Waldorf Working Papers No. 8/1
An imprint of elewa July 2023

Reassessing the relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy Part 1

Martyn Rawson

Table of Contents

Please read on in part 2, where you will find the chapters on

Introduction

In this article I argue that there are compelling reasons to review the relationship of Waldorf education to Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy. Though these reasons are not new, the question has acquired a certain urgency through the recent, mainly critical and sometimes malicious media interest in anthroposophy within the German-speaking world and thus Waldorf education as its most prominent representative. In Germany pupil numbers are stagnating or dropping, and it is getting harder to recruit teachers. One of the reasons, but by no means the only reason, why teacher recruitment is suffering has to do with the relationship to anthroposophy. Even in 1923 Rudolf Steiner complained that the lack of young people interested in becoming Waldorf teachers was because "encapsulation has become systematic in anthroposophical circles" (26.2.1923, in collected works Vol. 259, p.382). Steiner's criticism was that the anthroposophical movement (in Stuttgart) had become too preoccupied by itself (hence encapsulation), rather than engaging with the world. Today the question has changed somewhat, because it seems quite possible to be a Waldorf teacher without worrying too much about anthroposophy. Indeed, the educationalist Prof. Heiner Ullrich (2008, 2012, 2015), has been advising Waldorf colleagues for years to focus on their successful pedagogy and drop its obscure, non-scientific anthroposophical theory.

Readers outside of Germany may be surprised to hear that the Delegates Meeting of the Association of German Waldorf Schools (the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen) devoted their national meeting in January 2023 in Berlin to the question: what is the relationship between Waldorf schools and anthroposophy? (Lonnemann, 2023). The answer was a display of affirmation that Waldorf is unthinkable without anthroposophy, yet there were sufficient nuances among the keynote speakers, to rephrase the question; not *whether* but *how much* and in *what form* is anthroposophy needed? It is this question I seek to answer in this paper. The answer depends very much on what we understand by the term anthroposophy and in the following section I offer several different ways of looking at anthroposophy.

During Berlin conference I had a workshop asking if we are in a 'post-Steiner' period. I had used the term post-Steiner ironically in an online lecture in the International Campus Waldorf series run by the Alanus University, but like the proverbial genie in the bottle, once out, it refused to go back in. Some people were shocked, others felt liberated. I was politely asked not to use it by a number of people, whilst others accused me of betrayal. In the meantime, I think the term post-Steiner has serious intentions *in the interests* of Waldorf education and have sought to explain this in another article (Rawson, 2023).

The media are suspicious of sects and cults that appear to be based on what they see as an esoteric and irrational, or simply representing a set of ideas that are significantly different to mainstream, and which appear to be without a solid theory to judge it by. What lies behind the recent wave of media interest is probably the fact that some people associated with the Waldorf movement were prominent among the controversies related to the Covid-19 pandemic, and their response confirmed existing prejudices that anthroposophy is an irrational, non-scientific and sectarian ideology. Nobody wants to be labelled irrational and nonscientific or belonging to a cult, especially if you teach on a Masters' programme on Waldorf education. The anthroposophical movement and Waldorf schools- and in this paper I focus only on the relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy - have to react to criticism, in order to correct misinformation, to prevent generalizations based on single or rare individual cases (e.g. that Waldorf teacher are violent, or affiliated with right wing ideologies etc.), to counter defamation, prevent discrimination and to highlight the genuine and not inconsiderable contribution they make. We also need to engage with this criticism at an academic level in order establish that Waldorf education is a legitimate theme for university level study.

This article addresses Waldorf teachers everywhere and not specifically in Germany. Waldorf education is exposed to academic scrutiny in many countries because there are now some 15 institutions of higher education offering degrees in Waldorf education at Bachelor, Master and even PhD levels (see https://www.inaste-network.com/). Education ministries have to approve kindergartens and schools with curricula that differ from state curricula, and they too look to the academic world for guidance. As long as Waldorf education was hidden away in a niche, one could be Waldorf in any way one wanted. But it is not the task of Waldorf to serve private interests, it has a public contribution to make. Its potential to make a difference, however, is limited if takes either of two possible pathways. It could drift ever further from its anthroposophical roots, turning the education into the mere reproduction of certain practices, and perhaps gaining acceptance like Montessori education, a comfortable alternative. This has the advantage of being a simpler path to follow. However, by

continuously adapting to changing requirements without a core theory, it risks losing its coherence and source of renewal. The other pathway is to stick to its traditional discourse, which might seem a good solution to some purists, but in my view, this a path that will to isolation, irrelevance, and marginalization because the education will lose one of its primary its sources of renewal. This comes not from adherence to tradition but through trusting that the energy and imagination for innovation will come from unpredictable sources. Afterall, is it not a core principle of Waldorf education that it should not seek to reproduce the status quo but trusts that each new generation will interrupt and disrupt this stasis and bring forth something new? Once Steiner (1985, p.70) saw Waldorf education itself as the catalyst for changing society. Today Waldorf education itself needs disrupting. I think that after more than 40 years of practice and being identified within the international Waldorf movement (though less so in its heartland of Germany), as part of the tradition, it is beholden on me to be among the disruptors, perhaps even the provocateur of a new generation of disruptors.

Within the Waldorf movement there is, in my view, a need for a renewal of methods and curriculum in the face of a rapidly changing world, and for effective teacher education that can respond to these challenges. After a hundred years of expansion around the world, there are legitimate questions about how this essentially Middle European education system can be adapted to different cultures and geographical locations whilst being part of a globalized world. Waldorf schools are challenged to show that they are diverse, inclusive, pluralistic, multicultural and can really prepare children for the demands a post-industrial, digital world of work. Can they prepare young people adequately for the challenges to democratic civil society in an age of digital media and the crisis of truth, the challenges of political extremism, xenophobia, climate change and war? I am convinced that Waldorf education can develop answers to these challenges and is well on the way to doing so. Any pedagogical response to these challenges, however, asks questions of the relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy. In many ways this question is the elephant in the room and now would be a good time to address it.

I should state at the outset that my intention is not, as some critics are already predicting, to separate Waldorf out from anthroposophy, but rather to recalibrate the relationship. I do this in the knowledge that people will misunderstand my intentions, that they may be hurt or upset. I don't expect to change the minds of those who are convinced that holding on to existing relationships and structures is the best way forward. However, I too am convinced, that Waldorf education is too important to let things stay as they are. This probably true of the anthroposophical movement as a whole, but my perspective in this article is on Waldorf education. Some of the questions I pose have been addressed in a far more qualified way by Johannes Kiersch in a number of publications (2010, 2018, 2021), especially in his book *In 'okkulter Gefangenschaft'. Von der gewordenen zur werdenden Anthroposophie,* loosely translated as, *In 'occult captivity'. From anthroposophy that has become to anthroposophy that is becoming*. This book addresses the development and meaning of the Anthroposophical Society and the High School for Spiritual Science. The present paper builds on that book but focuses on the significance of anthroposophy for Waldorf education.

Regarding my intentions, I can say with Foucault (1980), "all my research rests on a postulate of absolute optimism. I don't construct my analyses in order to say, 'This is the way things

are, you are trapped.' I say these things only insofar as I believe it enables us to transform them. Everything I do is done with the conviction that it may be of use" (pp. 294–295).

What forms does anthroposophy take?

On the surface my question about the relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy has an easy answer, which is evidently sufficient for many people. We can say without contradiction that anthroposophy is the foundation of Waldorf education, and that Rudolf Steiner was its founder. At the next level, however, we might ask, but what is anthroposophy? what status does it have? what are teachers supposed to do with it? More questions follow: is it an educational philosophy? is it a theory? is it a method? is it a way of seeing and a state of consciousness? Is it a set of generative principles? Even trickier questions now appear; is it a closed system, a complete and coherent body of knowledge or an open, evolving system? If it is an evolving, perhaps emergent system, how does it evolve? If it is emergent, how does what emerge relate to what was there at the beginning?

We might also ask, is there not a Waldorf education that is Steiner + 104 years of practice by Waldorf teachers? This is what I have referred to as a *post-Steiner* perspective on Waldorf education, suggesting not that Steiner is passé, but that Steiner-in-the-present is Steiner +104 years of Waldorf practice and seen from the perspective of our horizon today, wherever we are and whoever we are.

The possible answers to all these questions have major implications for the relationship of Waldorf education to anthroposophy and how Waldorf education relates to the wider socio-cultural world. One way of addressing this is to explore the different forms that anthroposophy takes, because anthroposophy can be different things to different people at different times. It can appear both fixed and fluid, both substantial and insubstantial, both a body of knowledge and a process of generating knowledge and consciousness, both a place and a journey. For the purposes of answering the question posed in this paper, we can distinguish between five forms that anthroposophy takes from the perspective of Waldorf education (though are certainly more, but I'm trying to keep things simple without oversimplifying):

1. Anthroposophy as a narrative or meta-narrative, in which Steiner illustrates the history of the world, nature and the place of human beings in this cosmology in books, articles and lectures. An example of this is his book *Occult Science*. I call this a *grand narrative* and believe it should be approached hermeneutically, that is interpreted, not taken as fact.
2. Anthroposophy as charismatic foundation myth. As I explain below, Steiner's charisma and that of his work continued long after his death, transported by charismatic followers, who were (and still are) motivated to pursue a mission to save humanity from materialism by changing consciousness. These people were/are carried by the self-belief of apostles. However useful as it is for break the mold and introducing radical new ideas, charisma becomes increasing institutionalized, codified and reified in ways that focus on preserving the past. It no longer has a cohesive and motivational function. The foundation myth of origins includes the story of the

founding of the Waldorf School in 1919 and its historical significance, including the notion of an original, authentic, spiritually inspired curriculum.

3. Anthroposophy a self-directed esoteric path of schooling. This includes spiritual exercises, meditative verses, mantra, etc., with the purpose of enabling a moral basis for spiritual development and a new consciousness. An example of this approach is Steiner's book *Knowledge of Higher Worlds. How is it achieved?*
4. Anthroposophy as a philosophical, epistemological, and ontological practice. This includes various ways of generating knowledge about the spiritual dimension of life, starting with the spiritual in the human being, using the enhanced faculties of the mind. Understood in this sense, anthroposophy is a process, rather than set of outcomes of spiritual research. It is an open-ended rather than a closed system in a state of becoming as an emergent, growing, evolving process. This includes working artistically and capacity building (e.g. cultivating pedagogical tact).
5. Anthroposophy applied as a basis for Waldorf education (or other professional fields of work or applied through art forms such as Eurythmy of speech formation). This includes Steiner's pedagogical anthropology (in German *Menschenkunde*) and its developments over the past 100 years. The pedagogical anthropology comes with a contemplative method working with it (meditatively acquired knowledge of the human being) designed to build capacity, habits of mind and pedagogical dispositions. This is supported by practitioner researcher using techniques such as using boundary ideas as heuristics, contemplative inquiry, illuminative case study, narrative and nomadic inquiry and the secondary literature on curriculum, etc., that arises out of this ongoing professional development.

These different forms are integrated within and distributed across Steiner's lectures and books. Steiner's book *Occult Science an Outline* (1997), following my categories above is primarily metanarrative but includes esoteric exercises for the further development of human consciousness. Even the philosophical and epistemological works refer to the esoteric aspects, and the pedagogical lectures have elements of epistemology, knowledge drawn from spiritual research and sometimes refers to the grand cosmological and historical narrative. Steiner himself clearly did not make the distinction that I have just made, and no doubt many anthroposophists will say that it makes no sense to separate out these categories since they are all part of what they understand anthroposophy to be. I call this position *purist*. But that is exactly my point; without a differentiation into different forms the complete works invite the inquirer to accept them as an undifferentiated whole. The academic reception exemplified by Heiner Ullrich (2008, 2015) does just that; it cherry picks out the practice which is interesting but refuses to engage with any other aspects of anthroposophy. There are various reasons for this, perhaps an intellectual caution is one of them, combined with the fact that Steiner does not make it easy for them to extract a coherent theory. But that is only part of the story. After all the works of other thinkers is also not easy. The works of Gilles Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari are by no means easy, though the academic interest is immense. It may be that there is a degree of risk aversion; tackling Steiner could ruin a nascent academic reputation. It took high caliber receptions to establish Deleuze and Guattari (see Lambert, 2006), plus the brilliant translation work of Brian Massumi.

Anthroposophy as metanarrative

The term metanarrative or grand narrative (*grands récits*) was coined by Jean-François Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition* (1979/1983) to refer to totalizing stories that offer a comprehensive account of historical events, experiences, social and cultural phenomena based on an appeal to a kind of universal truth or that claim universal application. Indeed, it is typical of the Enlightenment narratives that they build on universalist ideals such as freedom/liberty, universal rights, universal laws, principles and truths, rationalism, notions of Bildung and culture etc. (Bristow, 2017). In what sense can Steiner's works be seen as metanarrative?

Much of Steiner's complete works consists of transcriptions of lectures in which he describes what he sees as spiritual realities. As Ulrich Kaiser (2020) has shown in a ground-breaking hermeneutic analysis of Steiner's lectures, Steiner saw himself as a narrator, using words artistically to create inner pictures in the minds of his listeners as a method of conveying them beyond the boundaries of their normal consciousness, just as any great stage performer does; we know that the actor is only playing Macbeth but when the role is done well, we get drawn into the tragedy and it may have a cathartic effect on us. It is rare but not unknown in theatres or concert halls. Lecturing, at least the way Steiner did it, was not only a performing art, but a ritual that enabled his audience to transcend themselves and understand things that they hadn't done before. There are many testimonies from people who experienced this, even beyond his devoted followers (according to Paull, 2011, even a journalist from the Manchester Guardian who spoke no German). Interestingly, not everyone was affected in this way. The feminist and poet Rosa Mayreder, to whom Steiner was very close whilst he was writing his *Philosophy of Freedom*, was not impressed. She wrote:

> Anthroposophical Congress. Stanzi invites me to a lecture by Dr. Steiner. The fact of his impact is simply inexplicable to me. He appears in pastoral dress, black, high-necked; the densely packed hall welcomes him with frenetic applause. He speaks in a sonorous voice, monotonously pathetic and unctuous in the manner of pulpit orators. What he says can be summed up in three categories: witty aphorisms from versatile knowledge, empty talk in stock phrases and incomprehensible intimations of supersensible abilities from the field in which the control of scientific thought, to which he refers, completely fails. I had thought it impossible that the great majority of his listeners could follow these remarks. Perhaps it is the promise of attaining a superior 'spiritual vision', as I would like to say, without the cumbersome educational process of modern science through meditative exercises, and thereby experiencing the past and the future alive within oneself, that draws people to anthroposophy; perhaps, however, the explanation of Steiner's work lies only in the pastoral tone- with which he hypnotizes people (quoted from Brehmer, 2012p 124, trans. MR.).

I cite this lengthy passage from Mayreder because it gathers together most of the risks that are associated with Steiner's method and the dilemma that we face in engaging with Steiner, if we do not treat anthroposophy as a religion and Steiner as its prophet and guru. Johannes Kiersch (2019) has spoken openly about this aspect that emerged during Steiner's theosophical phase (from approximately 1900 to 1912) and remained despite his requests that it should stop. As Kiersch reports,

> the founder of anthroposophy continued to be seen as a guru-model, herald of comprehensive truth and as teacher of wisdom, long after he freed himself from this role. Only very few of his followers asked critical questions about his work and continued their own development. Anthroposophy became a religion for the majority of his followers. The accompanying wave of enthusiastic consciousness of having a mission gave the anthroposophical movement a momentum and a strength that it could never have gained through rational processing of the ingenious ideas, observations and conclusions of its founder alone. At the same time, however, it suffers from a backward-looking tendency to save and preserve the traditional. The abundance of Steiner's statements about a 'spiritual world' and its relations to the world of the sensually perceptible is understood with an abstract reference to his early epistemological work as a kind of collection of facts…(Kiersch, 2019, p.169, Trans.MR).

Here in a nutshell, is the problem with anthroposophy as grand narrative. Firstly, Steiner's reports from his spiritual science are taken as tenets of faith. Secondly this faith is preserved as a tradition and maintained by anthroposophical institutions. As Kiersch (2018) reports, even during his lifetime Steiner was concerned that people would take what he said too literally or in too narrow a way. Thirdly, taken together with his published works, Steiner's lectures present the reader with a vast panorama of life, a cosmology, an evolutionary story of planets, human races, cultural epochs, complex hierarchies of spiritual beings from the lowest to the highest, a Christology, biographies of important individualities, interpretations of religious texts, religions, myths, epics, legends, fairy tales, works of literature, art, history, science- in short a very comprehensive and *grand* narrative.

Importantly, Steiner's historical narrative leaves the future open, primarily because of his emphasis on the fact that the future is in our hands if we develop the required spiritual powers and insight in the way he describes. It is not a closed system, but that does not disqualify it as grand narrative. A grand narrative is a theory of everything that allows for change under a designated a set of conditions whether the outcome is open or not.

Steiner's narrative, reduced to its most simple trajectory is an ongoing process of evolution and transformation under the guidance of higher spiritual powers, with a recent shift towards conscious human agency, or at least the possibility of this. This possibility has come about by virtue of two significant moments of transition, two crucial turning points in world history; the Mystery of Golgotha, which refers to the resurrection of the Christ in the life processes of the world, and secondly the ongoing emergence of the consciousness soul. The first is essentially religious and cosmological, the second is cultural (and around 1,500 years later). On the basis of his unique Christology, Steiner explains this event as a trans-religious process that transcends and unites all religions, including traditional Christianity. This is obviously a difficult position for people of various faiths to accept. This is further complicated by the fact that Steiner gave form and content to the Christian Community, a denomination outside the familiar Catholic, Protestant and Charismatic Church frameworks.

It is part of the grand narrative character of Steiner's oeuvre that it presents itself as a kind of culmination and is intolerant of other perspectives. The subtext is that spiritual leaders and prophets have always emerged to show the true path, and Steiner's anthroposophy is the

current best option. Rittelmeyer (2023) has also pointed to Steiner's often dismissive attitude to other authors and sciences (e.g. psychology, sociology) and his sometimes absolute assertion of certain 'facts', that can neither be proven nor questioned. This is not only due to the inaccuracies of transcription. That Steiner was apparently totally convinced that he was right is not the point. The point is how this gesture is received by his followers.

Steiner does not reach out ecumenically to members of other religious communities, and his Christology in effect claims to supersede all other Christian movements and other world religions, which are presented in effect as steppingstones to anthroposophy. A similar gesture can be found in Steiner's (1973) book *Riddles of Philosophy*, which outlines a selective sequence of philosophical ideas from "The World Conception of Ancient Greece" to modern scientific ideas and leads ultimately to anthroposophy. By way of contrast, we can take a contemporary work like Baggini's book *How the World Thinks: A global history of philosophy* (2018), which explores philosophical ideas from the Axial age to the digital age across Chinese (Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist), Indian (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain), Judaism, Islam, indigenous and Christian philosophers, showing how each world view complements the others, rather than providing a definitive ranking.

The turning point provided by the transition to the era of the consciousness soul, in contrast to his Turning Point of Time – the Christus Event, has been plausibly described by Barfield (1988) and Kiersch (2021), and aligns with many Western accounts of the history of Europe. These accounts also identify a significant cultural shift in which human relationships to and understandings of the world changed from a participatory perspective to a subject-object perspective, and which gave rise to the scientific revolution. In contrast to most accounts of this historical period today, the significance of colonialism, for example, in Steiner's grand Eurocentric historical narrative, is marginal. Read today, his accounts seem very historically situated, not unlike other 19th Century historiographies, in particular classical German historicist accounts of world history and the history of civilization like Herder's. In many ways the age of the consciousness soul, which in Steiner's terminology begins in the fifth post-Atlantean cultural epoch, has also brought with it the most important ideas of our times, namely those connected with feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism and ecology, all of which are deeply suspicious of grand narratives. As Kwasi Viredu put it, "A successful exercise in conceptual decolonization will usually be an unmasking of a spurious universal" (1996, p.5). As Seyla Benhabib has pointed out, universalism can be seen as an essentialist Eurocentric notion, based on weak philosophical arguments and notes that "it becomes all the more urgent to understand how claims to universality can be reconciled with assertions of religious and cultural difference; how the unity of reason can be reconciled with the diversity of life forms" (2007, p.9). She herself recommends Hannah Arendt's suggestion that the only fundamental human right is the right of every human being to have rights and thus the mutual recognition of the right to communicative freedom. This is a view that comes close to thoughts expressed in Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom, and which contradict the notion of the higher development of some cultures and individuals in relation to others, that Steiner's grand narrative frequently describes.

How do we deal with Steiner's grand narrative?

If somebody asks me if I believe everything in *Occult Science*, I would immediately have to out myself as a sceptic. My answer is, I have no idea and, more importantly, no way of

knowing. Though Steiner emphasizes in *Occult Science* and in many other places in the complete works, that anyone with an open mind who follows his train of thought, and ideally follows the path of schooling he recommends, and tests the fruitfulness of these ideas in the world, will be able to verify the veracity of his account (Rittelmeyer offers a number of examples, 2023, p.66). Indeed, as Rittelmeyer (2023, p.65) points out, Steiner was not averse to telling his listeners that if they don't follow his spiritual prophecies, "problems of great social, even historical relevance will occur". Rittelmeyer comments,

> But the rigidity and the lack of self-doubt with which these predictions of danger are presented virtually demand a critically balanced reading of Steiner, otherwise there is a danger of abandoning the scientific values and rational enlightenment demanded again and again by the spiritual scientist, the conditions of our democratic and constitutional existence, as well as that of civil society (Ibid.).

Rittelemyer draws a helpful distinction between, a) suggestions that Steiner makes (for example during the *Agriculture Course*) that have the character of a hypothesis that one could set up an experiment to test, b) statements about reincarnation or ancient cultural periods that cannot be tested, and c) descriptions, that can be used as heuristic thought models (e.g. the notion of the etheric body or the temperaments). Rittelmeyer also suggests that there are three possible responses to anthroposophical narratives, which he calls three different discourse positions. These are:

1. That one believes that Steiner was clairvoyant and trusts that everything he said is true. This includes accepting Steiner's claim that this knowledge is not exclusive to him but can be verified by following his methods. The problem here is that few, if any, people have ever claimed to be able to do this.
2. The second discourse position is to believe that Steiner was a highly gifted, incredibly well-read person who constructed his anthroposophical narrative but that this has nothing to do with researching the spiritual world.
3. The third discourse is to assume that Steiner was a charlatan with poetic skills and charisma.

From my perspective as a Waldorf teacher, none of these discourses is relevant. As Steiner himself insisted, presumably out of a sense of responsibility towards parents who were not anthroposophists and probably with the Ministry of Education in mind, "it is not our aim to fill the children's heads with anthroposophical teachings. Anthroposophy is not what is taught" (2020, p.17) and teachers should only apply anthroposophy "and what can be gained from it for education in general and for the method and practice of teaching…"(Ibid.). This is of course ambivalent. I interpret it to mean that any anthroposophical content derived from Steiner's spiritual insight (or from spiritual insight of any Waldorf teachers, using anthroposophical methods) should only be used if this is validated by broad scientific consensus. Without this alignment, it cannot responsibly be used. This means, "Dr. Steiner said" is not an adequate justification. Even less adequate is what Sagarin (2007) calls Waldorf myths, that is, practices or beliefs that are justified on the assumption that they derive from Steiner but were actually later innovations. It's not the innovation that is the problem but the justification through association with the Waldorf foundation myth (see below).

We can look at an example; some teachers in grade 5 teach ancient cultures and start with Atlantis, Ancient India and Ancient Persia. In Steiner's original curriculum suggestions for

history (see Heydebrand, 1972, Stockmeyer, 2015), he did not specify these cultures, though he clearly felt that the post-Atlantean cultural epochs that he frequently referred to, should be part of the curriculum, or should be a strand running through the curriculum (Zech, 2020). So there was undoubtedly some ambiguity and the teachers in the first Waldorf School, a number of whom were familiar with Steiner's general anthroposophical teachings, started improvising new content, which Steiner encouraged, by drawing on anthroposophical ideas. Today we know that Steiner's descriptions of these early cultural epochs do not match with what the sciences of archaeology and prehistory tell us about early human cultures (see Rawson, 2013, Zech, 2020). Should we believe Steiner or modern science, and can we justify telling children things that the rest of the world doesn't accept?

The argument that Steiner might be right and science wrong, which of course can happen, doesn't really justify making this part of educational content. Some teachers point out that Steiner subsequently made reference to Atlantis shortly after starting the school (on 25th September 1919, see Volume 1 of the *Conferences with Teachers*). There Steiner made a number of references to Atlantis in a geographical, geological context, though not in terms of culture. As we have seen, a few weeks before at the founding of the school, he insisted that no anthroposophical content should be taught and yet here he is, explaining geology using examples from Atlantis. It may be that Steiner considered Atlantis to be an established public (but not scientific) fact at that time (and it was an established theosophical idea), or he was using this as background for the teachers and not suggesting it should be taught. That, however, is not the point. This is a classic case of "Dr Steiner said". Even if he did say, "teach Atlantis", that is no reason for doing so, not least if we are supposed to be autonomous individuals capable of making our own judgements. There is no geological or archaeological or anthropological evidence supporting his Atlantis theory today, neither is there evidence for elemental beings, angels and archangels, Lucifer and Ahriman, or Lemuria. There is no way a Waldorf teacher can know these things from any other source than Steiner, so they can only draw on such ideas do so out of a religious-like faith, like believing in the immaculate conception because it says so in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew.

If one examines the possible reasons for teaching anthroposophical ideas that comes exclusively from Steiner, in a Waldorf school, which is usually recognized by the state in some way as a responsible provider of education to the general public, as a non-denominational, non-sectarian school, there are none I can think can be justified. The scientifically known world offers so many other remarkable, wonderous aspects of life, why would we need to add anthroposophical stories implying that they are true? To do so is to expose children to a hidden, non-explicit curriculum, even if (or especially if) the teacher believes in what Steiner said. Lower and middle school students believe what their teachers tell them. Of course, myths are not true in the scientific sense and we tell myths and other forms of orature (a term coined by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2012) to refer to imaginative works in the oral tradition, also known as oral literature). The difference is that children understand that myths of gods and heroes are not factual, however vividly they imagine them, and anyway these would be prefaced by an introduction along the lines of, "a long time ago indigenous people in Iceland/Pacific West Coast/ West Africa etc. used to tell the story that…". In the high school we can discuss the different types of narrative and the ways knowledge can be communicated.

There are further problems with teaching about Atlantis and it is worth peeling some of these layers open. Firstly, (and leaving paleogeography, archaeology and prehistory aside for a moment) Steiner's theory of cultural epochs is bound up with his theory of race and his overall account of human cultural evolution. As Ansgar Martins (2012) and Israel Koren (2022) have documented in considerable detail, Steiner's use of theosophical race theory was not just a brief phase but ran throughout his career. In 1923 (see Collected Works Volume 349) he devoted a whole lecture to his theory of skin colour and how it correlates with being permeable to the spirit (white skin is most and black is least transparent!). The work of these scholars cannot be dismissed as attacks by opponents. Johannes Kiersch (2018) describes the defensive reaction of a certain anthroposophical mentality as being comparable with an encircled wagon train being attacked by savages. It does not help to explain away these references to race, as, 'typical of his times' (the view of Steiner as an un-reflected conformist to popular belief does not resonate, and anyway other intellectual contemporaries were aware of racism, see Rawson, 2023), 'statistically insignificant in his complete works' (the same can be said for homeopathy), 'taken out of context' (actually in context they are often worse), or 'basically true, if politically incorrect today' (an argument I heard from an older white South African anthroposophist, who told me Steiner's descriptions of Africans were accurate).

The least we can say is that Steiner's references to race over the course of many years are highly problematical in the postcolonial, pluricultural context of the world today. Waldorf teachers who choose to discount postcolonial perspectives as political correctness or as woke, are misguided, and seriously undermine Waldorf education in the world. Two Waldorf teachers of colour have reported on a *#waldorflernt* podcast (recorded July 2023) that no reference was made to the need to decolonize the curriculum or Steiner's race and culture theory in any Waldorf teacher training course they had heard of and that this was factor in putting off not only people of colour but other young white people. Indeed, the first (and to date only) references to decolonizing Waldorf curriculum (Rawson, 2020, 2021, 2022) were very recent, and were considered contentious by leading figures in the international Waldorf movement.

As Myers (2006) has shown, Steiner's account of cultural evolution seen from a contemporary postcolonial perspective can be seen as colonial, Eurocentric (since it promotes the idea of a higher development culminating in Europe), Orientalist in the sense of Edward Said (1979/2003) and involving cultural appropriation (Steiner's adoption of the Bhagavad Gita with his own interpretation that takes no account of Indian understandings) and is bound up with Steiner's notion of the superiority of the German Cultural Nation. Even if these scholarly analyses can be somehow refuted, what signal does this theory send to non-white-non-European people, or indeed to white children?

From the perspective of the history curriculum, there is as yet no consensus within the Waldorf discourse as to what status Steiner's theory of cultural epochs has (i.e. as ideology or factual account), and what implications it has for all the regions of the world not included in the sequence, such as East Asia, Africa, the Americas. From a pedagogical perspective, it is not obvious why history as a curriculum subject should start in grade 5 (age 11) with the periods in history that are most remote from children's experiences, whereas geography starts with the experienced locality and expands outwards. Compounding this problem is that by starting with ancient cultures and their mythology, the transition from myth to history

requires a level of analytical understanding more likely to be available to high school students. How do children know what is myth and what is history and what the relationship is between them, and if historical consciousness is to be cultivated, is this best done with non-tangible material? Finally, the overall Waldorf history curriculum traditionally tells a Eurocentric, and often nationalistic narrative and urgently needs to take a more global and critical perspectives (see Rawson and Schmelzer, 2023). Currently much Waldorf secondary literature in circulation promotes Steiner's anthroposophical narrative and is often historically inaccurate. Like the mediation of story material, there is little critical awareness of the sources and their authenticity (Rawson, 2019).

Let me briefly summarize what comprises anthroposophy as grand narrative, from the perspective of Waldorf education. This includes Steiner's descriptions of the history and evolution of the earth and other planets, the history of life on earth, the whole spectrum spiritual hierarchies and spiritual beings, spiritual guides of humanity, his Christology and cultural history, his karma lectures in as much as his descriptions differ from what one can find in other evidence-based accounts, in short, everything we cannot realistically verify. Kiersch (2018) has written with great sensitivity about the need to discuss Steiner's anthroposophical ideas in public, but with reference to communications about karma, he requests, "Everything that moves in the esoteric realm of freely formed 'borderline ideas' is protected from the banalities of public conversation. Where Steiner's karmic references are transported into the 'outside world' with cheerful naivety, misleading myth-making, misguided meaningfulness, and shallow circulation arise "(Kiersch, 2018, p. 66). We can work with Steiner's narratives by using a benign hermeneutic to interpret them like any other text or historical artefact. This includes engaging with the context in which the text arose, the facts of translation, its reception and how this has changed over time. By doing this we may find images, pictures, transformations, also gaps and lacunae that illustrate rather than demonstrate processes.

Anthroposophy as foundational myth

In this section I use three metaphors, charisma, foundational myth and rhizome, to explore not anthroposophy as such but rather its reception by Steiner's followers and how the world has responded to this.

Charisma

The questions about the relationship between Waldorf practitioners, Steiner and anthroposophy have been around a long time. They were posed, for example, by P. Bruce Uhrmacher in 1995. He used the sociologist Max Weber's (1970/) analysis of the trajectories of charismatic leaders in periods of social upheaval and crisis and the evolution of the movements they give rise to, to explore developments within the anthroposophical movement. Weber (1970) borrowed the term charisma from the field of religious studies and generalized it in his theory of power and authority and its legitimacy. He identified three types of authority as legitimate forms of power and dominion over people (and nature) at all levels of society from the state to the family. These were, traditional, charismatic and legal-rational-bureaucratic. Traditional modes of authority are inherited, patriarchal, often attached to nobility and royalty, religious institutions, in which the leader is embedded in a self-perpetuating elite, often supported by ritual, myth, symbols and structures that express and reinforce both the legitimacy and the authority. They are legitimate in the sense that other

people to some degree initially acknowledge this power voluntarily and out of self-interest. There is always an element of consent and charisma grows within the framework of a relatively sustained, stable and mutually assuring relationships (e.g. a feudal system). Legal or bureaucratic forms of authority are exemplified by states that have laws, which they use as instruments of control. These can be democratic or totalitarian, but each are based on laws or regulations and initially come about through legal processes (e.g. Hitler in 1933, Putin since 1999).

Charismatic forms of authority are based on individuals who are perceived to have extraordinary and original powers, are of exemplary character, or are seen as heroic and superior to any potential rivals, and who do not belong to any traditional order. They are often outsiders and offer unusual solutions to the problems of the times that break with tradition and offer hope and motivation regardless how difficult the situation is. Anthony Giddens (1971, 160-61) makes the point that although the charisma derives from the remarkable qualities of the leader, it is not important whether this person actually possesses such powers, it is important that the charismatic's followers believe he or she has them. The basis for the leader's authority lies in the hands of the followers, they define the leader. Furthermore, although charisma is essentially irrational, Weber saw it as source of creative energy and innovation that can challenge and be revolutionary, and is far more likely to bring about change than the other two forms.

Weber's theory goes on to describe the process of the loss of charisma over the next generations or phases in the development of the movement. Initially charismatic personalities attract charismatic followers, who champion them and canonize the leader's ideas. In this phase, the 'true' path may become contested among the various followers, jostling for ownership of the authority that comes with the charisma. In the first phase, the pioneer phase, everything is exceptional, but this gradually gives way to a normalization with established everyday practices. Eventually the charisma is transformed into tradition and thus rationalised for members, at least in the sense that codes are framed, stating, "this is how we do things here". Reference to the body of work of the leader is usually sufficient explanation.

Charisma is therefore not only an attribute of a person but is transferred to artifacts connected to the original leader and places associated with that person. It becomes internalized, implicit and taken-for-granted. It becomes habitus and embodied disposition in Bourdieu's sense (1992), thus reproducing practice and reinforced through ritual.

Zander (2008, 408-418) makes generous use of Weber's charisma theory to analyse developments in the theosophical and anthroposophical movements and Steiner's role in them. He cites evidence that some of his followers describe him in charismatic terms and makes the point that his authority was based on his personality and his detailed claims to spiritual knowledge. Zander also draws attention to the element of myth in charismatic movements, which he misses in Weber's account, though Zander takes a very narrow and pejorative view of myth. I discuss myth below. Both Uhrmacher and Zander point to the parallels between Weber's theory and history of the anthroposophical movement, though Uhrmacher does so in a more neutral way, using Weber's ideal-type of charismatic leadership to describe in general terms the history of the movement, Zander's approach leads to a

discussion of charisma as pathology, which is typical for his overall hermeneutics of suspicion (Felsky, 2012) approach to Steiner.

Calling the effect that a person can have on those around him or her charisma is not a value judgement, but a conceptual representation of a phenomenon. It does not diminish the person or her works but refers to the effect they have on others. Uhrmacher takes a lead from Weber, in neither designating charisma as good or bad. He notes that Steiner evidently evinced modest charisma, citing Margaret McMillan, the Christian Socialist and pioneer of both primary education and nursing in the UK, and author of "Education Through the Imagination" (1904). She wrote of Steiner's visit to her school in Deptford:

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

Uhrmacher comments on his use of Weber's theory:

> I use Weber's theory as a useful heuristic in illuminating Steiner's popularity. By using Weber's theory, however, I do not mean to suggest that his analysis applies in all cases or that rival theories (see Adorno 1950) lack utility. My analysis proceeds in accordance with Joseph Schwab's use of the eclectic (Schwab 1969). In other words, I apply Weber's theory because I think it works in this context (1995, p. 403)

Both Weber and Uhrmacher make the point that charismatic people often attract other charismatic people. Uhrmacher notes that this largely accounts for the success of the Waldorf movement (in the English-speaking world) because it enables institutional charisma, and a chain of teacher-student relationships that reaches back to Steiner himself through which the charismatic torch passes through the anthroposophical movement from generation to generation. Uhrmacher names many of the charismatic individuals in the American Waldorf world at that time.

If I may make a personal remark, my mentor Edith Bierman (1906 -2012), who guided me and my fellow teachers at York Steiner School (which we founded in 1980) over many years, knew Steiner. She performed Eurythmy on the stage of the first Goetheanum as a child and saw it burn down and had painting lessons with Steiner. Her mother was a close pupil and accompanied Steiner on his various journeys to Britain. Edith lived and conveyed Steiner's charisma to me and my colleagues. Now some 40 years later, I have the sense that the band of this charisma has frayed and disintegrated. Like an umbilical cord, it serves its purpose and then withers, whilst the 'child' establishes its own nourishment system. Being cut off from this umbilical cord of charisma can make people feel vulnerable, unless they form a new relationship to the original source, the founder narrative or myth and establish their own autonomous relationship to the ideas of anthroposophy. This is reason enough for people in Waldorf education to form a new relationship to Steiner and anthroposophy.

Foundational myth

Steiner's charisma and his charismatic body of work are embedded in a narrative, the origins narrative or the foundational myth of the Waldorf School. The term myth (from the ancient Greek *muthos*) here refers to an understanding of events and the ideas connected to them that is constructed later to make sense of and give meaning to what happened (i.e. in terms of Aristotle's *Poetics,* the plot or narrative). Myth in this sense can provide orientation, a point of reference and a basis for identity for members of a community. Paul Ricoeur (1991) has pointed out that *muthos* also contains something of what Walter Benjamin (1992) called *Ursprung*, and this implies more than mere emergence and development, it suggests a rupture with the past and a surging forth of something new;

> In the origin, there is no becoming of that which has sprung forth, but rather that which has sprung forth from becoming and passing away. The origin stands in the flow of becoming as a whirlpool and pulls the material of origins into its rhythms" (Benjamin, 1992, p. 87, MR trans.)[1].

The origins myth of Waldorf education tells of a significant event, a birth in which 'material' is drawn into an emergent form. The question is how this form is translated. As Benjamin (1996) also explains, all understanding is translation and therefore interpretation. The origins myth needs interpreting, rather than merely accepted as fact. The narrative of the founding of the Waldorf School has tended to focus attention exclusively on Steiner (until recently the printed version of the *Conferences with Teachers* only documented what Steiner said, just as the Ilkley Course of 1923 only records Steiner's lectures and not those of his co-keynote speaker, Margaret McMillan). Oberman (1997) has argued that there is evidence in the accounts of some of those who participated in the founding of the school that much of the initiative came from the teachers, which Steiner encouraged and expected. She also emphasizes the influence of the mainly female workers in the cigarette factory in giving the initial impulse, an important footnote to the basically male narrative of the founding 'fathers', Molt, Steiner, Hahn, Stockmeyer, Boy etc. (see Zdazil's 2020 account of the first teachers).

In moments of crisis or doubt within the Waldorf movement, calls for renewal invariably lead to appeals for a return to the charismatic anthroposophical foundations of the education and Steiner's core educational texts, particularly the First Teachers' Course (2020) as well as the narratives relating to the founding of the Waldorf School in 1919[2]. Much of the literature that was published in association with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Waldorf School was in this vein, essentially looking backwards for affirmation, insight and inspiration.

---

[1]The whole original quote: Im Ursprung wird kein Werden des Entsprungenen, vielmehr dem Werden und Vergehen Entspringendes gemeint. Der Ursprung steht im Fluss des Werdens als Strudel und reißt in seine Rhythmik das Entstehungsmaterial hinein. Im nackten offenkundigen Bestand des Faktischen gibt das Ursprüngliche sich niemals zu erkennen, und einzig einer Doppeleinsicht steht seine Rhythmik offen. Sie will als Restauration, als Wiederherstellung einerseits, als eben darin Unvollendetes, Unabgeschlossenes anderseits erkannt sein. In jedem Ursprungsphänomen bestimmt sich die Gestalt, unter welcher immer wieder eine Idee mit der geschichtlichen Welt sich auseinandersetzt, bis sie die Totalität ihre Geschichte vollendet daliegt. (Benjamin, 1992, S. 87).

[2] I myself was inspired by the story of a school for the children of workers and that of the 'true teacher republic' and repeated this frequently in promoting the education.

The function of the founding myth is to focus the attention on a point in time as origin, the seed, as it were, of an arboreal development. The great 'tree of knowledge' – Steiner's anthroposophical anthropology (*Menschenkunde*) and the grand narrative of anthroposophy growing on the site of the foundation, dropping fruits, which are carried around the world and planted. As they grow, their point of reference, their orientation is always back to the narrative of the founding myth, which becomes heroic in the re-telling. The myth has been important in sustaining the Waldorf movement, provide it with a biographical mythos (Göschel, 2012), a trajectory from an origin, a line that directs us and gives coherence and orientation. The line deriving from the origin directs our attention back to the origin as object. In Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology, in perceiving the object I first turn towards it, the I take a direction towards and position myself in relation to and our position becomes embodied, if we regularly turn in this direction, that is to say, if we orientate ourselves towards something. Sara Ahmed writes,

> Orientations shape what bodies do, while bodies are shared by orientations they already have, as effects of the work that must take place for a body to arrive where it does. Bodies hence acquire orientation through repetitions of some actions over others, as action that certain 'objects' in view, whether they are physical objects required to do the work…or ideal objects that one identifies with (2006, p.33).

Our orientation, whether philosophically, in terms of gender or as cultural or ethnic Other, tends to align us with certain positions, ideas, ways of seeing that feel in line with our habits of mind and therefore unconscious and tacit. If the line become bent, twisted, warped spatially, between the straight lines (which is the etymology of queer). Thus, as Ahmed argues, moments of disorientation are vital in reorientating ourselves.

The centralized perspective of lines tracing back and forth between here and now and a foundational myth or origin need to be realigned, if we are to move forward and not only back and forth to that point in the past. Postcolonialism, for example, in the person of Frantz Fanon (1952/2019), teaches us that the phenomenology of the black body starts with a disorientation because the normative orientation is white, a straight world, the perspective from which non-white is literally discriminated from the white and therefore made into an object of white perception and the black man has to see himself first as the non-white object in the room. Thus, I believe that Waldorf education needs a phase of disorientation and disruption in order to come to a realignment of perspectives on anthroposophy. In my view, the line of charisma needs to become de-centred, rhizomic and emergent.

Rhizomic or arboreal

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2014) applied the metaphor of rhizome in contrast to arboreal to distinguish between different kinds of thinking, but also as social forms. Rhizome, like the plant (e.g. bamboo, Japanese Knotweed) is de-centred, non-heirarchical, hetrogenous and grows from an unseen network below ground. In contrast to this, the classic tree of knowledge metaphor- i.e. arboreal- implies a central trunk, with roots and crown, a single origin, branching out from this source, disseminating fruits that reproduce the original species. It stands for a vertical hierarchy and a linear progression that is perpetuates the original actions and ideas. If the fruits from an arboreal tree are transported to another part of the earth and planted there with a view to reproducing the original species, these new plants can be considered exotics, whereas plants that grow rhizomically can be seen as native because it grows from a local source, albeit one that is connected by the network of the

rhizome. At the risk of mixing metaphors, I am suggesting that the arboreal way of thinking is one that retains the grand narrative and an extended foundational myth. If the Waldorf movement grows out of a single foundational myth and retains this as its main orientation, and only adapts in minor ways, it can be described as arboreal.

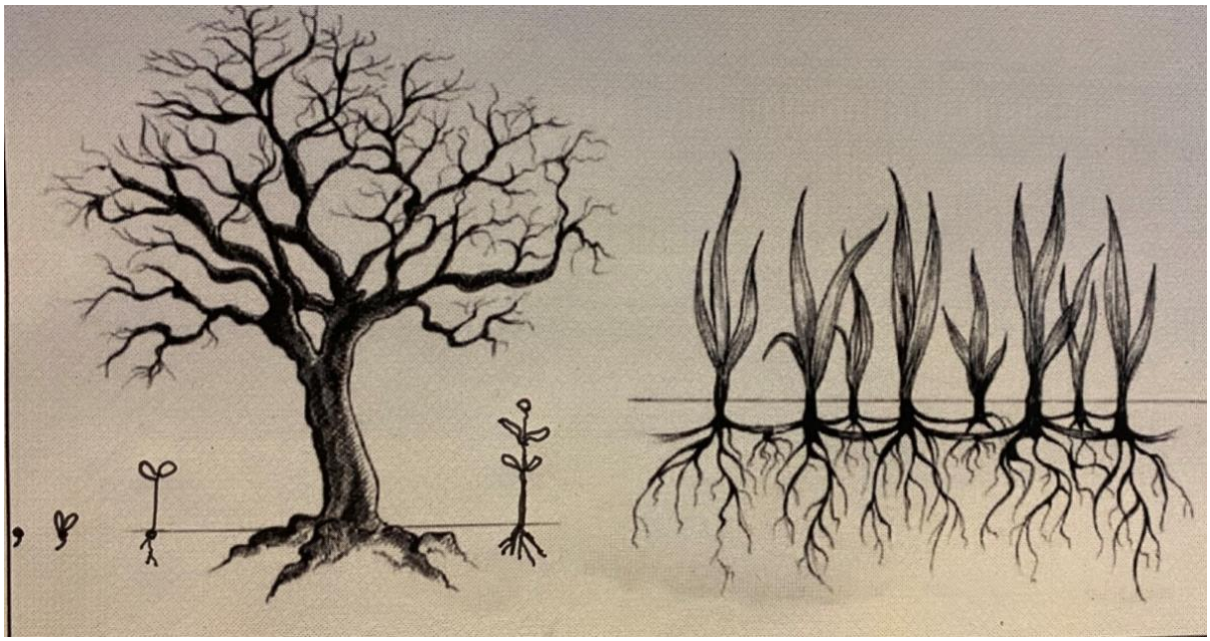

Figure 1. The metaphor of arboreal and rhizomic origins

The arboreal metaphor marks a single, central, original starting point. Lines emanating from this point follow a single line of thought, of orientation, of alignment (as we have seen above with help of Sara Ahmed). Lines emanating from rhizomes intersect, have multiple points of contact, diversify, allow pluralism. A rhizomic structure is distributed, an arboreal is centralized. I believe the historical reality has actually reflected the decentralized model below, in that the actual expansion has been from regional centers (such as Emerson College in the UK, Järna in Sweden and Rudolf Steiner College in Sacramento) during the decades of the 80s and 90s. In Middle Europe and South America, the point of growth has often been from Germany. A further complication has been the dissemination of mainly English language curricula and secondary texts. This fact has already disrupted the clear lines running from Stuttgart, because it is widely believed that the Rawson & Richter (2000) curriculum is *the* Waldorf curriculum, though it is in fact a British curriculum.

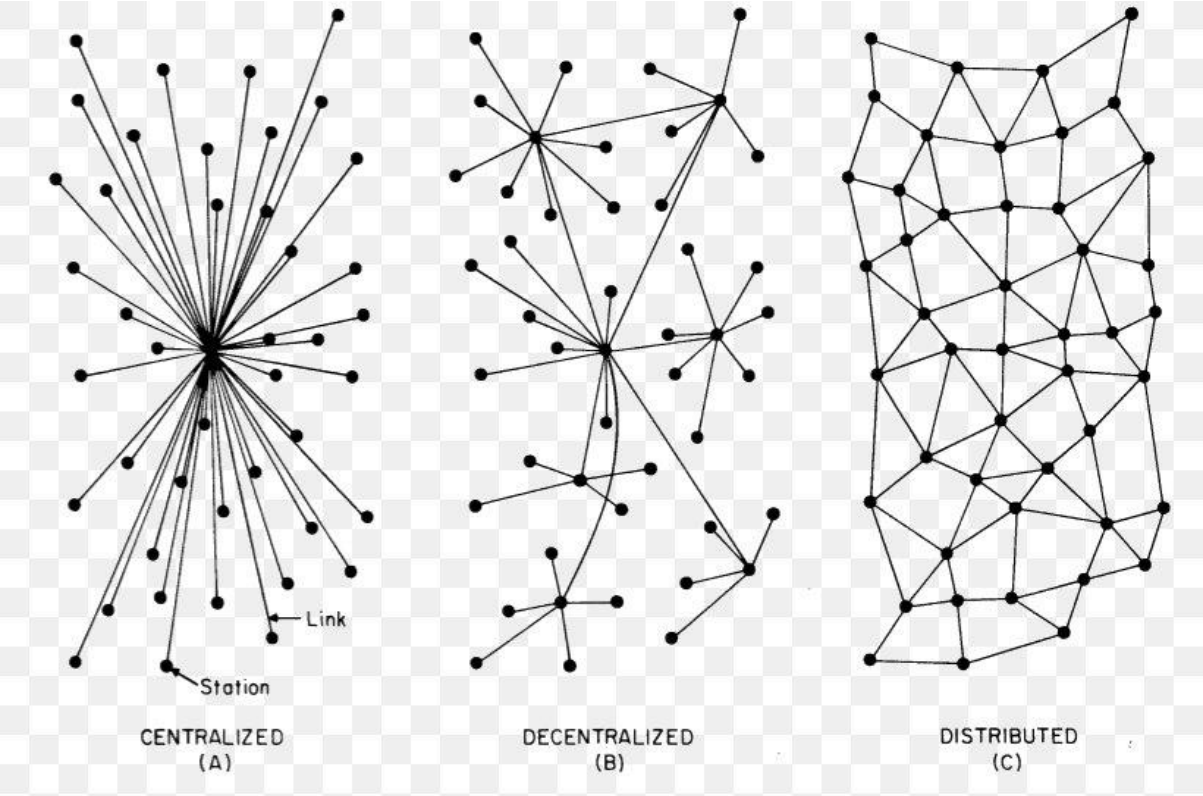

Figure 2. Another version of the rhizomic model showing a middle stage. The metaphor of the rhizome derives from Deleuze and Guattari (2004).

Purists, evolutionists and adaptationists

As Ida Oberman (1997a & b, 2008) has shown for the history of the Waldorf movement in the United States, what I call charisma, included not only fidelity to Steiner the person and to the founding circle of teachers, but also transports and is transported by a set of semiotic messages, key rituals and artefacts, such as the curriculum, that have enabled the Waldorf idea and movement to take root as an 'exotic', gradually becoming acclimatized and finding its niche and sustaining for some 90 years- the first Waldorf schools was founded in New York in 1928. Drawing on Linde's (1995) theory of institutional memory, through which the past is retained or recreated in the present, Oberman (1997a) suggests ways in which fidelity to the founding narrative have been expressed. The first is 'worked past' in which the past is brought into the present,

> specifically by member's performance or display of a representation of the past in language, a ritual, an artefact, or a commonly recited story of the institution's past. The 'worked past' resembles the contribution of a myth- rooted in but not strictly limited by actual history…that past is actively recalled to serve a purpose in the present…members 'work the past' in particular ways in order to present, represent, interpret and reinterpret the institution's past, its identity and its projected future" (Oberman, 2008, p. 15).

Oberman characterizes the growth of Waldorf in the United States as a case of balancing fidelity and flexibility. Steiner's ideas were transmitted in three ways; 'purist', literal ways, in which for example, the German curriculum was barely altered. The second mode was evolutionist, modifying as the situation affords it, but retaining much of the original as

'sacred' (in evolutionary developmental biological terms can be called the phenotype or bauplan, with vestigial forms). 'Sacred' may seem an inappropriate word but in my recent curriculum work with colleagues from the United States I have been told by colleagues who work in teacher education that the (*the* definite article indicating original, unique) curriculum was a gift of the spiritual world mediated by Rudolf Steiner to the children and any substantial change would weaken its efficacy. The third mode of transmission is accommodationist, "hybridizing old Waldorf methods with new language and instructional styles" (Oberman, 2008, 270). It also applies to the practice of Waldorf education in public or charter schools (members of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education), which have a framework provided by the state.

Teacher education evidently plays an important role in reproducing not only practice but also the narrative that this is embedded in. In this way institutional memory is cultivated in that Waldorf practices are always embedded in a narrative, the most influential being the foundational myth. Thus, a new relationship of Waldorf education means taking cognizance of the modes of its dissemination.

Anthroposophy as an esoteric path and a means to capacity building

The term esoteric is here used in the double sense of a special knowledge known only to a few people and in the sense that it refers to certain activities that when practiced can lead to the development of new spiritual faculties or capacities, such as expanded consciousness or mindfulness. Rudolf Steiner offered a wide range of ways of developing one's spiritual capacities through a variety of meditative and contemplative practices within anthroposophy and nothing suggests that these are not effective. Over the years the esoteric aspects of anthroposophy and Waldorf education have been made public and accessible to all who look for them, though there are still subtle distinctions in the social life of some institutions between those who identify themselves as practicing anthroposophists, or who belong to the First Class of the School of Spiritual Science (and its Pedagogical Section) with its mantric practices, or other groups who cultivate esoteric anthroposophical practices (see Kiersch, 2018).

However desirable a spiritual schooling is, the question is; to what extent an *anthroposophical* path of inner schooling is essential and whether Waldorf education can only be practiced if all teachers follow such a path of inner development? Are other spiritual paths compatible with Waldorf education, such as Buddhist, Sufi or Yoga practices? To my knowledge there has been research on this, and it would be hard to establish what effect such spiritual schooling has on pedagogical quality. My judgement is that such inner capacity building is always useful but not essential. I know that many anthroposophists who are Waldorf teachers will not agree with me. They will say that the anthroposophical path of spiritual schooling through exercises, meditations and verses is essential to Waldorf education, and there is considerable latent prejudice towards other spiritual paths and practices[3]. In my experience Waldorf education appears to work (which is, of course, a very

[3] York Steiner School which I co-founded in 1980 was not admitted to the Steiner Schools Fellowship for many years because many of the teachers were practicing Buddhists, Quakers, Sufis and New Age practitioners of various kinds. The school has thrived.

difficult quality to define[4]) very well without active spiritual practices such as those outlined in Steiner's *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*.

Paradoxically, most Waldorf teacher education programmes did not teach anthroposophical spiritual exercises (and many still don't, because it is felt that this is a matter of individual choice). There was I think an implicit expectation that it would be good if you did, but naturally this was never controlled. This is what leads me to believe that Waldorf pedagogy 'works' even without it, just as it does without people being members of the Anthroposophical Society or members of the esoteric First Class of the School of Spiritual Science. The relatively low numbers of members of the Anthroposophical Society or First Class among Waldorf teachers suggests that good quality Waldorf education is not dependent on people having a formal relationship to anthroposophy, much as purists would wish this.

Anthroposophy as a basis for Waldorf education

Steiner's lectures on education form the basis for Waldorf education, these include the First Teacher's Course (2020), which included lectures on anthroposophical pedagogical anthropology (in German *Menschenkunde*), methods and curriculum. There were later further pedagogical anthropology lectures for the teachers and the transcripts of the meetings with teachers. Steiner (1983) clearly intended that his lectures on pedagogical anthropology to be studied in a particular way, as he outlined in the lectures collected in the book *Meditatively Acquired Knowledge of Man* (sic) (also published as *Balance in Teaching, 1983*) and specifically in the lecture of 21st. September 1920. This approach involves a study of the ideas, meditation upon them and then the manifestation of pedagogical intuition in practice (see Lutzker and Zdrazil, 2019, pp.10-12, Wiechert, 2019, Rawson, 2020). As I have suggested elsewhere (2021), this meditative method can be capacity building, since it can lead to dispositions or ways of seeing and thinking that can direct the teacher's gaze to salient aspects of pedagogical situations and to the faculty of pedagogical tact, the intuitive ability to read and respond meaningfully to pedagogical situations.

Most of the teachers in the first school were already familiar with anthroposophical ideas (Zdrazil, 2019, 2020). For students today it is usually also necessary to study Steiner's book *Theosophy* (2011), particularly chapter 1, in which he outlines a description of the human being in his unique delineation of the constituent organizational structures of physical body, the body of life processes, the psyche and the spiritual core of being - the Self (in German das Ich) and the process of embodiment. In chapter two of *Theosophy*, Steiner outlines the way in which the Self transforms experience into abilities and thus provides a basis for a learning theory and a theory of development and an understanding of the laws of karma, as he saw them. Both chapters can be taught as hypotheses, or as heuristic ideas that can be used as a lens to interpret pedagogical and life experiences.

His other pedagogical lectures were mainly either to teachers and parents at the Waldorf School, or were introductions given to the general public in various places. These generally

[4] Space does not permit a discussion of what the word 'works' here means, and there are no easy references to cite. Nevertheless, if pushed, I would define a successful Waldorf pedagogy is one in which children and young people enjoy going to school, one that appears to enable them to become confident, active and creative learners with strong social awareness and sense of responsibility. These qualities certainly seem to be typical of York Steiner School alumni (although they may only have enjoyed Waldorf up the age of 14).

do not come under the category of narrative discussed above and contain very little esoteric descriptions nor outcomes of his spiritual research and they are generally accessible in outlining Waldorf education. They also do not necessarily require the meditative approach referred to above.

Anthroposophy as an epistemological and ontological method

My personal belief is that Waldorf education has traditionally neglected Steiner's theory of knowledge. Without it and without criticality, Waldorf teachers have no effective way of dealing with anthroposophy as grand narrative. I have given my account of Steiner's epistemology elsewhere (Rawson, 2021, pp. 20-26). Here I would like to add to what I wrote then.

Steiner's epistemology (1963) is productive, meaning that you have to do it in order to 'produce' new understandings. In doing it, one not only generates knowledge but brings oneself into being. Dahlin (2013, p.81) elegantly summarizes the essence of this theory of knowledge in the formula, knowledge + experience = reality. We can also paraphrase Steiner's (Steiner, 1963, p. 112) original account as follows: percept + concept = (individualized) knowledge. The subjective perception takes the form of a representation but in our intuitive spiritual activity of thinking (spiritual because it is done by our spiritual core of being, the Self, in German das Ich), which is partly located in the body and partly in the spiritual world, it becomes more objective. The spiritual nature of the Self enables us to cross the borderline between the subjective representation and objective concept. Not only is this process productive, it is also iterative, in that each time we do it, we can expand the knowledge gained because the knowledge we generate needs to be contextualized,

> to explain a thing, to make it intelligible, means nothing other than to place in into the context from which it has been torn, owing to the nature of our organization…What appears to our observation as single entities, combines, bit by bit, through the coherent, undivided world of our intuitions, and through thinking we fit together into a unity everything that has been divided through perception (Steiner, 1963, p.113).

Thus, thinking joins up the separate perceptions into a concept and joins up the concepts into a larger idea embedded in the whole. However, the things we experience intuitively need to be 'translated' (Steiner used the term *Dolmetsch*, 1968, p.52) so we can grasp and communicate them, firstly to ourselves then to others. That means clothing the process of knowing as well as the outcome of this activity that we call knowledge, in words and other symbolic systems (e.g. mathematics, art, myth). This makes them culturally situated and even gives them individual voice.

Epistemology is how we know what we think we know, and ontology is the study of being. "It is concerned with 'what is', with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such" (Crotty, 1998, 10). How we know depends on who we are, what we understand to be reality and how the process of knowing changes who we are. In order to provide an epistemology for diversity in a postcolonial context, we would need to take a step down from Steiner's idealist position and acknowledge that we first have to generate our own reality, then translate this into words that others can understand. At the same time, we must be open to the voices of others and translate these so we can engage in dialogue, so that we can access the pre-semantic common act of knowing.

Waldorf teachers have applied Steiner's insights to bring about all kinds of innovative practices and insights, as have others in the various fields of applied anthroposophy. The wealth of secondary literature, professional development opportunities, new ideas and the sheer fact that Waldorf education is practiced to good effect in so many different places, often under incredibly difficult conditions is a testimony to how effective Steiner's ideas have been. If we compare this to the 'outcomes' of national educational systems and universities with all the resources they have, it would be fair to say that anthroposophy is highly effective.

Please read on in part 2, where you will find the chapters on

Critical and postcolonial perspectives in Waldorf and the need for new epistemologies

Applied anthroposophical research

Conclusion: a globalectic perspective

References