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Bo Dahlin

Rudolf Steiner
The Relevance of Waldorf Education

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Bo Dahlin

Rudolf Steiner

The Relevance of Waldorf Education

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Bo Dahlin
Karlstad University
Karlstad
Sweden

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Preface

This book is primarily addressed to scholars and researchers of educational science and philosophy, who wish to familiarise themselves with Rudolf Steiner's educational thought; that is, the underlying basis for Steiner Waldorf education (here, for simplicity's sake, called only Waldorf education). I have tried to pick out and present those of Steiner' ideas that may be of interest to a present time academic educational thinker or researcher that knows little or nothing about Waldorf education. My picking and choosing is partly guided by similarities to views and ideas present in contemporary educational thought and practice—even if such similarities are only 'partial overlappings', or strictly limited 'intersections', since the basic perspective, or paradigm, that informs Steiner's ideas, is not shared by any of the educational philosophers and researchers referred to.

To give a comprehensive view of Steiner's educational thought is not easy, considering that Steiner never summed up his ideas on education in a systematic way (hence, the many introductions to Waldorf education that have been written after Steiner's death). One reason why Steiner did not write such a book is probably lack of time. However, the main reason may have been that, as Steiner himself says, Waldorf education is *not* intended to be a neat system of educational ideas and principles, but an *impulse of awakening*. To capture such an impulse and express it anew about a hundred years later requires more than intellectual orderliness. There is a certain conflict here between the norms of academic discourse, and the essence of the subject presented.

I am very grateful for the help and support I have received from friends and colleagues in trying to accomplish this task, so this is the place to express my gratitude to first of all Marek Majorek and Arve Mathisen, who reviewed a first draft of this book and gave valuable suggestions for improvement. Thanks go also to Lennart Nilo and Maria Eloranta for providing some important facts and information, and to all those who have expressed their good wishes for the work.

Stockholm, Sweden
March 2017

Bo Dahlin

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About the Author

Bo Dahlin is Professor Emeritus of Education at Karlstad University, Sweden. He was born in 1948, and graduated at Stockholm University in 1971, with mathematics and philosophy as major subjects. After a period of travelling and having various short-term jobs, he took a Ph.D. in Education in 1989, motivated by his interest in human learning and development. His dissertation researched young people's ways of understanding religion, and argued for a spiritual perspective on religious education, based on existential phenomenology and C.G. Jung's depth psychology. He maintained an interest in the philosophical and spiritual aspects of education throughout his academic career. During 2003–2005, he led an evaluation project of Swedish Waldorf schools. He later participated in planning and starting up a master's programme in Steiner Education at Rudolf Steiner University College, Norway. Since he retired in 2012, he has continued to publish papers on the philosophy and spirituality of education.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Abstract This chapter begins by describing how the first Waldorf school came about in Stuttgart in 1919, and the intentions behind it. The development of this alternative educational impulse into a worldwide movement is described shortly. In mainstream media today, Rudolf Steiner's ideas in general, as well as in education, are often presented as controversial, because being perceived as un- or anti-scientific, mythological, or even racist. The misunderstandings behind these allegations are pointed out. The similarities and differences between Waldorf education and progressivism, or *Reformpädagogik*, are shortly discussed. Some reasons for the relative lack of academic research on Waldorf education are pointed out, and some examples of the reception of Steiner's educational and philosophical ideas are given. Finally, there is an overview of the following chapters of the book.

Keywords Waldorf education · Progressivism · *Reformpädagogik*

1.1 The Waldorf School Movement: Facts and Fiction

The first Waldorf school started in 1919 in Stuttgart. It came about because the owner of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Emil Molt, asked Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925)—at that time the leader of the Anthroposophical Society (AS)—about advice for starting a school for the children of the workers in his factory.[1] Molt had realised that the German school system at that time would provide no future possibilities for these children. Higher education was costly and segregated. Girls and boys went to separate schools, and the different social classes never met in a common education. Steiner's ideas for education were different and

[1]In addition to founding an 'alternative' form of education, Steiner was a pioneer in ecological farming methods, developed complementary forms of medical care, suggested new and more ethical forms of banking, and inaugurated a new Christian church. All of this was done on *requests* from people involved in the respective fields and derived from his spiritual science, or anthroposophy. As he often pointed out, true spiritual science is not some metaphysical dream, but has practical consequences for all human and social life.

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radical for his time, and Molt wished to contribute to their realisation. Negotiations were started with the social democratic government of Württemberg, who seemed not to mind that a capitalist wished to pay for a comprehensive school for children of all social classes. In the autumn of 1919, the school started with 256 children enrolled. About 75% of them were children of the employees of the factory, and the rest came primarily from anthroposophical families in Stuttgart. Seven years later, the school had over a thousand students and was one of the largest in Stuttgart (Ullrich 2008). In the UK, the first Waldorf or Steiner school was the Michael Hall school in East Sussex, established in 1925, as a result of Rudolf Steiner's lecture tour on education in England in 1922. Other countries, in which at least one Waldorf school was established already in the 1920s or 1930s, are Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, USA and Argentine.

In 1939, the number of German Waldorf schools had grown to 25.[2] After the end of WW2, there was a boom of new schools in Germany, and the number increased from 6 in 1945 to 209 in 2008, encompassing more than 80,000 students (Randoll 2010). But the worldwide expansion of Waldorf education really took off in the latter decades of the twentieth century. In 1980, the number of schools in the world was less than 300; in 1990, it was 600; and in 2015, it was over a thousand.[3] In the same period, the number of countries harbouring Waldorf schools doubled from about 20–40 between 1980 and 1990, and in 2015, the number had grown to nearly 70. At present, there are Waldorf schools not only in Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world, but also in Africa, Asia and South America. In addition, there are the Waldorf Kindergartens or preschools, also in all parts of the world. Waldorf education is certainly a worldwide educational movement.

From its very start, Steiner made it clear that the school was not intended for a particular class of people, or ethnic group. It was to be a school for boys and girls being educated together for 12 years (an uncommon thing in those days) and for children of all social classes. There was to be no hierarchical distinctions between teachers, gender based or otherwise, and it was not to be a school only for the children of members of the anthroposophical movement, nor was it to teach the anthroposophical worldview. It was to be directed towards that which is universally human in all people, regardless of ethnicity, class, religion or gender. It was to be a school for humanity, a *Menschheitsschule* (Steiner 1986 [GA 307], p. 15).[4]

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[2]Some influential Nazis, like Rudolf Hess, took a certain interest in anthroposophy and Waldorf education, being attracted by what they perceived as mythical and anti-intellectualistic traits. Waldorf schools were therefore allowed to continue to operate for some years after the Nazi takeover in 1933. Eventually, however, the Nazi government realised that the strong emphasis on individualism and freedom was incompatible with Nazi ideology, and all Waldorf schools were closed in 1941 (for a more detailed account, see Ullrich 2008, pp. 154ff).

[3]At the Website of *Bund der freien Waldorfschulen*, http://www.waldorfschule.de, a list of all Waldorf schools in the world is available. For more information, see also https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/waldorf-worldwide (both Websites accessed 24 March 2017).

[4]GA refers to Steiner's collected works (*Gesamtausgabe*); see below, Sect. 1.4. For English edition, see Steiner (1989a).

In present times, such ideas and intentions are often looked upon with sceptical eyes. Can anyone claim to know what is 'universally human'? Isn't the very idea of a universal human essence just a social construction, arising out of different social, cultural and ideological conditions, and therefore, by its very nature, not universal at all, but relative and contingent? Furthermore, looking at the students of Waldorf schools almost all over the world, the majority come from well-educated middle-class families, and many of the parents are members of the Anthroposophical Society or adhere to specific spiritual views and values. It may appear to be a school for 'some', not for all people (see Chap. 7).

When Waldorf schools are reported on in media, it is nowadays often done with a comment to the effect that the underlying ideas are controversial. This often refers to commonly perceived or alleged aspects of Steiner's thought, such as that it is unscientific and 'mythical' and that it contains racist views. Regarding the first point, Steiner's thinking is certainly not scientific in the mainstream sense of the term, but 'science' is a human or social construction. Since Kuhn (1977), we know that there are historical shifts in the paradigms of science; therefore, one can hardly claim that the nature of science is 'given' by some objective, non-human authority, natural or otherwise. Nor would the possible consensus of all scientists about the nature of science constitute anything but a historical contingency. Steiner himself argued that the knowledge of the world and of the human being that he presented in his anthroposophy is a *spiritual* science and that the underlying research is as rigorous and objective as natural science. It differs only in the means and methods used and in the underlying epistemological principles. A comprehensive presentation of Steiner's reasoning in this respect, and its relation to modern philosophies of science and knowledge, is given by Majorek (2002, 2010, 2015), who even argues that Steiner's criteria for objectivity are stricter and more demanding than those commonly applied in mainstream science.

As for racism, Steiner is not the only pre-Nazi 'great thinker' who—rightly or not—has been accused of harbouring such ideas. It is also a well-known fact that talking and writing about the differences between races was not as sensitive an issue then, as it is today. Steiner did say things about specific racial differences (most of them found in transcribed lectures), but he never consistently maintained the universal supremacy of the white, Caucasian race, nor did he argue that other races should be denied human rights (cf. Rose 2013; Dahlin 2014). In a few cases, however, the accusations of racism led to the formation of commissions with the task of investigating their validity. One such commission was appointed in the Netherlands because of the appearance of media publications about Steiner's supposedly racial doctrine. Some people feared that this might influence the teaching in Waldorf schools. The commission's extensive study was published in 2000 and concluded that of the discussed 245 quotes from Steiner, 16 were of such nature that *as isolated statements*, they would violate the present-day well-developed and highly sensitive Dutch law on discrimination. In the conclusion, the commission writes:

> The number of pages with statements that can be experienced as discriminatory today is less than 0.05% of the 89,000 pages of Rudolf Steiner's collected works. Anthroposophy and social Darwinism are diametrically opposed to each other. Suggestions that racism is inherent in Anthroposophy, or that conceptually Steiner helped prepare the way for the holocaust, have been proven categorically incorrect. The Commission has the distinct impression that, compared with other nineteenth and pre-World War II twentieth-century authors, such as Hegel or Albert Schweitzer, Rudolf Steiner has become the victim of 'selective indignation'.[5]

A few words directly quoted from one of Steiner's lectures may prove the point:

> [A] person who today speaks about the ideal of race, nation or tribe, he speaks of degenerating impulses of humanity […] because through nothing will humanity bring itself more into decay, than if the ideals of races, nations and blood were to continue. (Steiner 1999 [GA 177], p. 220; my transl.)

Calling Waldorf schools, or their underlying ideas, controversial may also hint at the Waldorf movement as being sectarian in nature. The reason for this would be that many of its students come from families with a so-called anthroposophical lifestyle. This involves for instance the prohibition for children to watch TV; a general resistance to media technology; the preference for clothes of pure wool and for bio-dynamically grown food products; and the resistance to vaccinations for child diseases. However, if this is perceived as controversial, it is mostly because it seems odd and not in line with the 'modern way of life'. Recent research even hints at the possibility that this alternative lifestyle is healthier for children, protecting them from the development of allergies, at least up to five years of age (Swarz 2014). As for watching TV, it has been found that the so-called mirror neurons are much less activated in watching media pictures than by being in the presence of real persons (Speck 2009, p. 141). By looking a lot on media pictures of human beings speaking and acting, the brain may develop the habit of seeing other people while less or no simultaneous activation of mirror neurons occurs, thereby reducing the neurological basis for empathy and communication (for a general discussion of research indicating harmful effects of TV on children, see Sigman 2007; Christakis 2009).

1.2 Steiner and Progressivism

Ideas for educational reform have been presented from time to time in Western history since Plato. In the modern era, J.A. Comenius (1592–1670), J. Rousseau (1712–1778) and J.H. Pestalozzi (1746–1827) count as prominent heralds of new educational ideas and practices. One central notion common to these thinkers was that education must be based on an understanding of child nature as different from

[5]Quoted from http://www.thebee.se/comments/Holland/Dutch-FinalPressSummary.htm (accessed 2017-03-30. See also http://www.waldorfanswers.org/ARacistMyth.htm#Netherlands (accessed 2017-03-30).

that of adults. The Romantic idea of childhood added a further emphasis on this idea (Ullrich 1999, p. 107f; Dahlin 2013a). Another central notion was the important role of education as a force for social change. These views were taken up and further developed towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, giving rise to a movement for educational reform called progressivism in Anglo-Saxon countries and *Reformpädagogik* in Germany (Scheibe 1971). It had various manifestations both in Europe and the in USA.[6] As part of civil society, it was inspired by different personalities with different points of view; nevertheless, there were some common overriding themes. One was the criticism of mainstream education as too intellectualistic and not considering the whole human being (Pestalozzi's 'head, heart and hand'). Another was the disregard of the needs and interests of the child, and the lack of understanding of children's development. Schools were criticised for being disciplinary institutions based on formal authority and punishments, and forms of instruction for being one-sidedly frontal with children as mere passive receivers (Scheibe 1971; Skiera 2003).

On a surface level, Steiner shared most of these ideas, the one possible exception being that he put teachers in the centre of the classroom. But he demanded that they be enthusiastic and inspiring for their children, giving full reign to imaginative and aesthetic forms of (re-)presentation. Steiner also considered education as a force for social change (more about this in Chap. 7). Nevertheless, he was critical of most forms of *Reformpädaogik*, because they did not have a deep enough understanding of the nature of the human being and children's development. In other words, they lacked a spiritual educational anthropology, which, for Steiner, was the *sine qua non* of all education. Therefore, even if the Waldorf school can be seen as part of the general movement for educational (and social) reform from a superficial point of view, when looking more carefully at the conceptual foundations of its practices, it is something quite unique.

1.3 Research on Waldorf Education and the Reception of Steiner's Educational and Philosophical Ideas

There is a great amount of secondary literature on Waldorf education, which often have an 'immanent hermeneutic' approach to Steiner's educational texts and lectures. But systematic empirical research on Waldorf education is relatively scarce, considering that Waldorf schools have existed for many decades in many different parts of the world. There are several reasons for this. One probable reason is that the foundations of Waldorf education are commonly perceived as unscientific, as noted above. Many academic researchers therefore hesitate to get involved in studies of Waldorf schools, because it may hamper their future career. Another reason is that

[6]In the USA, progressivism is commonly associated with John Dewey. For a comparison between Waldorf education and Dewey, see Ensign (1996).

within the Waldorf education movement itself, there are—or have been until recently—very few people with a proficient research competence in the field of educational science (Randoll 2010).

As for the secondary literature, its immanent hermeneutics unfortunately often results in a kind of discourse that addresses itself to those who are already in tune with the underlying ways of thinking. As Gidley (2010) remarks, many of these texts appear anachronistic to academics and mainstream teachers and so become an obstacle to mutual understanding and dialogue. In 2008, the Rudolf Steiner Schools Association of Australia therefore funded a research project to investigate the relationships between Steiner pedagogy and related twenty-first century academic discourses; see Gidley (2010) for a report on this project.[7]

Other difficulties that partly overlap with those already mentioned are described by Wiehl (2015, p. 244). For one thing, teachers in Waldorf schools look primarily to Steiner's practical recommendations regarding content and teaching methods. These tend to become a tradition handed over orally and in curriculum and syllabus plans, without contact with and relating to mainstream educational research and practice. Another reason is that there is still no basic, systematic, academic work accounting for the theoretical grounds of Waldorf education in an open, unprejudiced and impartial way, relating it to other streams of educational thought and practice. A third reason is that part of the foundations of Waldorf education are the research methods of anthroposophy, the understanding of which also need philosophical, epistemological and *spiritual* research. Attempts at introducing these to the general public usually meet with rejection due to the differences in worldviews.

The few academic researchers that do study and discuss Steiner's educational ideas or Waldorf schools often do so on the basis of their own preconceptions about anthroposophy or other matters. An obvious example is Prange (2000), who sets out to demonstrate that Waldorf schools are nothing but schools for producing future anthroposophists. Another, less extreme example is Helsper et al. (2007), who see the idea of authority in Waldorf education as a reflexive demodernisation (*reflexiver Entmodernisierung*) and Waldorf schools as pedagogical anti-worlds (*pädagogische Gegenwelten*) within the framework of antinomies of modernisation (*Modernisierungs-antinomien*). Examples of the latter are demands of autonomy and of self-discipline aimed towards the development of competencies and capacities in ever earlier ages, or the plurality of lifestyles and possible biographical trajectories, and the freedom to choose among them. Such a perspective may to some extent explain why people choose to put their children in Waldorf schools, but it does not capture the basic intentions and ideas of Waldorf education.

A third example is Ullrich (1994), who on UNESCO's initiative investigated Waldorf education and tried to place it within the context of academic educational theories and perspectives. Ullrich found, however, that Steiner's educational

[7]The journal in which this report is published, *RoSE: Research on Steiner Education*, is an online open access academic journal, started as an attempt to remedy the state of affairs described here; see http://www.rosejourn.com.

thinking cannot be placed within any established academic field or discipline. It is not ethical–philosophical (like Kant or Herbart), nor sociological (like Dürkheim), nor is it empirical–psychological (like Piaget). His conclusion is that Waldorf educational discourse is derived from anthroposophical 'neo-mythology' and that it is not conceptual but mainly metaphorical character. In addition, however, he notes that Waldorf schools are pedagogically innovative and that former Waldorf students are often successful in their lives (more about this is Chap. 7). This he considers as somewhat surprising, as he perceives the basic principles as rigid and dogmatic. Regarding Waldorf education, there seems to be a paradox of acceptance of practice while being ignorant of the underlying theory, Ullrich notes (but isn't this paradox rather common in modern techno-based society?). In more recent works, Ullrich (2008, 2015) gives more extensive accounts of Waldorf education—including its epistemological and philosophical grounds—and more differentiated and sympathetic judgments of its ideas and practices. Still, however, he misrepresents or misinterprets important aspects of Steiner's philosophical thinking and holds on to his previous conclusion that Steiner's educational psychology is prescientific and anachronistic. But it would lead too far to go into this issue here; for a discussion of Ullrich's misapprehensions, see Schmelzer (2016) and Dahlin (2013b).

Critics like Ullrich and others often portray Steiner as authoritarian in his knowledge claims and see this as the cause for a certain resistance among Waldorf teachers to further research and development. The Waldorf school movement is therefore viewed as antidemocratic, as if holding on to a Platonic ideal of Philosopher-Kings. In his lectures to teachers and for members of the Anthroposophical Society (AS), Steiner used expressions like 'As spiritual science has demonstrated…' or 'As we know from supersensory research…'. Perhaps this is a justifiable way of talking in such situations, but one could wish that he had used more moderate expressions. On the other hand, Steiner probably counted on the intelligence of his listeners that they would understand the position from which he spoke. This position is not dogmatic in the usual sense, because Steiner had a strongly developed *Sprachskepsis* (cf. Kiersch 2010). He was acutely aware of the hazards involved in translating his spiritual insights into ordinary language, which—as he often remarked—is not created for speaking about phenomena of the spiritual world, but only about mundane facts. Ullrich's remark on the metaphorical character of Steiner's discourse is therefore relevant, but one must realise that even ordinary language is to a large extent metaphorical, except that we have become so used to the metaphors that we take them literally. To express one's understanding of spiritual facts requires that language itself becomes alive, imaginative and plastic. The same goes for thinking and the concepts that are used. In a dogmatic stance, however, words themselves are taken as literal and absolute truths. This was not Steiner's stance. Even though he never spoke or wrote something he did not consider true, he never wanted to influence the judgement of his listeners. In other words, his attitude was something like 'this is what I have recognised as the facts of the case; it is not the words I use but what they point to that is essential; whether you believe it or not, and what conclusions you draw, is up to you'.

However, not all academic studies of Waldorf education start with a critical or sceptical approach. Some are more open minded and even sympathetic.[8] A few examples are Oberski (2006), who studies how Waldorf students 'learn to think', and Oberski (2011) who focus on Steiner's concept of freedom as a basis for spiritual education. Nielsen (2006) reports an ethnographic study of an Australian Waldorf class, with a special focus on the role of imagination in teaching. The work of Nobel (1996) focuses on the concept of art and the role of artistic practices in Waldorf education, pointing to its roots in the ideas of Goethe and Schiller. Finally, there is the evaluative study of English Waldorf schools by Woods et al. (2005; see also Ashley 2009), which I will discuss more extensively in Chap. 7. In that chapter, I will also present other empirical studies of an evaluative nature.

In addition to the above, there are many master and Ph.D. theses, as well as other small-scale studies, from different parts of the world, dealing with Waldorf schools and their ideational foundations. It is, however, impossible to give a comprehensive overview of all these works here.[9]

Although marginal, an academic interest in Waldorf education and its underlying ideas has existed for quite some time, probably because Waldorf schools have been a visible part of society and from time to time have been negotiating with state educational authorities for many decades. Things are different when it comes to Steiner's *philosophical* works. Here, the academic interest is rather recent, but shows signs of growing. One reason for this may be the emergence of post-structural philosophy and deconstructionism. Post-structural philosophy can be characterised as a kind of thinking that is utterly sensitive to what lies beyond the horizons of the known and the knowable, but which also constantly disrupts attempts to capture reality in precise definitions and conceptual systems. Thus, Pattison (2005) finds an interesting dialogical potential between post-structural philosophy, on the one hand, and Steiner's philosophy, on the other hand. Post-structuralists tend to see the transcendence of philosophy as leading to 'acts of unknowing' beyond the limits of language and cognition, whereas for Steiner such experiences are often the stirrings of new or hidden cognitive capacities (ibid., p. xv). For instance, for Levinas (1999), ethics is the primary philosophy, not ontology or metaphysics (which is the classical view). Ethics, according to Levinas, involves the recognition of the *impossibility* to know the Other, my fellow human

[8]By sympathetic, I do not mean a completely non-critical stance, but one that really understands (many of) the underlying ideas of Waldorf education and considers them to be legitimate alternatives to mainstream education.

[9]The Website http://www.waldorfanswers.org presents a list of such studies in English and German. In the Nordic countries, the following are worth mentioning: Lejon (1997), Mansikka, (2007), and Stabel (2014). Lejon and Mansikka both place Steiner's educational thought—especially its philosophical aspects—within the context of the German tradition of *Bildung* and Romantic idealism. Stabel investigates the historical development of Waldorf schools in Norway 1926–2004, focusing on the interaction between the ideas, norms and values of Waldorf education and those of the surrounding society. Her analysis points not only to an underlying and unbroken continuity of the Waldorf tradition, but also to its reformulation and adaptation because of confrontations with mainstream educational policy and debates.

being. The Other is beyond knowledge, beyond our conceptions. Rudolf Steiner, on the other hand, said that we must learn to understand the real person behind the ghost-like conceptions of human nature that natural science tends to give us. To do this, we need to develop new organs of perception, organs whose potentiality for development lies dormant in all of us. The development of these organs can be speeded up by certain exercises and ways of life, but it also to some extent takes place naturally and spontaneously in the process of human history. Steiner's educational thinking can be taken as a way to prepare for this future development of human consciousness (cf. Gidley 2009). However, it is possible to see the stirrings of such developments within various present cultural expressions, of which post-structural philosophy may be one example. Examples of English and German works on Steiner's philosophy, critical as well as sympathetic, are Welburn (2004), Schickler (2005), Sijmons (2008), Dahlin (2009), Traub (2011), Sparby (2016) and Eftestøl (2013).

1.4 About This Book and the Following Chapters

Steiner's written works and transcribed lectures are published as his collected works (*Gesamtausgabe,* GA) by Rudolf Steiner Verlag in Dornach, Switzerland. The GA contains 354 volumes (I use the expression 'GA' in deference to the fact that it is a publication in German). The volumes on education comprise GA 293–311, consisting of about 3800 pages, but Steiner occasionally touches on educational issues in other parts of the GA also.[10] Even if the same or similar themes are often repeated in these texts, they are also taken up from different points of view or contextualised in various ways. It is obviously impossible to give a comprehensive account of all this material in a small book like this. The difficulty is illustrated by the recent, very diligent work of Angelika Wiehl (2015), who titles her work a *propedeutic* to the teaching methods of Waldorf education—and the book contains over 250 pages of very dense text.

The following chapters will deal with what in my view are the essential aspects of Waldorf education, including a very short sketch of part of Steiner's biography in Chap. 2 and examples of evaluative empirical research in Chap. 7. I try to consider Steiner's childhood, youth and early adulthood from an educational point of view, noting the various influences that—probably—informed his educational thinking. Chapter 3 takes up important themes of his philosophical work, themes that are also relevant for education. Chapter 4 goes into the ideas of anthroposophy, focusing on the anthroposophical understanding of human nature and development, especially that of children. Some people want to make a clear distinction between Steiner's

[10]It may be noted that certain changes and 'corrections' have been made by the editors of the GA. These are, however, more important from an historical and biographical point of view (cf. Skagen 2015, p. 50f).

philosophical and anthroposophical works, claiming that there is an essential difference between them (for inst. Zander 2011). Others, including Steiner himself (Steiner 1989b [GA 13], pp. 343–344),[11] maintain that there is an underlying continuity, even if the discourses of the two categories are very different in terms of concepts and linguistic expressions (Prokofieff 2006; Skagen 2015).[12] The latter is also my own view; therefore, I see no problem in dealing with both his philosophical and his anthroposophical ideas. Chapter 5 presents some basic principles for the Waldorf school curriculum, general ones as well as more specific, directed to particular school subjects, or age periods. The term 'curriculum' is taken in a wide sense, as that which Waldorf students are supposed to 'go through' experientially during their time in school. Chapter 6 gives an account of Steiner's social philosophy, which he formulated and tried to spread after WW1, as a solution to 'the social question', that is, the need for social reform that was especially urgent for post-war Germany. When his ideas for social renewal did not get the hearing that Steiner hoped for, the Waldorf school movement became—at least partly—another line of work for social change. Chapter 7, finally, tries to answer the question whether, or to what extent, Waldorf education 'delivers'. As with all evaluations of educational systems and methods, this question is harder to answer than most people think, among other things because it is a question of values, not only of facts.

A note on the references to Steiner's works may be needed. As noted above, Steiner's books and lectures have been published as his collected works in German. These are the volumes I have used for references in almost all cases. However, the books that Steiner wrote himself, and some of his most important lecture series, have also been translated into English (and other languages). When referring to a central work of Steiner, I have therefore added a reference to an English edition in a footnote. In a few cases, however, it was necessary to refer to English publications that do not contain information on which GA's they are based. I have also often included a reference to the page number, even if there is no direct quote. This is because Steiner's lectures deal with many different issues, and some of them are mentioned just in passing, which makes it hard to find the relevant text if one does not have the page number.[13]

[11]English edition: Steiner (2011).

[12]As will be clearer in Chap. 2, in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, Steiner immersed himself in many different streams of ideas, such as German idealism and mysticism (Cusanus, Bruno, Böhme), Nietzsche, Darwin, Haeckel, Stirner, anarchism, socialism and theosophy. He lived intensely in the cultural turbulence of his times. But, as Skagen (2015, p. 67) maintains, he followed his own inner compass through these very different ideological landscapes.

Another ground for assuming continuity rather than a break in his biographical trajectory is Steiner's own view that spiritual knowledge is built on an *intensification*—not a break with—ordinary human knowledge faculties (ibid.).

[13]As for English translations, many of the GA's are now available at the Website of the Rudolf Steiner Archive, http://wn.rsarchive.org. Also, the Website http://www.waldorflibrary.org/ provides good information on English translations of Steiner's lectures on education.

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Chapter 2
The Formation of a Western Sage

Abstract This chapter describes Steiner's life from his boyhood years until the time when he joined the Theosophical Society. It recounts how Steiner grew up in the borderland between nature and culture and between traditional country life and the growth of modern technology. How as a young boy he had clairvoyant experiences of the spiritual world and how it led him to study philosophy, especially epistemology, in his youth. These personal interests were added to his studies of engineering at the Vienna College of Technology. Steiner edited Goethe's scientific writings and developed a Goetheanistic epistemology. He had a personal encounter with Nietzsche, obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy and wrote the book *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (*The philosophy of freedom*). He was part of cultural life in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century, working as a writer and literary critic in journals and as a teacher in the educational movement of the working class. Steiner's open and non-dogmatic relation to Christianity, as the result of a period of inner struggles and trials, is dealt with in a special section. Finally, how Steiner gained practical pedagogical experience by working as a private tutor in his student years is described.

Keywords Spiritual experience · Goetheanistic philosophy of science

The East has its sages and has had them for ages. Although they can also be saintly, sages are above all *wise*. Sages have access to a spiritual wisdom that goes beyond science and ordinary experience. In the West, such people seem to have disappeared from public life around the Renaissance. Since that time, the scientific worldview has grown more and more dominant in our culture, and therefore, spiritual wisdom has been marginalised and neglected. However, Rudolf Steiner did not only possess spiritual insight and wisdom, he also had extensive knowledge of science and technology. During his lifetime, he was much more of a well-known public figure than he is today. He can certainly be called a sage of our time. How was such a

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personality formed? In this chapter, I describe Steiner's life from his boyhood until when he was about 40 years old and became the secretary of the German section of the worldwide Theosophical Society (TS). Even though the first Waldorf school started many years later, when Steiner was fully engaged in the anthroposophical movement, his personal life in those years is of less interest from a conventional educational point of view.

It might be noted that the story of Steiner's life from boyhood until middle-aged adult presented here is not based on systematic biographic research (that would be too extensive a task to carry out for this book). I have chosen to take a more 'naïve' approach, using Steiner's autobiography (2000a [GA 28])[1] as my main source of information. This chapter is therefore based on Steiner's own testimony, unless other sources are referred to. There are many Steiner biographies, and other books describing events from his life, most of them sympathetic and appreciative (Beltle and Vierl 2001; Lindenberg 1997; Wehr 1982; Wilson 1985). Recently, however, some critical works have appeared, most notably that of Zander (2011), who deploys the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and a highly contextualistic approach (understanding Steiner's life and actions mainly from an external point of view, as the result of environmental influences and conditions). Zander's work has received some attention in anthroposophical circles, where it is often disdained as built on misapprehensions, false quotations and dubious sources (Ravagli 2009).[2] Personally, I have the impression that this criticism is justified; I have therefore abstained from using Zander's work to any great extent.

Another Steiner biography worth noting is that of Skagen (2015), who, in my view, has succeeded well in not falling into the any of the extremes of turning Steiner either into a divinity, or reducing him to an average person of our own times (Skagen's work so far is only available in Norwegian). As Skagen points out, Steiner wrote his autobiography towards the end of his life, when he was bedridden by a disease that would eventually end his life (he died before the biography was finished). As the leader of the Anthroposophical Society, he was beset with external criticisms from all sides: from the church (both Catholic and Protestant), the socialists and the conservatives/nationalists. The growing Nazi movement had even made at least one attempt to kill him. Skagen presents evidence that these external difficulties of 'the older Steiner' in various ways influenced his account of 'the younger Steiner's' life. He omitted things that could be misused by his enemies, and he emphasised the things that proved them wrong. In other words, he made his autobiography a weapon in the fight for anthroposophy.

[1]English edition: Steiner (2010).

[2]The criticisms of Zander can also be found on the Website of Lorenzo Ravagli, http://www.zander-zitiert.de/publikationen/rudolf-steiner-die-biografie/ (accessed 2017-03-16). See also Weickmann (2007, October 4), who, from a more neutral point of view, comes to a rather similar critical evaluation of Zander (2007).

2.1 The Formative Years: Childhood and Youth

Rudolf Steiner was born on 27 February[3] 1861, in Donji Kraljeveç, which at that time was a small village in the Hungarian part of the Empire of Austria-Hungary (Lindenberg 1997) (nowadays, it is in Croatia, north of Zagreb). At his birth, his father was a telegraph operator at the southern Austrian Railway. About two years later, he became a railway station master in Pottschach, another village situated in the beautiful nature of the eastern Austrian Alps. Here, Steiner spent most of his childhood, from 2 to 8 years of age. Despite his father's position, the family was poor because the wages were low. However, his parents were always prepared to make sacrifices for their children's welfare (Steiner 1996).[4]

In Pottschach, the young Steiner could experience on the one hand the beauty of untouched, pristine nature and, on the other, the latest advancement of technology. In those times, the railway was the pinnacle of technology, especially on the countryside. Steiner recounts how people gathered at the station whenever a train arrived—which was not very often—simply to watch the event. Apart from many ordinary villagers, the schoolteacher, the priest, the accountant at the manor and even the mayor used to come. Steiner reflects that his childhood encounter with the railway was probably of great significance to his development because it awakened his interest in mechanics. This interest engaged his thinking mind and thereby threatened to dominate his feeling life, which was more attracted to the grand and beautiful natural surroundings—into which the trains repeatedly disappeared, ruled by their mechanical laws, as Steiner describes it.

He had deep experiences of the nature around Pottschach, sometimes probably of a clairvoyant character, involving 'nature spirits' and similar supersensory phenomena. It is presumed that he referred to such experiences in one of his mystery plays (the 5th scene of *The souls' probation*; Steiner 1998 [GA 14]), in which a story is told about a boy dwelling alone in the woods, seeing into invisible worlds. Things that normal people consider lifeless spoke to him of secrets hidden behind ordinary sense experience (cf. Wehr 1982). Already as a child, Steiner realised that the things he experienced through such clairvoyant perceptions could not be shared with other people. He found himself living in two worlds: the one he shared with other people and the one that he alone could experience. This became a source of inner questioning for him and already in his youth he began searching for

[3]There is actually some uncertainty regarding the exact date, whether it is the 27 or the 25; again, see Ravagli's Website, http://www.zander-zitiert.de/publikationen/rudolf-steiner-die-biografie/falsche-behauptungen/ (accessed 2017-03-17).

[4]This book is based on a lecture held in Berlin 1913 for members of the Anthroposophical Society (AS) and seems not (yet) to be part of the GA. The concern of the lecture is to refute the accusations of Ms. Annie Beasant, at that time head of the Theosophical Society (TS). Ms. Beasant claimed that Steiner was educated by the Jesuits (not a favourable thing in the theosophical view). In the book, Steiner also explains why he did not join the TS in the 1880s, when he first encountered them in Vienna. The reason was that he perceived a lack of—perhaps even a resistance to—logical and exact thinking.

answers to basic philosophical problems such as the nature of reality and the origin of human knowledge.

Steiner's father was eager that the boy learned to read and write, and Steiner was sent to the village school as soon as he reached school age. However, his father and the schoolteacher soon came into a conflict, which resulted in his father taking him out of school and starting to teach him himself. Steiner had to sit beside his father in his office at the railway station and read and write. But he was more interested in what his father was doing and wanted to do the same things as him. He also became interested in the work going on at the railway station. Gradually, he developed a strong interest in physical phenomena and the laws of nature. He recounts the fascination he felt when pouring sand over an ink-written paper and watching the ink dry, not being able to resist the temptation of testing its dryness with his finger. Another fascination was a spinning-mill close by. He could see the raw material arriving with the train and being brought into the mill. He could also see the ready-made products coming out and being sent away. But he was not allowed to enter inside the spinning-mill itself and see the work there. What was going on inside the mill was a mystery. This was his first experience of the 'limits of knowledge'. In a way, the mill became an illustration of Kant's notion of the thing-in-itself, although he would not encounter this idea until his teens, when he read Kant's *Critique of pure reason*.

In his eighth year, the Steiner family moved to Neudörfl, a then Hungarian border village that now belongs to Austria. On the slope of a mountain close by lay a cloister of the Order of the Most Holy Redeemer. On his walks in the area, Steiner often met the monks from the cloister and wished that they would speak to him, but they never did. Nevertheless, they made a solemn impression on him, and he developed a feeling that there must be something very important connected with the life of these monks, something that he ought to learn about. This evoked further questions in his thinking life, questions that made him lonely because he felt there was nobody he could talk to about these things.

Nevertheless, some people he met became very important to him. One was an extra-teacher in Neudörfl, who gave lessons outside of school time, in which Steiner participated. The lessons themselves did not give him much, but he became friends with the man and spent a lot of time in his office. By this time, he could read, and he discovered a book about geometry in the teacher's library, which he could borrow and read for himself. Reading this book gave him his first experience of real happiness. He realised that it was possible to clearly grasp purely spiritual things. Even though the figures dealt with in geometry have a certain connection to our ordinary sense experience of lines and figures, they are nevertheless idealised forms. A point, for instance, has no extension, and such a thing does not exist in the physical world. Furthermore, the laws and relations between these forms are purely conceptual in nature. He realised that in addition to the external space of the sense world, there is an internal space that is the scene of spiritual processes and events. This inner space was as real for him as the world outside, and geometry was a clear illustration of this reality. It provided a basis for the assumption that the spiritual world is as real as the sense world.

This teacher also introduced Steiner to the world of art. He played the piano, and he loved to draw. He made Steiner practise copying paintings and portraits. Regarding music, Steiner was also deeply touched by Hungarian gipsy music, which he could listen to in a village close by. Regarding religion, Steiner's father was a so-called freethinker and never went to church, so at home Steiner never experienced any attempts to intentionally influence his beliefs. He was never confirmed in the Catholic faith. There were of course traditional Bible- and catechumen-classes for all children, which was obligatory the first four school years. But already by this time, the dissolution of traditional religiosity had reached even village life in this part of Europe (Steiner 1996). What the priests talked about there made very little impression on the boy Steiner. What did impress though was the music and services carried out in Catholic mass, which he experienced as an altar server and as part of the village church's boy choir. In these, he experienced a link to the supersensual world and the mood which they evoked in him stayed with him in everyday life at home, despite its relatively secular atmosphere.

As a boy, Steiner took very much part of everyday life, but his thoughts and feelings belonged to 'the other world'. In one respect, he declined to follow the common behaviour of people around him: he refused to act submissively to persons who were his father's superiors, many of whom spent their summer holidays in the village. On such occasions, he sometimes hid himself in the station waiting room, where he pondered the mysteries of a picture book with movable figures. One such day, when he was about nine years old, he recounts he had a clairvoyant vision: a woman unknown to him suddenly entered through the door, stepped into the middle of the room and started to make strange gesturing movements. She asked him to do as much as he could for her now and in the future and then disappeared into the heating stove. Some days later, Steiner came to know that in a place quite far away, a relative to the family, one that Steiner had never met, had committed suicide at the very same time that Steiner had the vision in the waiting room. From that time onwards, Steiner says he could see the spirits working in nature and allowed them to influence him (Steiner 1996, pp. 5ff).

Despite these other-worldly experiences, Steiner claims he was no dreamer but easily found his way in all practical affairs. He was interested in how the railway worked, and he learned to use the telegraph. Through the telegraph, he learned the basic laws of electricity. Thus, Steiner seems to have been eager to study and learn about many things that he encountered in the world around him. At one time, the village priest gave a lesson on the Copernican world system to a small group of more mature pupils. The subject so fascinated the 10-year-old Steiner that he was given an additional private lesson about the sun and moon eclipses. Subsequently, he directed much of his desire for knowledge to phenomena of the solar system.

As for reading and writing, these were very different activities for Steiner as a boy, perhaps because of his early homeschooling. He recounts how, when reading, the words seemed to immediately evoke images, ideas and concepts in his mind. Consequently, he did not pay attention the grammatical and orthographic aspects of the text. When writing, he tried to carefully capture the sound-pattern of the words as they sounded in his dialect, an approach which can easily lead one astray. Even

when 14–15 years old, he made mistakes in his essay writing in school. These were, however, compensated for by their contents (Steiner 1996). Later in life, he deemed this to be a good thing, because learning to write at an early age, in the way that is required by modern education, does according to Steiner kill certain qualities of the soul. This, in turn, raises many obstacles to the development of spiritual faculties, which Steiner himself therefore did not have to struggle with. In a lecture towards the end of his life, Steiner claimed that modern schooling, due among other things to its emphasis on the early acquisition of literacy, prevents people born with a potential for great spiritual wisdom to realise this wisdom in their life (Steiner 1994 [GA 235]; p. 203). From this point of view, things are perhaps even worse today.

Around his tenth year, his father decided that in his secondary school years, Steiner should attend a *Realschule*, a school form with a strong emphasis on science and modern languages. At that time, Steiner himself felt that it did not matter which kind of education he followed because he was so full of questions about life and the world that he thought he would learn something of interest in any case. The school he had to go to was placed in the city of Wiener Neustadt. Steiner found it somewhat difficult to adapt to city life, being used to life in the countryside. The first year he also had difficulties in following the teaching; it did not touch him as particularly interesting. He was longing for teachers that he could look up to as exemplary in some way. In the second year, his teacher in geometry proved worthy of his respect. This teacher payed no heed to textbooks but made all drawings himself on the blackboard, which the students copied. He then dictated to the students what they should write, so that the students made their own textbooks. This made their learning a process of active participation, which Steiner felt was a good thing. In other lessons, he notes, there were ample opportunities for sleep (Steiner 1996, p. 14).

The emptiness created by the lack of exemplary teachers was filled by reading. In an essay about physics, written by the rector of the school, Steiner came across a reference to a book by the same author, with the title *The general movement of matter as the basic cause of all natural phenomena*. Steiner decided to save money to buy this book. To learn everything that could help him understand the essay and the book became an ideal for him. Even though he did not sympathise with the views presented in the book, he felt a need to understand the ideas it contained. He had to read the book and the essay several times—and other books in mathematics and physics as well—before he could grasp the contents.

During these secondary school years, Steiner felt that he had to come closer to natural phenomena to be able to take a stand regarding that spiritual world, which he experienced so clearly and self-evidently. He felt that this spiritual world can only be understood in and by the soul, which meant that thinking must develop in such a way that it can grasp the (supersensuous) essence of natural phenomena. He therefore became fascinated by Kant's *Critique of pure reason*, which he accidentally discovered in the window of a bookshop and, again, he did everything he could to be able to buy the book as soon as possible. To find time to read the book, he took apart his textbook in history and bound it again with the pages of Kant's

book inserted. (He had earlier learnt the art of bookbinding because he had no money to get his schoolbooks bound.) In this way, pretending to read the history book, he could read Kant during history lessons. The teacher himself was merely reading from the textbook—although he pretended to give a lecture—and the students had anyway to read the same text again as homework.

Kant's work was of course no easy read for a young boy, and Steiner had to read the *Critique* many times. He strived for complete clarity of thought and to not let his emotional life influence his thinking in any way. He felt that there was an inherent power in thinking, which could be developed so that it truly grasped the world and its processes. This view is of course not in accord with Kant's notion of a 'thing-in-itself' that human understanding cannot grasp. Nevertheless, Steiner struggled to understand Kant, and at this age, he was not yet critical of his views (see Chap. 3). The reading of Kant stimulated his interest in other philosophers, so that already at the end of his secondary school years he had a good understanding of, for instance, J.F. Herbart.

In the upper secondary years, the curriculum included early Greek and Latin literature and poetry. When he met these subjects, Steiner felt a bit sorry that his father had sent him to the science programme and not the Latin programme. He perceived that so much of the characteristics of ancient Greek and Latin texts were lost in translation. He therefore started to study the upper secondary language textbooks and some years later even taught the same course as a private tutor.

In his boyhood years, Steiner can be seen to have lived and moved between several opposite or contrasting worlds, such as the world of science and technology versus that of pure nature; that of mathematics and geometry versus that of literature and poetry; and that of practical material life versus that of religion. Not only did he note that these different realms of life and experience existed, he also took an active interest in all of them. On top of his ordinary school studies, he developed his own 'study projects', many of which were related to questions of epistemology and ontology, which arose out of his clairvoyant perceptions. His searching spirit could not keep away from questions like 'what is reality?' and 'how can we really know things?'. This search for clear epistemological grounds for his spiritual experiences makes Steiner rather unique in Western cultural history. Most people who have such experiences remain content to be visionaries and just claim to know things without bothering about philosophical justifications. Already in his childhood, Steiner had an active inner life, which made him formulate his own study projects and pursue them in a self-educative manner. This tendency continued and grew stronger in his early adulthood.[5]

[5]As pointed out in Chap. 1, as a young adult Steiner involved himself in studies of many different and opposed streams of thought, such as mysticism as well as natural science. Some of his critics take this as a sign of superficiality and eclecticism. But we see from his boyhood that already then, he was engaged in a personal search for truth which led him in many different directions (cf. Skagen 2015; p 80f).

2.2 Steiner as a Young Man

In the summer of 1879, having finished upper secondary school, Steiner prepared to enter the Vienna College of Technology. On his very first trip to Vienna, he bought a great number of books on philosophy with money that he got from selling all his schoolbooks at a second-hand bookstore. One of his favourites by this time was Fichte's *Science of knowledge* (*Wissenschaftslehre*). It was Fichte's idea of the activity of the 'I'—or rather the 'I' *as action*—that caught his interest. Not surprisingly, he had come to the conviction that true knowledge could only be achieved by the inner efforts of the 'I'. Steiner recounts how he 're-wrote' Fichte's book out of his own perspective, which turned into a long manuscript. He also continually worked on transforming his immediate intuitions of the spiritual world into thoughts and concepts.

Steiner now directed his education towards becoming an upper secondary teacher and enrolled for studies in mathematics, natural history and chemistry. But he also attended lectures in other disciplines, such as German literature, held by Karl Schröer, where he learnt about Goethe and Schiller. At the University of Vienna, he went to lectures in philosophy held by Franz Brentano. Steiner was particularly interested in Brentano as a person. He admired the clear logic with which Brentano expressed his ideas, deriving each thought from its logical relations to several other thoughts. But he felt that Brentano's thinking was not connected to his personal life experience that it was somehow alienated. The loose way in which Brentano held his lecture manuscript and how he merely glanced in it now and then was for Steiner a gesture that confirmed this impression.

Steiner says he felt it to be his duty to search for truth through philosophy. He was going to study mathematics and science, but he was convinced that these studies would not give him anything substantial unless he had a philosophical ground of certainty for his own experience, which told him that the spiritual world was *real.* It was immediately evident to him that each human being had their own spiritual individuality, of which the body was only an external manifestation. But whenever he talked about these things with other people, he found them completely uninterested. Some of them started to talk about spiritism (the approach to the spiritual world through séances, mediums, 'Talking tables' and the like), but Steiner found it distasteful to approach spirituality in such a way. Yet he did not necessarily want others to agree with his own views, he just longed for people with a serious and genuine openness for spiritual things.

An important break in this inner loneliness was when on his regular train trips to Vienna—'by a special chain of events' (Steiner 1996, p. 23)—he came across a remarkable man, who sold wild herbs to the pharmacies in the city. This man lived with his family in a remote mountain village and possessed a lot of books on mystical and esoteric wisdom, which he had penetrated deeply. Steiner describes him as very pious, and with him, he could talk openly about the spiritual world and

his own experiences. He was an uneducated and simple person, but his soul carried an elementary and creative wisdom, much of which he had gathered in nature while picking the healing herbs. In communicating with this man, Steiner partook of an instinctive spiritual wisdom, untouched by modern civilisation, science and the contemporary worldview. Many years later, in a lecture to members of the AS, Steiner recounted how this man put him in contact with another person (whose name is not disclosed), who became his spiritual mentor and helped him to bring his powers of spiritual cognition into maturity (Steiner 1996, pp. 23ff). Through these events, which took place in the winter 1881–1882, Steiner's must have felt that his spiritual experiences were externally confirmed as real and valid.

Another confirming consolation was his repeated reading of a certain dialogue between Goethe and Schiller, in which Goethe enthusiastically describes his experience of the archetypal plant (*Urpflanze*). Schiller's rather intellectualistic, Kantian response was that this was not an experience, but an idea. To which Goethe answered that in that case, he could *see* ideas. This was very much in accord with Steiner's experience of thinking as a spiritual activity.

Steiner searched for connections between natural science and the spiritual world, but remained disappointed. He saw Darwin's idea of the development of life from simple to ever more complex organisms as fruitful, but nevertheless hard to reconcile with his own experience of the spiritual world. (Later in his life, he wrote an appreciative essay of Darwin's views and took a stand for him against the conservative resistance of the Catholic church (Steiner 1989a [GA 31]).) Neither did the philosophical search lead him to a clearer vision of the spiritual world. One reason, Steiner realised, was that many philosophers saw thinking and experience as *contraries*, whereas for him thinking was itself an experience, although not based on the external senses. Only in Hegel did he encounter a philosopher who seemed to have a similar view of thinking. (However, Steiner later realised that Hegel was one-sided in his underestimation of sense experience.) Somewhat Platonic, Steiner viewed thoughts as a reflection in the physical brain of that which the soul experiences in the spiritual world. In the beginning of his 20s, he had concluded that by moving deeper and more intensely into abstract thinking, something from the spiritual world came to meet one. In this way, one could encounter a spiritual reality, which subsequently could be re-found in the essence of natural phenomena. This was a spiritual view that was not built on vague, mystical feelings, but on clear and conscious mental activity, not very different from that of mathematics.

As a student at the technical college, Steiner became a member of a student association and study circle, in which texts related to the political and cultural issues of the day were read and discussed.[6] In these discussions, Steiner always

[6]This was a German nationalistic student association, which was affiliated with *Leseverein der deutschen Studenten Wiens* (readers' association of German students in Vienna), a fact which has been used to depict Steiner as a German nationalist in a negative, political sense (cf. Skagen 2015; p. 319). However, as Skagen (ibid.) points out, German nationalism was the mainstream cultural movement in Austria by this time. In addition, Steiner's motive for participating in the association was not political but only cultural and intellectual. It gave him the opportunity to write letters to the

emphasised the plausible aspects of the opinions that were expressed, in accordance with his stance that there is always *some aspect* of truth in what human beings think. After some time, he was unanimously chosen as the chairman of the study group. However, only half a year later, everyone voted against him. The group had discovered that because he saw something justified in political opinion he could never agree with only one party, which was of course what each party had hoped for. This is a typical example of Steiner's attitude to different points of view, both in philosophical and in practical or political issues. However, it did not prevent him from strongly objecting to opinions that, in his view, distorted or misapprehended the facts of a case. All ways of seeing, or *perspectives*, have something that speaks for them (also materialism), but that does not mean that *what* they see is, in every particular case, correct and true.

Regarding politics and 'the social question', which was much debated in these times, Steiner was clear about its importance and acute need of resolution. But he felt that the abstract materialistic ways of thinking dominating the times were tragically unable to produce any fruitful solutions. For Steiner, the question of how to organise society could only be solved on the basis of a spiritual world view. After WW1, he was to present such a view in the idea of a threefolded social structure (see Chap. 6).

2.3 Emerging as a Philosopher

In 1882, on the recommendation from Karl Schröer (the professor of German literature mentioned above), Steiner was invited to edit Goethe's texts on nature and natural studies, which was part of a larger project on German national literature, carried out by Joseph Kürschner in Stuttgart. By this time, Steiner had no academic degree—he had finished his engineering studies in 1883 without completing the final examination (Lindenberg 2010)—and he had no formal study merits in the Humanities. Yet he was asked to do such a seemingly prestigious work. However, Goethe's natural studies were probably not as highly esteemed as his literary works, and so the edition of these texts was perhaps included more out of a sense of obligation, than out of real interest. Steiner may have seemed a good choice, because of his genuine interest and understanding of Goethe's way of thinking.

The work with Goethe's texts on natural phenomena meant that Steiner had to clarify his position regarding both natural science and Goethe's view of the world. He discovered that Goethe himself never formulated an explicit theory of knowledge, nor could one use any other existing theory to explain Goethe's way of

(Footnote 6 continued)

authors of many books that interested him and ask them for a free copy to the association's library. Steiner's sympathy for German nationalism was based on the deep inspiration he received from German idealistic philosophy; it had no racist connotations.

thinking. Steiner therefore felt the need to work out such a theory himself, which resulted in a small book published in 1886 as *Theory of knowledge according to Goethe's world view* (Steiner 2003 [GA 2])[7].

It was around this time that he found a good friend in Rosa Mayreder, an Austrian freethinker, author, painter, musician and feminist whose husband was for a time the Rector of the technical university. With Rosa Mayreder, Steiner shared an engagement in the question of human freedom and they exchanged many letters about this and other topics throughout the 1890s (Steiner 1987 [GA 39]). In Mayreder, Steiner found someone to whom he could openly express his ideas and the questions that interested him, and who would honestly answer him with her own views. He says the friendship with Mayreder somewhat eased his feelings of inner loneliness in these years. However, when he later (1902) joined the Theosophical Society in Berlin, Rosa Mayreder distanced herself from Steiner, who earlier had advised *her not* to join the TS in Vienna.

In 1889, Steiner encountered the director of the Goethe–Schiller archive in Weimar, Bernhard Suphan. Suphan supervised the work of another edition of Goethe's collected works, and on his request, Steiner again agreed to take care of Goethe's scientific texts. In the beginning, Steiner travelled back and forth between Vienna and Weimar, but in 1890, he settled in Weimar. The editing work went on for seven years, with constant tensions between himself and Suphan. In his letters, Steiner calls Suphan 'the Goethe–Pope' (*Goethe-Papst*) (Steiner 1987 [GA 39]; p. 47) and describes him as a philistine old Prussian school master, because of his lack of understanding of the philosophical implications of Goethe's studies of nature, implications that were highly important for Steiner to demonstrate.[8]

Steiner's feelings of inner loneliness did not prevent him from living a very active social life. In Weimar, he participated in several cultural circles of different kinds, consisting of artists, journalists, authors and academics. In these groups, he was confronted with many different views of life. Although there was much debate about such questions—especially in Weimar—and although he made great efforts to understand the point of view of others, there was hardly anyone who showed the same interest for his own ideas.

By this time, Steiner says he became aware of how the external sense world had always seemed a bit dim and distant to him and how he felt most clear and awake in his inner thinking life. When he visited other people, and talked about philosophical ideas, it was as if he had to make a special effort to step out of his own inner space to enter that of another person. Nevertheless, once he had left his own space, he felt at home also by the other person. But he never felt that another person really entered *his* 'home'. In his own spiritual world, there were no visitors. It was not that he expected agreement, he only wished for people to show an honest interest in his

[7]English edition: Steiner (2009).

[8]Goethe himself would probably approve of how Steiner dealt with his texts on science. Schimanski (1998) reports Goethe saying that the texts he left to the world should be treated liberally and, according to his intentions, not pedantically and without love.

ideas. This general lack of interest in other people's thinking Steiner regards as an effect of 'the enchantment of intellectualism', which tends to make people content with their own perspective on things. Whereas if one *sees* the reality of the spiritual world, one also sees that many different—even opposing—standpoints have their justifications, and one must guard oneself not to be biased towards one or another of them. However, such openness to different perspectives is not to be confused with having no stance of one's own, and just 'going with the wind'. In his correspondence with Rosa Mayreder, for instance, Steiner did not hesitate to express his own ideas and how they differed from those of his female friend, to which Rosa Mayreder responded with the same straightforwardness. But they seem to simply have liked to share their views on things, not having a quarrelsome discussion about who was right.

During his work at the Goethe–Schiller archive in Weimar, Steiner met the sister of Friedrich Nietzsche, Elisabeth Foerster-Nietzsche. She wanted to consult Steiner regarding her intention to create a Nietzsche archive on similar principles as the one of Goethe–Schiller. She also asked whether Steiner could be the editor of Nietzsche's collected works. In the beginning, Steiner felt a deep sympathy for her, but later they were to have painful conflicts, presumably caused by her continuous attempts to distort Nietzsche's texts, in order to present him as anti-Semitic, something that she later succeeded to do in cooperation with the Nazi government (Eriksen 2013). Steiner seems to have been the first to publicly denounce her untrustworthy character (ibid.).

Through the contact with Elisabet Foerster-Nietzsche, Steiner came to meet Nietzsche personally in his time of mental illness. The encounter made a deep impression on him: Nietzsche was lying on a sofa, to all appearances completely lost to the world. But Steiner could sense how the soul of the deep thinker was as if soaring above his head, in worlds of spiritual light, devoted to worlds that he had longed for but not been able to reach before his illness. Steiner says that what he experienced in this meeting he could only express in a 'stuttering' way in his own book about Nietzsche's philosophy. (Steiner 2000b [GA 5]). He considered Nietzsche's illness as one of the most unfortunate things that happened to Western philosophy in his time. He was convinced that if Nietzsche had read his book on the philosophy of freedom (1995a [GA 4])[9], he would have found in it the further development of ideas that Nietzsche himself had left unfinished, especially regarding ethics (Steiner 1985a [GA 38], p. 238f) (see further Chap. 3).

It was during his Weimar years that Steiner—inspired by the social encounters with the artists working there—began to reflect more about the significance of art in human life. As was his habit of mind since childhood, he wanted to formulate his ideas about art in harmony with the views he had hitherto developed about knowledge. In 1890, he published some essays in the field of aesthetics (Steiner 1985b [GA 271]), and throughout his life, he repeatedly returned to the significance of art for spiritual insight and development. Perhaps there is a correlation between

[9]English edition: Steiner (2011a).

Steiner's new interest in art and his claim that towards the end of the Weimar period he felt that his senses became more sharp and clear and that his observation of the physical world became more exact and intensive. Thereby, the opposition and contradictions between the spiritual world and the sense world also became more prevalent for him. But he did not experience this opposition as something that had to be mediated, explained or dissolved. On the contrary, he felt that to really experience this opposition was to understand life as it really is. Any attempt to dissolve the contraries by a mere idea would smother out life into something abstract and dead. Seeing that life thrives on contradictions, Steiner instead devoted himself to intense contemplation of the mysteries of the world.

Steiner, perhaps a bit surprisingly, did not feel that the riddles and mysteries of existence could be solved in or by thought. Thinking could take one a bit on the way, but the actual solutions had to be found in the world itself. Some phenomenon or process would *show* the solution. One is reminded of Goethe's dictum that 'facts are their own theory' and his view of the sunrise as the archetypal phenomenon (*Urphänomen*) that explains all optical colours.[10] For Steiner, the human being itself became the ultimate solution to the mysteries of the world—a basic principle of his later anthroposophical teachings. This has perhaps some affinity with what is presently called the anthropic view of the universe: that the whole of creation is geared towards the arising of humankind (cf. Breuer 1991).

The consequence of this view, according to Steiner, is that human insight itself becomes part of the world process. Insight means *participation* in what processes and happenings in the physical and spiritual world communicate to us. The solution to the world riddle is participation in the mystery itself, one might say. This relates to the non-representational view of knowledge that is a crucial aspect of Steiner's epistemology (more about this in Chap. 3).

During the Weimar years, Steiner was struggling hard to find a clear expression of his philosophical views (but in a way, this struggle continued throughout his whole life). Among other things, he worked on a thesis on epistemology, and in 1891, he was promoted Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Rostock. The title of his thesis was *The basic question of epistemology with special regard to Fichte's theory of science* (*Die Grundfrage der Erkenntnistheorie mit besondere Rücksicht auf Fichtes Wissenschaftslehre*). In 1892, an extended version of the thesis was published as a book with the title *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft* (1980 [GA 3])[11]. A few years later, in 1894, the first edition of Steiner's main philosophical work, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (1995a), was published. In a letter to Rosa Mayreder, he describes this book as a biography of a soul striving for freedom (1987 [GA 39], p. 232). He says he is not trying to teach something, he is only giving an account of the paths of thought that he has wandered in his soul, when searching for a true

[10]Goethe says: 'The highest would be: to understand, that all actuality (*alles Faktische*) is already theory. The blueness of the sky reveals the basic law of chromatics. Only do not seek anything behind the phenomena: they themselves are the theory (*die Lehre*)' (Goethe 1981, p. 233; my translation).

[11]English edition: Steiner (2007).

understanding of freedom. (This may be the reason why most academic philosophers do not consider this book a serious philosophical work.)

Steiner's productive engagement with his own philosophical quest had consequences for his editorial work with Goethe's texts, which was constantly delayed and therefore a source of irritation to Suphan, his employer at the Goethe archive. By this time, Steiner had changed his plans and hoped for a position at some university, which must have spurred him to write and publish his own ideas. From Steiner's letters, we can see that he aimed first for a professor's chair in Philosophy at the Vienna College of Technology and later for a *Privatdozentur* (Associate Professor) at the University of Jena (Steiner 1987 [GA 39]; p. 246 and 273).

In his autobiography, Steiner admits that *on the surface* there are contradictions in his writings from this time (the 1890s). Steiner claims, however, that if one can see behind the words into what he was trying to convey, such contradictions are dissolved.[12] Nevertheless, he was painfully aware that the way he understood the philosophical issues of knowledge, reality and ethics was very much opposed to the predominating views of the times. In a talk with a physicist about Goethe's theory of colours, the scientist told him that Goethe's views were such that they were completely useless to physics. This utterance made Steiner dumbfounded. He realised that what was truth for him was of no interest at all to the world in general. Towards the end of the 1890s, the question 'Must one become dumb?' lived strongly in his soul (Steiner 2000a [GA 28]; p. 334).

By this time, Steiner was invited to become editor of a magazine on literature—*Magazin für die Literatur des In- und Auslandes*—which published poetry and essays from all streams of cultural life. The magazine had an open approach to different views, and Steiner accepted the task and was given the publishing rights in 1897. The magazine had constant financial problems, and Steiner did not manage to increase its number of readers. Nevertheless, he continued to be its editor for some years, and this work, he says, led him to a deeper understanding of the ideas and attitudes of the bourgeoisie at the time.

The work at the Goethe–Schiller archive in Weimar was at an end, and the new job as editor made Steiner move to Berlin. There, in 1898, he was approached by another fraction of society: Wilhelm Liebknecht's *Bildungsschule* for working class people. The leaders of this institution asked whether he could take on the lessons in history and rhetoric. The socialist ideology on which the institute was based did not interest Steiner, but he felt that teaching people from the working class would be an interesting task. He therefore accepted on the condition that he could teach history from his own point of view and not based on marxism, as was usual at the time in such institutions. This condition was granted. As a teacher for these people, Steiner

[12]One can find such a contradiction also in his autobiography: in contrast to his objection to dissolving the dualism between spirit and matter noted above, he later in the same book (Steiner 2000a [GA 28]) says, that the source of that which expresses itself as spirit in human culture and as matter in the physical world is something, that is beyond both modes of being. This something unites both spirit and matter and is the basis for Steiner's monistic ontology, which is therefore, strictly speaking, neither materialistic nor spiritualistic (see further Chap. 3).

says he had to learn their conceptions and way of forming judgments to be able to communicate his ideas in a language that they understood. He himself came from a poor family background and probably found it easy to identify with his new students. He found that their way of seeing things was very much based on their experience of working life. But they had no ideas about the spiritual forces at work in history; therefore, the marxist view of history could easily find acceptance with them, because of its focus on economy and productive material work. True to his basic attitude towards different perspectives, Steiner admitted that there was some truth in the marxist view of history, but only after the sixteenth century. Before that age, social life was dominated by other powers, what marxism would call ideology: the formative power of ideas and spiritual influences. Steiner demonstrated to the workers that the human capacities for knowledge, religion and art also had contributed to historical development. To begin with, the leadership of the school gave Steiner freehands and did not care much about the contents of his lessons. But as time passed, they learnt more about his ideas and became more concerned. Steiner recounts how one of their lesser leaders spoke at a gathering of his students and explained how the proletarian movement did not want freedom but 'rational force' ('*vernünftigen Zwang*'; Steiner 2000a [GA 28]; p. 379). The purpose of the speech was to drive Steiner away, against the will of his students who were very fond of him. But in 1902, Steiner had to abandon this teaching work[13]

In Berlin, Steiner continued his habit of becoming a member of different cultural societies. One of them was *Die Kommenden* (The Coming), founded by a Jewish poet, Ludwig Jakobowski, with which Steiner became friends. The society consisted of authors, artists, scientists and other people interested in cultural life. Jakobowski was also the leader of an association devoted to resistance to antisemitism. Steiner sympathetically describes how this work weighed heavily on the poet's soul, because every day it reminded him of the forces of antipathy directed towards his people.

Another society Steiner visited was the Giordano Bruno Association, consisting of people who sympathised with a monistic spiritual world view. When Steiner gave a lecture at one of their meetings, he caused a great upheaval against himself. The main part of the leadership of the association thought that Steiner wanted to introduce Catholicism, because he had pointed to the non-dualistic world view of the early Medieval Scholastics.[14] According to Steiner, the strong opposition between matter and spirit, which the society wanted to dissolve, is really a construction of modern times and was not so strong in earlier ages. For the early Scholastics, the whole of creation dwells in Divine Wisdom; it is only the limits of human perception that make us blind to this fact. Steiner says he mentions this event in his autobiography because later many people imagined that by this time in

[13]The number of students increased each year and the lectures were held in late evening, from 9 p.m. to 11 p.m.—perhaps a testimony to the interest and enthusiasm of both the students and their teacher.

[14]Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Rome in 1600, condemned for heresy by the Catholic Church.

his life he adhered to a *materialistic* world view. This is an example of how his flexibility in terms of intellectual perspectives made people ascribe all kinds of different and contradictory world views to him.

Steiner visited, or was invited to give lectures, to several groups and gatherings around famous personalities of the Berlin society around the turn of the century. One of them was the Berlin branch of the Theosophical Society, where he finally found people who were not only interested in his ideas, but also—according to Steiner's perception—had an inner need for them. Steiner was careful to explain that he did not talk out of a mere intellectual understanding and adherence to theosophical book knowledge (he says he found most theosophical literature of the time 'distasteful' in how it presented spiritual ideas). He spoke only out of his own insight and experience. His lectures were much appreciated, and eventually, in 1902, he became part of the leadership of the German section of the worldwide Theosophical Society.

2.4 Steiner's Relation to Christianity

Towards the end of the 1890s, a period started in Steiner's life, in which he says he went through many soul conflicts and inner trials that—at least partly—had to do with his relation to Christianity (Steiner 2000a [GA 28], Chapter 26). As described above, in his childhood, the rituals of the Catholic mass made a deep impression on him when he served at the altar in the village church, but he never cared for the instructions in Christian beliefs given by priests and teachers. Now, he felt that he had to come to terms with the ideas of the Christian faith. This inner crisis lasted a few years and resulted in a small book about Christianity as a 'mystical fact' (1989d [GA 8])[15], which was first published in 1902.[16] His so-called ethical individualism, which is a basic element in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (Steiner 1995a; see further Chap. 3), seems to have been at the centre of these inner struggles. Steiner's ethical individualism is based on a radical concept of freedom in the realm of morals and ethics, a concept that contradicts the traditional Abrahamic religions, which are based on revelations of 'God's will'. This implies that ethical values are given by a source external to the individual. In contrast, Steiner saw values and ideals as the result of the unfolding of the human spirit, an unfoldment which can only take place in freedom and can therefore take different external forms in different people.

Another aspect of these inner conflicts had to do with Steiner's view that a modern spiritual world view had to take natural science as a *starting point.* It could no longer be based on revelatory scriptures and speculative interpretations of such texts. Steiner saw the impulse that generated natural science as itself of spiritual

[15]English edition: Steiner (2011b).

[16]According to Bock (1961), in 1899 Steiner completely changed his lifestyle almost from one day to the next, as a result of his inner tribulations.

origin and as an essential part of the development of human consciousness. Its importance lies in the development of clear concepts and of clarity in thinking. Based on such a stance, the human being can approach the spiritual world in full consciousness and absolute freedom and only so can modern mankind develop spiritually in the right way.

Steiner's views in these areas were of course not compatible with traditional Christianity, which tends to moralism in the ethical sphere and to 'blind faith' regarding the more ontological contents. That is probably the reason why he by this time felt it necessary to publish texts that were critical of Christianity and texts that sometimes border on atheism and are not far from the spirit of Nietzsche (see Steiner 1989c [GA 30]). Steiner's way out of these soul conflicts was to study the history of Christianity, which led him to the insights published in GA 8 (1989d). In this book, we find a form of Christianity that is completely reconcilable with the other aspects of Steiner's thinking. Christ is of cosmic significance for the spiritual development of mankind as well as of the Earth, but this does *not* mean that we all must become Christians in a denominational—or even confessional—sense. In a beautiful passage from one of his lectures, Steiner describes what a true Christian culture could be like, a description which also has strong educational implications (cf. Dahlin 2013):

> Imagine that you were on an island where there were as yet no scriptures about the mystery of Golgotha: if people there worked in such a way that they through their spiritual life in full consciousness took in the power of early childhood all the way up to old age, then they would be Christians in the true sense. (Steiner 1989b, p. 96)

2.5 Steiner as Practical Pedagogue

Steiner was never employed as a schoolteacher, but he was a practical pedagogue from his early youth. Fourteen years old, in the lower secondary school, he often helped his younger friends to understand things they found difficult. In the upper secondary, at the age of fifteen, he started taking jobs as a private tutor. He recounts how he assimilated many of the things he was taught in school in a sort of half-dream state. Only what he had to struggle with, out of inner interest, was clear and fully conscious to him. However, the task of teaching others gave him the opportunity to achieve this clarity about more things than those which spontaneously interested him. Perhaps it was this experience that led him to suggest that students make their own textbooks: working on such a task is a bit like teaching or communicating to others what you yourself have understood. Steiner's private tutoring made him learn many things about psychological development in childhood and youth. Among other things, he noted how the processes of maturation in boys and girls are very different. He continued private tutoring during his higher education years at the Vienna College of Technology. At the time, this was a very common way for poor students to earn their livelihood. He taught mostly

undergraduates, but also some postgraduate students, mostly in mathematics (Wehr 1982).

In 1884, Schröer, the professor in German literature, recommended him as private tutor to a business family in Vienna. The family had four sons, one of whom suffered from hydrocephaly. The parents had no great expectations for this boy. Steiner, however, accepted the task to try to educate the boy, on the condition that he was given complete command over his life, i.e. his daily habits of rest, movement, food and sleep. He won the parents' trust to do this, especially the mother's. He was convinced that the boy had great spiritual gifts, despite his obvious handicap. In one of his lectures, Steiner says that a seemingly undeveloped brain may hide great spiritual capacities and that the environment in which a child grows up is an important factor for how these capacities manifest (Steiner 1983 [GA 54]; p. 227). In a significant way, human beings are mirror-images of their surrounding world. Present theories of development would have no argument with the idea that we are 'products' of our immediate surroundings, our culture and our society. Yet Steiner also says in his autobiography that already in his youth he was convinced that the human 'I' is an independent spiritual reality. People who see the 'I' as the result of merely external influences do not know its essential nature. This is an example of how Steiner often thinks 'both-and' instead of 'either-or'. Paradoxes of 'both-and' can usually be dissolved by more careful thinking and more sensitive perceptions. For instance, the 'I' is not the same as the *character* of a person, or the manifest personality. The latter is formed by all kinds of factors, from biological to sociological, whereas the 'I', the spiritual kernel, primarily exists in the inner depths of the soul.

As for the hydrocephalic boy, Steiner recounts how he first had to find an entrance to the boy's soul, which mostly dwelled in a kind of sleeping state and had difficulties controlling its body functions. In the beginning, he taught the boy only for half an hour a day, a lesson which he spent several hours to plan and prepare, so that it would be as effective as possible. Primarily, the task was to bring the boy's soul into the body, so to speak. His work with teaching this boy gave him many insights into the nature of the human being, insights that later became part of the pedagogical anthropology of Waldorf education and presumably also of his curative pedagogy (*Heilpädagogik*; see Steiner 1995b [GA 317]), i.e. his educational methods for mentally handicapped. Because of Steiner's work, the boy developed far above expectations. He was eventually able to enter upper secondary school and then went on to become a physician.

One of this boy's brothers once told how Steiner later in his life, as the leader of the AS, used to pay social visits to the family (Wehr 1982, pp. 64f). During such visits, he never talked about anthroposophy, and when asked why, he said that for him this topic was far too serious to 'discuss' or 'converse' about in a social gathering. Anyone who was genuinely interested was welcome to visit him privately about it, he explained. This shows something of Steiner's attitude towards his spiritual teachings. Even though he considered them vitally important to the future of humanity, they were not something to be talked about indiscriminately and certainly not to be propagated to children and young people in school.

2.6 Conclusion

Steiner's whole life was, in a way, a life in and for the spirit. Already in his boyhood, he was occupied with deep questions of a philosophical and spiritual nature. But he was not, according to his own words, a dreamer with no sense for practical things (and those who knew him as an adult would most probably agree). And he was always willing to enter new situations and to communicate with people who had different views of life, to learn from them. He worked and associated with artists and freethinkers of the middle class, and he became a teacher for working class people and tried to understand their way of thinking. His mind was probably both sensitive and flexible by nature, and his way of taking on different tasks must certainly have kept these qualities alive and even developed them.

Looking only at his inner, thinking life, one could perhaps divide his biography into three main periods: up to his 30s, he was constantly struggling to find ways to understand his spiritual experiences and their relation to the science and philosophy of his time. This inner struggle culminated in his book about 'the philosophy of freedom' (Steiner 1995a, b [GA 4]), which can be understood as demonstrating how a spiritual philosophy and science is possible. In the second period, from around 30 to 40 years old, Steiner's struggle changed into finding ways to express spiritual truth and reality in forms suitable for the time and age. The third period, finally, starts when he joins the TS and becomes the secretary of its German section. Within this framework, he found the possibility to express his spiritual experience and insight in ways that could be understood and appreciated by other people. However, in 1913, for reasons we need not go into here, he felt compelled to break with the theosophists and founded his own society, based on anthroposophy.

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Chapter 3
Steiner's Philosophy and Its Educational Relevance

Abstract Apart from Steiner's explicit talks and texts on education, his philosophical works are also relevant, since they deal with epistemology, ethics, and philosophical anthropology. Steiner's views in each of these fields are described and related to other philosophical perspectives. For instance, Steiner's epistemology has a phenomenological character, and results in a participatory view of knowledge, anticipating the present critique of representationalism. Genuine knowledge, based on living thinking, is constituted in an active relation between the self and the world. The potential freedom inherent in human thinking is the link between knowledge and action; i.e. ethics. Steiner's ethical individualism is based on love and freedom, expecting each person to live according to the moral ideals that they intuit in their thinking and strives to realise in their lives. Steiner's 'philosophy of the human being' (*Philosophie der Menschheit*) proposes a synthesis—or at least a collaboration—between empirical studies of human nature (physiology, psychology etc.) and the spiritual insights gained through contemplative methods of research. The knowledge produced by these two approaches is not contradictory; it is like a developed photograph and its negative. The educational significance of these different fields of knowledge is pointed out.

Keywords Knowledge as non-representational · Ethical individualism · Freedom · Living thinking

3.1 Steiner's Philosophical Works

Like all scientific disciplines, educational science was once part of philosophy. In education, these philosophical roots have been kept somewhat more alive than in other disciplines, although the number of professorial chairs in philosophy of education seems to be gradually diminishing. At the same time, one can witness a growing interest in the philosophical aspects of education among educational researchers at international research conferences. One reason for this may be a search for clarity about the 'grounds' of educational science, its basic norms and

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principles. There is also a wide spread reaction against the tendency to reduce educational science into a mere technology for teaching and learning.

Steiner published most of his philosophical works before he became engaged in the Theosophical movement in 1901, but he continued his work in this field also after that time, exemplified by his book *Die Rätsel der Philosophie* (Steiner 1985 [GA 18])[1], which was published in 1914.[2] This work is a treatise of the history of Western philosophy focused on epistemology as an expression of the evolution of human consciousness; a perspective that Steiner perhaps picked up from Hegel's *The phenomenology of spirit.* Steiner admired Hegel's capacity for abstract, conceptual thinking, but considered his philosophy as a whole to be too idealistic. He looked upon the work of philosophers as attempts to formulate in explicit rational terms that which live more as intimations and feelings in the souls of people in general. That is how the history of philosophy can be understood as an expression of the development of human consciousness.

Steiner's philosophical works can be categorised into epistemology, ethics, philosophical anthropology, and social philosophy. His philosophy of knowledge is closely related to his ethics in that the concept of freedom plays a significant part in both. The human being is free primarily in her thinking, and it is in thinking that we construct our knowledge and intuit our moral values (Steiner 1995 [GA 4]).[3] The third area, philosophical anthropology, is the one most explicitly related to Steiner's anthroposophy, or spiritual science (*Geisteswissenschaft*), as he called it. Steiner's social philosophy on the other hand is relatively independent of anthroposophy or can at least be presented as such. It is laying the basis for a re-organisation of the social order and will be dealt with separately in Chap. 6.

3.2 Steiner's Phenomenological Theory of Knowledge

Within the frames of this book, it is not possible to go deeply into Steiner's epistemology. We can only give a summary of his main ideas and concepts, and relate them to similar ideas in other thinkers and streams of thought. Readers who are interested in the more explicit arguments behind Steiner's ideas have better consider his own works.[4] It must also be emphasised that the ideas presented here are not to be understood as Steiner's final conclusions about the nature of

[1]English edition: Steiner (2009a).

[2]However, this book is a revision and expansion of an earlier work, published in 1900–1901 in two volumes of *At the end of the century. Looking back on a hundred years of spiritual development*, vol. XIV and XIX (*Am Ende des Jahrhunderts. Rückschau auf hundert Jahre geistiger Entwickelung*). Steiner was invited to contribute to these volumes; a token of the appreciation that adhered to his person in German intellectual circles at the end of the nineteenth century (cf. Lindenberg 1997).

[3]English edition: Steiner (2011).

[4]Steiner's philosophical works are contained in GA 2-7, GA 18, GA 21, and GA 25.

knowledge and how it is achieved. They are more like temporary resting points awaiting further discoveries and development. Some of Steiner's followers, like Unger (1976), Witzenmann (1983), and Majorek (2015), have produced such works (for an interesting comparison between Steiner and the constructivist theory of knowledge of the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, see Grauer 2007). Furthermore, it may be added that Steiner often said that his most basic philosophical book, *The philosophy of spiritual activity* (GA 4),[5] is an organic whole that ideally has to be read from beginning to end with sharply focused attention, in order to mentally perform the same acts of thinking that the author did when writing it. To read it is an exercise in pure, living thinking; a thinking that tries to connect with the spiritual well spring at the ground of our being. At the same time, Steiner admits that the book is a very personal expression of his own struggles and realisations in the philosophical quest for truth. Steiner's understanding of philosophy can be called 'expressivist' (Sparby 2016). Philosophy can only be an individual expression of the quest for a universal understanding of life and the world; a quest that in principle takes place in freedom. Steiner is, by the way, not alone in the attempt to bring life into philosophical thinking and to look upon philosophy as expressivist in nature: a more recent example is Gilles Deleuze (cf. Deleuze 1990; Deleuze and Guattari 1994). The parallel between Steiner and Deleuze in this respect has been nicely demonstrated by Eftestøl (2013; see also Eftestøl 2016). Deleuze, for that matter, was also interested in and inspired by the Western esoteric tradition, especially some of the Neo-Platonists (see Ramey 2012; Kerslake 2006).

3.2.1 *Knowledge as Non-representational*

For Steiner, knowledge is a product of human creativity. This, however, does not imply a purely subjectivist view of knowledge, which will hopefully become clear as we go along. In the foreword to his doctoral thesis (1980 [GA 3]), he says that the task of knowledge is not to construct a representation of reality, but to create a new realm that, *together* with the experiences we receive through the senses, constitute reality. Steiner therefore belongs to those philosophers who object to a so-called representational view of knowledge, according to which knowledge is a kind of image or 'representation' of reality; a view that takes reality as given independently of human consciousness and sees the task of knowledge as to reproduce a true image of it. The objection to such a view is nowadays common among educational thinkers, which emphasise that knowledge is not a representation of something that is more real than itself. Knowledge can only emerge out of active participation in the world and its social activities (cf. Osberg and Biesta 2008; Dahlin 2013).

[5]Steiner recommended this non-literal translation of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* as more appropriate for English language and culture.

Knowledge as such would not exist if human beings did not have the desire to know, as well as the capacity to create concepts and ideas, which are the very essence of knowledge. As far as their linguistic aspect goes, concepts and ideas are constructed in thinking. We strive to find the right words that express our thoughts. These discursive constructions are however preceded by a kind of prelinguistic intuition. In the context of philosophy, Steiner used the term intuition to refer to this ability to perceive concepts and their relevance for a certain (sense-) experience. In order to put prelinguistic intuitions into words, discursive thinking is required. The whole process of intuiting a relevant concept and then expressing it in words is an instance of human creativity. If through this process, we feel that we arrive at an experience of something *real*, we also experience our knowledge as *true*. Knowledge is therefore also *experienced*, but it is of course another kind of experience than what we have of the external world. In his attempt to adhere closely to experience even in such abstract realms as epistemology, Steiner has much in common with the phenomenological approach to philosophical issues. One can find interesting similarities between Steiner and Husserl (Majorek 2006) and Heidegger (Dahlin 2009) and Merleau-Ponty (Dahlin 2013).

Thinking as an inner activity is of basic significance for Steiner's philosophy. This may give a very intellectualistic impression. However, it must be noted that the thinking Steiner refers to is a *living* thinking, as are the concepts it creates. To be genuine, conceptual knowledge must be *experienced* in the soul. This means that other faculties must also be involved, such as the heart (feelings) and the imagination. The implication is that children should be engaged in aesthetic or practical activities connected with the subject of learning. This is especially important for younger children, who live more in their 'limbs' than in their 'head'. Therefore, the Waldorf concept of early learning is based on 'limb-learning' rather than 'head-learning'; it is about *participating* in the world and not about being a passive spectator (Schieren 2012). However, participation here means not merely outward action but also inner activity of the soul (thinking, feeling, imagination).

3.2.2 Points of Similarity with John Dewey

Famous as he is for the motto 'learning by doing', the active and participatory mode of learning is also prominent in John Dewey's educational thought. The 'doing' that he envisages is not only outward action; the activities of thinking and reflection are also included. There are more subtle similarities as well. In one of his later works, Dewey says we cannot really grasp and possess an idea 'in its full force' if we have not *sensed* it and *felt* it as if it were a smell or a colour (1987, p. 125). Such expressions agree well with Steiner, who often spoke of the development of organs of spiritual perception as involving the living experience of ideas and concepts. An idea in this sense is a mediator between an object and the human understanding of that object. The idea enables the essence of phenomena to manifest as knowledge in human consciousness. Dewey on his part did not primarily refer to spiritual

realities, but he certainly did not deny their existence. In another work he says, 'Soul is form, spirit informs' (1958, p. 294) and notes that even though the words 'soul' and 'spirit' are so heavily loaded with mythology that it may not be possible to use them in science and philosophy, 'the realities are there; by whatever names they are called' (ibid.).

It is noteworthy that Dewey also speaks of the *force* of an idea (1958, p. 125). This implies that ideas have energy, which may be hard to accept in the nominalist/materialistic perspectives dominant today. If ideas have energy they can, presumably, also be causal factors. Finally, to say that ideas are felt and sensed like smells and colours implies that they are experienced in a much more qualified way than a passing thought. It is significant that the quote discussed here is from Dewey's book on aesthetic experience (*Art as experience*). Steiner, for his part, said that the capacity to experience things in an aesthetic or artistic way is a good basis for the development of spiritual perception, especially if connected with an inner stillness of the mind (1992 [GA 10]; p. 47, footnote)[6].

For Dewey, thinking is as much an action as more overt and visible behaviours. Similarly, in Steiner's phenomenological approach, to perceive and to understand are active forms of being-in-the-world. The pedagogical implication is that, to be genuinely understood, concepts and ideas must be experienced in a participatory way, not merely by the senses, but also by the mind (thinking, feeling, imagination). This insight should bring teachers into a special relation to the ideas they try to convey to children, different from the nominalist stance. For nominalism, ideas and concepts are merely lifeless shadows of the real, and they cannot by themselves awaken any strong experiences or feelings. In this view, an idea is virtually the same as a word: a contingent sound pattern or sign on paper.

3.2.3 *Goethe and Nietzsche*

Steiner found a great source of inspiration in the studies of nature carried out by J. W. Goethe (cf. Chap. 2). He often pointed to Goethe as a predecessor and anticipator of his own epistemology. Steiner's books and lectures about Goethe provide a basis for the view that Steiner's philosophy—like Goethe's approach to nature—is a kind of phenomenology, although Steiner never used that term to describe his own philosophy of science (regarding Goethe as a phenomenologist, see Seamon and Zajonc 1998; Heinemann 1934). This is probably because the famous inaugurator of the phenomenological movement, Edmund Husserl, had not yet developed his phenomenological thinking at the time when Steiner started to write about Goethe's epistemology.

[6]English edition: Steiner (2004).

But Steiner also related to another famous German thinker, who became of much greater importance for European cultural history: Friedrich Nietzsche (Steiner 2000a [GA 5]) (Nietzsche, by the way, also admired Goethe). Steiner first read Nietzsche towards the end of his years in Vienna (see Chap. 2). Nietzsche evoked contradictory feelings in him. On the one hand, he found statements which seemed to agree very much with what he himself felt and experienced in his inner life. He says some of Nietzsche's ideas corresponded completely with what he himself wrote in his early works on epistemology (2003 [GA 2])[7]. On the other hand, he was repelled by how Nietzsche could speak about spiritual things without having dived deep enough into the corresponding realities. To Steiner, Nietzsche's writings seemed to be a tragic result of the inner conflicts that the scientific materialist age caused in a sensitive and perceptive soul. Nietzsche clearly felt the inner stirrings of spiritual life, and yet believed that they had to be expressed within a scientific frame of reference, which he took from biology and Darwin's idea of evolution (although, for sure, Nietzsche also made some critical remarks about Darwin in *The will to power*).[8] In Nietzsche, Steiner saw a soul that could not directly experience the spiritual world, but in which the spirit subconsciously struggled against the non-spiritual views of the times.[9] From his encounter with Nietzsche in his latter days of illness (see Chap. 2) Steiner understood that spiritual search could not find anything essential in the contents of natural science, but only *through* them *in the spirit.* This made him see Goethe's natural studies in a new light. Goethe wanted to dwell in the observation and experience of natural phenomena. Through this, he reached the spirit at work in nature, but he did not go further, to knowledge of the spiritual world itself. Nietzsche, on the other hand, proceeded from a mystical intuition of this world, for instance in the form of the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus, who for him were real spiritual forces at work in cultural history (cf. Cox 2009). However, this vision led him not to knowledge of the spiritual world, but to *nature*. Apollo became the scientific world of material facts, and Dionysus the natural forces at work behind these facts. Thus, Goethe found the spirit *in* nature, whereas Nietzsche lost it in a subjective dream *about* nature.

One can argue that Steiner's perspective is Nietzschean in the sense that he does not seek any ultimate ground of truth, in the absolute and universal sense, that has been the inner motivation of Western epistemology at least since Descartes. In Steiner, as well as in Nietzsche, we meet a mode of thinking whose only foundation for truth is the *experience* of the thinking subject (for this aspect of Nietzsche, see Carroll 1974); including, at least in Steiner's case, the experience of thinking. Before I can use the concept of truth in my search for knowledge, I must have

[7]English edition: Steiner (2009b).

[8]Later, in a letter from 1918, Steiner expressed a similar view of Freudian psychoanalysis as originating in a longing for spiritual soul knowledge but being chained to a dogmatic view of natural science (1987 [GA 39], p. 474).

[9]As Nietzsche is often regarded as a main inspiration for post-modern or post-structural philosophies, perhaps this could be said also of these thinkers: there is a subconscious longing for a spiritualization of philosophy and science, but this cannot be outrightly expressed (cf. Gare 2002).

constituted the meaning of 'truth' in my thinking. This means that thinking—as an intuitive spiritual activity—always precedes the discrimination between truth and falsehood.[10] From Steiner's point of view, it is intuitive thinking that provides any evidential experience, by bringing forth the concepts that are understood as adequate to what the senses perceive. This has the important implication that our understanding of truth is highly dependent on the range, intensity, and depth of our experience. Hence, a participatory mode of learning is of primary importance.

3.2.4 Rigid Definitions Versus Living Concepts

In our academic culture, there is—especially among scientists—a certain resistance to accept that real understanding can be reached without clear—which often means abstract and rigid—*definitions* of the concepts employed. Clear definitions and formal logical deductions obviously have their place, especially in what Steiner calls pure, sense-free thinking, such as mathematics. But the kind of understanding that results from such an approach is not suitable for life, because reality is more complex than any formal definition or logical deduction can grasp. As a teacher, one must surely know the basic laws of logic, but in the lower and middle grades, one should keep this knowledge in the background, not make it explicit but only let it shine through one's presentations and reasoning (1992 [GA 293]; p. 134).

Therefore, to counteract the overestimation of the logical approach, Steiner emphasised the need for pictorial descriptions and narratives when teaching subject knowledge before puberty. Rather than going from definitions to deductions, teachers should present the subject in lively and colourful pictures, without of course falsifying the knowledge as such. To make children memorise exact definitions of central concepts would be like putting 'gloves of ice' on their hands he said—an interesting analogy considering the role that our hands have had and still have for the development of our thinking (Goldin-Meadow 2005; Wilson 1998; Dahlin 2013). In this sense-based, narrative approach, concepts *emerge* out of perceptions as the *result* or product of the learning process; they are not the starting point. Such concepts can live in the soul; they can change, grow and transform. Our experience of life changes as we grow and develop. To keep pace with these changes, our concepts and ideas must be able to adapt. Static definitions cannot do this. If we remember them at all in later life, they have often turned to useless mental baggage.

Steiner often pointed out how inadequate modern education is—or was in his time at least—regarding its preparation for practical life. Whether it is better today or not, the tendencies to cognitive overload and overintellectualisation remain,

[10]This is a parallel to what Steiner says about the distinction between subject and object, which is also preceded by thinking. The individual subject lives "by the grace of thinking", as Steiner expresses it (1995; p. 60).

especially since much vocational training has now become part of higher education. One example is teacher education, where students often fail to see the relevance of their studies of educational theories. One reason for this may be that neither they nor their teachers have learnt to see theories and concepts as living essences necessary for making deeper sense of practical experience.

The one and single value of knowledge, Steiner claims, is that it contributes to the development of *all* aspects of the *whole* human being (1995 [GA 4], p. 271). This may be called a pragmatic view of learning and knowledge: knowledge is *for* something beyond itself. It is also a view very similar to that of W. Humboldt, who said that knowledge is only for *Menschenbildung*; i.e. for linking the self to the world in the most spirited way:

> It is the ultimate task of our very existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay. *This alone is the yardstick by which each branch of human knowledge can be judged*. (2000; pp. 58–59; italics here)

As pointed out above, the confluence of knowledge with sense experience constitutes (our experience of) *reality*. The *search for reality* could be taken as the basic characteristic of Steiner education (Kiersch 2010). Therefore, the objects of learning are often studied from many different points of view, and the question of the sense and meaning of the world is always kept open. Reality, in its totality and fullness, can never be finally determined and understood. Nevertheless, the task of a genuinely human education is to approach this ultimate mystery again and again, from as many points of view as possible.

For something to be experienced as real, at least two of our senses must interact, Steiner claims. Many such synesthetic interactions take place naturally, for instance between the eyes and the kinaesthetic sense, which is necessary for one to grasp the shape or form of physical objects (it is known in neuroscience that the eyes always scan the things they look at). But such interactions can also be consciously encouraged. Therefore, teachers in Steiner schools (ideally) make students use as many senses as possible in learning something. In contrast, it may be noted, natural science disregards as much as possible of sense experience as subjective and therefore not to be trusted. It is still under the spell of the Pythagorean–Platonic tradition, for which the true language of nature is mathematics and the sense world is illusory (cf. Dahlin 2001).

As mentioned above, Steiner found a great source of inspiration in the studies of nature carried out by Goethe. Most modern scientists relegate these very little known works of Goethe to the dust heap of history, regarding them as of no consequence. There are, however, a few exceptions, such as Ribe (1985), Sepper (1988), Goodwin (1994) and Portmann (1956) (for a discussion of the educational possibilities inherent in Goethe's theory of optical colours, see Dahlin 2003). Steiner's view was that although the employment of mere abstract mathematical models was fruitful for grasping purely mechanical and physical phenomena, it

would never make it possible to understand the phenomena of organic life. In Goethe's approach, he found a living thinking, an openness to the *experience* of ideas. He called this approach *empirical idealism*. To understand life, our thinking must itself be alive. The kind of thinking we use to know a thing must have an affinity with the nature of that thing. Rigid abstract concepts cannot grasp the nature of a living organism. Nor can it understand psychological and social phenomena, because they too are living and fluid by nature. A so-called Goetheanistic-phenomenological approach to nature has therefore inspired parts of the Waldorf science curriculum, to counteract the effects of mechanistic scientific models and awaken in students the ability of living thinking (see for instance Kranich 2005). Unless such ability is cultivated in education, it will generally decline, Steiner maintained, and so will the possibility to understand the complexities of natural and social life.

It is known—but seldom paid much attention to—that Goethe's natural studies had some influence on Hegel's philosophy. Hegel and Goethe exchanged many letters, and in one of them, Hegel expressed his deep appreciation of Goethe's theory of optical colours (Hoffmeister 1953; see also Kaufmann 1993). Hinting at the living nature of philosophical thinking, Hegel compared an idea to a plant; that is, a living and growing organism. This desire for a thinking that is alive can be sensed also in some present-day philosophers. Thus, Deleuze (1995) compares philosophical texts to novels in which the concepts employed are like persons going through all kinds of changes and developments. Philosophy is about setting life free where it has been trapped, and a homogenous system of language and thought cannot achieve that (cf. ibid., p. 140). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) seem to imply that only a *pedagogy* of the concept can save conceptual thinking from its degeneration into either encyclopaedianism or commercialism (see ibid., p. 12). Taking their lead from such hints, educational thinkers have been inspired to formulate more explicit suggestions for a curriculum that encourages living thought in students, for instance Cole (2011) and Semetsky (2004). In such suggestions, it is possible to find both similarities and differences with Steiner's educational ideas, but they would take too long to go into here.

3.2.5 The Freedom of Thinking

Steiner emphasises that in creating knowledge, human beings are, in principle, free. In practice, there may be all kinds of internal or external blockages and hindrances, conscious as well as subconscious, which prevents this freedom. But such hindrances can be discovered and overcome. The history of human knowledge is partly the history of the overcoming of such hindrances, such as the dogmas of religion, the power of the church and superstitions.

Nowadays, we could add to this list the dogmas of science (Sheldrake 2012), and the Kantian 'meta-paradigm' of epistemology (Ergas 2016), which is perhaps at the bottom of all scientific dogmas. It is well known that Kant introduced the notion of

the 'thing-in-itself', about which we cannot have any knowledge because it is beyond space and time, the two basic categories of our sense experience. He did this to safeguard a place for religious belief or faith, a realm which could not be deconstructed by empirical science. For Steiner, the general acceptance of this idea was one of the major reasons why a science of the spiritual world has not been developed in the West. The philosophers of early Romanticism (Goethe, Hegel, Novalis, Schelling) all tried to go beyond Kant in this respect, but this cultural impulse died out in the nineteenth century. Kant's epistemology was therefore a constant target of Steiner's philosophical critique. In a lecture on education (1986 [GA 308], pp. 75ff), Steiner says that accepting the Kantian view is tantamount to accepting that we cannot know the human world, because human beings are, basically, spiritual beings. What then remains to know is only the physical body. A science of education and psychology working from such a standpoint can only become mechanistic and materialistic, and Steiner urges teachers to become thoroughly familiar with all the ways that materialism expresses itself in modern culture (1991 [GA 301]; p. 170).[11] In some respects, Steiner's thinking has recently found an interesting echo in Ergas (2016), who propose—independently of Steiner—that a Kantian 'meta-paradigm' has ruled science since the eighteenth century and has prevented the development of a science of the spirit in the Western world.

However, nothing prevents us to hold on to our beliefs and our dogmas. We are free to believe that the moon is a green cheese, if we are prepared to bear the consequences. This is because thinking is the primary expression of freedom in an inner, spiritual sense. Thinking carries the seed of human freedom, and it is a seed that has the potential to grow into action. The freedom of thinking is therefore the link between epistemology and ethics, because freedom is a condition for responsible action and ethics is not possible without responsibility. In relating epistemology and ethics, Steiner implicitly points to the moral nature of scientific

[11]In an essay from 1893, Steiner, among other things, describes his monistic ontology and its consequences for education (1989 [GA30]; pp. 60–68). From the monistic standpoint, there is no separate reality 'behind' the phenomenal world that we experience; no Kantian 'world-in-itself' as it were, about which we can only postulate hypotheses. Knowledge arises out of relating one phenomenon to another, i.e. we do not have to leave the phenomenal world in order to (try to) grasp something 'behind' it. But this is what mainstream natural science does; it establishes a Kantian dualism between reality and the world of appearances. The knowledge that arises out of such an approach can only be abstract and general, *it cannot grasp the nature of an individual being*. When applied to education, it means that the individuality of the human person is nailed to the grid of general conceptual schemas and what should be the overriding purpose of all modern education—to develop the individuality and freedom of each child—is lost.

The monism that Steiner describes here has certain affinities with Deleuze's "doctrine of univocity" (Smith 2001), as well as with his immanentism (Goodchild 2001). Monism does not mean that "everything is the same"; on the contrary, with the supposition of immanentism, it is the only perspective that can understand the unique nature of each being (for an interesting exposition of this trait of Deleuze's thinking, see Smith 2001). This kind of monism is a basic characteristic of Western esotericism, as demonstrated by Iwersen (2007) (for esoteric influences on Deleuze, see Ramey 2012). In esoteric thought, there are no *principal* limits to human knowledge; only contingent ones.

research. He thereby prefigures views and perspectives in present-day human and social research, such as the history and sociology of science. In these developments, there is a more or less implicit recognition of the moral nature of knowledge construction (cf. Welburn 2004).

In his view of thinking as basically free, Steiner deviates from the traditional way in which the question of freedom is usually put: Do we have a free *will*? Somewhat counter-intuitively, Steiner says (in his autobiography) that it is thinking that gives power to the will, not the other way around.[12] Therefore, the will is free to the extent that it derives its power from free thinking. Steiner's ethics is based on this basic relation between thinking and willing.

3.3 Ethical Individualism

Because of its emphasis on individual freedom, Steiner called his moral philosophy ethical individualism. It has a certain anarchistic flavour in its strong opposition to anything that smacks of duty or discipline. According to Steiner, one characteristic of modern consciousness is a tendency to reject the existence of *universal* norms and values. Kant's idea that one should act so that the principle of one's action could be generalised for all humanity has therefore lost its validity (if it ever had one). Instead everyone can contribute the most to society only if they can express their innermost being. The very idea of moral laws or rules contradicts the basic value of freedom. However, there certainly are moral *values* or *ideals*, and they even have a certain objective nature, comparable to that of mathematical laws. Therefore, Steiner recommended the study of geometry in order to get an experience of the objective character of pure ideas, as a preparation for understanding the objective nature of moral ideals (moral preaching he dismissed as useless, see for inst. 1990 [GA72], p. 58]). But there are no objective moral *rules* that we have a *duty* to follow. Again, in opposition to Kant, as he understood him, Steiner says that because a truly moral action is based on freedom, there is love and joy in it, whereas Kant held the view that there cannot be pleasure in moral action, since it is based on duty, which implies a feeling of being compelled. In his rejection of this idea, Steiner follows Schiller and Goethe: Schiller ironically said that he often was troubled by feelings of pleasure in serving his friends, because this meant that he was not virtuous. For Goethe, duty meant to love the action that one commands oneself to do (cf. Steiner 1986 [GA 308]; p. 80).

Steiner does not comment on the fact that Kant tried in his own way to overcome the conflict between universal rules and individual autonomy by arguing that when our own reason proves to us the validity of the rule, the conflict is dissolved. Perhaps the difference between Steiner and Kant is that Kant tries to accommodate

[12]"Die Freiheit lebt in dem Denken des Menschen; und nicht der Wille ist unmittelbar frei, sondern der Gedanke, der den Willen erkraftet." (GA 28, p. 333).

individual freedom to the existence of universal rules, whereas Steiner does the opposite: for him, individual freedom is primary and the existence of moral rules and values is accommodated to this basic principle. This view has much in common with Nietzsche. For instance, in his *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche says that virtue should not be something external, like a cloak one puts on, it should be one's very own self, and that too much attention has been paid to those who 'equate virtue with spasm under a whip' (2006, p. 72). The first association to this quote is perhaps that of medieval self-flagellation, but it could also be a comment on Kant's view that duty cannot be enjoyable.

To see the primary expression of human freedom in thinking, and thinking/intuition as the faculty that grasps moral ideals and thereby starts the process that incorporates our personal values and virtues—makes them expressions of what we are—means that freedom is intimately correlated with individuality.[13] Thus, the innermost core of a human being is not determined by any natural or biological laws. Steiner relates this to the issue of gender equality, pointing out that our perception of a person of the opposite sex is very much influenced by the biological differences, so that the other's uniquely individual qualities are often lost to us. This, he points out, is more detrimental to women than to men, because men tend to reduce women to the roles of mother and wife and therefore not allow them to choose their own destiny in life. This idea, that individuality is based on freedom, has some affinity with Sartre's existentialism, according to which we have freely chosen who we are, and to the extent that we do not recognise this we live in 'bad faith', blaming external circumstances for what is really our own responsibility (Sartre 1969; cf. Østerberg 2013). Furthermore, the thoughts expressed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The second sex* (1953) about how women are perceived through conceptions of 'the female nature' and not allowed to create their own 'individuality project' are very similar to what Steiner also said (Østerberg ibid.).

As mentioned above, it is by intuition that we grasp the prelinguistic aspect of concepts and ideas. Moral values and ideals are, basically, of the same nature as ideas; they are ideas about what is good, just or righteous. In thinking, we elaborate these intuitions and express them in words and moral discourse. Moral ideals have the power to awaken certain feelings in us, feelings of enthusiasm, desire and love. It is the nature of such feelings that they want to be expressed; they therefore easily flow into our will and become forces of action. A moral intuition is therefore only the first step towards moral action. Steiner introduces moral *imagination* and even moral *technique* as additional moral abilities needed to complete a moral action. Moral imagination means imagining ways in which the intuited ideal or value *could*

[13]It must be admitted that to say that "thinking is the primary expression of freedom" is somewhat of a simplification if the *whole* of Steiner's thought is considered; i.e. not only his philosophy, but also his anthroposophy. Steiner's concept of freedom is not as radical as that of for instance existentialism; it is embedded in certain ontological and historical-anthropological frameworks, which would lead too far to go into here. See Sparby (2016) for an interesting discussion of Steiner's concept of freedom related to that of Hegel.

be realised; moral technique is the capacity *to do it*.[14] People's abilities in these respects vary; one person may have very strong intuitions but lack the ability to realise them; another may possess the technique to carry out the imagination of someone else.[15]

To be sure, the moral life of humanity is not based only on positive feelings of love and compassion. People also feel rage and the desire for revenge for injustices and crimes that have been committed against them. Still, one may consider such reactions as implicitly based on the love for justice and goodness. For some people, the love of ideals like non-violence and peace may also turn out to be stronger than the desire for revenge and guide their actions into more constructive channels. Such things are after all happening in the world, although we seldom here about them.[16]

Steiner was not a blue-eyed idealist; he was always aware of the complexity of things and did not simply preach love as the solution to all moral conflicts. It is obvious that what we call love may in some cases be very selfish. 'I love you' can mean 'I want to enjoy your company; I need you for my happiness' etc. On the other hand, such egoism may also express itself in care and thoughtful consideration for the other person, and then, it becomes selfless. This shows that we cannot capture the reality of moral life by neat logic based on abstract definitions of for instance egoism and altruism. Reality cannot be bottled up in ideas, systems or ideologies. In this stance, Steiner has something in common with the deep distrust of theoretical systems or so-called grand narratives that characterise present post-structural or deconstructive approaches to philosophy in general, and ethics in particular. A grand narrative reduces everything to 'the Same', that is, all differences in terms of for instance time, situation, individuality, culture etc. are made invisible and disappear into a general 'essence' that is the same whatever the context (cf. Critchley 1992).

Steiner's ethics can perhaps be summed up in the saying of Augustine: love (unselfishly), and do what you will. This points to the essential connection between love and freedom. If our moral ideals are grasped in the freedom of intuitive thinking, they inspire love and action. Naturally, Steiner foresaw the objection that letting everyone follow their own 'intuitions' of what is good would soon lead to social chaos. His answer is based on a deep trust that human beings would—eventually—agree, because they are essentially of the same nature. Another reason for this trust is that the world of moral ideals is not a subjective and arbitrary individual invention; it has an objective character. That is why moral ideals are first *intuited*, and not the product of subjective imaginations. One may see this reasoning

[14]Steiner is not alone in using the notion of moral imagination; see for instance Fesmire (2003), who discusses its significance in Dewey's work. Dewey, and others, tends however to assimilate what Steiner calls intuition into what they call imagination.

[15]The three stages from intuition, over imagination, to technique can also be applied to pedagogy (which is of course basically also a moral activity); we can have an intuition of a pedagogical ideal; imaginations of how it could be worked out; and techniques for realising it in practice; cf. Tyson (2015; 2016).

[16]See for instance http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/the-real-enemy-in-gaza/.

as rather naïve: What about the atrocities of genocide and terrorism that we have witnessed over the last century? What kind of 'moral intuitions' make people become adherents of Nazism or terrorist ideologies? Are there any signs that humanity is developing towards a common agreement of what is good and just? Steiner would probably answer that the thinking that leads people to believe in Nazi or terrorist values is simply *not grounded in freedom* and therefore cannot arrive at the same conclusions that more sane thinking people reach. Somewhere along the line, such unfree thinking is stopped or twisted by subconscious presumptions, negative emotions or neurotic complexes. As for signs of increased moral agreement, the gradual rise and spread of values such as democracy and human rights is one example (disregarding here, as invalid, the leftist critique that such values are only Western and therefore ethnocentric and relative). Another is the form of activism based on non-violence and peace, which finds adherents across many ethnic, cultural and religious groups.

Steiner was concerned to establish a form of education that would help young people to grow into the potential freedom inherent in human nature, or that would at least not create unnecessary hindrances and obstacles for such a development. One of the overriding aims of Waldorf education can therefore be said to be freedom, in an inner, spiritual sense (Carlgren 1976; Oberski 2006, 2011). To be more precise, it is to prepare the growing human being so that when leaving school at the age of 18 or 19 (Waldorf education is based on 12 years) we are ready to take our own development in hand—if we want to—and continue the path towards ever-greater freedom, and love. Because the seeds of freedom are certainly not fully realised at such a young age—indeed, from one point of view, they are never realised in full.

3.4 Steiner's 'Philosophy of the Human Being'

Steiner's anthroposophy can be described as a philosophical anthropology based on the reality of the spiritual world. It is a wisdom (*sophia*) of the human being (*anthropos*). We will go deeper into Steiner's view of the human being in Chap. 4. Here, we will discuss Steiner's understanding of human nature from a more general philosophical point of view.

In one of his written works Steiner (1983 [GA 21]) deals with the relation between his spiritual understanding of the human being and more mainstream philosophical and empirical research. Here, he suggests the possibility of a general 'philosophy of the human being', which would *integrate* mainstream philosophical and empirical anthropology with anthroposophy. This suggestion is somewhat surprising since these two streams of thought are usually based on very different assumptions and presuppositions. The first explores and establishes empirical facts and common experiences, and *is quite justified* in disregarding all purely spiritual aspects of the phenomena studied, Steiner maintains. The latter, in contrast, is based on research in supersensible realms employing clairvoyant powers of perception

available only to an utter few. For Steiner, these two fields of investigation are nevertheless compatible, and he uses the analogy of a photograph and its negative to illustrate his point. A photograph is in many ways the opposite of its negative, still they are obviously compatible since they are of the same object. But whereas the photograph is rather factual or literal in character ("the camera never lies"), its negative needs a kind of transposition or interpretation; its images cannot be taken in a simple, literal sense.

Perhaps one could say that it is as if Steiner envisaged a synthesis of *mythos* and *logos*; of poetic symbols and factual prose, of empirical science and spiritual wisdom. *Mythos* is a highly imaginal language, it describes the world as it appears before intellectual analysis—*logos*—has abstracted some ideal 'essence' of phenomena. In performing this abstraction, the intellect removes phenomena from their context. In theology (*theo-logos*) this means that God is placed outside the world, while imagination—*mythos*—finds God *within* his creation. The idea of a synthesis between *mythos* and *logos* inspired the early Romantics at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, especially in Germany. Steiner's own descriptions of the world also have this character of mixing well established facts with poetic or symbolic images of the invisible, spiritual world 'behind' them. This cooperation between the rational and the imaginal faculties of the mind has been called 'seeing with two eyes' (Chittick 1998). It makes Steiner's discourse (his way of expressing himself in texts and lectures) full of 'freely floating conceptual structures' and 'dynamic semantic fields' (Kiersch 2010, p. 68)—that is, it is sometimes hard to pin down his *words* to a precise and permanent meaning, although the underlying *intuitions* may be clear and meaningful in themselves.

Steiner maintained that it is an imminent task of present-day mankind, especially Western humanity, to bring the intellect in harmony with spiritual knowledge. In the ancient past, human beings had spirit without intellect; then, the spirit gradually declined and the intellect grew. But now the spirit should be regained *by means of* the intellect. This is the way cultural life must develop in the future, or humanity will exterminate itself through ever more brutal wars (Steiner 2000b [GA 354]; p. 143). The view that intellect and spiritual knowing can work together seems to have been at least implicitly present already in Plato and Aristotle (Hanegraaf 2012), and it was certainly taken for granted by the esoteric streams within Islam, for example by Ibn 'Arabi, who recognised Plato as one of the ancient prophets. Ibn 'Arabi distinguished between two kinds of philosophy: as *love of wisdom* and as *reflective thinking*. The first kind admits that truth is achievable not only by way of rational, discursive thinking, but also in a direct, revelatory way (Coates 2011). Just like our ordinary senses reveal the physical world to us, so, Steiner would say, spiritual or clairvoyant perception—if we develop such powers—will reveal the spiritual world to us. The second type of philosophy is the modern, Enlightenment kind, which *only* recognises discursive, rational thought and which in the words of Diderot encourages all things to be 'examined, debated, investigated without exception and without regard for anyone's feelings' (quoted by Coates, p. 38); i.e. a relentless questioning of all knowledge claims not based on rational logic alone.

The spiritual aspects and dimensions of the human being that Steiner describes in his books and lectures (see for instance Steiner 1992 [GA 293], which is often used in Waldorf teacher education), cannot be captured in rigid definitions and abstract concepts. They must be *experienced* in all—or as many as possible—of the forms of symbolism (cf. Cassirer 1979) that are available to the human mind. This is one reason why artistic work is always part of Waldorf teacher education. Concepts must be kept in a fluid state, and what first appear as dogmas must be melted in the fire of living thinking. 'Human beings must dogmatise in order to know the truth, but they must never see the truth in dogmas', Steiner said (2001 [GA 89]; p. 254; my translation). A so-called dogma is like a clothing that we give to a truth we have experienced; like a dress of words. In and for themselves such clothes are not the truth. Nevertheless, clothes are necessary for the truth's survival, both in our own life and in the life of humanity. Therefore, the accusation that Steiner education is based on a dogmatic view of the nature and development of the human being is based on a misunderstanding of the kind of discourse that Steiner deployed to transmit his insights. This misunderstanding may be present also among many of his adherents (Kiersch 2010).

Another, similar and equally justifiable approach is to take Steiner's ideas in a heuristic way. Steiner tried to open new ways of seeing, understanding and experiencing the world in general and the human being in particular. He had to 'translate' his spiritual insights into more or less ordinary language, which meant finding words and analogies for realities that this language had never coped with, except in a purely mytho-poetic form. But the language of myth, poetry and fairy tales no longer awakens the same instinctive understanding in its listeners and readers as it did in former times. Modern human beings need a more rational discourse. To use Steiner heuristically means to see his words as provisional expressions of attempts to open new ways of understanding. This can be done in at least three ways: (1) one may come upon *new* hypotheses for ordinary empirical research; (2) one may *re-interpret* or find new significance in already established empirical facts; or (3) one may *re-discover* the insights of earlier times and cultures. An example of the last point is Rittelmeyer (2010), who relates the ancient and nowadays abandoned idea of the four temperaments (the sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic; a basic notion for the early school years in Steiner education) to modern psychological research (see further Chap. 4). Rittelmeyer has also published many books and papers that exemplify the first and second heuristic uses of Steiner's ideas (Rittelmeyer 2002, 2007 a.o.). His work is probably the most prominent example of what an *educational* 'philosophy of the human being' in Steiner's sense can look like (unfortunately very little of it is translated into English).

Thus, for practising teachers and educational thinkers Steiner's spiritual understanding of the human being and child development can be a source of inspiration for gaining new perspectives on education, relevant both for research and for daily teaching. It is an understanding that goes far beyond the present reductionist tendencies of cognitivist 'datafication' (Lees 2016), following in the wake of global neoliberal educational policies and driven by international league tables of educational testing (Ball 2012).

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Chapter 4
Anthroposophy as the Basis for Pedagogical Anthropology

Abstract In present times, the philosophical anthropology of education is a rather neglected field of inquiry. Steiner's view is that the practice of education must be based on a true understanding of the nature of the human being and of children's development. His spiritual and holistic view can be described as encompassing the physical, the physiological, the psychological and the existential or spiritual aspects of the human being. As for psychology, the functions of thinking, feeling and willing and their development during childhood are of primary importance for education. Other aspects are the classical idea of the four temperaments, and the twelve senses of the human organism. This chapter ends with considering Steiner's far-sighted view of human development, which includes the whole individual life span as well as the cultural history of humanity, and some affinities between his views and Romantic ideas in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Keywords Educational anthropology · Developmental psychology
Aesthesiology · The Romantic view of childhood

4.1 A Neglected Field of Educational Thought

The idea that education must be based on a deep understanding of the nature of the human being can be found, at least implicitly, already in Aristotle (Reeve 2000). This question is basically a philosophical one in the sense that the essential nature of something cannot be grasped by sense-based knowledge alone. Before human nature, in terms of our mind or psyche, became an object for empirical studies—towards the end of the nineteenth century—the field of pedagogical anthropology was, therefore, exclusively a branch of philosophy. However, the rise of empirical psychology led to the question of how the soul, psyche or mind develops in children. Researchers devoting themselves to this question could not avoid drawing

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practical conclusions about education from their findings (cf. Freud, Jung, Piaget, Vygotsky a.o.). Developmental psychology, therefore, gradually became an important basis for educational thought and practice, and an essential part of teacher education.

However, while Waldorf education still holds on to the view that understanding child development is the *sine qua non* for being a teacher—using Steiner's ideas for this purpose—in mainstream education developmental psychology has lately become of less significance. There are several reasons for this. One is the critique of stage models of development, such as that of Piaget. Such models are perceived as too static or rigid. For instance, children can sometimes express abilities that are supposed to belong to a later stage, depending on how the task is presented to them. Therefore, at school children can be held back by the teacher's belief that they are not supposed to have certain abilities (cf. Ashley 2009).[1] Another reason for the partial abandonment of developmental psychology is the growing influence of social constructivism and its inherent relativism: theories of development are understood as the results of social and discursive practices, hence dependent on contingent contextual factors. Related to this is so-called postmodernism and its scepticism regarding so-called grand theories: all claims to universality of theoretical models and structures are understood as expressions of rationalistic hubris. As an alternative to psychology, the sociology of childhood has developed as an empirical field of research, in which different, socially constructed childhoods are mapped out and described. This research is of relevance for education, but it provides very little support for taking a stance in practical situations (for a further discussion of these issues, see Dahlin 2013).

To speak plainly, without a holistic vision and detailed knowledge of what constitutes a natural developmental trajectory from child to adult, we lack a solid ground for educational and pedagogical actions. And if education does not care to formulate such a 'grand theory', others will: evolutionary biologists and brain scientists seem to have no doubts about their capacity to do this. Steiner's anthroposophy can provide a powerful alternative to these more or less materialistic and/or scientistic attempts to understand human nature.

In this chapter, I will present some of the basic ideas of Steiner's view of human nature and development. These ideas go against the grain of much of present day mainstream perspectives. To assimilate them and understand them in their real intent takes time and effort. What is presented here is only so to speak a skeleton: the warm flesh and blood of living understanding can only come with experience and reflective inquiry.

[1]From a Steiner/Waldorf point of view, this critique could be answered by saying that even if these observations are true, in the long run it is not good for children to actively engage in tasks that are beyond their developmental stage. Such activities tend to 'defuse' their potential for further development of these abilities at the appropriate age. An indication in this direction is given by some results of an evaluation of Swedish Waldorf schools (Dahlin 2010), which will be discussed in Chap. 7.

4.2 The Four-Folded Structure of the Human Being[2]

That the human being has many different aspects or dimensions, which are all integrated into one complex whole, is a fact that can hardly be disputed. The enumeration or classification of these aspects can take different forms, but there is probably a large consensus around saying that there are four basic aspects or dimensions:

(1) a physical body, consisting of physical matter, most obviously illustrated by bones, teeth, nails and hair;
(2) a physiological aspect, consisting of life processes, expressing themselves in biochemical processes, and often involving various forms of liquid matter such as blood, lymph and bile;
(3) a psychological aspect, consisting of thoughts, feelings, perceptions, desires, imaginations, hopes, dreams, etc. formerly seen as aspects of the soul;
(4) an existential[3] or spiritual aspect, consisting of awareness of being an 'I' or a self, having an identity, being a person that was born at a certain time and will eventually die, being gifted with a certain freedom and possibility to realise meaning and moral values.

There is a certain parallel between these four aspects and the fundamental structure of the human being that Steiner returns to many times in his books and lectures. This structure consists of four 'essence members' (*Wesensglieder*), which Steiner—using some traditional esoteric technical terms—calls the physical body, the etheric body, the astral body and the 'I' or the ego.[4] These 'bodies' are related to different phases of the cosmic evolution of the planet Earth, the physical body being the oldest and the 'I' the youngest member (Steiner 1989a [GA 13])[5]. However, one must remember that this is just a primary classification of the aspects or dimensions of the human being, which Steiner further differentiates and refines in his books and lectures. Of all these 'bodies', it is only the physical body that is known to science

[2]This section is a slightly revised version of a section in Dahlin (2013).

[3]I use "existential" as denoting the same kind of phenomena that traditionally was called spiritual, although the two terms obviously have different connotations as they are part of completely different conceptual frameworks. The term "existential" also has a more limited scope.

[4]Steiner's understanding of the human being is part of his spiritual science (*Geisteswissenschaft*) and rests on two basic principles: (1) there exists a spiritual world (or even worlds) that is ontologically prior to the physical/sensory world (the relationship between the two is—as Steiner (1987a [GA 9]) (English edition: Steiner 2011b; p. 107) roughly depicts it—like that of the ocean to the icebergs); (2) this spiritual world can be investigated by means of super-sensible faculties of cognition with the same exactness and objectivity as sensory reality is investigated by natural science. Steiner's description of the human being is a result of such super-sensible investigation.

[5]English edition: Steiner (2011a).

today. There are, however, a few exceptions in philosophy and philosophical reflections on scientific findings, where something rather like what Steiner refers to as the *etheric* body shows up.[6]

To begin with, it was implicitly realised already by Kant that if we could identify a substance that mediated between thought and physical matter, then its implications for philosophy would be very significant (Schickler 2005). German brain researcher Hüther (2005) provides a more recent example of how such a mediating substance can be understood. According to Hüther, the remarkable characteristic of living organisms is not the complexity of their life processes, but the ability to *govern and link* all these processes, so that the organism is *maintained as a whole*, although by the laws of physics and chemistry alone it should disintegrate. Therefore, living organisms must be understood as structures (*Gebilde*) that are able to use matter in accordance with an inherent inner pattern, an 'inner image' of what it shall be and become (ibid., p. 33) This agrees with one of Steiner's alternative terms for the etheric body: *Bildekräfteleib* (approx. 'body of image powers'). Thus, it is as if the etheric body mediates between physical matter and the 'idea', pattern or image that the organism manifests in physical matter.

A similar notion is found in Sheldrake's (2006) relatively well-known conceptions of morphogenetic and morphic fields. Morphogenetic fields are related to the biological world (and was suggested already in the 1920s, according to Sheldrake), whereas morphic fields have a more general extension. Like Hüther, Sheldrake points to the necessary presence of an inner organising force or agency in living organisms. For instance, if the same genes are present in all cells irrespective of which organ they belong to, how can we explain that cells develop differently in different organs? Sheldrake also refers to the mathematician René Thom, who developed mathematical models for morphogenetic fields (Thom 1983), in which the end points towards which living systems develop are called *attractors*. All morphic fields have attractors, Sheldrake claims, and he even identifies the force of these fields with 'the force of *habit*' (p. 33; my italics). One kind of morphic field is what Sheldrake calls *perceptual* fields. These fields link us to our environment and to each other and extend far beyond the brain. They explain, for instance, why we sometimes can sense someone looking at us from the back (Sheldrake 2005a, b). They also form the basis of telepathy and telecommunication between pets and their owners. (Probably also between mothers or parents and their babies, we could add.)[7] However, the concept of morphic fields does not explain how forms, patterns or habits *arise*, only how they are transferred from one organism to another.

[6]The etheric body would roughly correspond to the physiological aspect of our total being, even though physiology in a general sense consists of visible biochemical processes; that is, it is physical, whereas the etheric is invisible and non-physical. Nevertheless, the correspondence is there, in the sense that the etheric forces regulate the physiological processes.

[7]The reason why such telepathic phenomena are relatively more common between humans and their pets is probably that the etheric forces of animals are not disturbed by influences from the 'I'. This should apply also to babies and small children.

From these admittedly sketchy accounts, we can gather that the concept of an etheric dimension to the human being is not completely out of reach to present (but more or less marginalised) academic thought. Moving on to the so-called astral body, references to this or similar conceptions are harder to find in academic literature. In its basic form, however, the idea is not so strange, because it simply refers to our inner, conscious or unconscious, psychological life: the continuous flux of mental images, memories, plans, dreams, phantasies, desires, fears, expectations, etc. Neither does it take much serious self-observation to realise that my personal inner life has a kind of topography (or topology), which is different from that of other people. In that sense, our personal mind is organised like a body. A body does not have to consist of physical matter. (Even in higher mathematics certain algebraic structures are called 'bodies'.) However, the problem with the notion of the astral body begins when one considers the claim made in esoteric traditions, that this body is called 'astral' because it is related to the planets and the fixed stars. Such an idea naturally falls outside the range of any present day academic thought, philosophical or other.

Regarding the fourth aspect, the 'I' or the self of human beings, the idea that this 'innermost core' of the human person is of a purely spiritual nature is challenged on two academic front lines: that of brain science and that of (most) post-structuralist human and social science. The first reduces the self to an epiphenomenon (at the most) of purely material brain processes. The second reduces it to a social or discursive construction that varies from context to context, without any essential identity. In answer to the first, it may be said that Steiner does not deny that, *for the normal state of consciousness*, the brain is necessary for us to have a sense of 'I' or personal identity. Secondly, to the extent that post-structural thinking argues for the *decentred* nature of the human 'I', it agrees with the Romantics (Bowie 2003) and therefore, implicitly, also with Steiner (and other esoteric traditions). For Steiner, the *real* 'I' resides in the unconscious, beyond any discursive processes. Our normal I-sense is a mere reflection of this spiritual reality, a reflection indeed produced by the brain. *This* sense of 'I' is, therefore, also subject to various social and cultural processes. Thirdly, we may note that there *are* philosophers and brain researchers who argue for a basically spiritual understanding of the human person (and of the brain), for instance, Spaemann (2006), Popper and Eccles (1998) and Beauregard and O'Leary (2007).

The terms 'etheric' and 'astral' may cause some revolting feelings in people who vehemently reject all kinds of occultism or esotericism as just so much superstition or unscientific nonsense. However, these terms refer to rather simple and basic phenomena. In principle, a 'body' is an *organisation*. A physical body is an organisation of dead, physical matter. However, as we know from quantum physics, a physical body is not the mass of solid matter that it appears to be to our senses of sight and touch. Physical matter consists of fields of quantum particles and energy; matter is a swirl of elementary particles that, essentially, is *energy*. It may, therefore, be better to use the notion of *fields of energy*, force or power instead of bodies. As Deleuze says, 'every relationship of forces constitutes a body—whether it is chemical, biological, social or political' (quoted in Protevi 2001, p. 36). From this

point of view, the so-called etheric body is really a field of life forces.[8] This field has many aspects but one of its basic functions is to regulate all life processes and connect our various organs into one functioning whole: to keep our body in shape (a corpse has lost this energy and gradually disintegrates). Steiner, therefore, also talks about the etheric body as a body of *formative forces*. The astral body in turn is a field of another, more 'psychic' energy, which consists of forces of desire, imaginations, thoughts and emotions. The 'I' or ego, finally, can be understood as a purely spiritual power; a power of personal presence, awareness and attention (cf. Kühlewind 1998).

Each of these different bodies or energy fields go through particular developments, from dependence to relative independence, as the child is first born and then grows from infancy to adulthood. In the womb, the physical body of the foetus is obviously dependent on that of the mother. After birth, this body gains its independency in a physical sense, but the infant's etheric body is still strongly connected to that of the mother. The etheric energy field gains a relative independence around the age of seven, forming the basis for individual memory and conceptionalisation. At puberty, the astral energy field of desires and feelings develops more personal characteristics and becomes (relatively) independent.[9] Finally, the 'I' gains its relative autonomy around the age of twenty-one; this is also the time when the individual *will* come to the fore, because it is no longer so strongly linked to the body's organic processes (for a more extensive discussion of the four essence members and their development, see Dahlin 2013, p. 36ff).

It must be emphasised that this short description of Steiner's understanding of human nature is a simplification. For instance, each of the four essence members can be differentiated into further aspects or dimensions. This fourfold scheme, therefore, only works as a preliminary scaffold for further investigations needed to deepen our understanding and make it more living and concrete. It may also be pointed out that Steiner's conceptual scheme has certain parallels in classical Aristotelianism and in other spiritual traditions.[10]

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[8]According to Steiner, the etheric body is not to be confused with Bergson's élan *vital*, which Steiner rejected as a "pure phantasy" (Steiner 1987b [GA 73], p. 250).

[9]This is of course related to changes in the neurophysiology of the brain, cf. Siegel (2015).

[10]Aristotle identified nutrition, perception and mind as aspects of the human soul (Shields, Christopher, "Aristotle's Psychology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/aristotle-psychology/); nutrition being a parallel to the etheric and perception and mind to the astral, roughly. In the early Christian (Paulinian) distinction between body, soul and spirit, the soul would encompass the etheric and the astral bodies, and the spirit would correspond to the 'I'. In the ancient tradition of yoga or Vedanta, there is a parallel between the so-called pranic sheath (*pranamaya kosha*) and the etheric body (*prana* being equal to breath and life energy). The other "sheaths" of the *Atman* (the self), such as *manomaya*, *vijnanamaya* and *anandamaya kosha* can be taken as further differentiations of the astral body (cf. Guénon 1981). In the various physical disciplines derived from ancient Taoism, the notion of *chi* (Chinese) or *ki* (Japanese) corresponds to *prana* and to the etheric forces. Regarding *ki*, Hisayama (2014) presents an interesting phenomenological study of its many different aspects and suggests a kinship to the old Greek concept

4.3 The Three Soul Functions: Thinking, Feeling and Will, and Their Bodily Correspondences

Steiner adhered closely to the Paulinian distinction between body, soul and spirit. However, the difference between soul and spirit has largely been lost in the Christian tradition of the West, which can cause some difficulties in understanding Steiner's ideas. One often finds thinkers that use the term 'soul' to denote what Steiner would call spirit, and vice versa. One example is Emerson, who describes the soul as that which animates all the organs of the human being and uses abilities such as intellect and memory as its organs. For Emerson, the soul is a kind of infinity that cannot be grasped (cf. Geldard 1993, p. 174). However, from Steiner's point of view, this would be a good description of the *spirit*, not the soul.

In Steiner's way of speaking, 'body' means the physical body; 'soul' roughly equals the etheric and the astral bodies described above, and 'spirit' refers to the 'I' or the self (there are also spiritual beings above the level of the 'I'). Child education is about helping the spirit to 'incarnate', that is, to take full possession of its different bodies and turn them—as far as possible—into faithful servants of the spirit. One aspect of this process is helping the 'I' to master the different functions of the soul. Steiner divides these functions into *thinking*, *feeling* and *will,* corresponding roughly to the classical division of the mind into the cognitive, affective and conative faculties (for the history of this idea, see Hilgard 1980). Of these, thinking and feeling are well-known aspects of our inner life, but not so the will. The life of will, as Steiner uses the term, proceeds in the depths of the unconscious. This may be surprising, since we all experience what we want, desire and intend to do as just as conscious as anything else that we are aware of. But knowing what we want is actually a thought, an idea, a conception. The will is not involved until we *do* something to realise our desire. The will is that which is *at work* in our physical actions (including speech). Whenever we carry out a physical action, we are not conscious of all the interactive processes that take place between our brain and nervous system on the one hand, and our muscles, joints and bones on the other. The physical body carries out these things without our awareness of *how* it is done. If we were to become conscious of these processes, it would only disturb them, like the well-known example of the centipede, who would not be able to walk if it started to think of all its feet. It is the unconscious activity of the will that works in our limbs when we act (but of course we can be aware *that* something is being done).

In this regard, the holistic character of Steiner's understanding of human being and development comes to the fore, because the three soul functions are explicitly related to three aspects of the physical body. Thinking is related to the brain and the nervous system; feeling is related to the heart and the lungs (the rhythmic system); and will to the limbs and the digestive system. These different systems are not

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of *pneuma.* Nagatomo (2009) relates *ki* to the "intentional arc" of the lived body in Merleau-Ponty; this could be further related to Sheldrake's morphic perceptual fields mentioned above.

isolated from each other, they interact in various ways. The nervous system is not absent from the stomach and the limbs, and there are metabolic processes in the brain. Oxygen from the lungs and blood from the heart permeates the whole body. But even though everything is connected to everything else, we can see a relative dominance of the nervous system in the head (the brain); a relative dominance of the rhythmic system in the breast (the heart); and a relative dominance of the metabolic system in the limbs and the lower part of the torso (stomach, hands and feet). Similarly, we tend to *experience* thinking as going on in our head, and feelings and emotions in our breast ('it breaks my heart'). Careful self-observation also reveals a connection between feeling and the rhythm of our breath. As for will, it may take some time to get used to the idea that it lives in our limbs and is connected to our digestion. However, one may note that stomach problems often weaken our energy and our desire to do things.

Aristotle is famous for his idea of the soul as the form of the body. Steiner's explanation of the soul-body correlations may illustrate this idea. For Steiner, childhood is the phase of life in which the Aristotelian oneness between soul and body is most accurately true. In childhood, whatever affects the body also affects the soul, and vice versa. This fact is the basis for the salutogenic aspect of education and pedagogy, about which Steiner was deeply concerned (cf. Sobo 2014, 2015; Zdrazil 2000, 2010).[11]

In terms of child development, the will/digestion/limbs play the main roles in infancy and early childhood (approx. 0–7 years old); the feelings/heart/lungs come to the fore in primary and lower secondary school (approx. 7–14 years old); and the thinking/brain/nervous system in the upper secondary school and later (14–21 years old). The infant learns through *imitation*, which is primarily an expression of the life of will. Steiner describes the small child as if 'religiously devoted' (German *religiös hingegeben*) to the surrounding human world (1986a [GA 308], p. 75). It is as if, for the child, the world is basically *good*, and imitation is the way in which the child takes part of this goodness. Its devotional attitude makes it want to imitate what it sees people do. The impressions made by the actions, gestures and tone of voice of the adults around are absorbed by the child's senses and penetrate deep into the organism. Depending on their character, these impressions contribute in a positive or negative way even to the child's organic development.

Later, between age 7–14, the feeling life becomes more dominant and learning is more 'aesthetic' in the sense that the child picks up a lot through the sense qualities and the atmosphere that adults create, not least the teachers. Due to the liberation of (some) etheric forces, the child is then able to form inner images and mental representations (*Vorstellungen*) based on its experiences, which it can also

[11]Zdrazil (2000) compared about a thousand German Waldorf students with around 2500 mainstream students (both groups were in their middle to late teens). Waldorf students reported significantly less problems such as headaches, nervousness, dizziness, stomach problems, nausea and strong heartbeats. It is, however, hard to prove that such differences are caused by Waldorf pedagogy alone, as Zdrazil himself points out (see further, Chap. 7).

remember. Therefore, *feeling* and *remembering* are key words for teaching and learning at this age.

At puberty, cognition and logical thinking awakens to more conscious levels and learning starts to happen mainly 'through the head'. This is related to the liberation of certain astral forces, which up until then works on the formation of the reproductive organs. The teenager starts to question things in a more analytical way, asking for causes and reasons, not taking things for granted in the same way as before. This is the time when *personal judgment* can start to develop. If children are asked to form judgments before this age, their thinking life as adults will be lopsided, Steiner claims. If children are asked for their personal judgements too early in life, they will form the habit to judge things on the basis of their physical body (Steiner 1991 [GA 301], pp. 169–170). That is, their judgements as adults will not be based on impartiality and objective observation, but on other factors related to the physical body, for instance, the temperament (see Sect. 4.4).

The general movement from will to thinking over the years from 0 to 21 can also be seen on a larger scale, from childhood and youth to old age. The child usually has a lot of energy in arms and legs and often runs off to do things without much reflection. The old person, on the other hand, is slow in movement and often spends time thinking, reflecting and considering what to do next, or wondering and questioning things. In general, in relation to each other, the child is more sanguine, and the old person is more melancholic or phlegmatic.

Finally, it must be pointed out that even though thinking, feeling and will are clearly distinguishable from an analytic point of view, they are nevertheless not separate and watertight compartments of the soul. They continuously interact and flow into each other. There is unconscious will in thinking, and vice versa, even though their organic counterparts (nerve cells and blood vessels) are physically distinct. This is the general nature of the realms of soul and spirit: 'things' are not as separate in time and space as they are in the physical world.

Table 4.1 sums up the relations between age periods and various aspects of development.

Table 4.1 Relations between age periods, soul functions, essence members (*Wesensglieder*) and body/soul/spirit

Age period	Liberated soul function	Independent essence member
0–7 years	Sense-perception	The physical organism
7–14 years	Memory/conceptionalisation	The etheric body
14–21	Feeling	The astral body
21–	Will	The 'I'

4.4 The Four Temperaments

Another basic idea, that is part of Steiner's anthropology, is that of the four temperaments: the choleric, sanguine, melancholic and phlegmatic (Steiner 1976, 1984 [GA 57], pp. 281ff). These he took from the ancient Greeks and developed in his own ways. Steiner sees the temperament as a mediator between the specific qualities of the individual spirit—the 'eternal' aspect of the human being—and those qualities which derive from heredity and the physical body—the temporal aspect. The temperament balances these two realms. There are also certain correlations between the four essence members described above, and the four temperaments. However, these correlations are different in children than in adults. In the adult, the choleric is ruled strongly by the I-forces; the sanguine by the astral forces; the phlegmatic by the etheric; and the melancholic by the physical forces. In the child, the I-forces correlate with the melancholic temperament; the astral with the choleric; the etheric with the sanguine; and the physical body with the phlegmatic temperament. The logic behind these correlations would lead too far to be fully explained here. Let it just stand as one example of how Steiner's conceptual schemes relate to one another, forming very complex wholes with high degrees of inner differentiation.

Since the soul and the body are very strongly connected in childhood, the notion of the temperament is especially relevant for the pedagogy of the primary school years. Steiner describes the choleric person as having a strong will and urge to action. This temperament manifests in childhood as, for instance, taking the lead in all plays and games. The melancholic is withdrawn and occupied with his own thoughts. A melancholic child may be very reluctant to share his toys with others, keeping things to himself as it were. The phlegmatic tends to be lazy and dreamy and has little interest in the external world. The sanguine, in contrast, is easily engaged and interested, but the interest tends to fade and soon turns towards something else.

It is important not to take the temperaments (as Steiner understands them) as mutually exclusive; most people have traits from more than one of them. Neither are they to be seen as static properties which will remain with us from birth to old age. Although the different qualities of the temperaments are most easily observable in childhood, they are not rigid and unchanging behaviours that we are stuck with all our life. They can change and develop.

Each temperament manifests a certain one-sidedness of the soul-body organism. However, this one-sidedness may be counteracted and rounded off in school, Steiner claims. This can be done simply by placing children of the same temperament close to one another in the classroom. This counter-intuitive advice (it may seem more logical to put opposite temperaments close to each other) is explained by the fact that meeting someone with the same temperament as myself evokes a reaction of opposition in me. For instance, I can easily get bored by seeing the same laziness in the other person as in myself, and this awakens the desire to get active and do something. Of course, this mostly happens subconsciously, especially in

childhood. Naturally, each temperament also has positive aspects, for instance, the strong will of the choleric, the deep thinking of the melancholic, the calmness and carefulness of the phlegmatic and the enthusiasm of the sanguine. By having an eye for the qualities of the temperaments, the teacher can draw upon the different positive sides of the children, as well as helping them overcome the less positive ones.

However, to categorise the children in one's class in terms of their temperament is not an easy task. It takes careful observations over a long period, and many Waldorf teachers nowadays shy away from this task. In addition, in Western culture, theories and models that categorise or classify human beings into a limited number of types have been viewed with much scepticism since WWII. A less cumbersome approach to the idea of the temperaments is to use it for planning classroom activities: ideally, these should include something pleasing for each of the temperaments, so that all children can feel stimulated by the forms of teaching. Using it this way, the children themselves need not be put into one or another 'temperament box'.

The idea of the four temperaments has been the subject of much scorn from the critics of Waldorf education, because it seems to lack all scientific grounds and to be completely outdated by modern psychology. However, as has been aptly demonstrated by Rittelmeyer (2010), the psychological qualities that define the different temperaments can be clearly detected as *implicit* in the so-called EAS theory of temperament, developed by Buss (1991). Buss's theory belongs to the strand of modern psychology that links up with evolutionary biology and is thus oriented towards expressive behaviours of the bodily organism. The model is based on the three variables emotionality (E), activity (A) and sociability (S). Emotionality varies from having a strong and intensive emotion to having a more cool and calm emotional life. Activity varies from liking to do things, displaying a lot of energy in one's actions and behaviour, to not being particularly energetic and preferring to take it easy and stay still. Sociability, finally, varies from being open to others and liking to be together with other people, to being withdrawn and not minding being alone. These psychological traits are also essential aspects of the four temperaments. Thus, the choleric type has strong emotions (E+), strong energetic behaviour (A+), but is not very social (S−). The emotional life of the sanguine is not particularly intense (E−), but the sanguine is very active and social (A+ and S+). The phlegmatic tends to sociability (S+) but is neither energetic nor intensely emotional (A− and E−). Finally, the melancholic is neither social nor active (S− and A−), but rather intensely emotional (E+). Thus, the EAS scales of Buss's model can be understood as a transformation of the four ideal types that constitute the classical idea of the four temperaments. As already noted, it is important to see the *ideal* character of each temperament: hardly any person is totally one or the other, but a mix of two or more, even though one temperament may be more basic. Similarly, in Buss's model, few people are positioned on the extreme values of the EAS scales.

4.5 Steiner's Aesthesiology (*Sinneslehre*)

Another important part of Steiner's educational anthropology is the aesthesiology (*Sinneslehre*), that is, his theory of the human senses. Steiner regarded knowledge of the senses as important for education, but, from his standpoint, the psychology of his time did not sufficiently understand human sense-perception. In line with the general 'abstractionism' of materialistic science, there was not enough insight into the qualitatively different ways in which the senses work, and the aspects of the world that they transmit to our consciousness. For Steiner, understanding the senses means understanding how the human being is interwoven with the world and actively participates in the world processes; an essential aspect of his participatory theory of knowledge (see Chap. 3).

Steiner's view of the human senses went through a certain development. In 1909–1910, when working with his philosophy of knowledge, he distinguished ten different senses (Leber 2002, p. 172). Seven years later, 1916, in a lecture for members of the AS, he presented his view that there are twelve senses (Steiner 1998 [GA 169], pp. 55ff). This view then became part of the introductory course for teachers in the first Waldorf school (Steiner 1992a [GA 293], pp. 146ff, 2004). Traditionally, of course, we have for a long time taken it for granted that human beings have only five senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch—disregarding here the notion of a *sensus communis*, which has played a certain role in some philosophers' conception of the mind (for inst. Aristotle). It was only during the last century that neurologists began to conceive of other sense faculties and now there seems to be a well-established consensus that we have at least eight senses. The additional three are the sense of temperature, the sense of balance and the sense of movement (kinaesthetic sense). However, the number of potential candidates for being a human sense faculty has grown considerably in recent times.[12] The issue is of course partly related to the question of how to define a sense organ.

In addition to the traditional five, Steiner also recognised the three senses of temperature, balance and movement. But his list encompasses four additional ones. There is the *life sense*, which in present terminology would be an interoceptive sense, directed towards the inner state of the body and its organs. The life sense tells us whether we are alert and energetic, or sleepy and worn out. The remaining three senses are what Steiner calls the *language* sense, the *thought* sense, and the I-sense. The latter senses the presence of *another* person, *another* 'I', not one's own. Similarly, the thought sense captures the thoughts expressed by another person, not one's own.

[12]See Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sense (accessed 2016-09-22). I am aware that this article lacks some verifying references to research but I have been unable to find any other easily accessible source on the subject. But science nowadays admits that we have more senses than the traditional five; for a discussion of different suggestions in relation to Steiner's view, see Rittelmeyer (2002, p. 62ff).

The language sense is related to the hearing of another person's speech. It does not grasp the meaning of what is said, but it distinguishes between what is language and what is irrelevant noise. Even if I do not know a word of Chinese, I can still *sense* that two Chinese people are *talking* to each other; that is, the language sense in operation. The language sense perceives a word as a 'sound form'; it can be seen as a transformation, or a 'turning inside out' (*Umstülpung*), of the movement sense, because a word is a movement between different sounds that have to be synthesised into a whole (Leber 2002, p. 208).[13] The thought sense is related to the language sense in that it grasps the *meaning* of what is said by the other person, the thoughts behind the words—which does not mean that we always fully and completely understand each other. All senses can be more or less sharp and accurate.

As for the I-sense, the epistemological problem of how we know that another human being is conscious like ourselves—the so-called problem of other minds—has been part of philosophy since Descartes. It seems to have arisen out of the Cartesian distinction between that which we can have direct access to, i.e. our own consciousness, and that which we can only access indirectly. As Scheler pointed out about a hundred years ago (1913), the solutions to the problem can be put in two categories: those based on deduction by analogy and those based on empathy (*Einfühlung*). But neither of these are satisfactory, Scheler argues, because they do not do justice to our experience: the presence of another *person* is felt *immediately*, it is directly given. We do not have to perform any deductions or have any particular feelings in order to know that we have another 'I' in front of us. After Scheler, Heidegger—and later Merleau-Ponty—dismissed the problem as an illusion, since human existence is given primarily as a *we*, not as an isolated ego. To this, Steiner would probably add that whatever sensation or impression that is *given* in our experience is based on a sense organ. If it be asked where an organ for the perception of another 'I' is located, it must be remembered that not all senses have as clear physical delimitations as the eyes or the ears. Steiner indicates that the I-sense is spread out over the whole body (like touch and temperature) but has a kind of gravity centre in the head. Certain areas of the brain may be involved: the clinical case described by Sacks (1998) about a man 'who mistook his wife for a hat' is perhaps an illustration of what can happen when the I-sense is not functioning properly.

Steiner relates the twelve senses to the three soul functions of thinking, feeling and will, as well as to the spirit, the soul and the body. These relations are presented in Table 4.2.

The spiritual senses are closely related to thinking and have a cognitive character, in a way they are the most cognitive senses, but—like all senses—their cognition is of a prereflective nature. The bodily senses work to a large extent subconsciously, like the will, as Steiner understands it (cf. above). Their 'knowing' is very rudimentary and purely potential, unless their sensations are intentionally

[13]From this point of view, it is interesting that the language centre of the brain—Brocash's organ—is situated on the opposite side of the preferred hands' movement centre (Leber 2002, p. 208).

Table 4.2 Correlation between the twelve senses, the three soul functions and body, soul and spirit (adapted from Leber 2002, p. 222)

Spiritual senses	Soul senses	Bodily senses
Related to thinking	Related to feeling	Related to will
I-sense	Temperature	Balance
Thought sense	Sight	Movement
Language sense	Taste	Life sense
Hearing	Smell	Touch

brought to awareness and reflected upon. The soul senses are in between these two poles; their 'knowing' is clearer than that of the bodily senses but not as clear as that of the spiritual ones.

None of the senses function alone, but interact with *at least* one of the other senses. This interaction takes place on a subconscious level. In each perception, one sense dominates consciousness and the others work more in the background. Synaesthesia is, therefore, the rule, not the exception; one can find a similar view in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception (1992, pp. 228f). Thus, Steiner says the eye would not be able to see the shape of a thing without interacting with the sense of movement. Modern research also clearly shows that the eyes always move rapidly when presented with a visual object, following its basic spatial outline. In a way, every visual form is, therefore, a 'frozen movement', both from a physical and from a perceptual point of view. Given a long enough time span, the shape of every physical object changes; its present form is, therefore, a momentary picture of a shape-changing process. In their interaction with the kinaesthetic sense, the eyes in a way construct their own version of this frozen movement.

The point of bringing this theory of the senses into the context of educational anthropology is the importance of the exercise and cultivation of all the twelve sense-perceptual abilities in school activities. This is what makes Steiner education *aesthetic* in the basic and original sense of the word. The old Greek *aesthesis* can best be translated as *sense-perceptual awareness*. This root meaning of the word is still evident in the term 'anaesthesia', which—as is well known—means losing the sense of a certain part of the body, or even of all sense-perception, i.e. falling asleep. In this respect, aesthetics has little to do with art and beauty. But art is, on the other hand, a cultural practice in which our senses can be intentionally cultivated and refined. All the various forms of art, therefore, play a significant role in Waldorf education. Steiner seems to have been concerned with the tendency of modern culture and social life to undermine the life of the senses so that they are in danger to atrophy. This threat has been further emphasised by some of his followers (e.g. Glas 1994), but it has also been noted by other social researchers (Kamper and Wulf 1984). Many people in the present 'information society' suffer from a cognitive overload; what we take in of the world around us tends to bypass the senses, or, more exactly, it is of such a character that we do not need to dwell on sensual qualities but can 'get the message' directly. Dwelling on the quality and deeper meaning of our sense experience is time consuming, but time—despite (or rather because of) all our time saving inventions—is always short.

4.6 The Far-Sighted View: The Lifespan Development of the Individual and the Evolution of Humanity

In contrast to most development psychologists, Steiner's view of human development encompasses the whole lifespan from childhood to old age. Steiner considered it vital for spiritual development that we continue to inquire and learn new things throughout life and not regard ourselves as fully developed at the age of 25 or so. If we do not overcome this view, we will not be able to establish good conditions in society and cultural life (Steiner 1990 [GA 186], pp. 166–167). Thus, Steiner had his own vision of lifelong learning decades before it became a political idea in the Western world, with a rather different agenda behind it. An interesting presentation and extension of Steiner's view of adult development is given by Lievegoed (1997). Lievegoed was a Dutch psychiatrist who founded the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute (NPI), which helps organisations and individuals to realise their social, cultural and economic goals. At the NPI, Livegoed and his colleagues developed *Theory U*, a now rather famous management concept (cf. Senge et al. 2004). Unfortunately, within the frameworks of this book we cannot go deeper into Steiner's and Lievegoed's ideas about adult learning and development.

As is well known, Piaget's theory of child development ends with the stage of formal operations, which matures after puberty. Even though this stage can become more refined and sophisticated, Piaget recognises no deep qualitative shift after it, because his main interest was the development of the intellect (cf. Dahlin 2001). Recently, however, the notion of a post-formal development stage has come to the fore among some researchers; for an overview, see Gidley (2016; Chap. 5). In lieu with Steiner's views, Gidley also relates the discussion of individual development to the general development of human consciousness from the ancient past to the distant future by drawing not only upon Steiner, but also on Ken Wilber and Jean Gebser (ibid. Chap. 2).

Some scholars (Prange 2000; Ullrich 2012) have seen a strong similarity between the so-called recapitulation theory—that 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny' as Ernst Haeckel famously expressed it—and Steiner's ideas for the content of the curriculum in different school years. Haeckel's idea is nowadays considered disproved in biology, but it was rather influential at the end of the nineteenth century, and was transferred also to psychology and theories of cognitive development. Both Freud and Piaget seem to have been influenced by it, and Herbert Spencer said that education is—or ought to be—a repetition of the history of civilisation on a smaller scale (1884). It was, however, Tuiskon Ziller, a follower of Johann F. Herbart, that constructed a model of cultural stages (*Kulturstufenplan*) in which each cultural stage of development was correlated with a certain age of the child. Based on this correlation, the content of the curriculum for each school year was prescribed. Steiner also uses the term *Kulturstufen* in relation to the development of specific human abilities and cultural achievements, and there are *partial* agreements between his suggestions for curriculum content in different school years and the *Kulturstufenplan* of Herbart/Ziller. However, Steiner himself denied that his

educational ideas were based on Herbartianism and the recapitulation theory, and there are obvious differences between his views and those of the Herbartians. This has been clearly demonstrated by Wiehl (2015, pp. 122ff), who also points out the shallow character of Prange's (2000) and Zander's (2007) work in this respect. Steiner called the idea that the child repeats the developmental history of all humanity a mere phantasy (Wiehl, p. 146), and he regarded Herbart's psychology—which informed the educational methods of Herbartianism—as abstract and estranged from real life, since it reduced soul life to a kind mechanics of conceptions (*Vorstellungen*), and lacked real insight into the essential nature of the human being.

By looking both at the lifespan development of the individual and the cultural evolution of humanity in the past and the future, Steiner's view of learning, development and education can be called far-sighted indeed. Regarding individual development, he claimed that what a child experiences in the early years of life has consequences much later, in adulthood. In a lecture in 1912, Steiner says we can understand many human beings regarding their health and state of mind in their 30s, 40s or 50s if we know what they experienced in childhood of their parents and the surrounding world, and what at that time entered their subconscious soul life in terms of joys and sorrows (Steiner 1994a [GA 143], p. 80). Childhood experiences affect not only the soul, as in the psychoanalytical view, but also the body—again pointing to the importance of education as a salutogenic factor. Actually, at any point in life we have to do with the whole lifespan of the individual, not only the present condition. The human being is a *time organism* just as much as she is a spatial one (this is connected to the etheric body, which is also a 'time body').

Steiner would probably have agreed with Novalis, who said that 'the longer the human being remains a child, the older she will become' (quoted in Geppert 1977, p. 242; my transl.) This rather remarkable statement has recently been at least partially corroborated by empirical research. Thus, Kern and Friedman (2009) report on a longitudinal study which found that early school entry was associated with *less* educational attainment, *worse* midlife adjustment and even *increased mortality risk*. They also found that 'early reading was associated with early academic success, but less lifelong educational attainment and worse midlife adjustment' (p. 419). Steiner, on his part, warned that if children were required to memorise a lot of facts in the early school years, it would have negative consequences on their health later in life.[14] It may be interesting to note that already Aristotle claimed that starting formal education too early can have negative health effects (Reeve 2000).

[14]This does not contradict the fact that learning in the early school years is based on feeling and remembering, as noted above. The key point is not to *demand* memorisation and to *overload* the memory.

The haste with which some people today want children to start learning sometimes takes absurd expressions: there are even attempts at making the foetus learn in the womb.[15] Steiner would never have agreed to actions of this kind. The child's prenatal development is very much dependent on the state of the mother, not only physically but also mentally. If the mother strives to bring truth and goodness to expression in her soul, then something of that quality will pass over to child. Apart from that, the less we think about influencing the child before birth, the better (Steiner 1992a [GA 293], p. 21f).

However, Steiner was not advocating the approach that only that for which the child can develop a conceptual understanding should be brought up in teaching. This seems to have been a common idea at his time, but also later, as a consequence of Piaget's theory of the stages of intellectual development. Thus, in religious education, Goldman (1965) claimed that the stories of the Bible should not be taught to children because they lack the conceptual resources to understand their symbolic nature. In contrast, Steiner gives the example of how someone in his 40s could suddenly realise the significance of something that a teacher very dear to him once talked about in a lesson, but which he did not understand at the time. Such experiences in adult life can have a deeply vitalising effect, Steiner claims. In the East, this approach to child education has a long tradition, based on traditional stories and fairy tales. Such narratives often have a deeper meaning, which is not grasped by the child but which can emerge later in life, when conditions arise that makes the penny drop. Steiner hints at the same thing when he talks about the importance of telling fairy tales to children (Steiner 1988 [GA 62], pp. 321ff).

According to Steiner, the start of the change of teeth at around the age of seven marks the readiness for school. This fact, Steiner says, was well known to the ancient Greeks. It was also known in the Orient and belonged to the Eastern wisdom traditions (Steiner 1986b [GA 307])[16]. The growth of a new set of teeth indicates, Steiner explains, that certain energies of the etheric body are set free from their work on the physical organism and can, therefore, be used by the psychological faculties of creating conceptions and remembering them. This is the reason why starting school learning before this age can have negative health effects. The etheric forces needed for organic development would then be led into other channels and prevented to do their work on the organs.

4.6.1 The Nine-Year Crisis

In addition to the seven-year period of development related to the four essence members described above, there are more subtle changes happening within these periods. One of these occurs within the second seven-year period, when the child is

[15]See for instance http://www.internationalparentingassociation.org/Early_Learning/womb.html.

[16]English edition: Steiner (1989b).

around nine years old. At this age, Steiner claims, children begin to experience themselves as more separate from the environment. Up to this age, they experience themselves as a natural part of their surroundings, and they do not distinguish themselves so sharply from the world around them. But around the age of nine, there is an inner awakening to a deeper self-awareness. From a region below the soul, from language as it were, the words 'I am an I' can emerge in a clearer and less dreamlike manner than before, Steiner says (1986c [GA302], p. 134f) (this may have some affinity with Jacques Lacan's view of the relation between language, the subconscious and self-identity, but it would lead too far to pursue this possibility here). Children begin to see that they have an inner soul life which is separate from that of other people. Consequently, they can more easily understand talk about psychological issues. To talk about psychological things with children before this age is really talking above their head.

Hermann Koepke, a Swiss Waldorf teacher, researched some biographies in order to corroborate Steiner's view of the significance of the ninth year (Koepke 1989). One of them is the autobiography of Bruno Walter, a German composer, who describes a strong experience of standing one early morning in the empty school yard and suddenly waking up to his own self, to the feeling of being an 'I' and having an individual soul; a soul which was somehow 'called upon' from somewhere, by something unknown but powerful. Another example (not taken up by Koepke) is the autobiography of the Irish author Christy Brown (1992).[17] Brown was born with a brain damage which made him unable to move anything but his left foot. In his early childhood, he was drawn around in a simple carriage or carried on the shoulders by his brothers but he never felt odd or special about this. Although people often stopped and stared at him, he did not understand why. But this all changed during his ninth year. Life went sour, and the bottom fell out of his world. He looked in the mirror and was disgusted (he had looked in it before but never reflected on what he saw). With the only limb available to him, he managed to unhook the mirror from the wall so that it fell to the floor and was shattered to pieces. Regarding the significance of mirrors, Steiner (1986c [GA 302], p. 131f) notes that a monkey looking in a mirror will certainly become curious about what it sees and will perhaps run away with the mirror to investigate it. But this experience will not make a lasting impression on the monkey; it will not change its character or behaviour. It can be very different for a nine-year-old child.

The nine-year crisis can of course be more or less dramatic, depending on the surrounding world and the child's own character. But it is the beginning of a three-year period of soul transformation, which ends around the age of twelve and constitutes 'a point of no return'. It entails a loss of the 'innocence' of childhood. In Waldorf parlance, this period is, therefore, called the first (nine-year old) and the second (12-year old) Rubicon (Rubicon being the river that Caesar crossed with the famous words 'the die is cast', thereby inevitably starting a civil war). The dream of

[17]This book, *My left foot*, was first published in 1954. It was later (1989) turned into an Oscar-awarded film.

childhood—in which the soul lives primarily in the hands and the feet, the arms and the legs—is over. The limbs become more 'sleepy' but the head wakes up: cognitive abilities start to develop more intensely.

The Rubicon period is of special importance for children with handicaps of various sorts, because the increased self-awareness entails a stronger disposition to compare oneself with others. Some Swedish researchers in special education have noted that this age is special (Lagerheim 1988; Goldinger 2000). The statistics of children going to the school nurse with various ailments, such as stomach pains or headaches, shows an increase of such visits around the ninth year. Other studies show an increase in bodily and psychological symptoms in this age (Lagerheim 1988). If the child passes through this period without resolving the psychological issues it entails, it may as an adult suffer from a certain lack of self-confidence that is not experienced consciously but manifests in their temperament, their character or even in their physical health (1986b [GA 307], p. 137). In this period, teachers have an important task in showing each child a special care and love; so that they feel seen and appreciated as individual persons.

4.6.2 Steiner's Cultural Psychology

In parallel with individual development, human history is also characterised by certain phases of development, certain cultural epochs, in which different soul qualities and faculties come to the fore. This may seem an outdated idea based on the 'cultural imperialism' of the West, placing itself at the pinnacle of historical development, thereby giving itself the legitimate right to intervene in the development of other cultures and nations. But Steiner never supported such imperialistic policies, which are anyway more based on greed for power and natural resources than on a genuine wish to help. Furthermore, Steiner's idea of development, whether that of the individual or that of history, is not based on hierarchical stages in an absolute sense. Later stages are not in all respects 'higher' or better, because something intrinsically valuable is always *lost* in the passage from one stage to the next (cf. Dahlin 2013).

In their empirical psychological research among illiterate peasants in the south of the Soviet Union in the 1920s, Vygotsky and Luria (1976) came to conclusions which have a certain affinity with Steiner's perspective. Vygotsky and Luria studied the ways of thinking and verbal reasoning among these peasants and concluded that there is a general shift from context-bound and functional modes of thought to more abstract and conceptual ones, which seems to correlate with learning to read and write (cf. Cole and Gajdamaschko 2007). Similarly, Steiner says that people in ancient cultures did not have words for abstract concepts and categories. For instance, they could speak of trout or salmon, but they had no concept of the general category *fish*. Generally, abstract concepts have entered human thinking and culture through evolution, he claims (1992b [GA 146], p. 33). Present scholars in linguistics, however, seem to reject the view that human *language* in general has

evolved from the concrete to the abstract (cf. Cole and Gajdamaschko 2007, p. 209). Be that as it may, Steiner strongly affirms that human consciousness is not the same today as it was one thousand, two thousand or 5000 years ago (and Vygotsky and Luria would agree, but for different reasons). This comes to expression in the way we organise society and cultural life, as well as in general ideas and attitudes towards life and the world. Hence, there is a certain inner correlation between cultural life forms on the one hand and consciousness and cognition on the other. Furthermore, even our 'hard-wired' biology has changed and continues to change in subtle ways throughout history, Steiner claims. This contrasts with what present day evolutionary biologists often say about humans that we are basically the same now as on the steppes of Africa many thousands of years ago.

It would lead too far to present the whole of Steiner's scheme of the cultural epochs and their characteristics here. Suffice it to say that Steiner claims the present cultural epoch began around the early Renaissance, and his descriptions of these particular changes agree to a large extent with the views of mainstream historical research, especially the notion of the 'scientific revolution'—a notion which has naturally been questioned since this 'revolution' took a long time to be completed and was much more like a gradual development. In some lectures, Steiner also points out that humanity always lives in changing times, because no historical changes take place from one day to the next; they are always gradual. Still, it can hardly be denied that many significant things happened in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, having to do with the emergence of a new world view and new ways of thinking, based largely on a new idea of science. For Steiner, this denotes the beginning of the epoch of the 'consciousness soul', characterised by—among other things—increased self-awareness and self-reflection on the part of each individual. Each cultural epoch lasts about 2500 years, so we are still only in the beginning of this historical phase.

4.6.3 The Educational Spiral: A Romantic Idea Implicit in Steiner's Educational Thinking?

Steiner often pointed to the impulse of Romanticism as of great significance for Western cultural history; an impulse that slowly died out during the nineteenth century, being smouldered by new scientific, technological and economic developments. For example, he recommended teachers to always carry with them a copy of Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the aesthetic education of man* and study its significance for their work. Steiner's view that learning and development can and must continue throughout human life is also an important aspect of Romantic thought. A basic tenet of many Romantic thinkers was that a further *spiritual* development was possible as an adult, and even necessary for the fulfilment of human culture and society.

Like Steiner, the Romantics had a deep appreciation of the spiritual qualities of childhood. Novalis, for instance, envisions the child as a 'spiritual seer'; to a child everything appears as spirit, and the freshness of their insight exceeds those of the Prophets (cf. Kennedy 2000, p. 519). For Novalis, 'the *merely* grown up person' ('dem *bloßen* erwachsenen Menschen'; quoted in Geppert 1977, p. 247; italics in original)—someone who has matured only in a biological sense—lives in a 'desert of rationality' (ibid.), cut-off from the creative spiritual sources of life that are available to children. For Schiller, the child represents not only the beginning of personal development, but also the end; because the goal of life is the *re-appropriation* of childlike spiritual qualities, which are lost on the way to adulthood:

> They [children] are what we were; they are what we should become once more. We were nature like them, and our culture should lead us along the path of reason and freedom back to nature. (Schiller 1993, p. 180)

A very similar appreciation of childhood can be found among the British Romantics, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley; see Rowhanimanesh (2011). Steiner, for his part, says that the wisest of us can learn a lot from a child, because the spiritual world can speak through children, but we are mostly unaware of it. It is the child's 'angel' that sometimes speaks out of the child (1989c [GA 127], p. 64). This appreciation of the spiritual qualities of childhood forms the basis for a spiral view of human development: we may come back to childhood in old age, but on a 'higher' level, retaining also such capacities as self-awareness and logical reasoning. Hanegraaff (1998) calls this 'the educational spiral' and identifies it as an aspect of the Romantic idea of evolution; an idea that also belongs to the Western esoteric tradition.

Thus, for the Romantics, the direction of inner development in adult life is geared towards recapturing the spiritual openness of childhood experience. It does not mean that adult rational understanding is abolished but that it is developed further into a trans-rational realm. We can, therefore, describe the educational spiral as going from the prerational (in a non-derogative sense), via normal rationality—a kind of socialisation of cognition—to trans-rational wisdom or higher knowledge.

But the question then arises: if the child's voice reaches us from beyond the borders of adult discourse and rational social life, *how do we hear it* (cf. Kennedy 2000)? The answer may have to do with whether we have become stuck in a 'rational desert' or whether we are prepared to take further steps of inner development towards spiritual wisdom. It may be that cultural conditions today open our ears and hearts to children more than in earlier times. The child as a symbol for potential human development and the idea of maturity as a second childhood has gained some influence in present Western culture through the attention paid in psychotherapeutic circles to 'the inner child'.[18] So although children are increasingly marginalised in present technocratic, instrumentalist society, the positive values that they represent for the adult mind seem to have increased significantly.

[18]A search on http://www.amazon.com reveals countless books related to this theme.

This has been labelled the 'emotionalisation' of childhood in present empirical childhood sociology (for a critical review of this research, see Göppel 1997).

The idea of the educational spiral points, however, to another question, which may be an implicit but nevertheless important element in Steiner's educational thought: how do we educate so that the stages from infancy to adulthood become as good a preparation as possible for *further* inner development of the adult towards self-transcendence and wisdom? I believe that Steiner considered his educational ideas and suggestions as an answer to this question (in addition to many others). Steiner praised the ancient Greek education because it understood how to maintain the spiritual forces of childhood throughout life. But at that time, only a limited section of the population was allowed such an education, viz. the sons of the free (male) citizens. This was one of the conditions that made this kind of education possible, Steiner claims (1986b [GA 307], pp. 47ff). In our time, we must find other ways to achieve the same thing, and it is obvious that Steiner wanted Waldorf education to be an answer to this need. Steiner, therefore, seems to imply precisely this, that child education must be a preparation for a fruitful and continuous spiritual development in adult years. He was also concerned that the spiritual qualities and potentials of children born in our time encounter great obstacles for their manifestation and realisation, not least because of the form of education they must go through (1994b [GA 235], p. 203). Since his time, these obstacles may have become even worse because of social, cultural, ecological and nutritional conditions.

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Chapter 5
The Curriculum of Waldorf Education: Some Basic Principles and Practices

Abstract This chapter presupposes some acquaintance with the basic concepts of Steiner's understanding of the human being, introduced in Chap. 4. The concept of curriculum is here taken in the widest possible sense. It is not only about curriculum plans or documents but about any- and everything that children can 'go through' in school, i.e., all actual and possible experiences, conscious and subconscious, that they are intended to have. After a general introduction, pointing out the many aspects and dimensions of Steiner's curriculum ideas, an attempt is made to explain some of them in a more linear fashion, starting with the general ones that apply to all teaching, then going on to more specific ones that apply to certain age groups and school subjects. Some points about what it means to be and live the life of a Waldorf teacher are taken up. The chapter ends with a short section on the significance of school architecture.

Keywords Waldorf curriculum · Teaching as an art · Teacher's authority · School architecture

5.1 General Remarks

As noted in the introduction to this book, it is rather impossible to give a fully comprehensive presentation of the curriculum and teaching methods of Waldorf education. A good scholarly overview of the field is given in German by Wiehl (2015) (I am not aware of any similar work in English). But even though it consists of over 250 pages of dense text, Wiehl calls her work an introduction (*Propädeutik*), bearing witness to the complexity of the field. One reason for these difficulties is probably the simple fact that Waldorf education—as Steiner himself says (1967 [GA 217], p. 27)—does *not* intend to be a 'system of ideas', but an impulse of awakening, of vital action. Teachers' work is—or should be—*creative*, like that of an artist. Naturally, creative work cannot be specified and regulated by too many and too detailed rules or methodical steps lined up like a mechanical procedure. Although he sometimes called Waldorf schools *Methodenschulen*

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(method schools), Steiner argued against an understanding of teacher education as consisting of the acquisition of several clearly specified teaching methods (1989a [GA 31], p. 123; cf. Wiehl, p. 66f). The term *Methodenschulen* was used to take a distance from *Weltanschauungsschulen*—world-view schools—which Waldorf schools were *not* supposed to be. Anthroposophy should be the knowledge basis out of which educational ideas and principles can be derived—but methods in a very general and lose sense. Anthroposophy should never be the content of any teaching or instruction. In saying that teaching is an art, however, Steiner does not reject the possibility of an educational *science* (even ordinary artists may use scientific knowledge in their work). For Steiner, the main part of educational science is the anthroposophical understanding of the human being and development; it is mainly out of this knowledge that educational principles and actions must be derived (although sometimes compromises must be made with the curriculum of mainstream schools in order not to create future obstacles for the students). However, the mere knowledge of principles and ideas must be transformed into art, into creative action. For this to happen, the spiritual anthropology of anthroposophy must permeate and transform the very essence of the teacher's personality (1991a [GA 301], p. 9ff).

If it is asked how this permeation and eventual transformation occurs, perhaps one could construe an answer in parallel to how Steiner conceives of ethics and moral action. In Chap. 3, we saw that Steiner distinguished three aspects of what we may call 'moral competence', for lack of a better word. There is moral *intuition*, moral *imagination* and moral *technique*. One could distinguish parallel levels of competence in education. Steiner's texts and lectures can be understood as based on general pedagogical intuitions, in the sense that intuition for Steiner is the faculty by which we perceive ideas, ideals and principles. But intuitions need not be of a mere conceptual nature: Steiner says that as teachers we must be able to develop intuitions of everything that is humanly possible. Such intuitions belong to specific classroom situations, in which we get an idea about what is appropriate to do 'here and now' (cf. 1986a [GA 307], p. 62)[1]. They are usually mixed with a kind of imagination, which gives us a concrete picture of how we should act. Pedagogical technique, finally, is our actual ability to carry our idea into action. It is a form of spiritualised technique, based on spiritual and moral insight. Intuition is related to our understanding of children, both in general and as particular individuals; this is the level of *knowledge* of laws and principles. Imagination and technique are related to the *artistic*, creative work of planning and teaching actions. Imagination is the principal link between knowledge and action.

It has been suggested by Kiersch (2007) that Steiner's view of teaching as an art is informed by his understanding of Goethe's conception of art as bringing to expression what is *possible*, not as a representation of what is already a fact (Steiner 1985 [GA 271]). In this regard, teaching is the art of bringing forth that which is potentially inherent in the students in one's care, that is, their *individuality* (maybe

[1]English edition: Steiner (1989b).

also the individuality of the teacher) (cf. Wiehl 2015, p. 148f). Teaching is the art of helping the students to realise their essential humanity, or their 'true self'; but this true self is not preconceived in the form of an abstract and general model, as it tends to be in Kant and Herbart. Of course, our essential humanity may have certain general characteristics, but it is first of all uniquely individual. Therefore, education is not directed *towards* the true human being, but takes place *by* and *through* it. It is not only about 'becoming' human, it is also about *being* human. It is about cultivating our essential humanity.

This may be the reason why the horizons around Steiner's curriculum ideas are so wide and deep. The so-called Ilkley course, for instance, which is the first series of lectures on education given in England in 1923 (Steiner 1986a [GA 307]), begins with a lecture on knowledge, art, religion and morality, and how these are related to the deeper cognitive functions of the human being, i.e. imagination, inspiration and intuition (cf. Steiner 1993 [GA 12]). In ancient times, Steiner says, knowledge, art and religion/morality were one undifferentiated whole (we can still see how this is so in certain aboriginal cultures). In the course of history, they have separated from each other and become independent fields of cultural practice. But their destiny, according to Steiner, is to unite again, on a higher (or deeper) level, retaining the levels of differentiation that they have achieved. This is necessary because the deep split between these different fields of human endeavours produce a split also within the human being, preventing us from reaching down into the spiritual sources of our existence.

A forerunner to the future synthesis of art and science is Goethe, who acknowledged that beauty is a manifestation of the secret laws of nature and that art is a most appropriate way to express those laws.[2] Anthroposophy, or spiritual science, also paves the way for this to happen. Again, in ancient times, children were educated out of an instinctive spiritual wisdom, which is now lost. We cannot go back to this instinctive knowledge; instead, we must go forward to an *intuitive* knowledge of how to teach, Steiner suggests. Intuition is a spiritual function, by which we know the spiritual element in the human being (and in nature). It is out of the intuitive knowledge of the spirit that we must educate today. But knowledge of the spirit in the modern era is abstract and dead: Steiner takes Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill as illustrations of such thinking. Modern thinking about the spirit resembles a skeleton; a lifeless structure of ideas connected by mechanical associations. It must become alive by developing living thinking and living concepts (1986a [GA 307], Lectures 1–4). In our actual experience, we never see life arise out of dead matter, but we see how living things die; how death comes out of life. In the same way, the abstract and dead thinking of modern times is really the product

[2]Natural science needs a 'redemption' through art, and Goethe's studies of nature gave an important impulse in this direction. Art in its turn needs to be redeemed by religion, and religion is to be redeemed by knowledge, i.e. spiritual science (Unger 2012). Redemption here means a kind of liberation or 'unfreezing' from too rigid and limiting practices and thought patterns. This warming up and expansion come from the feeling realm, the cognitive aspect of feelings, 'thinking with the heart' and not only with the head.

of a spiritual *life*, a life that flows in our unconscious (ibid.). The task is to reconnect our thinking with this inner, spiritual wellspring. As pointed out in Chap. 3, Steiner's 'philosophy of spiritual activity' (Steiner 1995a [GA 4])[3] intends to lead the reader to the immediate experience of living thinking: a thinking that perceives itself *as it takes form*, which is the first step towards the reconnection to its spiritual source. Steiner exhorts teachers to let thinking come alive in this way in their whole being; to develop thoughts full of character and humanity; to get beyond the bleak, impersonal, objective, purely observing, and neutral kind of thinking that is the modern academic norm—but which is now, after the event of post-modernism and post-structuralism, beginning to lose its hold at least in some corners of academic life.

Teachers must not only develop living thinking; they must also learn to appreciate living *speech*—the life of the *Logos*. Western humanity began to lose the inherent spiritual quality of words and speech already in the seventeenth century, Steiner claims. At that time, Francis Bacon in his *Novum Organum* proclaimed the famous four categories of idols, which, in his view, stand in the way of objective scientific knowledge. One of these categories is the 'idols of the market', which consists mainly of *words*. Human beings reason through words, but words can easily lead us astray from the real things, Bacon argues. Objective knowledge must be based only on 'objective' sense-perception. By this line of thought, the human, 'subjective' element of knowledge is rejected. When this view enters education (as it did), the consequence is that teaching no longer finds support in the human element (*das Menschliche*), but only in the external world (*das Außermenschliche*). We see this happening in the educational thinking of Michel de Montaigne, John Locke, and Johann Amos Comenius, Steiner says (1986a [GA 307], p. 100). The power of living speech should be rekindled, and this can be done on the basis of a new understanding of spoken language. A word is not a mere conventional sign, or an abstract pattern of sounds (phonemes), which accidentally has come to be associated with the thing it refers to. Although this is certainly the mainstream view today, there are a few modern linguists and philosophers that adhere to renewed versions of a more or less onomatopoetic view of language, without being influenced by Steiner (see for example Jacobson and Waugh 1979).[4] One major example is Merleau-Ponty (1973, 1992), who emphasise the expressionist and *gestural* character of words and speech. A spoken word is a gesture in sound and rhythm, and these concrete sensual qualities express aspects of its meaning. To be sure, the experience of these qualities takes place in the subconscious, they are part of the archaic evolution of human language. We seldom experience them, because we mainly use words as signs, not as gestures. But as teachers, we must learn to use words as gestures; we must feel the sense qualities of the vowels and consonants, as

[3]English edition: Steiner (2011).

[4]See also Hadreas (1986, pp. 100ff) for a highly interesting example of how the words for earth and sea in different languages share a similar expressive structure, despite consisting of different phonemes. Furthermore, there is the fascinating book of Abram (1997), who presents an ecological philosophy of language, based on similar ideas.

well as the rhythm of the phonemes, and we must learn to use these in an intentional way to convey what we wish to say.

Poets and writers may be more sensitive to these aesthetic qualities of words. Thus, the famous Argentinian author Borges (1986) talks about how the English word 'moon' reflects something of the moon's qualities: its stillness, how it makes us slow down when we say it, and its roundness, expressed in the oo-sound (and the letter O), and how it starts with almost the same sound as it ends.

Steiner was rather optimistic about the efficiency of the educational methods he proposed, despite their high demands on teachers, their complexity and their fathomless grounds in the spiritual nature of the human being, as well as in our past and possible future evolution.[5] Economy in teaching was a quality that would emerge of itself, if teaching was based on a true knowledge of human nature. One would therefore be able to teach in a quarter of an hour what normally would take two hours, Steiner promised in a lecture to prospective parents of the first Waldorf school.[6] This somewhat naïve optimism is rather like the one displayed already by Comenius in the seventeenth century, in his *Didactica Magna* (1967). In the preface to this work, Comenius describes his method as—among other things—quick and time saving. Like Steiner, Comenius also wanted to 'follow nature' in his educational ideas and teaching methods (cf. Dahlin 2009). However, Steiner strongly objected to how Comenius had brought the principle of observability (*Anschaulichkeit*) into pedagogical thinking, turning teaching and learning too much into sense-bound activities (Wiehl 2015). This is important to note, because there is a tendency to interpret Waldorf education as 'against thinking' in a general sense, frowning on everything that smacks of intellectualism. But Steiner often pointed to the necessity of a middle course: the emphasis on narrativity and on aesthetic and artistic activities must not be taken as a rejection of the significance of thinking. For instance, Steiner opposed the idea that Mathematics should always be taught as concretely as possible: it is better if children *gradually* learn to do without the counting of apples or beans when finding the solution to arithmetical problems (1983 [GA 105], p. 37).

5.2 Some Basic Curriculum Principles

In the following, I will enumerate some of the basic ideas and principles for the Waldorf school curriculum and shortly account for the reasons behind them. The term 'curriculum' is here used in a wide sense, including everything that children or students in a Waldorf school or preschool may experience or are supposed to

[5]It is important to emphasise that the future of human evolution is by no means *given*, it is a drama the outcome of which is highly uncertain (cf. Dahlin 2012).

[6]'A lecture for prospective parents of the Waldorf school'. Available: http://www.bobnancy.com/lectures/s3829a.html (accessed 01 Feb 2017).

experience, during their school day—consciously or subconsciously. Thus, not only the contents of teaching and learning, but also the way the teachers teach, and the teachers themselves as persons are included in 'the curriculum'. Even the aesthetics of the internal and external architecture of the school house is part of it, because in the ideal Waldorf school, this aspect of the external environment is consciously designed to support children's development. All aspects of the curriculum are related to the potentials for learning that children have in different ages and phases of development. Therefore, a detailed knowledge of child development is of vital importance (Steiner 1998 [GA 297], p. 45).

A certain reservation may be needed concerning the possibility of conveying in book form the whole, or even the most essential, of the curriculum and practice of Waldorf education. One cannot really understand what it means to be a Waldorf teacher merely by reading this, or any other, summary of the 'basic principles'. One major reason for this is that (Waldorf) teaching is an art, and artistic work is always based on concrete and context-bound personal judgements about, for example, what is 'too much' and what is 'too little' of one thing or another.[7]

5.2.1 General Principles

1. *The Waldorf school curriculum encompasses 12 years, starting at the age of 7 and ending at the age of 19*. Contrary to the major trends of schooling in Steiner's time, Steiner saw the general need for children to learn and develop up until the end of the teenage years. As noted above (Chap. 4), the four essence members of the young person have not fully come into the world until the age of 21 (when the 'I' is fully incarnated). Today, we know that the teenage brain is still not fully developed. These are, in principle at least, good reasons for establishing a general 12-year schooling. In practice, this is already the case in many developed countries, but not out of concern for the well-being of young people, but because of labour market conditions. In addition, it may be noted that there should be no gender differentiation during these 12 years. From his experiences as a private tutor, Steiner realised that boys and girls develop psychologically in very different ways (see above, Chap. 2). But his conclusion of this observation was not that they should have different or separate educations. Instead, they should go to school together, because by learning and developing together, they would round off or balance out their respective, biologically based, one-sidedness.

[7]An interesting advocate for teaching as an art is Eisner (1985), who expresses some insights overlapping with those of Steiner: teachers make judgements based on qualities that emerge during the actions of teaching; teachers are influenced by qualities and contingencies that are unpredictable; the ends of teaching are created in the process of teaching; and teaching can be performed with such skill and grace that the experience of the students is *aesthetic* (pp. 175–177).

2. *All education is self-education.* On whatever level, education is essentially always self-education. Self-education is here not meant only in a subjective sense, as when one is engaged in studying and exercising by oneself, but also in an objective sense. *E-ducare*, German *Er-ziehung*, literally means to draw (*ziehen*) out or up—the implication being that one leads another human being, another *self*, to the experience of the stage of cultural development that humanity has reached (1986b [GA 308], p. 81). One does not work directly on the self of the student, one only brings it to the possibility of experiencing the world. How the self of the student is affected by these experiences depends on what it brings with it from the spiritual world; in this sense, it is always educated by itself. As a teacher, one must even feel a certain hesitance regarding the intention of teaching something to children, Steiner says, because the basic reaction of the child to being taught is resistance (1986a [GA 307], p. 87). Children do not by nature take it for evident that they must be taught things, on the contrary. Therefore, as a teacher, one should ask oneself how this basic resistance can be transformed into a willingness to learn.
   This idea of self-education clearly puts Steiner in the tradition of educators who proclaim the 'gardening' metaphor for teaching, as opposed to that of 'engineering'. As teachers, what we can do is to provide as good an environment as possible for children to learn and develop by their own activity (1989c [GA 306]; especially Lectures 2 and 3 emphasise the importance of the surroundings). However, to provide this environment is not an easy task, and Steiner would certainly not agree with modern tendencies to reduce the teacher to a coach or a facilitator, which ultimately turns teachers' work into merely moderating and administrating groups of self-regulated learners. On the contrary, the teacher must be ensouled by the subject taught, and the subject must be surrounded by the authority of knowledge and culture, which the teacher must embody. Without passion for the subject, teachers lack one of the most important qualities for their work (cf. Reichenbach 2012).
3. *What is taught and how it is taught must be appropriate to the age of the child.* Steiner often complained that social work in our present intellectualistic culture is so much ruled by abstract and dead truths, which accomplish nothing of what we really wish for. Abstract and linear thinking makes us blind for what is appropriate for children to learn in the different phases of childhood. One such abstract truth is that we want schools to educate intelligent people; therefore, we must start as early as possible to cultivate the intellect of the child. This idea of starting 'as early as possible' has gained even more strength in our time, due to the discovery of the so-called plasticity of the young child's brain. But it is detrimental to the child's healthy development (cf. Chap. 4), and it will not accomplish its desired aim. If we want intelligent grown-ups, we must not start too early with intellectual training. To abstract, linear, mechanical thinking, it may seem obvious that if we want to cultivate intelligence we should start as early as possible. But this kind of thinking cannot grasp the living truth, the truth of real life, that for the young child—before the age of puberty—the

intellect is actually cultivated by a sound belief in and respect for the authority of the teacher (Steiner 1999a [GA 177], pp. 131–132) (more about the authority of the teacher below).

4. The development of the abilities of the soul is of primary importance; the retainment of factual knowledge is secondary. In classical German educational thought, the emphasis on faculties and abilities is called *formale Bildung*, in contrast to *materielle Bildung*, which focus on the acquisition of knowledge contents. Steiner was certainly more concerned with the former. This may have been a reaction on his part against the almost complete dominance of the latter in the traditional, mainstream school system of the time. It should not be interpreted as a disregard for the knowledge content, because, for one thing, even the content must be considered from the point of view of which abilities can be exercised, and what soul qualities need to be supported, in different ages. However, the most basic task of school is to enhance as much as possible the functions of thinking/perceiving, feeling, and will. Thinking and perceiving—the head or 'the upper man'—as well as willing—the limbs or 'the lower man'—should be awakened through the feeling life, 'the middle man' (lungs and heart). The teaching of mere ideas and concepts should be avoided before puberty; otherwise, we will educate 'sceptics', not only in their thinking (which is not too bad), but also in their feeling and will (which is worse) (1986a [GA 307], p. 233).[8]
5. *Teaching in the early school years must be addressed primarily to the feelings*. It should be full of warmth, interest and enthusiasm. By addressing the feelings, a bridge is created between thinking and will. This brings together the basic polarity between 'head' and 'limbs', which tend to fall apart in modern human beings. It is as if only our heads are educated by being filled with ideas that have little or no connection to our feelings and our will. We tend to live in our heads and leave the rest of the body to itself, as it were (cf. Shusterman 2012). This tendency began to appear in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the time when Western culture turned towards intellectualism. In contrast, in the Waldorf school, children should *feel* the ideas they pick up; because through feeling their *will* may be activated.

   A specific consequence of this principle is how writing is taught in Waldorf schools (writing is taught before reading). In Waldorf schools, children are not hurried into reading and writing; they are expected to learn when they are ready for it, which can differ a lot between individual children.[9] For many children, a letter is a rather abstract and alien thing, according to Steiner. The letters are

[8]It may happen that the striving for a harmonious, all-rounded development of human abilities comes into conflict with the intellectual talents that some students may have in certain areas, and which they wish to develop further (cf. Helsper et al. 2007). In the Waldorf school ethos, such students may even be stigmatised as a swot. This problem takes a lot of attention and care for the teacher to handle.

[9]See Suggate et al. (2013) and Suggate (2013) for empirical evidence that in the long run it does not matter much whether a child achieves literacy at an early or a later age.

therefore introduced in an aesthetic and somewhat playful way by letting them emerge out of concrete forms and pictures (1986a [GA307], pp. 263ff). The letter S, for example, may be extracted from the picture of a swan, the head and long neck of which resembles the S-shape. This is somewhat in line with how the letters of the Roman alphabet emerged in cultural history, the letter A, for example, being a transformation of the sign for 'ox' in the Phoenician script, the inverted A resembling an ox's head. This is one reason why Steiner is mistakenly associated with the Herbartian idea of letting children repeat the stages of cultural history. Steiner based his pedagogical suggestions on much more complex ideas.

Letting the letters emerge out of an aesthetic activity like drawing animal forms is also an illustration of how the abstract concept (allowing for letters to be like concepts) is like the end product of a living activity that involves the 'lived body' (Merleau-Ponty) of the child. Learning is most genuine when it is based on participation in a living activity that engages the whole being.

6. *Teaching is directed to the whole class*. The classroom is taken as a paradigm of society and the teacher must strive to establish as good and wholesome a classroom atmosphere as possible (Waldorf teachers are certainly not alone in doing this). There is no singling out of more advanced or more slow students and giving them special tasks or instructions. If help is needed by one or a few children, this should be given in the context of whole class teaching. Only in very problematic cases is extra tutoring outside the class provided. As Ginsburg (1982) points out in her comparison of Steiner and Piaget, the latter also considered whole class work as important to counterbalance the egocentric tendencies of children's thinking.
7. *The cultivation of the will depends upon repetition and the cultivation of habits*. The will is not developed by being given general exhortations to make more effort or to perform better; this will only make the child weak and nervous. Instead, children should be given concrete practical tasks and told to carry them out every school day for some months, or even for a whole year (1992a [GA 293], p. 73)[10]. This kind of repetitive action also strengthens the memory, because the power of memory derives from feeling and will, not from intellectual memory exercises (ibid., p. 122). It may be interesting to add that the practice of repetition is a strong element in the teaching of various traditional art forms in the Far East, including martial arts (cf. Hisayama 2014, pp. 110ff). In classical Chinese painting, for example, one starts by drawing a straight line again and again, striving for a 'perfect' expression of this simple form. The perfection of the form is related to the quality of the so-called *chi* that it manifests, and *chi* corresponds to the energy of what Steiner calls the etheric body, which is also related to memory (see Chap. 4, note 4).

[10]English edition: Steiner (2004).

8. *Moral education should be based on imagination and feeling, not on precepts or commandments.* If we give children moral precepts or rules that we demand them to follow, we merely awaken feelings of antipathy and opposition. Instead, children should be encouraged to develop their own moral sentiments based on examples and stories, fictional or based on facts. However, asking young children to form explicit moral judgements should be avoided, because the ability to form independent individual judgements does not arise until puberty (when the astral forces are set free). Then, children can develop morally as free human beings. Much disgust and hatred have arisen against the noble and beautiful moral ideals in human history, because they have been presented to children as precepts and intellectual ideas (Steiner 1991b [GA 305], pp. 68ff).
9. *Arts and handicrafts are as important as cognitive subjects.* Pestalozzi's well-known principle that education is not of the 'head' alone, but also of the 'heart' and the 'hands', is generally applied in all grades of the Waldorf school, not only in the lower ones. Various forms of art and handicraft are practiced in the afternoons, when 'the hands and feet'—that is, the will—are more energetic than thinking and cognition. All crafts (including knitting and forging work) are taught to both boys and girls. In the lower grades, the recorder—or a special pentatonic flute—is played for a short while every day.[11] In addition to sports and gymnastics, Eurhythmy, the special form of dance that Steiner created, is also part of the Waldorf curriculum.
10. *No graded marks, but individual reports, are given at the end of each school year*. In these individual reports, the student is not primarily compared to a general standard or norm, but to him- or herself: what are the strengths and the weaknesses; what efforts and what progress have been made during the year, etc. The report should be supportive and constructive. Only in grade 12, marks are given, since they are needed in the public merit system.
11. *Education must be salutogenic.* The bodily states of adult life are sometimes the consequences of the state of the soul in some phase of childhood. We therefore need to see the connection between medical science and education. The forms of teaching and instruction that children experience in school will influence their future health. Even the food that they eat must be considered; some children may need a particular diet (1986a [GA 307], p. 215).

The health of the adult population is also, obviously, a concern of society. The question of how to organise society in a just and fruitful way is therefore partly an educational question, which is in turn a medical question (Steiner 1989d

[11]The pentatonic scale is considered especially suitable before the age of 9. There is an interesting phenomenology behind this idea, explained by the anthroposophist and composer Lauer (1989, p. 189ff): the pentatonic scale lacks a definite tonic or starting note; that is, any of the five notes can be used as the tonic. It can therefore be said to lack a definite base, or ground—it is as if the music is hovering above the Earth, never landing. This agrees with the nature of the young child; whose soul is not yet really 'grounded' on the Earth. Pentatonic music is found in many ancient cultures, such as the Chinese, the Aztec in South America, the ancient Egyptian, and the Celtic.

[GA 314], p. 238).[12] However, a salutogenic teaching practice is not achieved without a clear and sensitive judgement on behalf of the teacher, because it often has to do with maintaining a middle course between 'too much' and 'too little'—and where these limits go is hard to define in general terms. In his opposition against the mainstream school practices of overexerting children's memory, Steiner is often perceived as saying there should be no memory exercises in Waldorf schools. But exerting the memory too little can *also* have negative effects, causing inflammatory tendencies in later years (1988 [GA 226], p. 111). However, Steiner does not give an explicit and general answer to the question of how to find the right balance between 'too much' and 'too little', probably because there is no such answer. It seems that this problem can only be solved in practice, by the intuition and judgment of the teacher.

5.2.2 *Specific Principles*

1. *The preschool teacher should be a 'model'* (Vorbild) *for the child to imitate*. Before the age of seven, children learn mainly by imitation (this was stated already by Aristotle in his Poetics [1448b, 5–9]).[13] The child at that age has a strong need and instinct for imitation. It is therefore important that preschool staff is engaged in clearly visible activities, for example, cooking and house care; but also creative ones like painting and handicrafts. Such activities should be carried out with grace and joy and the children should have the possibility to imitate them in their own way. Somewhat similarly, Piaget also pointed out that receptive learning is as natural for the child as is spontaneous activity, and the Waldorf preschool builds almost exclusively on this fact (cf. Ginsburg 1982). But Steiner extends the insights of Piaget by pointing out the deep and penetrating nature of children's sense-based receptivity. In one lecture, he compares the child during the first seven years to a big eye. But this eye is not merely a mirror producing an inverted picture of the world, as described in physics. The pictures that the eye receives, Steiner claims, affect the circulation of the blood in the choroid, and the whole eye adjusts itself accordingly. Not only that, the whole etheric body takes up the image, and thereby the blood circulation and the vascular and metabolic systems are affected. Thus, the whole organism is informed by what it senses of the environment; and tendencies are implanted which remains for the rest of life. Of course, these are very subtle processes, which cannot be observed by the physical eyes, but it does not take too much imagination to admit that they can be real. It is because of these subtle processes

[12] In another context, Steiner says that the social question is really a moral-religious question, albeit on the condition that such questions are dealt with on the basis of spiritual insight (1986a [GA 307], p. 28). One may take this as an example of a hopelessly muddled view of the world—or as one of how everything can be seen from many different but equally relevant points of view.

[13] http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html (accessed 01 Feb 2017).

that the very being of the adults surrounding the child is so important. As Steiner often said, children do not follow what you say, they imitate what you are and what you do (1989e [GA 311], pp. 25ff).

The principle behind this reasoning could be summarised as that teaching in the age from 0 to 7 should be *formational* (*gestaltende*), with the important addition that it is not about the child being formed like a lump of clay in the teacher's hands, but about the teachers *forming themselves* and their actions as a model for the child to imitate (Steiner 1979 [GA 304a], p. 170).

2. *During the first seven years, the sense organs should be particularly cultivated*. A hasty interpretation of this principle would be that children should be surrounded by aesthetically attractive things and environments. However, the crux of the matter is what is regarded as aesthetically attractive by a child. It is not about beauty in a conventional or superficial sense; it is about what may stimulate children's imagination. Nowadays, toys produced for children are often full of realistic details, which surely captures the eyes and the interest of children. But often it does not take long before such a toy is put in a corner and forgotten. Why? A normal child, Steiner claims, will reject a 'beautiful doll'—realistic in all its details, down to the eyelashes—and prefer a piece of wood or anything that activates the imagination (1990 [GA 95], p. 55). To give a child a 'beautiful doll' is really like giving its brain a whipping, Steiner claims (1986a [GA 307], p. 115). We know that when small children draw a human being, they draw a head and two legs; that is an expression of the very vague, global image they have of the human body. If they draw a mouth to the face, it may be displaced or disproportioned. Therefore, the child cannot understand all the details of the doll's realistic body, that is why its brain is 'whipped'. If instead you present the child with a rough outline of a human body, like a small round ball from which a 'dress' flows out and play with it as if it were a person, its imagination is stirred to see it as a human being, and its brain is stimulated instead of 'punished'. Thus, to cultivate the sense organs does not mean to present children with aesthetically elaborated toys and other things; on the contrary, it means presenting them with simple, half-formed objects that they must fill out or make complete with their own inner pictures.

Since Steiner's time, the market of children's toys has developed a thousand-fold. It is now a big industry, aligning itself with film and other media productions. There seems to be very little discussion and reflection on the subtler, indoctrinating aspects of these interventions in children's life. A recent development are the so-called transformers: plastic toys—sometimes with electronic or digital additions—that can be converted to different beings, such as a machine, an animal or a human being.[14] The implicit message of such a toy is completely in line

[14]For an example, see https://www.amazon.co.uk/Transformers-Robots-Disguise-3-Step-Grimlock/dp/B00P95Q2VC/ref=sr_1_3?s=kids&i.e.=UTF8&qid=1479717353&sr=1-3&keywords=transformers.

with the ontological assumptions of materialistic and technicist science: the human being is an *animal*; the living organism is a *mechanism* (for a serious discussion of the possible impact of such toys on children, see Rittelmeyer 2007; Chap. 3).

3. *From class 1 to 7 (approximately), the teacher should be a natural authority*. In Steiner's time, teachers in general presumably had a certain formal authority, on whatever level they were teaching. It was based simply on their position as professional teachers. Steiner recognised, however, that opposition against traditional norms and values, and the desire for freedom, was growing strong among people in his time (1986a [GA 307], pp. 54–55). Human beings want less and less to stand on the ground of memories and ideals of the past; they want freedom. In a way, Steiner's diagnosis of his time anticipates what the German sociologist Thomas Ziehe (1982) calls 'being culturally set free': moral, cultural and religious traditions are no longer considered self-evidently valid. One consequence is that school has lost its 'aura' as something of great value and importance. For many youngsters, school nowadays is just something you must get through on the way to the freedom that comes with being an adult. Therefore, teachers nowadays must *earn* their authority and respect, not least from their students (Ziehe 1996).

The external social and cultural conditions of schooling in Western society have developed in such a way that Steiner's idea of the teacher as a natural authority has become even more relevant. Steiner does not oppose the desire for individual freedom inherent in modern people, on the contrary. But, he claims, we are seriously mistaken if we believe that freedom should be given to children as early as possible. This would go against the laws of child development. Only a child, who in the period between seven to fourteen years old has felt genuine respect for their teacher, can later develop true personal freedom. But children should not respect their teachers out of moral obligation, or fear of punishment. The feeling of respect should arise naturally, out of the realisation that the teachers care for them and their future and that they have more extensive knowledge, not only of facts but also of what is good and valuable. The teacher knows things about the world that the child also wants or needs to know (1980 [GA 150], pp. 19–20).

The child's respect for the authority of the teacher should rest on the experience of the teacher as *representing the world* to the child. This idea is rather like what Hannah Arendt meant when she said that teachers should really take responsibility for the world and, with this feeling, show it to the children, as if saying to them: 'This is our world' (Arendt 1961, p. 189).[15] In doing this, the teacher represents the

[15]The context of Arendt's reasoning is political philosophy and thus completely different from that of Steiner. However, she points out that true authority is clearly separated from force or violence (these are resorted to when authority is lost), and that it is incompatible with rational persuasion, because the latter presupposes equality and argumentation (1961, p. 93). In these aspects, there is a certain affinity with Steiner's ideas, which also exclude force, and opposes the view that children before puberty should be reasoned with as equals. Arendt further argues that the loss of the traditional meaning of authority is related to an increasing unwillingness among modern people to take on responsibility for things.

past, but the children belong to the future. The teacher must leave the future open for what the new generation will bring into the world. Nevertheless, the teacher is an authority in that she knows the history of the world and what it has become, and this the children must also know, in order to recreate the world for themselves.

From a Waldorf perspective, the authority of the teacher is also based on the experience that what was taught and learned in a lower grade proves to be useful or meaningful in a higher grade. That is the advantage of having one class teacher in most subjects for many years.

That the teacher should be an authority may fly in face of many mainstream teachers and educational thinkers today, when adherence to the ideals of democracy and equality is widespread and taken as the very basis of modern society. However, it is important to see that the authority Steiner speaks of is *natural*, not based on the formal position of the teacher. Furthermore, the feelings of respect that is hopefully evoked in the children is counterbalanced by another kind of respect that the teacher should have for the child, partly based on the recognition that the child is so much 'closer' to the spiritual world. A wise teacher knows that he can learn a lot from a child, and this should inspire a feeling of reverence in him (1989f [GA 127], p. 64) (see also Weiss [2015] for an interesting comparison between Steiner's view of the teacher–child relation and the concept of recognition [*Anerkennung*] in the social philosophy of Axel Honneth).

However, it is important to note that after grade 7, when children enter puberty, the authority relation between the teacher and the students should fade away, and a relation of friendship and equality should take over (this transition may not be easy to accomplish for all teachers). This is the time when the young person starts to develop their own, independent judgement of things, and they should be given the possibility and freedom to do so.

4. *From class 1 to 8, there should be one class teacher leading the class and carrying out the main subject lessons*. By this arrangement, a deep trust and appreciation may develop between the teacher and each child. A condition for the continuity of relationship and communication is established. The teacher comes to know the characteristics of each child and may more easily intuit what it needs for its growth and development. Ashley (2009) considers this as part of the stability that Waldorf education creates for the child, as well as the teacher, which in turn creates good conditions for the realisation of the overarching aims and ideals that have been proclaimed for education for over a century, but so far with little success. However, the back side of the arrangement with a class teacher is of course that if the relation does not go well, a child may be stuck in a problematic teacher relation for many years. Empirical studies have recorded some discontent among former Waldorf students in this regard, see Helsper et al. (2007). A class teacher takes on a great responsibility for the development of individual children, which sometimes makes the relationship problematic. The teacher is not just an educational professional, but becomes a 'significant other'

for many children (Ullrich 2008). Because of the risks involved, Ullrich (ibid.) recommends that the class teacher years be ended in grade 6. Here, it must also be noted that the practice of having a class teacher for eight years is nowadays actually questioned and being abandoned by some Waldorf schools, for various reasons. One reason is the problem just mentioned, another is the growing lack of teachers with a sufficiently qualified Waldorf teacher education.

5. *Rhythm and musicality is an essential curriculum element*. This is an aspect of addressing 'the middle' of the human being: the feeling life, connected to the rhythmic functions of the heart and lungs (1986a [GA 307], pp. 121ff). It is especially important in the 7–14-age period, when teaching should be *enlivening* (*belebende*) (Steiner 1979 [GA 304a], p. 172). The learning process involves many polarities that must be considered by the teacher, such as 'breathing in and breathing out' in both a literal and a metaphorical sense, related to the polarity of observing/receiving versus doing/acting/practicing. Another polarity is remembering versus forgetting, related to sleep and wakening. Sleep and forgetting are actually as significant for learning as their opposites, which has recently been indicated by brain research (cf. Blakemore and Frith 2005, pp. 173f). One practical consequence of this is the organisation of teaching into subject epochs, lasting 3–4 weeks. During such an epoch, one subject is studied every day in the morning hours.[16] This allows for the things studied to be unconsciously digested during the night and then taken up again the next day. Ideally, a theme is dealt with in three consecutive days. On day 1 the theme is presented in artistic and vivid images, addressing the senses and the imagination. On day 2, the material is worked through by recalling, retelling, discussing and perhaps dramatising. On the third day, children work more individually by writing and drawing their own pictures of what they have understood, forming their own conception or 'individualised concept' of the theme (cf. Ginsburg 1982, p. 335). On a larger timescale, when the epoch is finished the whole subject is left to rest and forgotten, until it is brought up again at a later time. According to Steiner, creating such a rhythm in the children's learning contributes to the individualisation of the process; it gives each child the possibility to digest the knowledge content in its own way.

Rhythm is related to the musical element in education, and music is an expression of the inner world (1991a [GA 301], pp. 168ff). The musical element is not only present in music as such, but also in language and speech. If children have difficulties in writing orthographically[17] correct—which Steiner himself had as a child—it means that they have difficulties with musical hearing, that is, to hear the

[16]As noted above, the afternoons are devoted to bodily, practical or aesthetic activities. Cognitive subjects are usually studied in the morning, when the mind is fresh and more receptive; this is another aspect of rhythm on the daily scale.

[17]Orthography is about spelling, hyphenation, capitalisation, word breaks, emphasis and punctuation.

words in their full plastic content. Teachers must therefore also be very articulate in speaking. Language and speech also have melodic aspects, so rhythm and melody work together. By cultivating the sense for melody and rhythm in music, children also develop a sense for rhythm in language. A melodic phrase has a certain similarity to a correctly punctuated sentence. The musical element of language and speech usually lives in the subconscious, but teachers do well to bring this element into awareness and work with it consciously, for the art of teaching to overcome materialism. In our times, the spoken word seldom has the 'idealistic uplift' that causes genuine enthusiasm in the listeners (1992b [GA 224], p. 16). Teachers should not talk in a dry, mechanical voice, but endeavour to bring melodic, rhythmic and full-sounding (*Volltönende*) qualities into their speech.

The musical aspect of teaching can also be related to the *content* of what is taught. This is important especially in the subject of history before the age of twelve. History should then be presented in well-rounded, plastic images, but also include tensions and releases, contractions and expansions, almost like a symphony.

In the cultural history of mankind, rhythm has actually been a common *bonnes à penser* or 'tool for thinking', especially in non-literate cultures (cf. Egan 1998; with reference to Walter Ong). Rhythm is part of the tools of rime, narrative and metaphor; like when one sums up a teaching in rhythmic verses (cf. Mathisen 2015).

From the anthroposophical point of view, rhythm is an essential aspect of all life. It is an aspect that connects us to the whole cosmos; from the shifts of day and night to the rhythms of the starry constellations and the planets. As described in Chap. 4, the heart and the lungs are understood as the rhythmic system of the human being, placed between the nervous system (head/brain), and the metabolic system (stomach/limbs). But just as thinking, feeling, and will are not separate functions working in isolation from each other, so are the three organic systems also interacting and interweaving throughout the whole organism. The nervous system and the metabolic system both have their rhythmic aspects. This is evident from the rather recent development of chronobiology, a special field of research in biology and medicine. Chronobiology studies the various rhythms that regulate the organs and behaviours of human and other living organisms (see, e.g. Kreitzman and Foster 2004). The biologist Brian Goodwin even suggests that rhythm is the very essence of life, because it maintains the balance between order and chaos—which is the basic characteristic of living beings (Goodwin 1999). Too much order, and the organism dies out of petrification. Too much chaos, and the organism dies out of dissolution or disintegration.[18] The balance between order and chaos is important also in teaching and learning and can be related to Schiller's basic ideas in his

[18]In close observation of the heart beats, one finds that the interval between two beats always varies, even if the overall rhythm is steady, because the rhythm must adapt to everything else that goes on in the body. This is an example of the balance between order and chaos on the microlevel. If the interval was exactly the same, it would mean too much order and indicate a disturbance of the heart function (Goodwin 1999).

letters on the aesthetic education of man (for a discussion of this issue within the framework of chaos philosophy and with some references to Waldorf education, see Larsson and Dahlin 2012).

6. *The speech of foreign languages is learnt already in the early school years.* In the first Waldorf school, children were taught French and English. It is obviously useful to be able to communicate in a foreign language, and Steiner realised that it would be more and more important in the future. However, there are two other reasons for why this is introduced already in the lower classes. The first is that, according to Steiner, spoken language contains etheric forces that acts in a formative way on the young organism, especially on the rhythmic system (lungs and blood circulation) (1986a [GA 307], p. 199). However, different languages have slightly different effects in this respect. By learning to speak words of a foreign language, the one-sidedness of the mother tongue is compensated for. The second reason is that by introducing foreign language at a relatively early age one prepares the soul for openness to other languages and cultures. Ethnic and cultural hostility is actually to a large extent based on being too strongly identified with one's own mother tongue, Steiner claims (cf. Steiner 1981 [GA 299] and Denjean 1999) (this identification is of course completely subconscious).[19] Implicit in every language, there are different ways of apprehending things, ways that are expressed in (subconscious) imaginations and pictures. By conveying these imaginations to young children, their minds are opened to that which is 'other' and different, and they become more flexible. Steiner's view that different languages contain implicitly different world views is somewhat like the so-called Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, according to which different languages constitute different views of reality (see for instance Sapir 1983; Whorf 1956).[20]

It is important to note that in the early classes, foreign language teaching is kept on a strictly oral level. Spelling and grammar are not considered in the first school years, only how to pronounce the words and what they mean is conveyed. Rimes and songs are used to emphasise the rhythmic and musical qualities. Grammar and syntax are gradually and softly introduced in the third class, i.e., when the children are about 10 years old. Grammar and syntax are implicit forms of self-reflection (how do I speak? what rules do I follow?); they are therefore appropriate at this age, when self-awareness is intensified (cf. the 9-year crisis; Chap. 4).

[19]GA 299 is translated into English, cf. Steiner (1995b). This edition contains an interesting afterword by Adam Makkai, Professor of Linguistics at the University of Illinois.

[20]Even though Waldorf education grew out of German soil, Steiner intended it to be for the whole of humanity—which is not to say that its curriculum should not be adapted according to the ethnic context in which it is applied; on the contrary. This is, however, a challenging task that many Waldorf schools struggle with, especially since the recent interest in Waldorf education in China and other non-European nations.

7. *In the lower classes, studies of nature should be holistic and imaginative*. The child should get the feeling that not only 'I' can speak, but also animals and plants speak to each other, and to humans. Nothing should be considered as an isolated thing, but as connected to the world around it. The plant is related to the earth and the soil where it grows, as well as to the rain, the sunshine, the insects, and other animals; they all communicate with one another.[21] An 'ecological' perspective should dominate, but not in a way that lines up a lot of hard facts, but in a way that inspires the imagination to create holistic pictures of how different beings interact and interweave throughout nature. In the early school years, children still instinctively feel a part of the world, and this holistic approach to nature reflects this feeling.

The study of each plant or animal in itself, by dissection and analysis, comes later. This idea of starting with 'the whole', which is applied also in other subjects, is somewhat similar to what Comenius also proposed in his *Didactica Magna* (1967). Using the analogy of how Nature makes a fertilised egg develop into a chicken, Comenius points out how the contents of the egg to begin with is just one undifferentiated substance, which is separated into the white and the yolk, and then gradually becomes more and more differentiated, until the complex organism of the chicken is born. In the same way, teaching should start with a general characterisation of the whole of the subject and then gradually go into more details.

8. *In arithmetic, one starts from the whole and divides it into parts*. This is another example of the previous principle. In a way, Waldorf students learn division before addition, because arithmetic starts with the whole, 'the one', and then looks in what ways this whole can be divided. If you have one cake, you can divide it into two halves, that is, it can become two. Or three, or any number. Add all the pieces together and you have one cake again. The same operation can be carried out on any digit, say 14. 14 can be the sum of 6 and 8, or 5 and 9, etc. Therefore, instead of putting forth the problem 8 + 6 = ?, a teacher may ask: 14 = ? (of course, the + operation must be introduced first). The nice thing about such a question is that there are several possible and equally right answers, so many children can contribute to the solution. From this simple example, one gets the sense of how *life* can be brought into even such a brain-centred activity as arithmetic. According to Steiner, starting from the whole and moving into its parts has a stimulating effect on the so-called etheric body, the energy of living, formative forces (see Chap. 4 above) (1986a [GA 307], p. 181).
9. *Between the Rubicon years (9–12), the connections and relations between the human being and nature should be emphasised.* As noted above (Chap. 4), around the age of nine, children wake up to a more intense self-consciousness, which means that they start to feel separate from the world around them. To counterbalance this tendency, the relations between the human being and nature become an important theme for study (1986a [GA 307], Lectures 10 and 11).

[21]For an example, see Wohlleben (2016).

Different aspects of the human being are related to different aspects of the animal, the plant, and the mineral worlds; the latter is to be dealt with last, since it is furthest from the living human organism.

The Rubicon years, also called the heart of childhood, is the best time for developing living concepts (ibid., Lecture 9), that is, concepts that can grow and change with the individual, so that at the age of 40 we do not have to try to remember the correct definition of some concept that we heard of in school, but can express our own understanding of it, based on our own thinking and life experience.

10. *In the upper classes, science teaching should be based on a phenomenological approach*. Even though Steiner does not explicitly talk about a phenomenological teaching method for science, his suggestions for teaching methods in the later school years give clear hints in this direction (Wiehl 2015, p. 208). In a lecture on anthroposophy and science, Steiner (1994 [GA 81], pp. 17ff) describes the phenomenological approach to studying natural phenomena as based on patient and exact observations, out of which thoughts, ideas and principles are carefully derived. The result is a feeling that the laws and principles of natural phenomena are inherent in nature itself and then reappear in conceptual form in human consciousness. Ideas and concepts are not something that human thinking *adds* to nature in an external sense. Therefore, the deep and alienating split between subject and object, consciousness and nature, can be bridged and even healed. This approach to science teaching has been further explored by Dahlin (2001, 2003) and Østergaard et al. (2008).

The introduction of the scientific concept of causality starts around the second Rubicon, i.e. around the age of twelve. The lessons on modern science are counterbalanced by a more systematic study of art and art history; learning to understand the significance of different art forms in the cultural evolution of humanity. Thus, the understanding of science and art are equally important, addressing different aspects of the human being and contributing to the holistic character of Waldorf education. By the parallel study of science and art, Steiner also seems to intend a preparation for the experience of the world as a cosmic work of art, and of nature as a creative artist *par excellence*. This, in turn, has the potential to lead on to a spiritual experience of life (1986a [GA307], pp. 225–226). Thus, it may be taken as an aspect of the basic principle for teaching in the ages 14–21: *awakening* (*erweckende*) (Steiner 1979 [GA 304a], p. 178). Here, we also see how Steiner's vision of the future synthesis of science, art and religion informs the Waldorf curriculum.

11. *At the age of puberty, technical inventions and how they work should be studied.* Like many modern educators, Steiner also complained that despite the great technological changes that happened in his life time, nothing had changed in the school curriculum. The human spirit had created machines such as the steam engine and the railway—and of course many more things today. Many people could see the trains pass by, or ride on them, and yet they did not understand anything about how they worked. Thus, they had no part in the

spirit that had created these things; they were alienated from essential parts of human culture. Waldorf students should not be like this; they should *understand* how new inventions work, and to some degree learn to handle them. In other words, they should be open to the world around them, and puberty is the appropriate age for this opening (1986a [GA 307], pp. 196f). If young people do not develop a real interest in the world at this age (and not only in technology but in all other aspects as well), they will turn their interest towards themselves in an unhealthy manner, such as comparing themselves to others, becoming concerned with social status, and with physical pleasures such as sex, alcohol and drugs.

5.3 Being a Waldorf Teacher

Steiner puts a lot of responsibility on teachers. For instance, he claims that it is not primarily a question of the interest or efforts that students can bring to their studies, but how much interest, devotion and effort the *teachers* can bring to their teaching. Teachers must have the time to prepare their lessons to the degree that only the artistic expression in the classroom remains. Teachers must work out of their entire being, out of their human essence as it were, not merely out of their intellectual memory of facts and definitions. Only in this way can they educate whole and complete human beings.

The recent and by now well-known study of Hattie (2009, 2012) has made it clear that the teacher is the primary and most important factor for students' learning. The qualities or competencies of the teacher that Hattie identifies as most significant (see Hattie 2012) agree to some extent with those that Steiner wishes to see in a Waldorf teacher. For instance, Hattie says teachers need to be *caring* and *passionately engaged* in teaching and learning; they need to be aware of what *each student* is thinking and what they know; students and teachers need to *feel safe* to learn, i.e., errors must be welcomed as opportunities to learn, not discarded with criticism (cf. ibid., p. 22). About passion Hattie says it is a theme that is often avoided in the context of good teaching, because it is associated with emotionalism, being biased or less serious in one's teaching. But the key component of passion is 'the sheer thrill' of being a teacher (ibid., p. 19), and if teachers want to thrive in their work, they have 'to learn to experience the joy of inspired teaching' (p. 35). These are some of the qualities and abilities of a good teacher that Hattie portrays, which are in obvious agreement with Steiner's ideas (see further Lutzker in press).

5.3.1 Being Responsible for the World

We noted above that according to Arendt (1961), teachers' authority rests upon their being responsible for the world. This means that teachers must be open to the

world at large, to take a non-prejudiced interest in everything that is happening in society, culture, and politics; locally as well as globally. To be able to participate fruitfully in the world and do one's work in freedom, human beings must understand the times they live in and assimilate its dominant ideas (which does not necessarily mean agreeing with them). And what the teachers find in the world around them they should bring into the classroom—considering of course what is appropriate for the age of the children. In this way, teachers act as the link between school and the world outside.

Teachers should realise that human consciousness is not a mere observer of the world, it is an arena (*Schauplatz*) for world events. The human soul is an arena upon which events of great cosmic significance are repeatedly enacted. One may consider one aspect of being responsible for the world to be the understanding of one's consciousness to be such an arena. Steiner's early experience of geometry, when he envisaged the soul as an inner space in which spiritual beings appeared and events took place (2000 [GA 28], p. 21)[22] is an illustration of this view of human consciousness. Of course, in our everyday state of mind we are far from experiencing our consciousness in this way, but teachers should not shy away from such a possibility. Even though it seems irrelevant to the practical work of teaching, it is not.

5.3.2 *Being Able to Relate*

Another aspect of teachers' competencies is the ability to relate to children and students. Steiner went as far as saying that the most important requirement—even more important than subject knowledge—is that teachers have the heart, mind and temperament for gradually establishing a relationship between themselves and their students (1991c [GA 181], p. 136). He understood this statement would seem absurd to most of his contemporaries, and it probably still does to many people. Or, if one agrees, one would say that this is already considered in teacher education, where, for instance, preservice teachers are advised to break off their studies if they are seen to be unable to relate to students. But Steiner surely had deeper and perhaps more imponderable things in view than what is usually considered in this respect.

5.3.3 *Cultivating One's Inner Life*

As pointed out earlier (Chap. 4), human beings are made to learn and develop during the whole of life, particularly in the inner, soul-spiritual sense. This is

[22]English edition: Steiner (2010).

especially important for teachers. The teacher's personal cultivation of spiritual life includes a meditative or contemplative approach both to the knowledge content of their teaching, and to their work experiences. In this practice, the teacher becomes a learner, a student, on their own level of development. This is also part of the basis for the authority of the teacher: that they themselves are a student, a learner. It contributes to making the dialogue between teachers and students a genuine one, in which the students can feel that they participate in an action of communion with the teacher.

Steiner suggested some exercises for the practical development of thinking; which are also of relevance for teachers (1986c [GA 108], pp. 256ff). They are the following:

(1) exact observation of, for example, natural phenomena like the weather, then forming clear memory pictures of what one has seen;
(2) exact imaginations, for example, observing how another person behaves and then imagining how they will behave next time one meets them;
(3) becoming aware of cause and effect, for example, reflecting on the causes behind another person's behaviour;
(4) to consciously lead one's thought processes, to cut off distractions and focus on a theme or line of thought;
(5) exact memory, for example, trying to remember as many details as possible about another person;
(6) to think about possibilities, not making quick judgments or rushing to decisions.

Many of these exercises involve another person; for teachers, this other person is of course most often one of the children in their class; it is part of coming to know the individuality of each student. As for the first exercise, exact observation, Steiner says it is the most important one for teachers (1986a [GA307], p. 221); that is, the ability to observe the children, especially from the point of view of spirit, soul and body, and how they interact in each child. From such observations teachers can come to know, in an 'instinctually artistic way' (*instinktgemäß künstlerisch*), how to conduct their teaching.

Altogether, the six exercises develop the basic abilities of perception, the formation of inner pictures, and thinking, all of which are conditions for knowledge-based teaching and learning activities (cf. Wiehl 2015, p. 162f). By doing them, Steiner claims that prejudices, tendencies to premature judgment, and not seeing facts correctly may be overcome. There are, he says, many influences from our subconscious life that give colour and direction to our thoughts, but we are usually not aware of them. Our logical reasoning is often only a superficial justification of what our subconscious mind has already concluded.[23] The cultivation of the

[23]This is now verified by empirical studies, see for inst. Zajonc (1980). The difference between such studies and Steiner's approach is that the former just note the fact, whereas Steiner in addition points to the possibility of changing such ways of functioning through inner work.

abilities of exact observation and clear, impartial thinking are of course useful everywhere in life. But it is especially important in teaching and other social work.

5.3.4 *The Personhood of the Teacher: The Importance of 'Who You Are'*

In one of his letters, John the Apostle says, 'Children, love one another' (1 John, 3). The meaning of these simple words is not independent of who says them. Uttered by a fool, they carry no meaning at all, but said by a wise man in his old age, with a long and rich life behind him, their meaning is far and deep. In other words, the meaning of what a person says is not only in the words themselves, but also depends on the psychospiritual background of the person by which they are spoken (1999b [GA 161], p. 126). Thus, what a teacher says in the class, in teaching, is subconsciously taken up by the children in different ways, depending on the personhood of the teacher.[24] There are no 'teacher proof' ways of instruction.

It seems clear that if a teacher follows the suggestions and recommendations that Steiner makes regarding the cultivation of spiritual life, it will influence their personhood—whether this effect is for the good or not will show itself in their practice and their life (though one must be careful about judging people in this respect). What Steiner proposes here has some parallels with what has been suggested by Wivestad (2013), in a Kierkegaardian, existentialist approach to teaching and education. Children will often feel what kind of story we live by, Wivestad says, and if we live this story in an earnest and passionate way, we may give them a good example to follow, even if we fail. Personhood has very much to do with 'the story we live by'.

5.3.5 *About Planning One's Teaching*

In one of his lectures, Steiner presents an interesting and challenging fictional story about three teachers, each of which exemplifies a particular approach to their teaching work in terms of planning their future lessons (1982a [GA 166], pp. 60–81). Each teacher is interviewed at the beginning of the school year by the headmaster of the school, who asks them what conclusions they have drawn from their experiences of the previous year, and how those experiences will enter their plans for the upcoming year. The first teacher proudly recounts how he has evaluated the tasks he gave his students the previous year, both in lessons and as homework. He has now improved these tasks based on how the students responded.

[24]By personhood is meant something deeper and more encompassing than 'personality', which usually refers to a person's external and more obvious attitudes and behaviours (cf. Dahlin and Larsson in press).

The second teacher, equally proud, shows the new syllabus plan that he has developed by going through his syllabus for the previous year and correcting the mistakes he discovered he had made. However, the third teacher has a different approach. He says he has in his memory looked back over the previous year and tried to see the character of each of his students and what happened to them, what they went through, and if and how they changed. He had certainly made mistakes, but also good things, but this did not concern him so much. He thought that what had taken place was in a sense unavoidable, considering the character of his students, and the character of himself. As for the coming year, he had made no plans. He simply intended to study the character of his students, and since he had some practice in this during the summer holidays, looking at his previous students, he feels confident that he will now be better at it. As for lesson tasks and homework, he cannot present them now because he will create them on the basis of the observations of his students, which he has yet not seen. The headmaster is not very happy with the third teacher's approach. During the school year, he often inspects the lessons of the three teachers and finds that the third teacher is not doing as well as the other two. The headmaster is then promoted and another man takes his place. The new headmaster, on the contrary, likes the approach of the third teacher and encourages the other two teachers to learn from him. This new headmaster is, however, very soon transferred to another job. But he continues for years to follow the students of the three teachers and how they fare in life after leaving school. He finds out that the students of the first two teachers certainly become respectable and good people, but they do not accomplish very much in life. Those of the third teacher, however, although they were not particularly successful in school, become very significant persons and accomplish many good things.

Steiner's comment on the story is that the first two teachers are focused on the past and on the improvement of their own past mistakes, whereas the third teacher is more concerned with the students that is in his care at present, and how he himself participates in a living situation together with them. The story is touching in its implicit critique of the instrumentalist approach of 'performative efficiency', which characterise so much of modern society and which has increased a thousand-fold since Steiner's time. It is easily interpreted as putting a methodical, systematic approach up against an 'intuitive' one, rejecting the first and extolling the second. This would be in stark contrast to the many developments in different countries of syllabuses and curriculum plans for Waldorf schools, all of which (more or less) prescribe what is to be done in each school year, based on Steiner's recommendations and suggestions. One is drawn to the conclusion that Waldorf education in its own way encompasses both a systematic and an intuitive approach to teaching. But the intuitive is not to be confused with merely acting on the spur of the moment, without making plans and evaluations, and having no professional knowledge base. The systematic approach, on the other hand, is not to be understood as rules and models that should be applied in all lessons (cf. Wiehl 2015, p. 167).

5.4 A Note on School Architecture

With our extended concept of curriculum as including everything that students consciously or subconsciously experience during their time in school, even the forms and colours of the classrooms and school houses should be considered as part of the curriculum. Goethe once said that architecture is music that has congealed into silence; if that is true, we walk around in this silent music for the greater part of our life. Steiner had some interesting ideas for a new architecture, based on living, organic forms (1982b [GA 286]; cf. Bjørnholt 2014). His view was that the forms and colours of the buildings we dwell in affect our minds in a deeper way than those we commonly believe. In terms of the human sense organs (see above, Chap. 4), many more senses than the eyes are involved in experiencing architecture. For instance, a spatial form is a 'frozen movement'; therefore, in addition to the eyes, the kinaesthetic sense and the sense of balance are also involved in perceiving it. Where resources have been available, Steiner's ideas for an organic architecture have been taken up by Waldorf schools, resulting in some rather original school buildings.

Some interesting—albeit small scale—empirical studies of students' experiences of school buildings and classrooms are reported by Rittelmeyer (2002). Regarding colours, it was found that some children reacted with a slight increase of temperature in the breast region at the sight of red and yellow, and with a decrease at the sight of blue–white nuances. This is in accord with Steiner's recommendation to have walls of warm, red–yellow colours in the early years' classrooms, thereby activating the 'middle man', the rhythmic system, i.e. the breast region. In another study, children were told to look at photographs of school buildings and express their experience of what they saw. At the same time, their eye movements and the opening/closing of their pupils as they watched the pictures were registered. When looking at a cement-heavy and square-formed building with rows of equally sized square windows, the children often reported various feelings of dislike. These experiences were accompanied by a narrowing of the pupils, which is commonly established as a physiological correlate to feelings of antipathy. Looking phenomenologically at this physiological response as a *bodily gesture*, it can be understood as a subconscious expression of 'I close myself' and/or 'It gets darker' (cf. ibid., p. 61). It does not take much imagination to see how such a subconscious feeling for the school building among many students would affect the general atmosphere of a school.

It has been found in other studies that a feeling of *belonging* in school correlates with academic motivation (Resnick et al. 1997). When students feel safely 'at home' in school they are more likely to adapt to the norms of the school and make efforts in their studies. The emotional atmosphere of the school is of great significance for the quality of students' learning (Spitzer 2009). The studies of Rittelmeyer indicate that even school architecture may contribute to this atmosphere. Another contribution is how school life is organised. As Osterman (2000) points out, the organisation of schools often neglects and even undermines students' experience of being members of a supportive community. Steiner's idea of main lesson blocks (*Epochenunterricht*), in

which one subject is studied every morning for several weeks, is one aspect of how teachers' work is organised for the benefit of the children (and not for the administration). Steiner also had other ideas for school organisation, which correlated with his ideas for a new social order; this is the subject of the next chapter.

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Chapter 6
The Social and Political Aspects of Education

Abstract Steiner considered the free unfoldment of individuality to be the essential task of education. This requires more freedom from state rules and regulations than is the case for schools in most modern societies. Its creative nature makes education part of cultural life; it does not belong to the state or government organisation. Government organisation and cultural life are, or should be, two relatively independent realms of society; the third realm is economy. These three social realms should be based on the three social values we have inherited from the French revolution: equality in the state, freedom in culture and solidarity in economy. This is the basic view of Steiner's so-called social threefoldness. Steiner saw cultural life in general, and education in particular, as disempowered by the penetration of state and economy. Parallels to this view can be found in present-day social and political philosophy, such as that of Habermas and Cohen & Arato, where the cultural lifeworld and civil society are understood as illegitimately colonised by state and economic power, and in need of greater autonomy in order to liberate human creative forces. However, international agencies like the OECD have further increased the political influence of the state on education, eroding the professional knowledge base of teachers and turning them more into bureaucrats than creative artists.

Keywords Social threefoldness · Cultural lifeworld · Civil society · Individualism · School organisation

6.1 The Essential Task of Education and the Nature of Modern Society

Already in 1893, Steiner expressed his idea of the essential task of education to be the free unfoldment of individuality, which for him was the sole reality in the realm of culture (1989a [GA 30], p. 67). He considered this to be not merely a subjective ideal on his part, but an objective trend in modern social life that would grow stronger with time. There is a longing for the free cultivation and development of

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the individuality inherent in human nature. Steiner even states that in our age nobody should be forced to learn things by going to school; the teachers' task is not to implant knowledge content into the minds of children; it is to awaken their own desire to understand, their own longing for knowledge. In this way, education can still take place in an atmosphere of freedom (1994 [GA 4a], p. 247).

The strong drive towards individuality is inevitable, but it also has its negative side, which is an increase of antipathy in social life. Sympathy and antipathy are the two basic forces in the human soul; they are in a way 'given' by nature (Steiner 1983 [GA 21]). We cannot prevent immediate reactions of 'likes and dislikes' to arise, but we can learn to handle them more or less skilfully. In social life, sympathy is the force that binds us to other people, whereas antipathy makes us take a distance and affirm our autonomy and independence. If the latter tendency dominates and is unchecked, we risk ending up in a society of isolated individuals, in which feelings of community and solidarity with other people are sinking to levels below what is necessary for a sound and happy social life. John Dewey called this atomistic individualism and recognised its symptoms in American society almost a hundred years ago, warning for its social and moral consequences (Dewey 1981; pp. 575ff). According to Steiner's spiritual geography, the forces of individualism (and economism) are strongest in the Far West, so they would appear there first. In the East, there is more of collectivism and theocracy.[1]

It is interesting—and terrible—to see that the notion of individual freedom in education can easily be linked with present-day developments in information technology and communication technology. Thus, a recent article in *Die Zeit*, with the title 'A teacher for me alone' (Breithaupt 2016),[2] extols the future possibility of each student being connected to a computer that, on the basis of the student's neurological and physiological data, suggests what kind of learning activities they could profitably engage in: 'What about Maths? I see on your gaze and on your blood pressure that you are very focused right now', the computer suggests. A short interaction between the student and the computer ensues, ending with the computer saying that if the student solves the problem within 17 min s/he will be raised one level. The example so far exists only in imagination, but it shows how the idea of an education focused on individuality can be—already has been, to a certain extent—hijacked by technological (and economic) interests, thereby in fact turning it into its very opposite. It makes the student part of an impersonal technological system; a system based on values that derive from social and political interests, and not at all on the individuality of the student. In 2036, prophesies Breithaupt (ibid.), parents will book a 'virtual teacher' for their 5-year olds, and the voice of the computer will accompany us throughout our lives.

[1]This is obvious when looking at the history of Eastern societies, and it is still largely the case today, even though in China the bizarre mixture of state or semi-state capitalism and communist ideology (a form of cultural power) is almost overreaching itself (cf. Walter and Howie 2012). The worship of Chairman Mao was obviously in form not very different from that of the Divine Emperors in earlier history.

[2]The author, Fritz Breithaupt, is professor of Germanistics at the Indiana University, US.

The visions of Breithaupt and his likes go against the grain of everything that Steiner strived for in the educational realm. The efforts that he made on behalf of education were part of his work for social reform (Steiner 1997),[3] and as we have seen his view was that the renewal of society must be based on spiritual insight (above, Chap. 2). After World War I, the social and political situation of Germany was one of crisis in almost all respects. There was a great need for new ideas and new directions. It was in this time that Steiner tried to get a hearing among influential persons, as well as among people in general, for his vision of a three-folded society (1976 [GA 23]). He made great efforts to contact politicians and other influential people that he thought could appreciate this idea for a new organisation of society.[4] The basic principles of his vision are very simple. Modern societies are constituted by three different spheres or realms, which interact in all kinds of complex ways. One realm is that of *the state.* It is the realm of politics and power, and its main function is to constitute, enact and uphold the laws of the nation. The second realm is *economy* or 'the market'. In this realm, people produce things and sell them; it is the sphere of economical interchange and business transactions. The third realm is *culture*; this is the realm of art, science and religion, but not only that. Basically, culture is the realm of human creativity, learning and development. In traditional societies, culture is the sphere in which people seek connection to the spiritual world, which can take many forms, all of which are expressions of human creativity. Such expressions are of course still alive in modern societies, but the realms of scientific research, linked with technological inventions (and economical production), have come to play an ever-greater role.

The idea that societies consist of three realms, simply expressed as the state, the market and culture, is rather common in present sociology and political science. They have been called the great institutional metaphors of the modern world (Scott 1998). However, for Steiner they are not just metaphors. They are relatively independent realms of social functions, which are equally important but essentially different. In explaining his views of the nature and interactions between these three realms, Steiner claims that he is not propagating a new political ideology, but *reading the trends of the times*, or at least some of the trends; the *essential* ones from a human/spiritual point of view. He is not only describing facts; he is also trying to express the hidden virtual forces behind surface appearances. Some of these forces emerged in European social life already with the French revolution: the well-known ideals of *freedom*, *equality,* and 'brotherhood' or *solidarity*; ideals that since then have been central to many political reforms and revolutions, but still await their full realisation.

[3]This book consists of a selection of lectures from GA 192, 296 and 330-31. They deal extensively with the educational aspects of social threefoldness.

[4]Among the people that Steiner contacted were Richard von Kühlmann (German minister of Foreign Affairs), Arthur Polzer-Hoditz (counsellor to the Austrian emperor), Maximilan von Baden (cousin of the German emperor Wilhelm II) and Wilhelm von Blume (professor of State Law) (Kühn 1978; Lindenberg 1997).

The crucial idea of Steiner's vision of a threefold social order is that there is an essential correspondence between these three ideals and the three social realms: freedom is/should be the basic principle of cultural life; equality (before the law) is/should be the basic principle of the state (which constitute and maintain the rule of law); and solidarity is/should be the basic principle of economic life. Thus, the freedom and individualism of cultural life are counterbalanced by solidarity and community in economic life. In present-day capitalist economy, this kind of solidarity is to a large extent lacking; thus, individualism (or a distorted version of it) is allowed free rein in a basically consumerist culture.

If Steiner's vision of a threefold social order is accepted, one arrives at a standpoint which accommodates both liberalist and socialist/communist values: liberalism becomes the politics of culture, and socialist values rule in economy (as for equality before the law, it is presumably common to both of these ideologies, at least in theory).[5] The main mistake in liberalism is the extension of the ideal of freedom too far into the *economic* sphere, ending up with more or less ruthless forms of capitalism (social liberalism tries to contain the negative consequences of economic freedom). Especially in neoliberalism, freedom is strongly linked with *competition* in the economic sphere; i.e., the very opposite of solidarity. For Friedrich Hayek—the guru of economy behind the policies of Margret Thatcher in the beginning of the 1980s—competition was not only an economical principle but also a means of shaping a certain entrepreneurial mindset (Hayek 1973). However, from Steiner's point of view, competition belongs to the cultural sphere. Cultural life is partly a battle of ideas, ideals and values.What results from these battles is not only artistic work, but also new ideas for economic as well as political life. In Steiner's time, the obstacle for right-wing politicians to accept Steiner's view was its outspoken individualism. The conservative view was that the individual should merge with the nation, as the fundamental, ideal unit. Liberals, on their part, did not like the syndicalist tendencies implicit in Steiner's ideas for the organisation of economic life.

Socialism and communism are characterised by two other mistakes: the first is to let the state and the economy merge completely (communism), or partially (socialism); the consequences are more or less complete forms of *state capitalism*, which partly tend to have similar negative consequences as its liberal counterpart

[5]As will soon be clear, Steiner did not mean that the state should own the means of production and be an employer of workers. He rather envisaged economical life as organised on the cooperative principle: that consumers and producers unite in associations based on solidarity. As for the means of production, he suggested the *right of use* to replace the right of ownership. This requires the economic sphere to be transformed from a capitalist profit economy to an economy of solidarity, so that human individuality can flourish also in this field of life. According to Steiner, we make a big mistake by linking *wages* to *work*, since this inevitably turns human capacities into commodities. Consequently, the human being also becomes a commodity (here Steiner agrees with Marx, although he never refers to him in this context). But all human beings have the right to the economic means for fulfilling their basic needs, whether they are employed or not. Although Steiner never said so explicitly, the necessary consequence seems to be that a basic income must be guaranteed for all—an idea that has grown stronger in recent times (cf. Van Parijs 2001).

(in addition to other ones). The second mistake is the extension of the ideal of equality too far into the *cultural* sphere, resulting in oppression of individuality and creativity. Equality is then taken to mean more than just equality before the law; it comes to mean that all human beings are, or should, in some significant ways be 'the same'. However, in Steiner's time, the main obstacle for left-wing politicians to accept Steiner's view was their adherence to the idea of the class struggle; they could not accept collaboration with capitalists.

Another misunderstanding—one that tends to be common to both left- and right-wing ideologies, although more often explicitly expressed in the latter—is the linking together of *state* and *ethnicity*; hence the idea of *national* states (cf. Cassirer 1961). This idea arose in Western culture towards the end of the eighteenth century and was expressed by, for instance, Rousseau. It became the seed for the national Romantic movement that inspired people's wars of liberation in many parts of Europe. It was also a basic principle proclaimed by President Wilson in the peace negotiations after WW1. Each large enough ethnic population had the right to its own independent state. If these states were based on democratic principles, this arrangement would be a peace creating factor for the future. One wonders why Wilson did not consider this to apply to the USA, which is founded on a completely different principle—one that agrees with Steiner's view: the state, as the realm of equality, has nothing to do with ethnical identities: *all* are equal before the law.[6] Steiner considered Wilson's ideas and his role in the peace negotiations as catastrophic for their outcomes.

The three social realms, even though essentially different in nature, are not isolated from each other by watertight sheds. Just as the nervous system, the metabolism and the blood circulation interact on all levels of the human being, so do economy, culture and state (laws and regulations) interact in all social institutions and practices. The basic task of the state is to regulate their interaction in the most fruitful way for all citizens; striving for the fullest possible realisation of all the three values inherited from the French revolution. However, Steiner did not formulate any program for *how* this should be done. Some may perceive this as a weakness, but it is completely in accord with his democratic stance. If the majority of people accepted the soundness of the basic ideas, then the solutions to all the practical issues should not be dictated from above, but emerge out of the creative deliberations of the citizens themselves, and finally constituted as laws by the state.[7]

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[6]As Habermas (1992) argues, nationalism could be fruitfully replaced by 'constitutional patriotism'.

[7]In 1919–1920, Steiner and some of his followers did extensive public lecturing on the ideas of the threefold social order (published in GA 328-334). Steiner's lectures were rather popular, particularly in Württemberg, where they were often overfull, and they were reviewed in the daily press (Kühn 1978). Nevertheless, the movement for a threefold social order never became as large and influential as Steiner hoped for. Apart from criticisms, fabricated and false allegations were often published in the press, which made Steiner talk about 'factories of forged letters' that were sent to newspaper editors as 'authentic information' (1992 [GA 196], p. 83)—the machinations of fake news were operating already at that time.

This is an example of how the freedom of cultural creativity would inform the law constituting activity of the state.

6.2 Culture, Lifeworld and Civil Society

It would lead too far to go into all the details of Steiner's reasoning around the three social spheres and their basic ideals. It may, however, be worthwhile to point to certain parallels between Steiner and present-day social and political philosophy.[8] This would in a sense confirm Steiner's claim that what he proposed was not a mere ideology, but a way of understanding the nature of modern society and its potential development.

An interesting analysis of the three social realms, and how they relate to each other in modern capitalist society, is that of the early Habermas (1990 [1962]). For Habermas, all societies need the three basic functions of *power*, *production* and *reproduction.* In modern societies, power is obviously the function of the state, and production that of the economic sphere. Reproduction entails the upholding and transmission of knowledge, norms and values, but also the restoration of health and ability to work. These functions at least partially overlap with those of culture in Steiner's sense (see further below); what is missing is Steiner's strong emphasis on individuality and creativity. However, Habermas also warns that what he called the 'cultural lifeworld'—the everyday world of human interaction, which is and must be the basis of all social practices—is threatened by erosion, and in need of emancipation from the 'system world'. The latter, consisting of the state apparatus in union with industrial enterprises, business corporations and ever more advanced technological systems, tends to illegitimately colonise the lifeworld and its various

[8]It may be noted in passing that the view of society as threefolded goes a long way back. In ancient times, there were three types of gods perceived as ruling the three basic social functions of power/wisdom, production/fertility and war (sic!) (the latter was then more an aspect of culture than of power) (see further Dahlin 2006). In the seventieth century, Comenius also envisioned a threefold division of society. He named the three spheres *religion*, *culture* and *politics/economy* (Blekastad 1977). They should be organised as three relatively independent realms although every citizen partakes in a natural way in all three spheres. This was an important step in the historical development of conceptions of the social order. In older times, the individual was understood as belonging to only one of the three realms, like in Plato, or the Hindu caste system. Comenius also suggested that the three realms should be organised transnationally and separately, in a World Council of Churches including all religions; a 'Collegium Lucis' for the cultural life of the whole world (an idea that inspired the creation of UNESCO); and a supranational court of justice for political conflicts. These worldwide institutions should be based upon three principal values: that of the *equal value of all souls* in the religious and juridical sphere; the principle of the *freedom of spirit* within the cultural sphere; and the principle of *brotherhood* in the sphere of politics and economics (Comenius' conception of politics seems rather simplistic, and his distinction between religion and culture is a bit hard to accept from a modern point of view).

forms of cultural (re-)production (for a longer discussion of the parallels between Steiner and Habermas, see Dahlin 2006).[9]

Another more recent parallel between Steiner and modern thought is that between Steiner's concept of culture and the concept of *civil society*, as defined by some social and political philosophers. The discussions about the notion of civil society intensified in the decades following the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. This great and largely unexpected event raised the question of the role and significance of movements within civil society for bringing it about. Some maintain that a new concept of the *global* civil society grew out of the dialogue between the peace movement in western Europe and the dissident movements in eastern Europe (Kaldo 2003; see also, for example, Perlas and Strawe 2003). The 'victory of capitalism' opened the gates to a globalisation of the market economy, based on neoliberal principles. A significant reinforcement of the *economic tyranny*, that Steiner actually predicted nearly a hundred years ago, took place (Steiner 1997, p. 151).[10] But this was accompanied by the growth of global activist movements and associations of a non-government and non-profit character (NGO's and NPO's). Non-*government* and non-*profit* means neither state nor market, but the third realm which could be called a civil society on a national and global level.

But the concept of civil society is of course a contested one, and there are different views of what it means. A rough generalisation of the definitions that have been proposed is that those with neoconservative and neoliberal perspectives include everything that does not belong to the state as parts of civil society. Neoliberalism, in particular, tends to assimilate civil society with the economic sphere (Whitty 1997). Socialists and social democrats, in contrast, tend to assimilate civil society to the institutions and structures that are controlled by the state, which, ultimately, means the whole public sphere. There is, however, a third approach: a growing recognition that civil society is a realm that is analytically independent of, and empirically differentiated from, both the state and the market (Alexander 2001).

A civil society concept of this third kind is proposed by Cohen and Arato (1992), who also associate civil society with *freedom*. The rights to communicate and form associations make civil society a sphere of freedom, within which people can discuss issues of public concern and exercise influence on the political and economic spheres. Cohen & Arato's normative and political position constitutes a third approach in relation to on the one hand the neoliberal idea of letting the market rule as much as possible, and on the other the left-winged idea of putting as much as

[9]See also Monbiot (2001) for a powerful analysis of the corporate aspect of a modern capitalist state. Among other things, Monbiot recounts how education came to be viewed as 'a market opportunity' (p. 331).

[10]Steiner (1997; p. 151) characterised the history of Western society since ancient times as moving from a 'priestly tyranny'—a kind of cultural tyranny illustrated by the power of the church in the Middle Ages—over state or political tyranny beginning with the consolidation of the national state in the sixteenth–seventieth century, and moving more and more into economic tyranny, with the development of industrial capitalism at the end of the ninetieth century.

possible under state rule. They wish to warrant the autonomy of both the state and the economy, but at the same time protect civil society from destructive penetration and instrumentalisation by the iron forces of the two other spheres.

This view is obviously similar to that of Steiner's, in that the functions of civil society that Cohen & Arato focus on are part of what Steiner identifies as the cultural sphere. The sphere of culture is threatened by erosion if it is subject to economic tyranny. It needs protection from economic exploitation as well as from state clientisation. Cohen & Arato, on their part, see the concept of civil society as needed for capturing and describing the character of certain phenomena in (post-) modern societies—phenomena that do not belong to the state, nor to the market, but are central for the understanding of the 'crisis of democracy' and how we can work for the improvement of democratic conditions. What they point to is essentially linked to individuality and freedom, the basic values of culture in Steiner's view. As for the NGO's and NPO's making up civil society, state independent schools *not run for economic profit* also belong here, especially if founded on a long and worldwide tradition, such as the Waldorf schools.

6.3 Education as a Cultural Practice

In Steiner's view, schools and education clearly belong to the cultural sphere, at least in modern societies. Steiner recognised the historical role of the state as liberating the educational system from the dominance of the church. But in our time, the state too has played out its role as the ruler of education. Both teaching and learning are creative human activities; therefore, they are *expressions* of individuality, and—especially for the learner—their purpose is to contribute to the further realisation of individuality. As such, they must take place under the condition of freedom. All this places education in the cultural sphere. These aspects of Steiner's social and political philosophy can be compared with the ideas of W. Humboldt (cf. Lejon 1997; p. 96). It was Humboldt's opinion that the economic sphere should *support* cultural life (including schools and education), and the state-run judicial system should *protect* it. But neither the state nor the economy should *control* or *direct* it. Under such conditions, the inherent potential of the individual can be optimally realised in freedom and self-determination (Humboldt 1993).[11]

[11]As Burrow (1993) remarks, Humboldt is perhaps the first political thinker to point out the risk that citizens become more passive the more the state caters for their needs. Thereby he anticipates the kind of critique of the welfare state which holds that it turns its citizens into clients. Humboldt's ideas about limiting the influence and the commitments of the state can at first glance seem identical to the liberal notion of a 'night watch state'. It is, however, hard to equate Humboldt's political ideas with such an extreme liberalism, because his ideal society also has some socialist aspects (ibid., p xlix–l).

Like Cohen & Arato's view of civil society, Steiner saw culture as the source of all social and political development. Education should be a force for social change (Steiner 1997), but it could be so only if based on a true understanding of the human being and development. He aspired to create a form of education that would foster creative and socially engaged individuals, that would work for the improvement of society and human life. However, one important obstacle to this was the lack of freedom in cultural life, due to its penetration by state and economic forces. In the foreword to the fourth edition (1920) of his book on the threefold social order (1976 [GA 23]), Steiner ascribed the chaos and problems of social life after WW1 to the dependence of the cultural sphere upon the state and the economy. The emancipation of cultural life from these dependencies was for him a question of utmost importance. In a lecture to the workers in the Waldorf-Astoria factory in 1919, Steiner talked about how modern technology and a 'soul-numbing capitalism' tied both the soul and the body of most modern people to economic processes, and thereby limited their perspective on life. Only a few, who were not so strongly bound by immediate necessities, realised that for human well-being and development, cultural life must be emancipated. It would not be possible for human beings to develop their full potential, while at the same time serving the forces coming out of the state and the economy. Therefore, the primary task must be to liberate cultural life (1997, p. 110). The spirit behind these views is not very different from Habermas' critique of how the system world illegitimately colonise the lifeworld (see above).

Because of state laws and regulations, not only are teachers not free to teach according to their understanding and perception of what is needed, but the school as a whole is also not free to organise its work as it finds best. As cultural institutions, schools are best organised on the basis of collegiality, which gives the optimal marginal of freedom to the individual teacher.[12] A school is a mini-society, and it contains within itself the same threefoldness as the whole of society. It has an obvious economic aspect related to the costs of the work it does, and where the money for this comes from (which depends on laws and regulations). Following the principle of solidarity, some Waldorf schools have tried to give wages according to the needs of the individual, not according to workload or formal merits. But this principle is hard to uphold in a society where everything goes against it. As for the government aspect, there are state laws governing the work, but there may also be specific rules decided upon by the college of teachers. Ideally, organisational and administrative questions should be decided on by the whole college of teachers, unanimously. Traditionally, Waldorf schools have therefore no leadership or management in the form of a rector or headmaster. Recently, however, many Waldorf schools have seen themselves obliged to establish such leadership positions, partly because of government regulations, and partly because coming to

[12]This does not mean that there should be no laws at all governing schools and education. But these laws should focus on the conditions of justice under which schools must work, such as the rights of parents/children to choose the form of pedagogy that appeals to them. They should not, for instance, prescribe the forms and contents of teaching and assessment.

decisions based on full participatory collegial democracy is often a time-consuming process, demanding a lot of patience (cf. Stehlik 2014a, b). In our hurried times, it has become an ideal that is hard to uphold.

Steiner's suggestion was that there should be general meetings of all school staff once a week, in which administrative and other common concerns were decided upon. However, above all, these teacher colloquia (*Lehrerkonferenzen*) should be the spiritual heart of the school organism, inspiring teachers to continually learn and develop as human beings (1986 [GA 307], pp. 240f)[13]. Pedagogy and other issues of educational relevance should be studied, and teachers should share their observations and experiences, their problems and their attempts to handle them, so that all are aware of what is going on in the whole school. Steiner also encouraged teachers to be up to date on what is going on in mainstream educational practice and research, and even to occasionally contribute to this realm by publishing. Thus, the teachers' colloquia are part of the cultural life of the school, in addition to the work of each individual teacher with their students.

If the meeting of the teaching staff is the spiritual centre of the school, the parent's meeting with the teacher is of equal importance, but working from the periphery, as it were. Learning to listen to the echo of what comes back to the teacher from the parents must become another source of inspiration for the teacher (Stehlik 2002). The curriculum plans and documents should not be followed slavishly; it may be more important to let one's teaching be inspired by what emerges out of life in and around the school itself. This is an aspect of the necessity for teachers to develop a sense for the needs of our times; a sense which is clouded by state rules and regulations, turning teachers into duty-bound bureaucrats, instead of creative artists (cf. Steiner 1997; p. 97).[14] In present times, following the trends of globalisation in all fields, government interventions in education are reaching new, supra-state levels by the influence of agencies like the OECD (Rizvi and Lingard 2006). As a result of such influences, teachers are losing more and more of their professional knowledge base, having it replaced by detailed syllabuses, and assessment and administrative rules (cf. Ball 2003).

Of course, there is nothing wrong with globalisation as such. Transnational cooperation in the fields of politics, culture and economy are necessary and can contribute positively to the evolution of humanity. It is the hegemony of the economic sphere and the erosion of cultural creativity and freedom that is the problem. Steiner would most certainly have affirmed this. Due to its emphasis on the universally human, as well as on individuality and difference, Waldorf education has the potential of becoming a cosmopolitan education for global citizenship. True cosmopolitanism must mean to think universality *and* difference as *belonging together* (Appiah 2008).

[13]English edition: Steiner (1989b).

[14]The development of this sense has unfortunately remained a rather neglected aspect of Waldorf teacher education, which may have contributed to the relative isolation of Waldorf schools from mainstream educational developments.

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Chapter 7
Conclusion: Does It Work? Empirical Studies of Waldorf Education

Abstract There are some difficulties in doing empirical research on Waldorf education: the underlying concepts and ideas are complex and hard to get into; and some of the expected results such as 'individuality' and 'freedom' are hard to measure in a reliable way. Some studies comparing Waldorf and mainstream students and graduates have nevertheless been done. Short summaries of such studies in Sweden, Germany, the USA and Australia are presented. One overriding result is that Waldorf students seem more interested to learn and more socially engaged than mainstream students, but somewhat less knowledgeable when it comes to facts and scientific explanations. This raises the question whether we want to foster knowledgeable but uninterested, or interested but less knowledgeable students. The empirical evidence also shows that only a few percent of former Waldorf students become engaged in anthroposophy.

Keywords Waldorf alumni studies · Waldorf science education · Waldorf civic education

7.1 Difficulties in Evaluating the Effects of Waldorf Schools

Approaches to and examples of research on Waldorf education have been extensively displayed and discussed in Paschen (2010). These studies range from conceptual foundations, over empirical and methodological, to pedagogical content investigations. However, in this chapter, I will limit myself to empirical studies of an evaluative nature.

Steiner envisaged high goals for Waldorf education: not only the transmission of necessary knowledge and abilities, but also individualisation and personal development, a certain degree of freedom, health and social reform. These goals are certainly not alien to many present national educational systems, but Steiner had a special take on them and could spell them out in detail. This is hard for state-governed educational policies to do, because there is a general lack of

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consensus on such issues. If Waldorf education should be evaluated empirically on its own grounds, that is, based on what it itself tries to achieve, two difficulties arise. The first is to develop a wide and deep enough understanding of Steiner's educational thinking. The second is to find research methods that could measure the educational goals in valid and reliable ways.[1] As far as I know, there are no studies that have managed to solve these problems completely. Most of the research reported below is of a comparative nature, based on quantitative surveys of Waldorf and mainstream students. Comparisons are made of knowledge, abilities, attitudes and self-reported health status. Such data are at best merely indirectly related to the imponderable qualities of freedom, individualisation and personal development. This must be born in mind when reading the Sect. 7.2.

Another problem is that Steiner primarily gave conceptual frameworks and basic principles from which contents and teaching methods should be creatively derived and continuously renewed. To the extent that this does take place, Waldorf education becomes somewhat difficult to evaluate because we will not know if the observed results depend upon Steiner's ideas and principles, or on teachers' abilities to understand them and apply them in practice. If, for example, the evaluations prove disappointing, this may be due to teachers' inability to put Steiner's ideas into practice, rather than the ideas themselves.

7.2 Surveys of Waldorf Students and Graduates, and Comparisons with Students and Graduates from Mainstream Schools

In the USA, Baldwin et al. (2005) studied Waldorf students in North America and Canada, who completed their twelve-year schooling between 1991 and 2004. The survey included 27 schools and 2776 respondents. The focus of the study was what kind of further education was sought, and what those who did not enrol in higher education did instead. Results showed that up to 2002, over 80% of the respondents had graduated in either arts and humanities (40%), social and behavioural sciences (30%), life sciences (10%) or physical sciences and mathematics (3%). These were much higher rates than in the general population, in which only about 35% of the same age groups majored in any of these fields during the same period. At the same time, many of the Waldorf students, 19–25% of each graduating class, did not immediately go on to further education, but chose to travel or to work for some years.

In a later study by Mitchell and Gerwin (2007), Waldorf graduates from 1943 to 2004 were surveyed regarding education, career and life choices, attitudes, cultural interests and social engagements, social relations, mental and physical health, and attitudes to Waldorf education. Five hundred and fifty people responded to the

[1]See Dahlin (2010a), for a further discussion of this issue.

survey. The results paint a positive picture of Waldorf education, as the responding group was generally characterised by high degrees of passion for lifelong learning, creativity and thinking outside the box, engagement in environmental issues, and of social and emotional intelligence. They also enjoyed high levels of health, in accordance with the proposed salutogenic character of Waldorf educational methods hinted at above (here the results are corroborated with a German study reported in Barz and Randoll 2007).

As a counterbalance to the overall positive results, Mitchell and Gerwin (ibid.) include some negative judgments regarding the Waldorf graduates' abilities in higher education. These judgements came from interviews with college and university teachers. Although the judgements made by these teachers were generally positive, some of them found that former Waldorf students were lacking in the ability to abstract, too quick to make assumptions and form judgements, and to have writing skills below average (ibid., p. 83f).

The weakness of these studies from the USA is that there are no attempts to measure the influence of students' socio-economic status (SES) and other aspects of their family background, to ascertain to what extent the findings are specifically related to the Waldorf methods of education. This tends to be lacking in most studies of this kind. Although it is impossible to find ways to establish causal links between pedagogy and adult life attitudes with absolute certainty, there are ways to measure the statistical correlations. The authors are aware of this methodological problem and point to the need for future, more rigid studies.

A comprehensive evaluation of Waldorf schools was carried out in Sweden during 2002–2005 by Dahlin et al. (2006) (for an abridged English version, see Dahlin 2007). The project encompassed many issues, some of which overlap with those of Mitchell, Baldwin and Gerwin above. One purpose was to see how large a proportion of Waldorf graduates went on to higher education, what type of education they chose, how they felt about their studies and how they succeeded in them. A sample of 870 students, from eleven Waldorf schools, who graduated between 1995 and 2001, was chosen. The respondent rate was rather high, 68%. Deep interviews were also done with a small number of students to obtain a more substantial context for the survey answers. It was found that many Waldorf graduates waited some years before enrolling in higher studies, but that most them *sooner or later* entered higher education. An attempt was made to correlate the enrolment in higher education with the parents' educational level. In some year groups, data showed a tendency to higher frequency of enrolment of students with parents of low educational levels, as compared with mainstream school students. However, this was not the case in all age groups.

Swedish Waldorf graduates were found in all sorts of university courses and vocational programs. They studied to become doctors, engineers, economists, lawyers, teachers or artists. An extremely small proportion chose anthroposophical vocational trainings, such as that for Waldorf teacher, curative education pedagogue, or (therapeutic) eurythmist.

The Swedish Waldorf graduates seemed to have a different study approach compared with other students in higher education.[2] They were less instrumental and more deeply involved in their studies. Their study motivation was more often based on a personal interest than on improved job opportunities. They appeared also to be less worried about exams and did not use mechanically reproductive learning methods such as rote learning to the same extent. Overall, former Waldorf students were happy in the university environment and found their studies stimulating and interesting. For some reason, science students found their studies somewhat more interesting and were happier than students of arts and social science subjects. Only a very small percentage (6%) thought that their Waldorf school background was, or had been, disadvantageous to them. This was mainly because of a perceived lack of certain subject knowledge, or not being used to handle large amounts of course literature. At the same time, none of these students thought they had difficulty in meeting the demands of their studies.

Regarding comparisons between Swedish Waldorf and mainstream students *before* graduation, several aspects were investigated. In this area, the samples from the two student populations vary in size, depending on what questions were investigated. It seems unnecessary to go into all the details of this; the interested reader can find them in the reports referred to above. Among other things, it was found that Waldorf students more often felt that their teachers laid stress on everybody's equal human dignity, as well as on gender equity, environmental care and the repudiation of bullying. They also, to a greater extent, felt that their teachers attached importance to cooperation, that they thought that those who have greater difficulties should get more help and that they quickly intervened if a student was bullied. They felt to a lesser extent than mainstream students that they themselves were bullied or unfairly treated.

In the field of more specific knowledge and learning, the evaluation focused on comparing the results of Waldorf and mainstream students on the national tests in Swedish, English and Mathematics, in grade 9.[3] To get a broader perspective on these results, the study also included students' general opinion of school, and their opinions of the teaching of the three subjects. As for results on the national tests, no obvious and general conclusion could be drawn from the pattern of findings that emerged. However, on the other questions, some differences were noted. Waldorf students liked the physical environment of their school better, and they were happier with their teachers and with their schoolwork. Furthermore:

- Waldorf students had a more positive picture of their schoolwork; they thought that it was meaningful for their future and that it corresponded to what they could manage;

[2]Here, a Swedish version of Bigg's Study Process Questionnaire was used; see Watkins and Dahlin (1997).

[3]It also focused on knowledge and competencies in social studies; see below, Sect. 7.4.

- Waldorf students to a lesser extent only worked with their school subjects in order to pass the tests (this is analogous to their study approach in higher education; cf. above);
- the working atmosphere in the lessons was generally perceived as quieter and more pleasant in the Waldorf schools;
- Waldorf students had a more positive attitude to Mathematics and found Swedish a less difficult subject.[4]

From Sweden we go to Germany, which is probably the country where most research on Waldorf schools has been carried out over the years. Helsper et al. (2007) give an account of some of these studies. They note that from 1945 to the 1970s, the percentage of anthroposophists among former Waldorf students decreased from 17 to 7%, while indifferent or critical attitudes to anthroposophy increased from 53 to 61%. In the 1970s, Waldorf students more often came from the upper middle class and did their matriculation examination four times more frequently than the youth population in general. A later study from the beginning of the 2000s confirmed that most Waldorf students came from the well-educated classes (*Bildungsbürgertum*). These students could therefore probably find much support from their parents in their studies. Although Steiner intended the school to be for all children irrespective of social background, the lack of state funding for Waldorf schools naturally limits the clientele to families with high enough incomes [in 2006, the average tuition cost in Germany was 138€ per student and month (Randoll 2010)]. There were also few students with a migratory background.

Other findings reported are the following:

- Only about 3% of the responding Waldorf graduates were unemployed, whereas the public statistics for the corresponding age group was 12%;
- Waldorf graduates said that leisure time, prestige and career possibilities meant less for their job satisfaction than the work itself and its development potentials;
- more than 50% of the respondents complained about the quality of Waldorf science education, and 38% took extra-curricular courses in Science;
- despite some criticisms, 63% looked upon the Waldorf school as giving the best form of education;
- more than 80% felt seen and confirmed by their teachers;
- around 16% experienced a pressure to adhere to anthroposophical beliefs, but over 60% regarded anthroposophy as having no or almost no place in the teachings they received.

The authors conclude that former Waldorf students displayed a high degree of identification with their school, which they explain by the social homogeneity of the culture of the school and that of the parents. They also note that Waldorf teachers tended to have high demands on themselves, bordering on 'pedagogical perfectionism'. Finally, despite the ideal of a collegial and democratic school

[4]Regarding Swedish, mainstream students with Swedish as a second language were excluded from the comparisons.

organisation, they observed an informal hierarchy, with class teachers at the top and lower grade subject teachers at the bottom.

Barz and Randoll (2007) report some critical views among their sample of Waldorf graduates, which consisted of three age cohorts and altogether 1124 respondents. The age cohorts were 62–66, 50–59 and 30–37 (data collected in 2005/06). The criticisms were the following:

- too little of performance challenges and insufficient performance feedback;
- deficient foreign language teaching;
- too little of theoretical and factual knowledge transmission;
- hardly any instruction on strategies for study and learning;
- few present-time political and historical world events were addressed;
- sports, politics, social and natural science were not sufficiently dealt with.

A more recent German survey was carried out by Barz et al. (2012). The study was based on around 800 Waldorf students from ten German Waldorf schools. The results were compared with similar studies of state school students, based on samples mostly larger than 2000. Results showed that Waldorf students were significantly more enthusiastic about learning, had more fun and were less bored in school, more often felt individually recognised by the teachers and learnt more about their individual academic possibilities. Waldorf students more often experienced good relations with their teachers, and their school environment as more pleasant and supportive. They also had significantly less physical ailments such as headaches, stomach aches or disrupted sleep. However, there was no statistically significant difference between the state and the Waldorf school students' achievement on state examinations. Since this study focuses on students' experience while still in school, it gives a more reliable basis than the studies of former Waldorf students, for concluding that Waldorf schools do at least provide a curriculum (in the wide sense of the term; see Chap. 6) that is, generally speaking, more satisfactory from the students' point of view.

In Australia, a more specifically focused study was carried out by Jennifer Gidley in the mid-1990s (Gidley 1998). It investigated the views and visions of the future among upper secondary students in the three largest Waldorf schools in Australia. The research was a replication of an earlier study based on a large cross section of mainstream and other private school students. In some areas, the findings contrasted markedly with the research on mainstream students (cf. Gidley and Hampson 2005). Thus, Waldorf students could develop richer and more detailed images of their 'preferred futures' than mainstream students. They tended to focus on social rather than technological ways of solving problems. About 75% envisaged positive changes in the environment and in human development, and over 60% could imagine positive changes in the economic area. Regarding human development, they had clear ideas about what needed to be changed, in order to fulfil their visions, such as more activism, care for the future, better education and a change of basic values. Although they identified many of the same concerns as mainstream students, such as global-scale environmental destruction, social injustices and war,

most of the Waldorf students seemed undaunted in terms of their own will to do something to contribute to their 'preferred future'. Finally, in contrast to mainstream schools, there were no gender differences in the Waldorf students' 'preferred futures' or in the richness of their imaginations. These results could be interpreted as demonstrating the kind of living and imaginative thinking that Steiner wished to develop in young people. Admittedly, there is no 100% proof that the differences described are caused by different educational methods and not by other contextual factors. But it is highly unlikely that the differences in pedagogy would have no influence at all on these findings.

7.3 Studies of Waldorf Science Education

Jelinek and Sun (2003) report a broad study of science education in US Waldorf schools, including both teachers and students. Comparative data from mainstream students were also gathered. Two standardised tests for assessing science teaching were used: the Cornell Class-Reasoning Test, measuring verbal and logical abilities; and one item from the Third International Math and Science Study test (TIMSS). The Constructivist Learning Model (Yager 1991) was used to categorise video-filmed observations of classroom events. In the quantitative comparisons, the results of Waldorf students on the TIMSS item were on level with both US and international standards. The results of the qualitative analyses were more ambiguous. One thing that stood forth, however, was that Waldorf students had a more advanced *understanding* of scientific facts and could *communicate* their understanding in more elaborate ways, and this already at an earlier age. The conclusion was that Waldorf students seemed to possess 'more sophisticated forms of non-verbal logical reasoning at an earlier age' (Jelinek and Sun 2003; p. 59). More generally, the authors conclude that Waldorf science teaching provided the students with challenging tasks and encouraged them to develop individual, creative and critical ways of thinking, in accord with constructivist modes of teaching. On the other hand, they found that some 'pseudo-scientific' content from anthroposophy was part of the content of the Waldorf science curriculum. This consisted of Steiner's ideas on human evolution, which includes references to the 'mythical' continent of Atlantis. For some people, this would be enough to disqualify Waldorf science teaching altogether. However, it seems to be an oddity related to the US context. As has been noted above (Chap. 5), Steiner was clear about not teaching any anthroposophical content in school. He recommended, however, that in the beginning of the Rubicon period (ages 9–12), teaching should emphasise the correlations between the human being and nature (see above, Chap. 5), especially the relation to various types of animals. In anthroposophy, these correlations form the basis of a 'theory' (rather an imaginative vision) of human evolution, related to the general development of life forms on Earth. Naturally, this 'theory' should not be taught in schools as if it was on a par with present-day science. However, the correlations themselves are based on factual observations, and *as such* they can be

the content of teaching. Since the Waldorf curriculum does not even begin to introduce scientific concepts and cause-effect theories before grade 5, the teachings about nature before this age are not based on Science, but on a more experiential approach, including imagination and feeling. It is on the basis of this 'lifeworld experience' that scientific concepts and explanations emerge and develop (cf. Østergaard et al. 2008).[5] As for the notion of 'sunken continents' like Atlantis, a similar stance must be taken. Surely, it cannot be wrong to introduce this as a hypothesis or a possibility that can motivate further investigations—there are after all people who are doing this (see for instance Sweeney 2010). But it must also be made clear that no unambiguous scientific evidence (in the mainstream sense) for the existence of Atlantis has so far been found.

Another, more recent comparative study of science education was done in Austria based on data from PISA 2006 (Wallner-Paschon 2009). Participating students were born 1990 and thus 15–16 years old. The number of Waldorf students were 153, constituting 92% of the relevant Waldorf student population. The socio-economic status (SES) of Waldorf students was found to be higher and more homogenous than that of other students in other school forms (Austria has several different school forms at this age level), but this was not weighed into the statistical comparisons. Waldorf students were found to be above the OECD average regarding joy and interest in science. They were also better when it came to *understanding* scientific questions. They were on average with other Austrian students regarding knowledge of scientific explanations, but below OECD average in this respect.

Ullrich (2008) reports a German case study focused on the qualities of the science teaching in a grade 10 Waldorf class. In contrast to the rather positive findings of the US and Austrian studies, Ullrich notes several problematic aspects:

- few students could follow the path from a lifeworld understanding of phenomena, based on sense-perceptual experience, to the abstract scientific explanation;
- as commonly observed also in mainstream schools, boys were more interested and girls more distanced and resigned;
- the absence of textbooks made it hard for students to check their understanding independently and outside class;
- individual feedback on learning progress was insufficient;
- the limited time available for the study period was a stress factor for both teacher and students;
- the whole class lecturing style could not sufficiently deal with the heterogeneity of the students' learning abilities.

[5]This presupposes a certain sensitivity on behalf of Waldorf teachers, not to present Steiner inspired views as science (implicitly or explicitly); something that may be hard to do if one is convinced of the truth of anthroposophy (cf. Schieren 2015).

The two studies from the USA and Austria both point in the direction that Waldorf students develop perceptual, cognitive and communicative abilities in the field of science to a comparatively high degree, but not so when it comes to the retention or reproduction of factual knowledge. This agrees with Steiner giving priority to the development of abilities and capacities, rather than the encyclopaedic accumulation of facts. The results of the Austrian study raise the question whether we want students who know a lot of things in science but are not so interested and eager to learn more, or whether we rather want them to be interested and enthusiastic even if they have not got all the facts right. On the basis of interest and enthusiasm, factual knowledge can easily be learnt or corrected, but the opposite may be harder to achieve.

As for the results of Ullrich's study, we do not know to what extent they are generally valid for Waldorf science teaching, and to what extent each of these qualities is present in every Waldorf science class. However, the criticisms from Waldorf graduates reported in other studies indicate that they may be present in many Waldorf schools, and Waldorf science teachers would do well to reflect on their significance.

7.4 Studies of Waldorf Civic Education

Part of the Swedish evaluation of Waldorf schools referred to above (Dahlin et al. 2006) was an assessment of students' knowledge, attitude and values in civic education, or education for citizenship (a general aim of Social Science studies). A comparison was made between Waldorf and mainstream students in grades 9 and 12. The assessment test was based on a sample of items taken from a national survey carried out by the Swedish National Agency for Education. The context, methods and results of the comparisons have been more extensively reported and discussed in Dahlin (2010b).

The assessment test had two main items, consisting of open-ended questions about two specific social and moral issues. The first was related to the problem of hostility towards immigrants. A photography was shown, which had previously been published in one of the Swedish evening papers. It showed a demonstration of Neo-Nazi youths, at which an elderly lady was physically attacking a demonstrating skinhead by hitting him over the head with her umbrella. The task the students were given was to:

- describe what was happening in the picture;
- explain the reasons behind the event in the picture;
- decide whether the event evoked questions concerning right and wrong and if so, which questions;
- suggest solutions to the problem, if they thought something was wrong or unjust;
- give reasons for the solutions they had suggested.

The second item also focused on a real event, related to the development of biotechnological research. A photography showed a foetus in the womb, and the accompanying text informed the student that a group of researchers at a Swedish hospital had applied for permission to do medical experiments on living foetuses in the womb. These were, however, only to be performed on foetuses that were to be aborted. Except for describing the event, the questions in this item were virtually the same as those for the first one.

To a larger extent, Waldorf students found these two problems to be interesting and easy to understand. When suggesting solutions to the problem in the first main item, they tended to refer to moral qualities such as love, sympathy, solidarity and moral courage to a somewhat greater extent than mainstream students. Their suggestions were also characterised by greater confidence in the innate goodness of human beings and showed less confidence in that 'more policemen', or more severe laws, could solve such problems on the social level. Instead they stressed individual responsibility. In the second main item, Waldorf students were more concerned about the risks for causing pain and suffering for the mother and/or the foetus. In grade 12, more Waldorf students thought that research 'goes too far' in its strivings for medical development. In this age group, suggestions that the problem should be solved by more strict laws were much less frequent among the Waldorf students.

Besides these two main items, the questionnaire also contained several complementary questions with fixed answers on graded scales. The purpose of these questions was to gather data on how the students reacted to the two assessment tasks, as well as about ethical or moral issues, such as feelings of responsibility, and attitudes towards extremist and other deviant groups.

In general, Waldorf students had more open and tolerant attitudes towards deviant groups, for instance homosexuals.[6] They also had more open and tolerant attitudes to immigrants and to religious and political extremists. Only regarding criminals and Nazis/racists was the relationship between the two response groups the opposite, i.e., Waldorf students showed a less tolerant attitude than mainstream students. Even though girls generally displayed more open and tolerant attitudes than boys in both response groups, the differences between the sexes in this respect were considerably less among the Waldorf students. In addition, it was found that Waldorf students felt a greater responsibility for present and future social and moral issues. Waldorf students more often felt they had a responsibility for the moral development of society, and that as adults they would have a responsibility to contribute something to the improvement of human and social conditions.

The most interesting result in this respect was the *increase* among Waldorf students in grade 12 of the general interest and engagement in social and moral issues, as compared to grade 9. Among mainstream students there was, in contrast, a *decrease*. Table 7.1 demonstrates this difference in several more specific items. If this reflects individual developments, it may predict a higher degree of future social

[6]The students' SES, as indicated by 'the number of books at home', was weighed into the results described in this paragraph. Unfortunately, SES data were not available for all comparisons.

Table 7.1 Comparisons of the frequency of positive answers to a number of survey questions. Percent within each grade and school form. (W9 = Waldorf grade 9 etc.,; M9 = mainstream school grade 9 etc.,; Δ% = percent difference) (from Dahlin 2010b, p. 176)

Question	W9	W12	Δ%	M9	M12	Δ%
Thought the two main test items were easy to understand	15	26	*11*	13	13	*0*
Thought the two main test items were important	34	58	*24*	25	22	*−3*
Thought the two main test items were interesting	23	41	*18*	12	16	*4*
Considered themselves good at Social Studies	31	39	*8*	35	19	*−16*
Thought Social Studies was interesting	45	66	*21*	44	36	*−8*
Thought the school's teaching of Social Studies was good	27	50	*23*	46	22	*−24*
Would feel responsible as an adult for the problems presented in the two main test items	22	33	*11*	15	16	*1*
Felt responsible for the moral development of society	24	35	*11*	17	17	*0*
Discussed moral issues at home	14	20	*6*	15	10	*−5*

or political engagement among Waldorf students.[7] Political engagement often has its roots in moral engagement and the experience that something is not in accord with justice (Haste and Hogan 2006). These possibly different patterns of development in Waldorf versus mainstream schools have a parallel in the tendency to 'early closure' among mainstream students regarding interest in environmental issues, as observed by Ashley (2005a, b). 'Early closure' means that already in the early teens there is a loss of interest in knowing more about these issues; there is a feeling that one knows enough already. Ashley quotes a 14-year-old boy saying: 'I don't want to hear anything more about the environment because I learned everything I need to know at primary school' (2005b; p. 190). In his work with the evaluation of Waldorf schools in Britain (Woods et al. 2005; see further below), Ashley got the impression that this tendency was not as strong among Waldorf students. In the higher grades, Waldorf students were often very interested and eager to know more. Could it be that young people get *tired* of studying the problems confronting humankind today, whether they are social/moral or natural/environmental in character, because they feel that they have learnt enough about these things already in the early school years? Could it be that *waiting* with the cognitive aspects of such issues to the higher grades, as is done in Waldorf schools, contributes to more interest and engagement among the older students?

[7]The underlying data are not longitudinal but based on cohorts. No definite conclusion can therefore be drawn about differences in students' individual development from grade 9 to grade 12.

Perhaps the tendency in mainstream schools to start before puberty with training in cognition, discussion and judgement formation results in a 'paralysis of analysis' among young people (cf. Gates 2006)?[8]

Another study, with results pointing in the same direction, was carried out in Norway by Solhaug (2007). Solhaug compared Waldorf and mainstream students at the upper secondary level. Waldorf students scored significantly higher on tolerance and *social engagement*, as well as on *interest* in social issues and participation in future *non-parliamentary* political activity. Mainstream students, on the other hand, scored higher on factual *knowledge* and on participation in future *parliamentary* elections.

Whether Waldorf pedagogy or students' home environment play the most important role in the observed differences is hard to say. In an analysis of regression, Solhaug (ibid.) found that although the home environment of the students accounted for most of the statistical variance, the schools themselves also had a small but significant influence on the results. Furthermore, and more important from the point of view of cultural freedom (see Chap. 6), if one imagines a situation where no Waldorf schools existed, present Waldorf parents would have to send their children to other schools, where they would be subject to influences not so strongly in accord with the beliefs and values of their parents. It seems likely that their children would then not develop in ways so clearly different from those of mainstream students.

Randoll (2010, p. 139f) reports on two relatively recent studies in Germany that demonstrate similar results as noted above. In comparison to upper secondary state school students, Waldorf students displayed more tolerance, empathy and responsibility for other people and the environment. Levels of racism and right-wing extremism were the lowest compared to other school forms, and former Waldorf students were much more frequently socially engaged than the population in general.

Thus, if schools want to educate actively engaged democratic citizens, they may learn something from Waldorf schools. Steiner recognised individualism and democracy as strong impulses in modern times, arising from the depths of human nature, and therefore as legitimate social ideals. But these ideals belong to adult life. It is not self-evident that they must be applied to children. Steiner even maintained that if school life and teaching are based on democracy, children will most probably be unfit for democracy later in life (Steiner 1997; p. 193). By letting the teacher be a natural authority in the lower grades, and saving the cognitive, reflective and judgmental activities until the higher grades, Waldorf education builds up a potential that can blossom as interest and social engagement in youth and adulthood. The results displayed in Table 7.1 are perhaps an indication that Waldorf education succeeds better than mainstream schools in inspiring the love of moral ideals that is a fundamental aspect of Steiner's ethics (see above, Chap. 3).

[8]See Dahlin (2010b) for a further discussion of these questions.

7.5 A British Study of Waldorf Educational Aims and Methods

A relatively large study of British Waldorf schools was carried out at the University of West of England by Woods et al. (2005). It was based on 23 British Waldorf schools, and the main purpose was to find possible 'good practices' established in these schools; practices that could be usefully transferred to mainstream schools. The researchers tried to widen the meaning of good practice to include more than the strictly evidence-based notion now commonly in use, so that the holistic character of Waldorf education could be captured. Data consisted of surveys and interviews with teachers, documentation from the schools on students' health, teacher density, development projects etc.,; and students' results on various tests. The study describes Waldorf education as strongly focused on individual development but at the same time giving all students a broad general education. It pointed to the absence of test competition and ranking among students, and that each student was given opportunities and challenges to learn within many fields of knowledge. The Waldorf students that were part of the study were very successful in finding ways into higher education in unconventional ways, even without formal merits. Waldorf schools were found not to be 'faith schools' in the usual sense because students were not taught to become anthroposophists; on the other hand, they were also not non-faith schools, because in various ways they tended to draw upon the religious traditions of the whole mankind.

As a result of the study, the researchers suggested several areas in which mainstream schools could learn from Waldorf schools and vice versa (cf. ibid., pp. 122ff). Some of the things mainstream schools could learn were:

- how to combine class and subject teaching for younger children;
- how to develop speaking and listening through an emphasis on oral work;
- how to develop a good pace in lessons through an emphasis on rhythm;
- the importance of child development in guiding the curriculum and examinations;
- how to approach the arts and creativity.

Ashley himself (2009) concludes that the main thing that can be learnt from Waldorf schools is how to create 'stability', as opposed to the fragmentation of both the curriculum and the psychological support of students, that characterises mainstream schools. The main lesson blocs of one subject at a time (*Epochenunterricht*) and the long-standing relationship with one class teacher are some important practical aspects of this. Waldorf schools, on the other hand, could above all learn more efficient forms of management and organisation (which need not have an undemocratic top-down structure).

7.6 Do Waldorf Students Become Anthroposophists?

The critics of Waldorf education often claim that Waldorf schools are sectarian world-view schools, teaching or indoctrinating their students in the anthroposophical view of life (cf. Prange 2000).[9] We saw above that 17% of German Waldorf students from the 1940s adhered to the anthroposophical world view. Critics could take this as a confirmation of their allegations. But post-war Germany was in a special situation, with normal social and cultural life eroded and destroyed. Over 20% of the Waldorf students at that time came from an anthroposophical family background (Randoll 2010). It is probable that anthroposophical parents put their children in Waldorf schools because of their own sympathy for anthroposophy. That many of their children also developed such sympathy may be the result primarily of family and peer influences, and not of the school curriculum as such.

That 16% of German Waldorf students felt a pressure to accept anthroposophical ideas (see above), may be for the same reasons. Be that as it may, the percentage of anthroposophists have constantly decreased, so if the allegations of indoctrination were true, the conclusion of the more recent empirical studies must be that Waldorf schools miserably fail in their attempts to educate future anthroposophists. The study by Barz and Randoll (2007) showed that only 3% of the former German Waldorf students were engaged in anthroposophy as adults. Of those who chose to work as teachers (14%), only 2% were Waldorf teachers. In the US study by Mitchell and Gerwin (2007), only 2.5% of the respondents were Waldorf teachers or otherwise involved in anthroposophy. The Swedish study by Dahlin et al. (2006) shows similar results: only 2% chose a vocational training related to anthroposophy.

On the other hand, it is obvious that Waldorf education is based on a spiritual view of humanity and the world, and Waldorf schools are therefore—as Woods et al. (2005) put it—'not non-faith schools'. Are they therefore religious? Despite Steiner's repeated claims that Waldorf schools are not—or should not be—*Weltanschauungsschulen*, propagating a certain world view or view of life, he also said that the task of Waldorf education is to educate the whole human being, and that this whole human being is to be 'religiously deepened' (*religiös zu vertiefen*; Steiner 1986 [GA 307], p. 209)[10]. In the early school years, children should learn to love the world and to feel gratitude to life and all that it brings. Teachers, on their part, should look upon their work as a sort of 'service of God' (*Gottesdienst*) (ibid.). Many people would take these ideas as expressions of a religious view of education. On the other hand, love of the world and gratitude to life are values that are recognised also within purely secular world views, and the 'God' that is served in teachers' work is not further specified. Steiner's idea of religiosity is not bound to

[9]There are several websites devoted to the criticism of Waldorf education; see for instance http://www.waldorfcritics.org.

[10]English edition: Steiner (1989).

any religious tradition. It is *spiritual* rather than religious in the conventional sense.[11] However, Waldorf teachers and other representatives of Waldorf education sometimes seem reluctant to admit the spiritual nature of their basic ideas, which may add more fuel to the criticisms.

7.7 Conclusion

In their review of research on Waldorf schools, Woods et al. (2005) note that despite the lack of large scale, systematic and methodically rigorous studies, the many small-scale studies that have been done provide a cumulative sense of a positive correlation between Waldorf pedagogy and children's learning, development and 'holistic growth of the person' (ibid., p. 4). The studies presented in this chapter have some overriding results in common, which point in the same direction. They all display Waldorf students/graduates as more interested and engaged in learning new things, as compared to mainstream students. This goes for both natural science and human or social fields of knowledge. They also seem more interested and engaged in social and/or political activity. Some of the studies indicate that Waldorf students possess better developed perceptual, imaginative and communicative abilities. All this is in line with Steiner's emphasis on the development of abilities and capacities as being more important than the accumulation of factual knowledge.

Among the negative findings, the complaints among former Waldorf students of deficits in the teaching of science, foreign languages and other factually dense fields of knowledge, as well as of an absence of performative challenges and feedback, stand out as particularly common. This may be the shadow side of putting too much emphasis on the individuality and creativity of the students. There may be a certain resistance on behalf of Waldorf teachers to make high demands and outspoken assessments of students' responses, because such acts may be construed as oppressive or disrespectful.

Another interesting general result is that observed gender differences regarding knowledge, attitudes and values, are less among Waldorf students, compared to mainstream students. This may be seen in the light of cultivating the 'universally human' and getting beyond gender-determined stereotypes. Similarly, in an ethnographic study of a Swedish Waldorf kindergarten, Frödén (2012) observes that the pedagogical practices of the kindergarten staff worked in a 'gender-uncoding' way: boys and girls tended to do the same things and display similar behaviours. It is interesting to contrast this with the criticisms of gender-biased

[11] A distinction between spirituality and religion has been established in present-day philosophical, sociological and educational discourse. See for instance Lynch (2007), who characterises the 'new spirituality' emerging in Western culture as 'the unity of the ineffable and immanent Divine' (pp. 43ff); 'pantheism/panentheism' (pp. 48ff); 'mysticism and the divine feminine' (pp. 50ff); 'the sacralization of nature' (pp. 53ff); and 'the sacralization of self' (pp. 55ff). Most of these aspects are in accord with anthroposophy.

storytelling for young children, as described by Ashley (2009). Since Waldorf education often uses traditional fairy tales, in which men/boys and women/girls have traditional gender roles, one could expect a confirmation of such roles. But this is a rather superficial view, since the fairy tales are symbolical and point to male and female *qualities*, not to individuals.[12]

Although it is growing in the world, Waldorf education is still largely neglected by mainstream educational research and practice (and vice versa, it may be added). Nevertheless, critics continue to attack it, sometimes hostilely. There may certainly be instances of malpractice, but Steiner's educational thought contains many interesting and potentially useful ideas, which go against the grain of present educational practice and policy trends—trends that are also heavily criticised by many mainstream educational researchers. Even if Waldorf education will never achieve wholesale acceptance, it is of vital importance that there is a free cultural space available for those parents and teachers, who wish that their children receive this kind of education.

Over the soon one hundred years since their inception, Steiner's ideas for the curriculum and practice of Waldorf education have become a (more or less) fixed tradition, transmitted both orally by senior teachers to younger ones, and in textbooks. Publicly available curriculum plans and syllabuses exist in many different languages (e.g. Rawson 2000). There are of course influences from immediately surrounding social, cultural and political conditions (cf. Stabel 2014), but the common elements dominate. It is hard to accept that this is what Steiner himself wished to happen, considering his emphasis on freedom, individuality and creativity in teaching. There is an anecdote about one of Steiner's visits to a Waldorf school, when he went around to different classrooms and watched the teaching going on there. Afterwards he expressed a disappointment over the fact that what he had seen in the different classrooms was so similar. As pointed out above, Steiner never had the intention to give exact prescriptions for how teaching should be carried out. He wanted to give conceptual *frameworks* and basic *principles*, on the basis of which contents and teaching methods could be creatively derived and continuously renewed.

In its high ideals and ambitious goals, Waldorf education could be viewed as an 'edutopia' (Peters and Freeman-Moir 2006), not least because of its aim of social reform. Most utopian ideologies, from Plato and onwards, have specific ideas about how education should be organised to create and/or maintain a new social order (cf. Dahlin 2009). However, such ideologies are based on 'grand metaphysical narratives', in which the nature of the world, society and human beings are explained in ways that nowadays are often looked upon with scepticism or postmodern irony. All edutopias of the past have failed, and so has Waldorf education; that is, on the macrosocial scale. The ideals of the threefold social order (described

[12]Somewhat similar to the views of C.G. Jung, Steiner also maintained that there are female qualities in men, and male qualities in women (cf. Wehr 2002). One could of course argue that children are not capable of understanding the difference between qualities and persons. Nevertheless, the empirical data indicate less stereotyped gender identifications.

in Chap. 6) are as far as ever from being realised in any of the nations where Waldorf schools have existed for any length of time. Should we therefore abandon as futile all Great Educational Philosophies, as Aviram (2006) calls them? Like Aviram, I would say no. We still need them for inspiration and guidance, but they must have a certain open-ended and open-to-dialogue character. Whether Waldorf education has these qualities depends very much on the people who carry it in thought and practice. Even though his present-time critics want to depict him as authoritarian and sectarian, from his autobiography, and from testimonies of his contemporaries, it seems evident that Steiner himself did have such qualities.

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