction. Rudolf Steiner calls this reciprocal relationship Intuition. This is one of the essential spiritual experiences anthroposophy speaks of as an aspect of knowledge: we experience a universal validity and intrinsic order in our own thinking. We are thus led to something beyond ourselves. In thinking we touch the source of universal truth. As Rudolf Steiner puts it: "Our theory of knowledge leads to the realization that thought is the essence of the world, and that individual human thinking is the only direct manifestation of this essence."[8]

But …

Now, it can be objected that this way of looking at things and this concept of thought are precisely what give anthroposophy its

mystical, pre-Enlightenment profile. From the perspective of empirical science, to speak of a source of universal truth is an obsolete idea. In answer to this objection, it should be pointed out that although Rudolf Steiner assigned to thinking the qualities of correctness, accuracy, and veracity in principle, this in no way implies that we can designate any individual thought as valid and true. In his view of thinking, Steiner's whole focus was on its fundamental trustworthiness, for even the most cutting argument against the inherent veracity of thought rests upon statements produced by thinking and, as such, go unquestioned. Popper himself also acts in principle upon the possibility of thought being lawful when he says: "We are flawed, and tend to be mistaken; but we can learn from our mistakes."[9]

Steiner's concern was not to assert the veracity of every product of individual thinking, but to establish a healthy and justifiable trust in thinking itself. This, of course—in keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment—would not preclude subjecting individual thinking to critical appraisal, nor would it imply relinquishing the possibility of error. Without such a healthy trust in thinking, however, we would have little chance of coping with our everyday lives. We would never get into a car or use a cell phone if we could not rely on the assumption that the thinking behind such technologies is in principle correct, even though it is always in need of improvement.

Consequences for Waldorf Education

In what follows we will turn our attention to the consequences for Waldorf education of this concept of thinking. Rudolf Steiner introduces his lectures on *The Foundations of Human Experience*[10] (which form the basis of his ideas on education) by pointing to the special challenges any modern approach to education must face. He distinguishes a so-called "fourth post-Atlantean epoch" from one that has existed since the 15th century, namely, the "fifth post-Atlantean epoch." With the Renaissance, according to Steiner—and in this modern historians concur with him—a new form of consciousness took hold of European culture that placed a much higher value on the autonomy of individual human thinking. For education this meant, for instance, that its content could no longer be conveyed to the students in a purely top-down fashion. In 1919, when the first Waldorf school was founded, "cram" schools were still very much in vogue. Waldorf education rejected this pedagogical culture, as did the whole educational reform movement. To Rudolf Steiner's critical eye, it was evident—from the lack of allowance made for the individual student's thinking capacities—that the change of consciousness that had come in with the new epoch in the 15th century had not yet found its way into the school system. Waldorf education would set about to change this. Autonomy in thinking and individual processes of understanding would be resolutely exercised.

Today such demands are likely to be seen as having been met long ago and thus may seem outdated, for contemporary teaching methods are quite clearly aimed at the students' self-motivation. Among the most popular methods are "discovery learning," "action-centered education," and approaches to teaching arising from the results of brain research. But unfortunately these methodological innovations are all solely concerned with delivering more or less fixed bodies of information more cleverly and easily, and rendering them reproducible for the purpose of examinations. Similarly, the focus on competences—the latest object of educational adulation—cannot disguise the fact that even now education is ultimately geared to performance (measured in terms of surveys of learning standards and graduation results) on exams involving the regurgitation of fixed blocks of knowledge. The self-motivated activity of students favored by these teaching methods is thus merely the means to an end, namely, the processing of prescribed teaching content more quickly and efficiently.

In Waldorf education the reverse is the case: the self-activating quality of the power of human thinking and understanding constitutes the fundamental inner dynamic around which both teaching methods and content turn. How does this way of looking at things translate into actual classroom practice? The following are a few special examples:

Sense/experience-based teaching: A salient feature of the Waldorf approach, particularly in the kindergarten and early primary school, is its care of the senses and integration of sensory experience into the pedagogical process. In subsequent school years the focus on primary sense-experience gives way to more generally experiential, phenomenological teaching. This approach is based on a conviction that attains its full significance within the context of phenomenological philosophy. It is the conviction that in every sensory experience, in every phenomenon, something of its intrinsic quality, its idiosyncratic nature can be experienced, but not necessarily put into words. What we are encountering here is the impassivity of things. In her phenomenologically-oriented writings on education, Käte Meyer-Drawe refers to this as "the tendency of objects to object."[11] This theme is also very pronounced in the writings of Martin Wagenschein.[12] Following Goethe's lead[13] on the nature of experience, Waldorf education works with the idea that in every genuine sensory experience, we divine something of the being of things. We feel our way towards the true reality of the world. Through our quest for knowledge, we open up this path more and more, but in doing so we always begin from what we sensed originally and not from some arbitrary abstraction or pet theory that takes us off track.

Form drawing: Form drawing is an essential aspect of our whole approach to teaching and is "genuinely Waldorf." It demonstrates very concretely how the individual effort involved in performing a set task and the experience arising from its achievement are two aspects of the same, self-validating order and merge in the doing.

Nature study: The teaching of nature study, particularly as it applies to animals, is conducted in such a way that the single creature and its ecological surroundings are treated as one whole. The animal cannot be thought of as existing apart from its ecological niche. The students develop an inner sense for the fact that the single animal always stands in relation to a holistic context.

Imaginative teaching: In his pedagogical lectures Rudolf Steiner repeatedly drew attention to the fact that Waldorf teaching, particularly in the primary school, should involve the use of images and what he called "living concepts." He warned against too high a level of abstraction. His point is that only through an appeal to the students' feelings—such that they are warmly engaged with the material—can they form a personal attachment to the lesson content.

Nurturing of skills: A key aspect of Waldorf education is that it attaches a high value to the development of skills. Skills, if they are applied, give concrete expression to the direct connection between individual performance and a set of self-validating rules. Every acquired skill is characterized by the fact that its individual application occurs in full accord with the laws governing that particular skill. For instance, if someone wishes to play the violin, spending a year reading books on the subject and subsequently being able to talk about the instrument will be of no help. A skill can be acquired only by practice. When we practice something, we notice how our actions accommodate themselves with ever more smoothness and fluidity to the particular nature of the object (for instance the violin, but it could equally well be a foreign language, and so forth) and the rules inherent in it, and how their execution correspondingly improves. In every skill there is a perfect overlap between individual performance and a self-validating order of some kind.

Concept of Selfhood

Besides the importance of thinking and its various features for arriving at an understanding of the spiritual dimension of Waldorf education, there is a further spiritual element to which we will now turn our attention. This is Waldorf education's concept of the nature of selfhood. In Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom,* the so-called second key question has to do with this subject. It asks: "Is the human being, endowed as he is with will, right in claiming freedom for himself?"[14] In other words: Is there some aspect of the human make-up which can be said to be completely autonomous, self-justified, and not determined by anything else? According to Steiner (but also, for instance, Johann Gottlieb Fichte) there is such an aspect, and it can be designated the "I."

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In the academic discourse of Europe today, such a concept of the self has been abandoned. As a rule, the human personality is thought of as being compounded of disparate elements. It may contain inherited features, but it is said to be constituted almost entirely of experiences from its upbringing and influences from its environment, especially those associated with a peer group. According to this view, then, the human being is more or less a conglomerate of socialization experiences. [In North America the perspective leans heavily toward inherited and other material, DNA-based identity. –ed.]

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As far as I am aware, Waldorf education is currently, and also historically, the only form of education based upon and designed around a definitive concept of the self. As such it can be termed the pedagogy of the self, because it accords such importance to the unfettered development of the human "I." In this connection Rudolf Steiner says: "The greatest preparatory gift that can be given to the developing human being, to the child, is that at the right moment, through the understanding of his or her own selfhood, he or she may awaken to the experience of freedom. True freedom is an inner experience."[15]

This statement in no way implies that Waldorf education brings about the formation of the self or that it culminates in some definite outcome. Education has only a preparatory character. It prepares the ground for something that is likely to occur only much later, namely, at the right moment. The single most important aim of Waldorf education is to provide a pedagogical framework within which children have the chance to become acquainted with their own selfhood. This means the educational process approaches each one as a person, an individual I-being.

Here I would like to present two further examples of what this implies in practice:

Class community: As far as I know, the Waldorf school is the only form of school worldwide which gives children the chance to be part of a single learning group all the way from the first through the twelfth or thirteenth grade. This is a central, systematic component of Waldorf education. What is the thinking behind it? If we work on the assumption that Waldorf education is the pedagogy of the self, then the question arises as to how the education of the self occurs. In a somewhat simplified and abbreviated, but nonetheless accurate, form, we can say: the self is educated through encountering selfhood. Or, to put it in Martin Buber's terms: I is schooled by encountering Thou.[16]

A form of education wishing to be effective as a pedagogy of the self would need to create for its students an appropriate framework in which this education of the self could take place.

Here it is worth pointing out, by way of contrast, that the three-tiered educational system in Germany simply tramples the self underfoot. Other countries have indeed criticized this state of affairs as unjust, pointing out that in this regard the German system is extraordinarily backward. This three-tiered system works by sorting children into an intellectual hierarchy by means of rigid selection mechanisms. The only thing this process pays heed to is intellectual performance.

By contrast, the Waldorf school's class community, lasting for at least twelve years, creates a framework in which everyone—including the less intellectually gifted pupil—can feel respected and valued. Individual achievements in all areas (not just in intellectual pursuits) are honored equally, and individual rates of development are accommodated. It goes without saying that other problems and challenges arise in association with the decision to do things this way. For instance, there are the questions of how to meet the needs of intellectually gifted pupils, and how the school's educational expectations can avoid being levelled to a common average. But the crucial thing remains that the students see and experience themselves as a learning community in which all have a place by virtue of the unique self dwelling in each one of them.

Class teacher principle: The principle of the class teacher's staying with a class for a number of years points in the same direction. The idea is that through long-standing contact with a trusted figure of educational authority, the pupils will develop the powers of their own personality. This is true because in a certain sense one can say that every "I" is an authority unto itself.

Two Aspects of Spirituality

In what has gone before, two aspects of the spiritual dimension of Waldorf education have been described. One is thinking. It can be regarded as the more stable of the two, and as having a stabilizing effect, because it provides our connection to the orderliness of the world. For the students, to feel a healthy trust in their individual power of thinking is to place their whole school life on a secure footing.

By contrast the other aspect, that of the human "I," is a more open, indeterminate and even, in a certain way, more confusing notion. It takes us into the inner realms of the human mind. In the words of the Romantic poet Novalis: "Inwards leads the mysterious way. …"[17] Precisely because the self is not pre-determined (although anthroposophy is sometimes mistakenly thought to maintain that it is) but is by nature fully open to development, it presents us with one of the major challenges of human existence. Education helps us along the way towards meeting this challenge, which is to take hold of our inner life as the standard of our own biographical development.

These two aspects of spirituality, thinking and the "I," form the two pillars of Waldorf education.

These two aspects of spirituality form the two pillars of Waldorf education. The one, through the activity of thinking, provides children with confidence in their connection to a meaningful world order. The other bestows upon them the freedom to be the architects of their own self-development.

What, we may now be wondering, does an education which does not recognize such a spiritual dimension take as its ground? Ultimately, the watchwords of an anti-spiritual education must be chance-based evolution and determinism. If it is assumed that human thinking is incapable of participating in the

lawful order of the surrounding world and that this order is consequently denied, then the world appears as the product of a blind and random evolution which has somehow brought forth a conscious being, who in turn is a product of entirely materialistic determinism. Waldorf education creates an alternative to this picture of the world. It would thus be tragic if it were to lose track of its own spiritual intentions.

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Process Thinking

To finish, let us take a look at one more important feature of spirituality. In their philosophical writings, both Rudolf Steiner and Johann Gottlieb Fichte draw attention to the fact that the self does not enter conscious experience in the form of reflection, but only as an executive function, as a deed. In Waldorf schools this fact figures large in the teaching of artistic subjects, especially eurythmy.

Let us consider this more closely. During my time as a Waldorf teacher, I recall that we often—for instance, in connection with public exams or approval procedures—had guest colleagues from state schools present, and on such occasions they had the chance to experience our students. These colleagues seemed unanimously to be very impressed by them, remarking upon their open, confident self-assurance. This is exactly what we are after—that our students go out into the world with a confident, strong, and positive attitude to life. Although they noticed this, our state-school colleagues did not necessarily associate this with our pedagogical approach. But this is just the connection I would like to attempt to sketch here.

It is becoming ever more apparent that we are living in a culture of approval ratings. It is not so much what we do that counts, but how aware we are of how our actions have been received. How much access do we have to what has been said about us in various media: this is what counts! Parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles cannot seem to refrain from carelessly speaking about children in their presence, listing everything they can or can't do, things they have said, and so forth. In my opinion, this foists upon the young child's mind an over-developed faculty of self-reflection. This is then perpetuated in school. Once again, what the child says and does is not what counts; rather, how he or she is evaluated by a teacher is the only thing that matters. Only by means of external evaluation do the child's achievements attain significance, and if a child happens to receive a poor grade, he may lose all desire to exert further effort. The media of photography and film further reinforce this experience of value as being something external and valid only if it has been documented. Our current popular media culture takes this to extremes by inculcating the feeling that media presentation is the sole test of something's value. As is well known, this leads to an eventual lowering of standards.

From the point of view of Waldorf education, it is extremely important that both younger and older children are not constantly being forced to look at themselves in an evaluative mirror through which the value of what they have said or done is retrospectively determined from outside. If they are to develop healthy self-confidence, it is important that they experience for themselves, while in the process of doing it, whether something is good or bad or whether it works well. Playing music is a good example of what is meant here. A wrong note can be perceived and corrected as part of the process of playing, and need not be pointed out later as a mistake.

As a subject, eurythmy has a special function here. Unlike ballet, it does not work with mirrors, nor, as in sport, with prescribed indicators of achievement (goals, duels, measurements of speed or distance, and so forth). Rather, it works in such a way that, through a deepening of perception and

attention, a continuous process-awareness (as opposed to a discontinuous, reflective awareness) is maintained. This is reminiscent of the well-known myth of Orpheus and Eurydice which recounts how, following the death of his beloved Eurydice, Orpheus is so smitten with grief that he finds in himself the courage to descend into the underworld, release her from death, and bring her back to the land of the living. Hades, the god of the underworld, gives his consent to this unreasonable request only on condition that Orpheus walk before her and not look round to make sure she is really following him. As we know, Orpheus does not fulfill this condition, and so loses Eurydice a second time.

Thus it is also with the human "I." To approach it we must be prepared to descend into the depths of our inner being. But we can draw it into our consciousness only by carrying on with the act of doing so. But in bringing something to mind with a reflective, backward look, our "I" is no longer accessible to us. It withdraws from us. We run the risk, as today's media culture starkly demonstrates, of losing it altogether. The "I" appears as the subtle awareness of our selfhood inherent in every activation of our thinking, and we learn, in the act, to grasp it with increasing confidence.

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Endnotes

1. Heiner Barz, Sylvia Liebewein, and Dirk Randoll, *Bildungserfahrungen an Waldorfschulen: Empirische Studie zu Schulqualität und Lernerfahrungen.* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2012).
2. Dirk Randoll, *Ich bin Waldorflehrer: Einstellungen, Erfahrungen, Diskussionspunkte–eine Befragungsstudie.* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2012).
3. Heiner Ullrich, "Wissenschaft als rationalisierte Mystik: Eine problemgeschichtliche Untersuchung der erkenntnis-theoretischen Grundlagen der Anthroposophie", quoted in "Neue Sammlung. Vierteljahres-Zeitschrift für Erziehung und Gesellschaft," recently mentioned in his biography of Steiner (1988), p.28.
4. Wissenschaftsrat. "Stellungnahme zur Akkreditierung der Freien Hochschule Mannheim in Gründung", January 28, 2011, http://www.wissenschaftsrat.de/download/archiv/1010-11.pdf.
5. Cf. Jens Heisterkamp: "In the history of the anthroposophical movement, however, his complex presentations on the structure of the world and the influence of spiritual beings upon its development and upon that of the human being have had such a massive effect, that, regardless of their origin in laboriously acquired knowledge, they have created a receptivity for the 'higher worlds' of naïve realism. The primary meaning of inner activity associated with the engendering of every 'higher experience' has been neglected in favor of a contrived catalogue of higher worlds and beings, especially those having to do with religion." Jens Heisterkamp: "Durch mich wird Gott", *Info 3,* June 2006.
6. Cf. Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland.* Göttingen, 2007.
7. Rudolf Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit.* (Berlin: Philosophisch-Anthroposophischer, 1918), p.5.
8. Cf. Karl R. Popper, *Objektive Erkenntnis.* (Hamburg, 1994).
9. Rudolf Steiner, *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der goetheschen Weltanschauung.* (CW 2) (Dornach, 1979), p.79.
10. Cf. Karl R. Popper, *Objektive Erkenntnis.* (Hamburg, 1994), p.277.
11. Cf. Käte Meyer-Drawe, *Diskurse des Lernens.* (München: Fink, 2008).
12. Cf. Martin Wagenschein, *Verstehen lehren: Genetisch - Sokratisch - Exemplarisch.* (Weinheim, 1999).
13. In Goethe's words: "You may trust your senses; they will not let you see anything false."
14. See note 7 above.
15. Rudolf Steiner, *Die Methodik des Lehrens und die Lebensbedingungen des Erziehens.* (CW 308) (Dornach, 1974), pp.72–73.
16. Cf. Martin Buber, *I and Thou.* (Stuttgart, 2008).
17. Novalis: *Blütenstaub.* Fragment no. 16.

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