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# Uncommon Schooling: A Historical Look at Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy, and Waldorf Education

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## **ABSTRACT**

Rudolf Steiner founded the first Waldorf school in Germany in 1919. Unique elements of Waldorf education include an arts-based curriculum in which students learn subject matter through a variety of forms of representation, a pedagogy designed to meet students' developmental growth, an administrative system in which teachers govern the school, an organization devoted to sustaining a sense of community, and an integrated conceptual approach to education generally—a place where the cosmic and the mundane are intertwined.

Rudolf Steiner's life and writings are the foundations on which Waldorf schools are built. Therefore, this article is devoted to an overview of his work, which should assist us in understanding what goes on in contemporary Waldorf schools. Also, because Waldorf schools in North America are based on the first Waldorf school, I have included an examination of elements of that school's educational program. However, I do not present a simple chronological account of Steiner's life or of the origins of Anthroposophy (an outgrowth of Theosophy and the term used to denote the path of spiritual development from which Waldorf education springs). Rather in the last section of this article, I focus on possible reasons why Anthroposophy has survived and continues to flourish many years after Steiner's death.

*The first idea was to provide an education for children whose parents were working in the Waldorf-Astoria Factory, and as the Director was a member of the Anthroposophical Society, he asked me to arrange this education. . . . And so, in the first place, the Waldorf School arose as a school for humanity as such, fashioned, it could in fact be said, out of the working-class. . . . Here then, we have an educational institution arising on a social basis, that seeks to found the whole spirit and method of its teaching upon Anthroposophy.<sup>1</sup>*

—Rudolf Steiner *A Modern Art of Education*

Because Rudolf Steiner's life and writings are the foundation on which Waldorf schools are built, this essay is devoted to an overview of Steiner's work, which should assist us in understanding what occurs (or perhaps what should occur) in contemporary Waldorf schools. Rudolf Steiner

(1861–1925) is not widely known among American educators. Perhaps this is because his ideas do not fit neatly into any one sphere of knowledge. He was neither full-time educator, nor philosopher, nor artist, nor critic. In addition, his pantheistic and angelological outlook rattles many contemporary scholars and makes him suspect among scientifically oriented communities. His understanding of human nature, which consists of physical, etheric, astral, and ego bodies, certainly demands a great deal of open-mindedness from students trained in mainstream academia. Moreover, he expounded esoteric ideas, wrote obtusely, and often lectured with dogmatic conviction. Why is it then that anyone ought to be familiar with Dr. Steiner?

One reason is that oftentimes the best way to see one style of education is by examining others. Making the strange familiar and the familiar strange are two guiding slogans for cultural anthropologists. My point is that for anyone interested in understanding or improving public schools, one important place to start is with the investigation of other types of school systems. This argument is premised on the observation that alternative schools exist because of some dissatisfaction with mainstream schooling. In order to remedy the concerns, the alternative school will develop its own style of education. For example, teachers may teach differently or offer alternative types of curricula. Educational issues currently forgotten, dismissed, or simply unexamined may be addressed.

Another reason for examining the roots of Waldorf education is to understand the undergirding of current Waldorf schools and teacher training programs.<sup>2</sup> There are over 500 Waldorf schools worldwide and about 200 in North America (Canniff 1990). The United States also houses four major Waldorf teacher training institutions. The fact that there are many Waldorf schools spanning the globe from Germany, Scandinavia, and the United States to Brazil, Argentina, Japan, and India is noteworthy in itself. Students of education should not ignore an educational movement that has generated 500 schools worldwide any more than zoologists should ignore a newly found species—if for no other reason than parents want to know about them. Yet, little scholarly research has been conducted on Waldorf schools, in the world at large or in the United States (Uhrmacher 1991). The topic is unlisted in the *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, and a search for studies on Waldorf education through conventional resources provides little material.

Thus, educators ought to know about the impetus of Waldorf education. Where did it begin? For what reasons? With what methods? To these ends, let us examine Rudolf Steiner's ideas, in particular his ideas about Anthroposophy. In the last section of this article, I focus on possible reasons why Anthroposophy, the key to understanding Waldorf education, has survived seventy years after Steiner's death. My final point is not an empirical one. That is, I am not suggesting that Waldorf education or Anthroposophy will become a mass movement. Rather, my claim is that the themes generated from this movement have relevance for us all.

## THE ORIGIN OF WALDORF EDUCATION

On 23 April 1919, Rudolf Steiner gave a lecture in the tobacco storeroom of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany (Carlgren 1981, 15). Armistice had come into effect on 11 November 1918. People were tired of war, concerned about social upheaval, worried about the collapsing economy, and threatened by the possibility of a German civil war. Crowded on benches and chairs, sitting on large bags of tobacco, lining the walls in the back of the room, the workers listened as this philosopher, in his starched white shirt, immense cravat, and black frock coat, expounded on the themes in his newly published book, *The Threefold Commonwealth* (1966b).<sup>3</sup> Steiner argued that three spheres of social life—the spiritual-cultural, legal-political, and economic—must be decentralized within the modern state. Offering hope of a new social/world order, Steiner was suggesting that education could play an important role in shaping society.

In his view, constitutional states should limit themselves to the enactment and enforcement of laws to protect their citizens, and not become involved in economic or cultural affairs. Economic concerns, he said, should transcend political boundaries by building a sense of “fraternity” with producer and consumer associations. Why, he asked rhetorically, should national political concerns impede or obstruct economic considerations? In effect, Steiner was arguing for a common European market. Also, by separating the spiritual-cultural sphere from both government and industry, Steiner hoped to affect the technocratic order of the day. Rather than sustaining a system of tracking, whereby individuals were trained in a way that met the needs of the industrial world, Steiner believed that individuals should be encouraged to develop their own natural talents. Steiner said, “All of you, as you sit here, from the sixteen-year-old girl apprentice to the workers in their sixties, suffer from the fact that your real personality has been buried because from a certain moment there was only the hard school of life for you, but no longer any real education” (Carlgren 1981, 15).

The workers were as impressed with this social philosopher as Emil Molt, the head of the firm, had hoped. After all, Steiner offered hope for a new society—one liberated from the powerful modern state. Steiner’s views embraced strong antihierarchical notions. Following the lecture, Molt asked Steiner if he would create a school for the workers’ children. No stranger to the field of education, Steiner said he would, if several conditions were met: the school should be open to all children regardless of social or economic background, it should offer a twelve-year curriculum (Barnes 1980, 2), and it should be nondenominational in religious orientation. The conditions were agreed on, and the first Waldorf school, taking its name from the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, opened five months later, in the fall of 1919.

Before his death in March 1925, Steiner would live to see the opening of four Waldorf schools, two in Germany and one each in the Netherlands

and Great Britain. By 1938 there were nine Waldorf schools, but most of these closed during the war (von Baravalle 1967). The first Waldorf school in the United States opened in 1928 in New York City through the efforts of Irene Brown, who had heard Steiner lecture at Oxford. There were four American Waldorf schools in 1947 (Staley 1988), eighteen in 1975 (Ogletree 1979), and seventy-five in 1989. Today there are over 150 Waldorf schools in North America. In fact, in the United States some Waldorf schools are becoming part of the public school system. Why have Waldorf schools continued to proliferate long after their founder passed away? Why has a school that opened at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany continued to flourish in the United States as we near the end of the century? Just who was Rudolf Steiner? What ideas did he have about education?

### STEINER'S EARLY IDEAS

Rudolf Steiner was born in 1861 to Austrian parents in the small town of Kraljevec in Upper Austria. His father worked for the railroad and before Rudolf was eight the family had moved three times. Although several works examine the life of Rudolf Steiner (Easton 1980; Hemleben 1975; Shepherd 1954; Wilson 1985), his autobiography illuminates his early intellectual development most thoroughly. Clearly, what shaped Steiner's thinking most radically were numerous "supersensible" experiences. When Steiner was eight, an apparition is said to have appeared to him and asked for assistance. Bewildered, Steiner was not sure how to help, but he was certain of what he had seen. The next day Steiner learned that the woman who had come to him, one of his cousins, had died. This experience and others like it pointed Steiner to "undeniable truths." He remarked, "For the reality of the spiritual world was to me as certain as that of the physical. I felt the need, however, for a sort of justification of this assumption" (Steiner [1923] 1951, 12).

As a result of his working-class origins and his father's desire that he become an engineer, Steiner attended the *Realschule* instead of the *Gymnasium*, and the Vienna Polytechnic (a working-class college) instead of a university (Hemleben 1975). His inquisitive nature and desire to make sense out of his uncommon experiences, however, led him to a passionate study of geometry ("Geometry seemed to me to be a knowledge which appears to be produced by man, but which, nevertheless, has a significance quite independent of him" (Steiner [1923] 1951, 11)), of Kant ("In my boyish way, I was striving to understand what human reason might be able to achieve toward a real insight into the nature of things" (25)), and of Fichte ("And yet I had my own views. So, I took the *Science of Knowledge* and rewrote it, page by page" (35–36)).<sup>4</sup>

At the age of twenty-two Steiner, through the recommendation of his humanities teacher Karl Julius Schröer, was selected to edit and comment on Goethe's scientific works for the popular book series, *Deutsche National-literatur* (*German National Literature*). Goethe's scientific works were not taken seriously by most scholars; "in effect, Steiner was being tossed a scrap

that no one else wanted” (Wilson 1985, 49). Goethe’s science, however, corresponded quite well with Steiner’s viewpoint. Like Goethe, Steiner believed in understanding a living, whole world rather than a dead, dissected one. And like Goethe, Steiner believed in a spiritual world that interpenetrated the physical. In 1886 he published his first book, *Theory and Knowledge in the Light of Goethe’s Weltanschauung*, and in 1890 Steiner moved to Weimar to edit Goethe’s natural scientific writings for the Goethe and Schiller Archives.

Steiner stayed in Weimar for seven years. In addition to editing Goethe’s works, he assisted in organizing the works of Schopenhauer and of the poet Jean Paul Richter. At the same time, Steiner received his Ph.D. from the University of Rostock with his dissertation, “The Fundamental Problem of the Theory of Knowledge, with Particular Reference to Fichte’s Teaching.” Also, he published ninety-one texts (essays, articles, or transcribed lectures) (Hemleben 1975, 60) in addition to four books, *Truth and Science* (his dissertation), *The Philosophy of Freedom*, *Friedrich Nietzsche: Battler Against His Time*, and *Goethe’s Conception of the World*. Each is, in part, a philosophical assault on the materialistic thinking that pervaded common ideas of the time.

Between 1897, when he left Weimar for Berlin, and 1919, when he opened the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Steiner’s writing began to change. Esoteric theological themes began to pervade his work. Although he edited literary magazines (*Magazin für Litteratur*, *Dramaturgische Blätter*), lectured at the Workers’ Educational Institute (1899–1904), and published some texts that might be read by a general audience (e.g., *Riddles of Philosophy*, *Haeckel and His Opponents*, and *The Threefold Commonwealth*), he also wrote mystery plays (*The Portal of Initiation*, *The Soul’s Probation*, *The Guardian of the Threshold*, *The Soul’s Awakening*) and books disclosing the travel of the soul (*Theosophy*, *Occult Science: An Outline*),<sup>5</sup> and developed a new spiritual art form called “eurythmy.” Designed to make sound visible with the body, eurythmy expresses words or musical tones through specific movements. In addition, Steiner designed and constructed the first Goetheanum (1913–1920), in Dornach, Switzerland. The building was architecturally designed to enhance spiritual awakening through its seven varieties of wood, its utilization of clay, stone, glass, and other organic materials, and its overall structural form.

Steiner had probably become acquainted with Theosophy as early as 1888 (Wilson 1985, 56); by 1900 he was giving lectures to Theosophical circles. Appealing to the intelligentsia throughout Europe, Theosophy combined a study of world religions, ancient mysteries, philosophy, science, and psychic investigation. According to one of the original founders, Helen Petrovna Blavatsky:

Theosophy is . . . the archaic Wisdom-Religion, the esoteric doctrine once known in every ancient country having claims to civilization. This “Wisdom” all the old writings show is an emanation of the divine Principle; and the clear comprehension of it is typified in such names as the Indian Budh (sic), the Babylonian Nebo, the

Thoth of Memphis, The Hermes of Greece . . . and finally the Vedas, from the word “to know.” (Cooper 1979, 1)

There was much in Theosophy that Steiner embraced. In fact, some suggest that he borrowed more from Theosophy than he was later willing to admit (Clemen 1924; Wilson 1985, 56–57). However, others perceive Steiner as a confused, opportunistic young man who was initially anti-Christian (his work on Nietzsche has an existential quality to it), but later became religious, in part because he could capitalize on the German religious revival. Numerous esoteric movements such as Ariosophy and Theosophy were becoming quite popular in Germany (Berman 1989). Steiner, however, defends his later works by noting:

I had to make a certain position for myself in the world first. People may say nowadays that my writings are mad, but my earlier work is there also, and they cannot wholly ignore it. And moreover, I had to bring things to a certain clarity in myself, to a point where I could give them form, before it was possible to talk about them. That was not so easy. And then—I admit it frankly—it needs courage to speak openly about such things. I had first to acquire this courage. (Clark 1970, 50)

In any case, he became general secretary with the founding of the German section of the Theosophical Society in Berlin in 1902, and he participated in the society until 1912. At that time, when Theosophists declared Krishna-murti their new Christ, Steiner broke with the group, and took the German chapter with him to form the Anthroposophical Society.

## ANTHROPOSOPHY

Although some critics dismiss Anthroposophy as “a hodgepodge of 19th-century romanticism, Christianity, Eastern mysticism and various perplexing notions” (McGrath 1977), and others regard it as “a synthetic mixture, a surface barbarization of the Gospel by means of Indic, gnostic, and mystery elements” (Aulthaus 1962, 19), adherents suggest that Anthroposophy’s credibility should be tested by its results, and indeed, even the two critics mentioned here (McGrath and Aulthaus) admit that the results are impressive.

The word itself is derived from “anthropos” (man) and “sophia” (wisdom). To delve into all of its tenets requires a dissertation (see Geoffrey Ahern 1984), but three key points should be understood. First, according to Steiner, intertwined with the visible world is a spiritual one. Steiner was arguing not only that a spiritual world exists, but that the spiritual world interpenetrates the sense world. All attempts to deny the existence of the spiritual world or to solve problems on a solely material level were doomed to fail. What was needed was the recognition of the larger spiritual reality that has an impact on the material world. Like Spinoza and Goethe, Steiner embraced what philosophers call “psychophysical double aspectism.” That is, the mind and body are inseparable: What affects the body is experienced in the mind, consciously or unconsciously, through emotions or thoughts.

Moreover, according to Steiner, “knowing does not consist in a mirroring of something possessing essential being, but the soul’s living entrance into this reality of being” (Steiner [1923] 1951, 183). The goal of the process of knowledge is to raise one’s consciousness so that one can experience (or inwardly see) ideas in addition to sense perceptions. In this way, concept and percept become one.

This last point leads to the second key tenet behind Anthroposophy: human beings have the potential to perceive and enter into the spiritual world. Here, Steiner was arguing against Kantians who admit things-in-themselves, but suggest that there are limits to knowledge. Within us, said Steiner, are latent organs of perception that can penetrate the spiritual world. In order to develop such organs, however, people must first develop themselves, a difficult and formidable challenge. In addition to numerous recommended meditation exercises (described in Steiner’s *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and Its Attainment* ([first published in German in 1904] 1947) and *An Outline of Occult Science* ([first published in German in 1909] 1972)), cultivating one’s sense of the beautiful, sympathizing with fellow beings, thinking (i.e., studying geometry), and developing powers of observation are important preparatory stages. After years of patience and practice, one begins to develop spiritual organs that allow entry into the spiritual world. In each of three stages, which Steiner called Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition, the individual develops a different aspect of himself and is permitted greater access to the spiritual (Steiner [1904] 1947).

The third key principle behind Anthroposophy is that when spiritual investigators achieve the intuitive stage of apprehension they consciously enter into an objective spirit, the findings from which, to some degree, can be articulated and tested. Summarizing Steiner’s viewpoint, Robert McDermott writes,

Steiner in effect says: let future spiritual scientists observe the validity of my spiritual perception, and let the scientist limited to empirical observation note the extent to which observable phenomena not only correspond to, but are illumined by, the insights of Spiritual Science. (McDermott 1984, 292)

By meditating in the way that he did, Steiner suggested that anyone could see what he saw.

As a result of his spiritual research, Steiner offered comprehensive, complex, and spiritually based views of virtually every aspect of life. Several important results of his spiritual science influence Anthroposophical thoughts even today: Steiner’s cosmology, his understanding of humankind, and his ideas on child development.

## **STEINER’S COSMOLOGY AND UNDERSTANDING OF HUMANKIND**

Steiner suggested that the universe condensed from spirit into matter through successive stages, and that it will become spirit again with human assistance. The midpoint in this general evolution occurred at the mystery

of Golgotha. He also referred to this phenomenon as “the Christ event” and suggested that it represents the possibility of change in the evolution of the soul. The Christ event, said Steiner, allows free spiritual activity to be achieved by changing ordinary thinking into pure thinking: “This pure thinking then raises itself to the direct experience of the spiritual world and derives from it the impulses to moral behaviour” (Easton 1980, 90). For Steiner, to accept Christ within is to open up one’s powers of perception.

The evolution of the soul, as alluded to above, is a central element of Steiner’s cosmology. In fact, Steiner thought that by explicating the operations of reincarnation to Europe he was offering a “Copernican revolution.” Of course, this idea never reached revolutionary proportions in the West. Anthroposophists, however, embrace personal reincarnation as a fundamental truth. Summarizing Steiner’s ideas, Stewart Easton writes:

What Steiner taught was that a human being brings with him into a subsequent life on earth a framework of destiny that has been determined by previous lives on earth. . . . Man is thus given the opportunity to compensate for his previous evil deeds, while at the same time any spiritual progress that he has made in his earlier incarnations will also be reflected in the karma that he brings with him to his new life on earth. (P. 143)

Reincarnation allows individuals to develop their souls.

Anthroposophists not only accept Steiner’s cosmology, but they use their esoteric knowledge in numerous ways. Waldorf teachers, for example, try to create harmony in their classroom by relating the microcosm to the macrocosm—the curriculum to the cosmos (Uhrmacher 1991). Moreover, many assumptions about education stem from Steiner’s ideas about destiny. For instance, because Anthroposophists believe in reincarnation, the essence of the individual is preordained in the same way that a rose bush is. A rose bush will turn into a rose bush and not an apple tree. Still, a rose bush must be cared for and pruned. A rose bush can turn into a beautiful foliage or a scraggly shrub. Similarly, the kind of individual one turns into depends on many factors—especially education. Anthroposophists also believe in free will.

In addition to apprehending the workings of the universe at large through spiritual science, Steiner’s visions also revealed to him the nature and development of humankind. He divided the human being into numerous categories. His full-blown account includes nine analytical divisions: physical body, ether body, soul body, sentient soul, intellectual soul, consciousness soul, spirit-self, life-spirit, and spirit-man (Steiner [originally published in German in 1904] 1971, 36). More often, however, Steiner wrote about and lectured on the human constitution from triadic perspectives: body, soul, and spirit; head-man, chest-man, and limb-man; the organism as thinking, feeling, and willing; consciousness as waking, sleeping, and dreaming; and the physical constitution as nerve-senses, rhythm, and metabolism. Regardless of the way Steiner chose to speak about human nature, three points should be remembered. First, he acknowledged that his analysis is constructed, and pointed out that one should not confuse

his constructs for reality. Second, he recognized the interdependence of categories and stressed that one should never become too rigid in thinking about the human being. Third, Steiner was aware that his perspective was unconventional. He commented,

It is all too easy for the world to laugh at our saying that the human being consists of a physical body, etheric body, astral body, and ego. As long as one judges these matters only with the yardstick of customary science, one cannot help laughing. . . . But considering the serious tangle in which our civilization finds itself, one would expect at least some readiness to seek for what cannot be found elsewhere. (Steiner [1923] 1988a, 110)

### THREE STAGES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Waldorf educators are particularly concerned with the development of the soul of the school-age child, although Steiner recounted for Anthroposophists the full journey of the soul from birth and death to rebirth. Steiner suggested that children evolve through three stages.<sup>6</sup> The first stage he labeled the time of imitation. From birth to approximately age seven, children learn by empathy and doing. Steiner argued that “moral talk” and “prudent admonitions” have little power over the small child. Better, he pointed out, that one act morally and do good things in front of children.

Steiner also characterized this first stage in terms of its primary soul quality and corresponding physical organization. That is, the child is dominated by his or her will and metabolism. Steiner did not believe that consciousness resided in the head alone. Along the lines of traditional American Indians who believe that one thinks with the heart, or traditional Japanese who believe that the soul is in the abdomen, Steiner suggested that we learn through our entire body.<sup>7</sup> In this first stage of development, learning permeates the child’s entire physical being.

The second stage occurs around age seven when children lose their baby teeth. According to Steiner, the second set of teeth pushing out the first set visibly represents the etheric body breaking out of its “etheric envelope.” What does this mean? The etheric life force is vital energy found in plants, animals, and humans. According to Steiner, the etheric force is what distinguishes living things from minerals. For human beings, however, the etheric force is more than mere energy. At first, the etheric body works within the physical body and causes it to grow. When the etheric body is released from its protective sheath, however, as evidenced by the new set of teeth, the etheric body becomes the vehicle for character, temperament, habits, and memory. Steiner suggested that the etheric life force, invisible to the common eye, can be seen by anyone who chooses to follow his prescribed meditations.

The reason, then, that Waldorf educators do not teach children to read or memorize facts before age seven is that the etheric body is still tied to and working on the physical body. When one teaches children intellectual matter before the release of the etheric body, one is directly causing harm

to the child, resulting in physical scars that manifest themselves many years later in the form of diseases (Steiner [1919] 1967, 341).

Steiner also characterized the second stage as the time of feeling, which corresponds with the rhythmic system—the heart and lungs. This period, which lasts until age fourteen, requires teaching through vivid pictures, images, and rhythm, because these awaken the forces of feeling. Steiner argued that “everything that one brings to a child at this age must be given in the form of fairy tales, legends, and stories in which everything is endowed with feeling” (Steiner [1924] 1988b). According to Steiner, children apprehend primarily through image and rhythm during these years. Through stories, for example, children form a picture of what they have heard. Such pictures penetrate the human being differently from the way they did in the first stage. Now, instead of reverberating through the entire organism, newly learned material reaches to the level of the rhythmic system. Subsequently, “the child has the strong desire to experience inwardly in form of beat and rhythm everything that comes toward it” (Steiner [1921/1922] 1986, 144).

One last point should be made about this second stage of development. Steiner also suggested that children at this time have an inner need for a sense of authority—not a heavy-handed dogmatic authority, but leadership. Said Steiner:

One has to remember that the child’s inborn feeling for authority, which began with the change of teeth, was of a general, undifferentiated kind. The child accepted the dictates of authority as a matter of course and it felt an inner need to conform to them without being as yet aware of the individual character of the adults concerned. (P. 162)

The child’s need for authority, however, should not be confused with the adult desire to control the child. Steiner often cautioned teachers that by authority he meant “the child’s natural response to its teacher,” and not “an enforced authority. It is the kind of authority which . . . creates the right rapport between child and teacher” (159). Steiner also pointed out that at the age of nine, children’s need for authority changes from an inherent belief in everything the teacher says to a need for explanation. Therefore, at this time the teacher must alter his or her relationship to the students.

In review, the second stage, which lasts from the change of teeth until approximately age fourteen, is marked by the child’s need for authority (which undergoes a shift at age nine), the urge to learn through rhythm and images, and the release of the etheric body which allows teachers to work on the child’s habits and memory.

Finally, the third stage, from puberty to age twenty-one, is marked by the release of the astral body, the body of consciousness. As the vehicle of “pain and pleasure, of impulse, craving, passion, and the like” (Steiner [published in 1909] 1965, 12), the astral body, freed from the physical body, creates yet another mind and body relationship.<sup>8</sup> Thinking and judgment are the two catchwords for this phase of development. Whereas prior

to this time teachers tried to teach pictorially and rhythmically, now they can resort to abstractions more freely. Moreover, Steiner had cautioned teachers about encouraging students to form opinions too early: “Man is not in a position to judge until he has collected in his inner life material for judgement and comparison. If he forms his own conclusions before doing so, his conclusions will lack foundation” (45). At this time, however, students are encouraged to form their own opinions.

### GERMAN EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND THE WALDORF MOVEMENT

To appreciate fully Steiner’s educational proposals, one must recall the early twentieth-century German educational setting. Most students attended the *Volksschulen* (elementary schools) for eight years. These schools covered basic literacy, German history and culture, religion, and some mathematics (Shirley 1988, 17). They were successful by some standards. For example, at the turn of the century the German rate of illiteracy was 5 percent (Craig 1978, 187). However, unless students transferred at the end of their fourth year to preparatory schools, their road to higher education and more lucrative forms of employment was severely curtailed (190). In fact, most students quit school after attending elementary school. Few went on to the *Oberrealschule* (a modern school emphasizing modern languages, mathematics, and natural science) or the *Realgymnasium* (which combined elements of the *Gymnasium*’s classical education and the *Oberrealschule*) (190).

In addition to the structural problems of the schools and the class distinctions they created, there were also pedagogical limitations. The popular “object lessons” were often dull and uninspiring. The following was recorded by a British educator in 1904:

A picture of a harvest field, with trees round it, hung before the class.

*Teacher:* What is this? (pointing to a tree)

*Pupil:* That is a tree.

*Teacher:* What part of the tree is this?

*Pupil:* That is the stem.

*Teacher:* By what is the stem surrounded?

*Pupil:* The stem is surrounded with bark.

*Teacher:* What colour is the bark?

*Pupil:* The bark is brown. (Winch 1904, 203)

Numerous educational reformers rebelled against banal teaching, elitist school structures, and other school maladies. Although divergent in means and ends, most reform pedagogy emphasized “child-centered” instruction

(Shirley 1988, 22), development of the “total personality” of the child (23), a disdain for too much intellectualization of subject matter, and a “pedagogical eros” that included love, trust, and intensity as part of the learning process (24). Reformers such as Paul Oestreich, Fritz Karsen, Adolf Reichwein, Karl Wilker, Elisabeth Rotten, C. H. Becker, and Paul Geheeb thought the new education would heal all of society’s problems. (See Shirley for an overview of the alternative educational movement in Germany, 1910–1933.)

Rudolf Steiner’s educational system was to alleviate social ills, and it incorporated many of the reforms mentioned above. The Waldorf school was child-centered and designed to foster the total personality without a one-sided emphasis on the intellect. Steiner once remarked that when “considering other educational movements which are extending their influence into present times, I can only say: In all areas of contemporary education one finds a great deal of what is both positive and acceptable” (Steiner [1920] 1981, 14).

Waldorf schools, however, were distinguishable from other reform efforts of the time by the Anthroposophically based rationale for the school’s practices. Steiner made this clear:

The methods we use will certainly not differ from those applied hitherto merely because we want to do something new or different out of obstinacy; they will be different because we shall have to recognize from the special tasks of our particular age how teaching must be done if mankind is in future to be able to fulfil the impulses of development prescribed by the universal cosmic order. (Steiner [1919] 1976, 9)

When Steiner instructed the first Waldorf teachers, he spoke in cosmic terms to make sure that the teachers understood the larger issues involved in education. According to Steiner the purpose of education is to “bring the Soul-Spirit into harmony with the Life-Body” (Steiner [1919] 1966a, 19). Teachers should pay attention to “all that rightly organises the breathing process into the nerve-sense process” (21). Moreover, he remarked that “a rightly guided education . . . must enable the human being to carry over his experiences on the physical plane into what the Soul-Spirit . . . is engaged upon during sleep” (22). How should this be done?

Needless to say . . . in our educational practice there will be no question of direct training of the breathing, or of direct training of sleeping and waking. All this will only be in the background. What we have to learn will be concrete measures of educational practice. *But we must be conscious of what we are doing, right down to the foundations.* When we teach this subject or that, we must be fully aware that we are working either in the one direction to bring the Spirit-Soul more into the earthly Body, or in the other direction to bring the bodily nature into the Spirit-Soul. (Pp. 22–23)

Clearly, Steiner was not interested in utilitarian rationales or principles. The Waldorf curriculum, aesthetic foundations, pedagogical methods, forms of evaluation, school structure, and teachers’ intentions were, in part, derived

from Anthroposophy. Steiner understood what scholars would later call the hidden or implicit curriculum (Jackson 1968). In addition to being aware of implicit social and political messages, however, Steiner also emphasized the recognition of hidden spiritual messages.

From the start, Steiner had to compromise his ideal school. Steiner wanted students to be able to transfer from Waldorf schools to other school systems without being behind in subject matter, and he wanted his students to be able to pass the *Abitur* exam to gain acceptance to universities. (Perhaps the first test-preparation course of its kind, "Preparation Class for the *Abitur*," was included in the Waldorf curriculum after the twelfth year to prepare students for the national examination (Stockmeyer 1965, 23).) Steiner made a distinction between the child's physical, mental, and spiritual development, and education for the child's social and cultural background. The latter demanded that the Waldorf curriculum not stray too far from Germany's conventional education.

## THE FIRST WALDORF SCHOOL

Steiner designed the first Waldorf school for students from kindergarten through grade 12,<sup>9</sup> and made it coeducational (an innovation for that period) and teacher directed. Teachers assumed administrative responsibilities and had great latitude in making classroom decisions. In fact, Steiner cautioned teachers against following his indications too closely: "We must also be very clear that there is no need to make our methods rigidly uniform. For of course one teacher can do something which is very good in a particular case, and another teacher something else which is equally good" (Steiner [1924] 1983, 25).

The one constant across all grade levels was the *main lesson*, a two-hour block of time set aside each morning, in which subject matter would be taught over three to four weeks. Sometimes the subject matter was discipline based and sometimes it was thematic: for example, there were main lessons on arithmetic as well as themes such as "man and animal." Through the use of this extended block of time, Steiner tried to avoid the fragmentation of curriculum plaguing German schools.

In addition to main lessons were one-hour-long *specialty classes*: painting, singing, eurythmy, foreign languages, form drawing, and handwork. Often the scheduling of these classes proved to be unwieldy for class and specialty teachers. *Class teachers* were those who remained with their students for years, advancing with them from grades 1 through 8. Ideally, after eighth grade, class teachers took a year's sabbatical and then began again with a new first grade. *Specialty teachers* included kindergarten and high school teachers as well as those who specialized in a particular subject area: for example, singing, painting, eurythmy.<sup>10</sup> These subject areas had to be arranged so that the French teacher, for example, could meet the schedules of the different grades and yet not have to be in two places at once. Said Steiner in a moment of exasperation, "The timetable has become quite

impossible. Though trying to apply methods based on the knowledge of Man and his development, we are actually managing to become as unpedagogical as possible” (Stockmeyer 1965, 25). Scheduling problems were a frequent topic in teachers’ meetings.

The curriculum and pedagogy of the first school were contrived to meet the child’s developmental stage. Teachers of grades 1 through 3 taught, to all students, language arts, painting, arithmetic, social studies, two foreign languages, eurythmy, music, singing, handwork, and form drawing (students drew simple forms—straight and curved lines—to get a feeling for the “language of form”) (von Heydebrand 1966).<sup>11</sup> Because children of this age were in the stage of feeling where the rhythmic system predominates, teachers tried to teach pictorially and rhythmically. For instance, they taught the alphabet through images. Steiner described how this could be done:

Imagine for example . . . approaching the child by saying: You have seen a fish, haven’t you? Try and remember what the fish looked like when you saw it. If I do this on the blackboard [he draws a fish that resembles an italicized *f*] . . . it looks very like a fish, doesn’t it? . . . Now imagine you wanted to say fish. What you say when you say fish lies in this sign. . . . Now try not to say fish but only to start saying it. . . . fish, f-f-f. . . . When you start to say fish, f-f-f, you express it in writing by making just this sign. (Steiner [1919] 1976, 11–12)

This was one way Waldorf teachers taught through images.

The use of stories as a major pedagogical mode was another way teachers taught through images. Theoretically, images from the stories students heard were carried into their sleep life and subsequently affected their waking time. For instance, if students heard a story about a lion, the next day in school they would retell the story to the teacher and perhaps draw the lion or write a few sentences about it. In this way, according to Anthroposophists, the archetype of the lion lives in the students’ consciousness. Students learned fairy tales in first grade, animal stories and saints in the second, the Old Testament in the third, and Norse myths in the fourth. These themes were specifically chosen to meet the child’s changing consciousness.<sup>12</sup>

The rhythmical aspect of education also entered the curriculum through the use of stories. Teachers were discouraged from using textbooks because learning in this way was passive and lacked feeling. Subject matter, Steiner said, had to flow from the teacher’s soul. Thus, teachers told their stories with feeling, using meter, rhyme, cadence, and verse to create and support the meanings of the stories. In addition, subject matter such as arithmetic was taught rhythmically by hand clapping and foot stomping as students marched about. Thus a musical quality pervaded the curriculum and pedagogy.

Temporal rhythms such as the repetition of daily, weekly, and yearly activities affected the school as a whole. Michaelmas, Advent, Easter, and Saint John’s Day, for example, created seasonal benchmarks. The school schedule created weekly routines: for example, singing on Tuesday, handwork on Monday and Wednesday, and eurythmy on Thursday. The teacher

created daily classroom rituals and routines. In these and many other ways, rhythm and image, the two important elements that bring out students' needs for feeling, were implemented in the classroom.

Teachers altered the curriculum and pedagogy as students grew older. As children "incarnate" or grow down into their bodies, they become more able, said Steiner, to reach outside of themselves into the world. The curriculum reflected this evolution of consciousness. Nature Study was added in the fourth grade (although nature stories have been told all along), and history and geography took the place of social studies beginning in the fifth grade. Beginning in the sixth grade, the curriculum included physics, formal geometry, woodworking, and gardening.

Similar adjustments for developmental phases could be seen in pedagogy and in the specific directions suggested for subject matter within content fields. For example, foreign language study in the fourth grade included prose (whereas oral poems and verses were used almost exclusively in the first three years); language arts began to focus on grammar (thus students become conscious of language); and painting and drawing classes encouraged students to copy real objects instead of teachers' drawings. In short, students were being led into the world. From grades 4 to 6, a gradual transition from the imaginative treatment of material to a more "objective" handling took place.

Steiner outlined the curriculum to meet the child's evolving consciousness by grade level from kindergarten through grade 12. As children grew older, Steiner indicated that they should become more conscious of the structures and laws behind their studies (e.g., understanding grammar, logic, and cause and effect), begin to understand the inorganic world as well as the organic (e.g., mechanics, physics, and mineralogy), and become grounded in practical endeavors (e.g., sewing and writing business letters).

Thus, the first Waldorf school divided teachers into class and specialty teachers, was arranged so that most subjects were taught to all students, and was built to avoid a fragmented curriculum by using the main lesson. The curriculum was designed to meet the child's changing consciousness, and shifted emphasis from imaginative to objective material, and from the organic to the inorganic. Regarding the pedagogical, teachers relied on storytelling and paid great attention to rhythms and images. In addition, teachers generally tried to teach from the "whole" to the part (e.g., by providing the sum before the addend in math classes, or by telling students about trees before having students cut pieces of wood in woodworking classes) and to relate subject matter directly to the child's experience. Finally, Steiner encouraged formative rather than summative types of evaluations, even though reports of students were given yearly in the spring. Teachers were to avoid negative comments in their reports, and render an accurate picture of the child with humor and appreciative words. Also included in the report was a verse to "show the individual child the direction in which he should strive" (Müller 1982, 64).

Before I bring this discussion to a close, two more points should be made. First, although the principles of the school were based on Anthropos-

ophy, the aim of the school was not to create Anthroposophists. On this point, Steiner was very clear:

But do not imagine . . . that we have any intention of founding “anthroposophical” schools in the sense that anthroposophy as such, as a world conception, should be taught in them in the place of other world conceptions of today. . . . It is important to realize that this is in no way our intention. (Steiner [1919] 1967, 29)

Students were not taught to become Anthroposophists.

Second, one other classroom dimension ought to be explored—the aesthetic. Steiner once remarked,

How it is to be deplored, my dear friends, that the schoolrooms for our children are a veritably barbaric environment for their young hearts and minds. Imagine every school room, not decorated in the way often thought artistic today, but shaped by an artist in such a way that each single form is in harmony with what his eye should fall upon when the child is learning his tables. (Stockmeyer 1965, 238)

Steiner not only gave advice on how to paint the classrooms, and the kinds of pictures that should be hung on the walls, but he also suggested the kinds of clothes children should wear (cottons and natural fibers—today he would be considered an ecologically minded educator) and toys they should play with (he approved of unfinished toys, such as rag dolls without facial features so that children could fill in the toys by using their own imagination).

Steiner also offered some advice on wall color to the first Waldorf schools. Using a method called “lazure,” walls were painted in several coats. First, one person applied the paint near the ceiling and allowed it to drip downward. Then a second person brushed the dripping paint horizontally. When this process is applied several times (often with a splash of a second color) the eye does not stop flat when it hits the wall. Gentle swirls of color take the eye full circle around the room. Younger grades (1 through 3) had reddish walls, upper grades contained blues.

## **RECKONING WITH RUDOLF STEINER**

How should one make sense of Rudolf Steiner and his extraordinary ideas? Because interpretations are always embedded within perspectives, and perspectives proliferate rather than diminish over time, there are countless ways to bring meaning to the movement. I offer three perspectives, each of which borrows from a different type of analysis, that account in different ways for the rise of Rudolf Steiner and the continued longevity of his ideas. Max Weber’s analysis of charisma, Neil Postman’s ideas about stories, and Morris Berman’s thoughts on the role of the body in history each can be used to examine the Anthroposophical movement from a different perspective, and together form overlapping frameworks that help us understand the man and his vision.

First, Max Weber's sociological analysis portrays Steiner as a charismatic leader emerging in troubled times. According to Weber's theory, the charismatic leader is one unfettered from traditional structures and practices. In times of crisis, when human experience needs creative change, people turn to these outsiders who possess superlative qualities of mind or body. The charismatic leader attains authority through an impressive demonstration of power, and challenges established practice by going to the "root of the matter." Charismatic leaders can be villains or saints. Weber does not analyze the types of questions or possible solutions offered by the leader, but rather the sociological forms of expression.<sup>13</sup>

Steiner's life fits this pattern neatly. Lecturing and writing during a time of trouble in Germany, Steiner emerged not from established lines of power—the *Gymnasium* or university—but from a technical college. Moreover, his ideas were as Eastern oriented as they were Western, and therefore outside traditional practices. Although his call to realize the spiritual was not entirely new, his narrative of how the spiritual works was novel indeed. The root of the problem of a troubled Germany lies in its materialistic philosophy and spiritual ignorance. In addition, by all accounts, including his critics', Steiner possessed remarkable qualities of power and authority. He started movements in medicine, agriculture, education, therapy, and music; created an entirely new and original art form (eurythmy); designed buildings, wrote plays, and lectured extensively (between 1900 and 1925 he delivered 6,000 lectures) (his collected works comprise over 350 volumes). Educator Margaret McMillan describes Steiner's visit to her (non-Waldorf) school in England:

He walked from shelter to shelter, and wherever he went the children welcomed him. He looked on at their work like a companion. To the students he spoke only a few halting words. To the other guests almost nothing. Yet no other visitor ever left so powerful an influence. Later we saw him at Dornach, surrounded by adoring crowds who had come from every European country . . . to hear his words. Impressive as was that sight, it was far less imposing than his mere presence—the presence of a worn man, humble and gentle as only those can be who have won his secret. (1925, 393)

Steiner evinced a humble charisma.

Weber theorizes that when a charismatic leader dies, the organization undergoes troubled times, because sustaining it without the charismatic leader becomes problematic. Indeed, after Steiner's death, the movement was on shaky ground. Clearly, however, the Anthroposophical movement not only survived, but it has gained strength in the years since Steiner's death.

Weber offers an analysis that accounts for the success of the movement, at least in part. In his discussion of institutional charisma, Weber points out that successors may attain power in one of several ways, but in all cases the exercise of authority is bound up with individuals who possess distinctive qualities (Bendix 1960, 305–306). Weber's insight is useful here.

Steiner's charisma was of such magnitude that he appealed to some followers who were charismatic in their own right. Hence, familiar figures in the English-speaking Anthroposophical movement such as Oxford dons A. C. Harwood and Owen Barfield attracted many members, as did Stewart Easton, Francis Edmunds, John Davy, and René Querido. Younger members such as Betty Staley, Roberto Trostli, and Eugene Schwartz are becoming national and international Anthroposophical leaders as well. Forming a chain of teacher-student relationships that reaches back to Steiner himself, the charismatic torch passes through the Anthroposophical movement from generation to generation.

In summary, Weber's analysis of charismatic leaders helps us account for Steiner's popularity during Germany's frantic era. In addition, given that each epoch brings with it new problems and issues, Anthroposophy continues to proliferate through a chain of charismatic leaders who, on the margins of mainstream society, continue to offer fresh solutions. I return to this point in the discussion of Berman's historical analysis.

Neil Postman offers a second approach to understanding the success of Steiner's ideas. In his insightful article, "Learning By Story," Postman suggests that "Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of existence" (Postman 1989, 122). He continues:

I am talking about the more profound stories that people, nations, religions, and disciplines unfold in order to make sense out of the world. If our stories are coherent and plausible and have continuity, they will help us to understand why we are here, and what we need to pay attention to and what we may ignore. (P. 122)

The problem with modern stories, according to Postman, is that they do not provide meaning to life. The story of technological progress, for example, fueling bigger and better machines, is a fragment of the larger, modern picture that few still trust and many doubted to begin with. Similarly, the story of science, suggesting that life began accidentally and will end accidentally, portends "that the accidental life is scarcely worth living" (124). What we need are new stories.<sup>14</sup>

Postman's insight applies not only to the United States at the end of the century, but to Germany in the early part of it. Germans (and other Europeans) sought new stories to bring meaning to their fast-changing lives. Steiner's limited popularity can be attributed to the fact that he simply offered a compelling and rich story, countering the "modern" paradigm. Likewise, Steiner's stories continue to work for many people today because postmodern stories are fragmented, without grand design or destiny, beginning or end. The scholarly "truth" that there is no exalted narrative, but only partial ones, only magnifies the pursuit for the comprehensive story (note the debate between Habermas and Lyotard). Steiner's story embraces religion, science, art, practical arts, and politics in one comprehensive tale, thick with meaning, relevance, aim, and even blueprints for attaining the good life.

So far, I have provided two theories to account for the success of the Anthroposophical movement. The two together paint the picture of a charismatic leader who offered a comprehensive and meaningful story. Both theories, however, focus on form rather than content. That is, they provide some sociological insight, but they do not examine Steiner's specific ideas. The question that remains is: Are people still willing to accept etheric and astral bodies and, if so, why? Why has Steiner's story been perceived as meaningful? Were people taken in by a charlatan, someone whose modern counterpart would be Jim Jones in Guyana? This is where Morris Berman's analysis becomes useful.

Berman applies ideas from psychology (Freud, Jung, Lacan, Merleau-Ponty, R. D. Laing, object-relations theorists), anthropology (Paul Shepard, Edmund Leach, Mary Douglas, Levi-Strauss), religious studies (A. D. Nock, David Aune, Marcel Simon), and literary studies (D. H. Lawrence, William Blake, Milan Kundera, Owen Barfield), among other fields, to history in order to advance a novel thesis. Early in one's childhood,<sup>15</sup> he says, the individual undergoes a primary separation that might be seen as a split between the child and his or her environment, or the Self and the Other. As a result of this early division, people experience a sense of loss that they often later try to make up for through exaggerated attention to success, money, consumption, or reputation. Because the life of the infant, according to Berman, is created and reproduced through culture, this primary split exists on a social level as well. In fact, all social "isms" (e.g., communism, nationalism, patriotism), he says, are really attempts to restore a sense of meaning to our divided lives. The problem, however, is that these "isms" ultimately will not work. They are shadows of a deeper problem: a lack of somatic anchoring. According to Berman, Western culture, in particular, neglects and dismisses bodily experiences as a way to restore this initial divide, and consequently, heretical movements emerge and persist. These heresies,<sup>16</sup> Berman suggests, are really about an awareness of the body. He writes,

Although it is not often stated directly or even understood, the attempt to restore body cognition to the center of human consciousness is a central feature of most heretical movements in the history of the Christian West. (1989, 138)

As long as somatic experience is neglected, heretical undertows will continue to challenge the dominant paradigm.<sup>17</sup>

In Berman's story, Western history is characterized by its reluctance to admit somatic experience as a legitimate way of relating to nature, apprehending knowledge, or approaching God. In fact, Berman argues that the repression of gnosticism, the destruction and co-optation of the Cathars, the transition from alchemy (which, says Berman, was really about the relationship between human will and nature) to science, and the twisted ideologies of Nazi Germany are four major heresies in the West representing a typology of intersections between spirituality and politics. (Berman exam-

ines what he calls the Greek, the French, the Italian, and the German models.) Berman illustrates how each heresy played itself out, and in the course of his discussion makes four important points: (1) each heresy is about somatic experience, (2) each heresy is about synthesizing East and West—in the West a perpetual return to Eastern influence, (3) the heresy may be repressed, co-opted, secularized, or politicized, but it does not go away, and (4) each heresy is about an ascent phenomenon: a bodily experience of the spiritual that in effect says, “You can do it yourself” (251).

Berman’s analysis illuminates the Anthroposophical movement in two ways. First, from a historical perspective, one realizes why Steiner’s story was meaningful. His ideas represented one positive alternative to the course of Nazi Germany. Berman argues that the story of Nazism was a somatic one of repressed sexual energy and of a pagan embrace with the ecstatic phenomenon. In his discussion, Berman reveals how the need to respond to the body turned into mass political and national purposes. If we accept Berman’s assumption that somatic repression was part of the German problem, then Anthroposophy can be seen as a positive alternative. From this perspective, Steiner was absolutely correct when he suggested that the root of the German problem was a spiritual one. Of course, Steiner did not win out. Few Germans turned to Anthroposophy, but of those who did, the somatic experience worked well enough that survivors of the war continued to embrace it.<sup>18</sup> In the following passage by Berman, Anthroposophy could replace the term *gnosis*:

*Gnosis is not about belief, but about tangible proof of the existence of “larger forces,” which Western mystics over the centuries have claimed to have obtained by means of certain somatic techniques of breathing, chanting, meditation, and so on. (P. 138)*

Anthroposophy is about meditation and a way of seeing.

Berman’s theory also explains why the Anthroposophical movement continues to be meaningful today. In short, Anthroposophy, like other “heretical” movements (New Age mysticism,<sup>19</sup> Eastern spiritual movements), engages in a discussion where somatic experiences are taken seriously. Offering a somatic bridge between Self and Other, Anthroposophy in essence will not go away. That is, even if the movement were to die out, the general ideas or underlying spirit would be subsumed under some other group or organization.

Weber, Postman, and Berman each offer a perspective of the Anthroposophical movement that accounts for not only its initial success, but also its continued development. Before concluding, a few words ought to be said about the import of all these ideas for public school educators. Although the aim of this essay is to help readers understand the background of Waldorf education, rather than to elaborate on lessons to be learned (see Uhrmacher, 1993a, 1993b for essays on what can be learned from Waldorf education), I do wish to highlight a few points for current discussion. As I mentioned earlier, alternative schools exist because of some dissatisfaction

with mainstream schooling. Although the ideas expressed in this essay cannot be “installed” in other schools, they may be used, in Tom Barone’s words, as “an occasion for conspiracy . . . a conversation about the relationship between present and future worlds” (1990, 313–314).

Briefly let us consider the following. First, the history and analysis of the Waldorf movement reminds us that when discussing early childhood education (preschool to first grade) we have recently focused on progressive teaching strategies versus teacher-oriented ones. The idea, previously widely held in North America and Scandinavia, that formal education of any kind is inappropriate (regardless of its apparent effectiveness) before about age seven is not part of the debate (see Elkind’s *The Hurried Child* (1981) for an exception to my claim). Second, Steiner’s ideas remind educators interested in holistic education that holism may mean more than combining various kinds of curricula or appealing to the child’s mind and body. Holistic education is rooted in a cosmology that posits a fundamental unity to the universe and as such ought to take into account interconnections among the purpose of schooling, the nature of the growing child, and the relationships between the human being and the universe at large. I am not suggesting that one needs to agree with Steiner’s ideas, but one ought to wrestle with these types of issues. Finally, Steiner’s ideas remind educators that rather than focusing on a technocratic curriculum (forming objectives, teaching discrete bits of information, having students express themselves in propositional language and numbers, and evaluating students through summative styles of report cards), they could provide an arts-based curriculum (relating educational intentions by connecting small details to broad aims, teaching through rhythms, stories, and images, having students express themselves imaginatively through main lesson books, and evaluating students through formative styles of evaluation that speak to the students’ best selves and guide them gently with humor).

## REMEMBERING STEINER

With the rise of Nazism in the 1920s, Steiner’s lecturing in Berlin came to a close. His life was threatened on numerous occasions and smear campaigns attempted to cast doubt on his character. One English pamphlet, for example, suggested that Steiner was connected with an Italian secret society whose aims were to undermine the Allied countries, and that Anthroposophy was a right-wing group with connections to the Soviet government of Russia (Easton 1980, 292). The torching of the Goetheanum, in December 1922, could have been the final blow to the Anthroposophical movement, but Steiner wasted no time in designing and constructing the second Goetheanum—this time in stone rather than wood.

Rudolf Steiner died on 30 March 1925. That he was well known in his day is attested to by a front page obituary in the *New York Times*, numerous recounts of his life in a variety of journals (Mackenzie 1925; McMillan 1925), and the fact that thousands of people “from all over the continent”

(Mackenzie 1925, 775) attended his funeral. In 1942 Winifred Smith suggested that as Steiner's living presence fades, "the cult he founded will die away, like so many others of its kind" (Smith 1942, 40). However, Smith's prediction has not come to pass. Anthroposophy, a growing movement in the 1980s, has achieved enough prominence for Geoffrey Ahern, a student of religious studies, to call it "the modern heir of the Western esoteric tradition" (Ahern 1984, 15). If this is so, then Waldorf education represents the most widespread application of this tradition.

## NOTES

1. Anthroposophy can be thought of in two ways. First, it is a path of self-development for those who wish to follow Steiner's direction toward spiritual development and cognition. According to Steiner, through specific types of meditation, human beings can directly perceive the spirit world. Second, Anthroposophy is also the fruit from Steiner's ideas and methods. Biodynamic farming, Anthroposophic medicine, eurythmy, and Waldorf schools are a few of the results of Steiner's spiritual knowledge. People who embrace Steiner's ideas refer to themselves as Anthroposophists, and one may refer to them collectively as belonging to the Anthroposophical movement.
2. In my initial study of Waldorf education (Uhrmacher 1991), I examined two schools that thoughtfully tried to follow Steiner's ideas. I pointed out that the teachers did so because (1) they wanted to; (2) there were organizational features in the Waldorf movement (e.g., meetings, conferences, inservices) to encourage fidelity to Steiner's ideas; (3) the school ethos reminded everyone involved that they are working in a Waldorf school; and (4) Steiner provided a broad and elastic orientation—not a narrow technological program. Thus, being faithful to his ideas could lead to divergent practices. This is not to say that anything goes. In fact, Waldorf educators are concerned that some Waldorf schools are being run without sound knowledge of Steiner's ideas. They would like to restrict what counts as a Waldorf school. In any case, I remind the reader that understanding the background of Waldorf education should inform us about what is or what should go on in current Waldorf schools.
3. One hundred thousand copies sold across the continent (*New York Times*, 31 March 1925).
4. Others who shaped Steiner's thinking included teachers (Karl Schröer, Robert Zimmerman, Franz Brentano), poets (Friedrich Schiller, Jean Paul Richter, Marie delle Grazie); and feminists (Marie Lang, Rosa Mayreder, Gabrielle Rutter). Goethe would prove to be the most influential. Steiner spent many years seeking intellectual footholds to justify his spiritual beliefs.
5. See Robert McDermott (1984) for full references to these works.
6. Steiner's views on child development are strikingly similar to Piaget's. See Ginsberg's (1982) article, "Jean Piaget and Rudolf Steiner: Stages of child development and implications for pedagogy," and Ogletree's (1985) "An interpretation of Rudolf Steiner's theory of child development and school readiness" for inquiries into the similarities and differences between the ideas of these two men.
7. In his article, Paul Aiken (1980) reviews the research on mind-body relations and concludes that "neuromuscular activity plays an essential role in emotional, perceptual and cognitive processes. . . . Mental processes are not simply correlates of neuromuscular activity; they are in part the activity of neuromuscular

circuits” (12). For example, one study reveals an increase in EMG (electrical activity) when subjects engage in mental activities such as fantasy and imagination. EMG levels in the eyes increase when a person is asked to imagine the Eiffel tower, and they increase in the arm when he or she is asked to imagine throwing a ball. Aiken argues that the idea of all mental acts initiating or deriving from the brain is a cultural phenomenon: “Taken to its extreme, we have the science fiction account of a brain preserved alive and continuing to think without a body” (21). Aiken concludes that “It might be naive to say that we think with our muscles, but it would be inaccurate to say we think without them” (23).

8. The terms astral, ego, and etheric bodies sound strange in discourse outside of religious studies. However, Steiner’s notion of bodies has precedence. Aristotle believed in a hierarchy of souls: the Vegetative, possessed by plants, which allows growth (Steiner’s etheric), the Sensitive, possessed by animals, which allows pleasure and pain (Steiner’s astral), and the Rational, possessed by humans, which provides rational thinking (Steiner’s ego) (Hergenhahn 1986, 39). In addition, Yoga speaks of seven bodies, as does ancient Indian medicine (the seven chakras), the ancient cult of Mithras (seven gates), and Isis (with seven garments) (Berman 1989, 140). Steiner points out that his observations of the various bodies were also discerned by Augustine (Steiner 1986). The reduction of bodies to mind and matter is a recent modern account.
9. The school initially opened in 1919 with grade 1 through 8 and according to Easton with about 150 working-class students and 50 or 60 others. He also notes that by 1928 the school had 1,000 students and 50 teachers.
10. Class teachers could be specialty teachers as well.
11. Gymnastics began in grade three.
12. According to Steiner, fairy tales introduce children to important life themes such as good and evil at a time when they are still living in a dreamy consciousness—like fairy tales. “Animals and Saints” stories teach students to explore their lower as well as higher sides: people have animal and saintly qualities. The Old Testament meets children’s needs for an authoritarian law and order, and stories about Norse gods assist students in dealing with their own personalities changing into more complex characters.
13. I use Weber’s theory as a useful heuristic in illuminating Steiner’s popularity. By using Weber’s theory, however, I do not mean to suggest that his analysis applies in all cases or that rival theories (see Adorno 1950) lack utility. My analysis proceeds in accordance with Joseph Schwab’s use of the eclectic (Schwab 1969). In other words, I apply Weber’s theory because I think it works in this context.
14. I use Postman’s analysis because his short article helped me think about Steiner from a fresh perspective. Readers preferring a more academic analysis of modernity will find the works of Donald Oliver and Kathleen Waldron Gershman useful (Oliver 1976; Oliver and Waldron Gershman 1989).
15. The point at which this separation takes place is debatable. Berman suggests that the split occurs around the third year of life (1989, 24).
16. Berman uses the term “heresy” to refer to a Western countercultural tradition “that is rooted in bodily experience and that rejects the cerebral, or formulistic, way of life of the dominant culture (orthodoxy)” (136). Berman also suggests that heresy “is finally about the cognitive and perceptual history of the West—about its entire *Weltanschauung*, its way of coding reality” (137).
17. Feminist scholars who focus on somatic experience as a form of knowing (e.g., Nel Noddings, Madeleine Grumet) might be considered secular heretics.

18. I say "well enough" because very few, to my knowledge, in the Anthroposophical movement have reached Steiner's abilities of meditation.
19. I agree with Berman that a problem with the New Age movement is its "intellectual flabbiness," and naive belief that "archetypal energy" is always a good thing. Berman has illustrated the negative consequences of the release of somatic experience in his discussion of Nazi Germany.

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