



Educating the Will — Part III

Common Will and Comprehensive Will

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In Part I of this essay we considered the development of free and authentic individuality as the primary goal of education. We saw that cognitive subjects challenge students to develop will in their thinking, while arts and crafts require that they learn to think in their willing. In both cases, it is through the inner effort made in exercising willed thinking and thinking will that develops their spirit will, their spirit individuality. In Part II we saw that most subjects, including arts and crafts, are taught in ways that exercise the sense-nerve human being while leaving the feeling will underdeveloped. In our aspiration to educate whole human beings, we must reckon with the fact that we are at the beginning of learning how to develop feeling will in ourselves and our students. Thus, in Part III we will look more deeply at teacher development.

I speak of teacher development, in contrast to teacher training, to emphasize the on-going, life-long development of the teacher as compared to what is possible in a two-year teacher training. Also, I wish to underscore the self-directed process of inner transformation compared to the outwardly acquired knowledge of child development and the content and methods of the curriculum.

“...you can only become good teachers and educators if you pay attention not merely to what you do, but also to what you are. It is really for this reason that we have Spiritual Science with its Anthroposophical outlook: to perceive the significance of the fact that man is effective in the world not only through what he does, but above all through what he is.”

“...we must above all become conscious of this first of educational tasks: that we must first make something of ourselves, so that a relationship in thought, an inner spiritual relationship, may hold sway between the teacher and the children.”

(Steiner, 1966, p.23)

Spiritual science expands our understanding of what it means to “make something of ourselves.” Through the content of Steiner’s *Theosophy* and other lectures, we learn about the transformation of our astral body into spirit self. Often such thoughts seem abstract because they seem outside the parameters of what we can integrate meaningfully into our lives. However, in time a practical understanding of spirit self can give our everyday life and work purpose and direction. It can become the foundation for our on-going development as teachers.

Children know experientially, unconsciously, which adults are working on themselves and which are not. "Making something of ourselves" becomes more concrete and thus more practical if we can grasp what it means to develop spirit self. In transforming our astral body we develop our authentic individuality (in contrast to our personality). However modest and inadequate our efforts may be, it is the development of our individuality through transforming our astral body that influences our children more profoundly than anything we say or do. In working on ourselves, our children are given a living model of developing individuality that awakens their own budding individuality.

In addition, it is through the transformation of our astral body that we develop the capacity to perceive moral imaginations regarding our work with the children. In this respect, the transformation of our astral body, the transformation of our own unfree thoughts, feelings and will impulses, is the key discipline for the art of education. For example, we can transform our natural tendency to act out of subjective sympathy and antipathy into a new capacity: to attend to the qualities of a child's outer appearance and behavior and through this discipline develop the eyes to see the child's soul and spirit individuality.

The significance of developing spirit self for our work is brought into focus through the following three sentences:

"Each epoch must . . . prepare, bear within it in a preparatory stage, what is to come in the ensuing period of culture."

"In the sixth epoch, it is the spirit self that must be developed within the souls of men, just as now the consciousness soul is being developed."

"The whole purpose of spiritual science is to prepare . . . for the sixth epoch of culture."
(Steiner, 1979, p.3-8)

Towards finding a meaningful relationship to these thoughts, we might reflect on the fact that over 2000 years ago Plato and Aristotle, through their

writing and work with students, cultivated a way of thinking that prepared for the scientific culture of our era, the fifth cultural epoch. In a comparable way, the sixth epoch will be a culture grounded in spiritual science that must be prepared by individuals today dedicated to developing spiritual faculties and capacities. Today the consciousness soul is being developed through mainstream culture. In Anthroposophical and Waldorf circles our challenge is twofold; we must be grounded in the consciousness soul culture of our time while simultaneously cultivating the first seeds of a spirit self culture. We can do this mostly through our individual effort to transform the unfree elements of our astral bodies and what we are able to do subsequently out of our transformed capacities. We have no reason to be disheartened if our efforts appear to be quite modest in scope and effect.

There are two realms where we can see how the mastering of our astral body has practical implications. The first, as we have seen, is to better serve the children through the quality of our educational activities with them. There is much for us as Waldorf educators to clarify and elaborate regarding the transforming of our unfree thinking, feeling and willing, without which our theory of child development and Waldorf methods become lifeless husks. New forms of teacher development, both introductory and on-going, will surely emerge if we see the need to deepen the foundations of teacher development. To ensure that Waldorf education does not atrophy but grows evermore vital, we must be more rigorous and sustained in our efforts to reveal the ways each discipline challenges teachers as much as students to cultivate a living thinking that is free thinking and a creative willing that is free willing. In this essay I will not elaborate on this subject further, but it is my hope that this task will be taken up with colleagues in the near future.

As the work with the children provides the primary impulse for self-transformation, our work with faculty, staff and parents surely provides the second impetus. Colleagues never cease to amaze and bewilder us by how differently they think, feel and will compared to ourselves. Life would be so much simpler if our colleagues would only see the light of day and think, feel and will as we do! But apparent-

ly life is not meant to be so simple or easy, for the very diversity that frustrates and annoys us is quite obviously an act of God. Our problems with each other lie not in our differences, but in our own lack of insight and spiritual strength to recognize the complementary nature of our different ways of seeing and doing things. Only our lack of spirit will prevents us from finding creative solutions that incorporate rather than suppress our diverse views and gifts.

In this context, the development of spirit self may be seen as a practical necessity rather than a remote possibility. The very existence of a school, its ability to function and survive on a day to day basis, depends on the ability of the faculty, staff and parents to work together. It is in the practical spheres of a school community that we meet in our will—my will, your will. The practical survival of any contemporary community depends on our capacity to direct our will in creative rather than destructive directions. If we want our communities to be shaped by creative rather than destructive will, we must make clear what causes will to become destructive rather than creative. Towards this end we will need to discern the kinds of will that shape community and institutional life. In particular, we will learn to distinguish between “common will” and “comprehensive will.”

In lecture 5 of *The Social Future*, given in Zurich, October 24-30, 1919, Rudolf Steiner introduced the new concept of “comprehensive will” as distinct from the more familiar “common will” (Steiner, 1972). In this lecture Steiner describes three types of societies founded on three distinct expressions of will. He refers to past societies, such as monarchies, as “power societies” that were legitimately built on the power of one individual leader as long as it was a “divine will” that worked through the “individual will.” An echo of this form of social order still exists today in the way parents raise their children. In the early childhood years, it is generally considered necessary and good that parents establish clear parameters for their children of what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Parents and teachers assume the authority and thus the power to create a social order they believe to be in the best interests of their children. Most parents

do not abuse their power. Their love for their children motivates them to exercise their individual will in ways that serve the welfare of their children rather than their own selfish ends. Perhaps in such experiences we can find a glimmer of how individual will can serve a higher or divine will.

No matter how appropriate and successful such a social order is for a family with young children, as adolescence approaches, parents and teachers are tested in their ability to adapt to a sea change in the social order of home and school. When children bargain for this and that in their early years parents recognize that often they must not give in to them. Slowly and often painfully for the adults, such bargaining becomes more difficult to oppose as it becomes necessary for the child’s development for them to think for themselves and learn to act responsibly. Bargaining is an unavoidable developmental step in the biography of each child, recapitulating a comparable step in the biography of humankind.

Particularly in the last five hundred years, as societies around the globe have increasingly formed around commerce and trade (instead of agriculture), more and more people demand, often at great physical and psychological risk, the right of self-determination. Today the need to exercise individual will in shaping the quality and direction of one’s life arises as an elemental force in almost every human heart. However, as soon as multiple individual wills come to expression we see the birth of bargaining and competition, with each individual asserting their will against the will of others. For this reason Steiner calls this form of society the “bargaining society,” based on a “competitive will.” Many societies continue to create social order through the authority of one or an elite few because they see widespread individual bargaining and competition as constituting an anti-social force leading to social chaos. The history of the last few centuries centers around the drama of honoring or repressing individuality. The rise of democratic values and legal processes originates in the commitment to foster individuality.

The recognition of individual rights and dignity cannot be underestimated or taken for granted.

And yet it is not for lack of appreciation for what we have that a growing number of people find it increasingly difficult to accept the competition and bargaining aspects of democratic/capitalistic society. Especially as globalization makes this the only kind of society, the self-interest and greed that are legitimized by capitalistic values and facilitated through democratic processes are seen more and more transparently as destructive and anti-social and therefore to be challenged. Like those who fought for democracy against all odds, many people today, from depths they can hardly fathom themselves, challenge the premise that we must accept this as the best human nature can hope for. Human hearts ache to develop their individual potential, not only for self-advancement and personal gain, but in order that human physical, psychological and spiritual needs can be met through building community based on the diversity of insights and gifts of each individual.

Rudolf Steiner addresses this deep human longing when he speaks of a “communing society” founded on “comprehensive will.” This is the society of the sixth cultural epoch, the culture of spirit self, when our task will be to build a society of Philadelphia (love of brother). The fact that we are some 1500 years from the beginning of this cultural period is no cause for procrastination. The communing society will not arise by itself; it will become reality only if some human beings will to create such a society by beginning today to develop the faculties and capacities that will be needed tomorrow.

One primary capacity of the sixth cultural epoch will be the ability to enter into and work with the thinking and especially the will impulses of others very different from ourselves. Our challenge is to find the spirit will to make such foreign thoughts and will impulses our own in order to work creatively with them. In the communing society, social harmony and unity will be founded not on “common will” but on “comprehensive will.”

In Waldorf circles, as elsewhere, there is much discussion about consensus as an essential means for making decisions in a faculty-run school. It may be helpful to consider two different kinds of consensus, which I will refer to as “compromise consen-

sus” and “comprehensive consensus.” The first form is more familiar, because it is the consensus found wherever democratic values and processes are honored. In healthy democracies there is usually a balance of views and intentions requiring give and take in order for all sides to find “common ground” by which they arrive at a compromise course of action.

Compromise consensus appears to be a process that honors the views of each individual. In practice it is often a process by which individuals bargain and compete to have their own view and will win the day. Often enough, the so-called consensus embodies almost completely the will of one or a few who are often the most adept at bargaining. In this situation, at least, something will get done by those whose will has prevailed. When consensus is not the will of one, it is usually the will of none. We should not be surprised if frequently nothing comes from such decisions because the price we pay for everyone winning a concession or two is that everyone’s will is lamed.

Compromise consensus is inadequate to the spiritual needs of our time because it does not allow individuals to exercise their full human potential, in contrast to “comprehensive consensus,” founded on the cultivation of comprehensive will. Anyone seeking a practical understanding of comprehensive will may turn to the Social Ethic verse, given by Rudolf Steiner to the artist Edith Maryon:

The healthy social life is found,
When in the mirror of each individual
The whole community finds its reflection,
And when in the community
The virtue of each individual is living.

This verse points to two complementary capacities to be cultivated by each individual:

- i) to become a mirror that selflessly reflects points of view that belong to the community as a whole;
- ii) to develop and offer one’s individual gifts and capacities to the community.

Correspondingly, the community of individuals is challenged to create a space where:

- i) all individual perspectives can be heard in order for the community as a whole to be visible;
- ii) the virtue and gifts of each individual can unfold.

The verse is a positive expression of these capacities, but it can be helpful to consider their negative manifestations. Both the individual and the community are diminished and become unhealthy when individuals:

- i) do not reflect their truth, their carefully considered perspectives of the community as a whole;
- ii) do not develop and offer their gifts and capacities.

Likewise:

- i) when the perspectives of colleagues are judged by some or all as irrelevant or unhelpful;
- ii) when a community does not avail itself of individuals' gifts and capacities, either through failing to foster an atmosphere of encouragement or through blocking their will, obstructing the best they have to offer.

How do all individuals, not just those in executive positions, become a mirror for reflecting the community as a whole? How can a community form itself around the gifts and potentials of each individual? The answer is: to develop comprehensive will. Comprehensive will involves knowing our own will—our truth and our gift—while at the same time expanding ourselves to embrace the very different perspectives and gifts of every other individual in our community.

It must be noted that comprehensive will is a capacity exercised by individuals in relation to other individuals. It will be realized in practice

only when two or more are moved in freedom to work in this direction because it is their will to do so. Likewise, only individuals can obstruct the process of building community through comprehensive will. They can do it in two ways. The first is by asserting that it is too idealistic, beyond our actual capacities. The second is to claim to be doing it already. Both positions are half right. It is true to say that we lack the insight and capacity to practice comprehensive will at this time in anything but a seed form. If we feel we are trying our best to live according to such an ideal, then we may consider ourselves to be doing it. The point in distinguishing between our intention and our actual capacity is to avoid blocking ourselves and others from on-going development. A middle path knows how far we have to go but is committed to the long, hard work of developing comprehensive will evermore.

The idea of comprehensive will first came to my attention through Pietro Archiati's book, *From Christianity To Christ*. I wish to acknowledge my debt and gratitude to Pietro Archiati for the clarity with which he reveals the meaning and significance of comprehensive will: To form the comprehensive or total will it is necessary to affirm the individuality of each person, to create a shared, outer framework which allows all individual wills to mutually foster and advance each other. Of course this is a much harder undertaking than reducing everything to a single will. But easier is not better. Freedom is harder than unfreedom, but not worse.

Individual will means the will of the true ego of every human being. This will alone is truly individual. Most people know what they wish, but seldom what they will. The individualization of the will, as a process of increasing consciousness, has nothing to do with the egotism of the lower ego—for this is not individual at all. We can recognize real individuality by its spiritual and intuiting character, which can, in turn, only be grasped by thinking.

(Archiati, 1996, p.94)

Archiati points to two related aspects of comprehensive will, which can be seen to correspond to

the twofold aspect of the Social Ethic verse. The first is to “affirm the individuality of each person, to create a shared framework which allows all individual wills to mutually foster and advance each other.” He is clear that this is different and more difficult “than reducing everything to a single will,” or in other words, a common will. The second aspect, on which the first seems dependent, is that each individual know, “what they will,” not merely “what they wish.” He is clear that this individual will has nothing to do with the egotism of the lower ego, but rather with our “real individuality.”

We might be tempted to think the challenge to know our own will is the easier of the two challenges. To know what we want for our selves and other people is both easy and commonplace. But to know our will, the will of our individuality, is neither easy nor commonplace. To myself and others I may appear to know exactly what I want, but if and when I recognize that I am compelled in what I want, I recognize that I am unfree in my will. Only when I create a free space in myself, where I am not inwardly compelled to think, feel or want, can I know that I think, I feel, I will.

In his *Philosophy of Freedom* Rudolf Steiner gives the name “ethical individuality” to that capacity to perceive moral imaginations and intuitions by which an individual exercises free will (Steiner, 1964). We can recognize ethical individuality in ourselves and others by the intuitive and creative character of our/their thinking and actions. Ethical individualities know what they will.

But we might well ask, how do ethical individualities work *together*? They see little merit in compromise consensus, not because they are so self-absorbed that they cannot be bothered, but because they seek another way of working with others. Those striving to work out of ethical individuality seek to meet the ethical individuality in the other. They do not try to persuade or bargain. Ethical individuals try to create a shared framework that will mutually foster each other’s individuality. Ethical individuals seek a republican, not a democratic process; they aspire to exercise comprehensive consensus, not compromise consensus;

they strive to exercise a comprehensive will, not a common will.

Some think our social problems originate in the fact that our egos are too big, that our sense of individuality is too strong. This perspective sees the need to repress individual will in ourselves and in others in order to allow a common will to emerge as the basis for social harmony. Self-will and egotism are obstacles to social life that must be reckoned with. But egotism can manifest in subtle ways, for example, in the claim to have no personal agenda. To have no agenda is to not know our will. If we do not know our will, our task is to develop our individuality so that we can know our will. In our time and in our circles, such claims may express a failure in self-knowledge or a disingenuous ploy. In either case, the fact that our will remains a hidden agenda, perhaps even to ourselves, makes self-will and egotism all the more insidious and thus anti-social.

To have an agenda is not only unavoidable, it is essential to social life. As we have seen, the healthy social life requires that we know and represent our perspectives and develop our gifts. It appears that we have a love/hate relationship to individuality. We want to be individuals ourselves and claim to support others in unfolding their individuality, but at the same time we demonstrate a deep seated distrust of individuality, quick to equate it with egotism. In Waldorf and Anthroposophical circles we have a wealth of conceptual resources on this matter and yet there is little evidence that we avail ourselves of such insights in the social principles and methods presently in vogue in our circles. Our attachment to consensus processes in which we attempt to establish a *common* vision and a *common* will as the foundation to our institutional and community life appears not to fully take into account present and future development of human individuality.

Rudolf Steiner gives us the following perspective of human development that is both humbling and inspiring:

. . . from the last third of the nineteenth century (1879) the situation has been completely

reversed. The spirits of light who have been continuing in their activities have done enough where the establishment of blood, tribal, racial and similar bonds is concerned, for everything has its time in evolution. In the general and rightful scheme of things, enough has been done to establish what needed to be established through blood bonds in humanity. In more recent times, therefore, the spirits of light have changed their function. They now inspire human beings to develop independent ideas, feelings and impulses for freedom; they now make it their concern to establish the basis on which people can be independent individuals. And it is gradually becoming the task of the spirits who are related to the old spirits of darkness to work within the blood bonds.

(Steiner, 1993, p.185)

The spiritual perspective Steiner offers reveals why political nationalism and religious fundamentalism based on bonds of common blood, culture and religion are increasingly a source of destructive forces. The full implications of Steiner's perspective, however, are not limited to the obvious extremes we see in the world today. *Not just common blood, but all attempts to reduce diversity to commonality and uniformity are threats to the rightful unfolding of human individuality.* The spiritual drama Steiner describes is present wherever social unity and harmony are sought through outer policies, regulations and laws based on "common values" to which all individuals are expected to submit. The spiritual forces working through consumerism, corporatism, and institutionalism may have nothing to do with blood ties, but they too are vehicles through which human individuality is attacked. With this in mind we have reason to pause: to what extent are we in our own institutions repressing the legitimate unfolding of individuality, our own as much as that of colleagues? To what extent does this threaten the long-term viability of the very thing we intend to serve, the education of our children and the evolution of human culture and society?

We are good people, as are the experts we consult to help us to meet the complexities of institutional life. But the spiritual realities and challenges of our time put a question to each individual and each community of individuals:

"Am I, are you, seeking community through a spirit of commonality or individuality? Do I, do you, aspire to build community through common will or comprehensive will?"

This question is not one we need take up as an agenda item for decision. There is no reason to persuade our colleagues that this is how "we" should work together. There is certainly nothing to bargain over in order to arrive at a consensus. We can do this without saying a word to anyone. We need no mandate from anyone but ourselves to direct our will towards cultivating comprehensive will in any circumstance.

At the same time, this is an issue to discuss with colleagues, both formally and informally. There is every reason to help each other grow into this new potential for our work together. We will need to be generous towards each other regarding our limitations to practice comprehensive will. But we may need to be clear with each other what our guiding principles are, particularly between common will and comprehensive will. We are at a fork in the road. The path we choose matters very much. It matters that some Waldorf educators make a conscious decision to cultivate comprehensive will and comprehensive consensus as their guiding principle for building community. It will better serve the development of our children by better serving our own development. It is also true to the cultural evolution that Waldorf education is to serve.

If fully grasped, the perspectives of this essay may add to a sense of burden. Rather than lightening our burden by marginalizing or dismissing these views, one additional thought may give them meaning. In lecture 4 of *Study of Man* Steiner describes the 7 types or levels of Will:

physical—instinct
 etheric—impulse/drive
 astral—desire

ego—motive

Spirit Self—Wish to Do Better
 Life Spirit—Intention
 Spirit Man—Resolve

(Steiner, 1966)

Recently, the otherwise abstract quality of such a list unexpectedly came alive for me, a kind of revelation. This occurred when I noted that in, reference to spirit self, Steiner did not say “wish” but “wish to do better.” With every sculpture I make, every course or lecture I give, every article I write, I am left with the feeling that it is not as good as it could be. I wish I could do it better. The revelation was that in the moment I observe myself wishing to do something better, I am conscious of my spirit self not as abstraction but as living reality.

Whenever we find the spark of will that moves us to take inner and outer practical steps to do better, to become freer in ourselves, we can find strength in knowing our spirit self is stirring from potential into reality. And where two or more come together with the spirit will to do better, surely we are building, if not a road, perhaps a footpath to Philadelphia.

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