

FOREWORD

*“I do not want to be revered!
I want to be understood.”*

—RUDOLF STEINER, 1915

This biography should contribute to the present understanding of Rudolf Steiner. Anyone who follows the life of Rudolf Steiner will get the impression that, after a certain point, his constant attempt was to awaken, using numerous methods, an active, working understanding for Anthroposophy. Steiner used creative imagination to treat particular themes and tasks, ever anew, and in many forms. If we look at the variations of these presentations, we can see in them the intentions that guided his life. A biography that shows Steiner’s intentions and efforts in the context of the times and life circumstances will not only relate what happened, but also why, and thus lead to understanding.

Therefore, it is not merely a matter of relating facts in the course of his life here, but also, and most important, comprehending Steiner’s work within the context of his life. His work shall not—as is the case with many modern biographies—disappear behind the life story. The meaning and development of various life motifs will be shown within the work. At the same time, however, I have abstained from any highly elevated esoteric interpretation, which for me would lapse into making ungrounded assertions, as was common within theosophical circles at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, I wished to describe what we can observe in our thinking when we think through Steiner’s assertions.

Of course, a biographer must pick and choose from an abundance of material, showing what was characteristic and symptomatic. One must present the symptoms that provide a view of the essential, which cannot be arbitrary. Precisely in the case of Rudolf Steiner, it is easy for biographers to notice what appears important to them. For Steiner, it was never about offering isolated suggestions (for instance in medicine, social life, or pedagogy). Rather, it was always a matter of taking a foundational approach, of

taking up the practice out of a comprehensive and heightened knowledge. From this perspective, we can see Steiner's work as the sum of the metamorphoses of intention, expressed in his *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom**: to understand and to act from knowledge.

It seemed that in our perplexing times, in which every opinion claims equal validity, it is first and foremost necessary to follow the foundational themes as they changed, and to present these themes very clearly, regardless of how complex they may be. With this, however, such a biography can follow only certain lines or threads. I must openly admit that it was not possible for me to take into account in the same way all of the available material—the nearly 400 volumes** in Rudolf Steiner's Collected Works and the documents belonging to them, as well as the many memoirs. It was especially painful for me that an exhaustive description of Rudolf Steiner's efforts in poetry, painting, and architecture was beyond the scope of this biography. I have the impression that only individual monographs dedicated to showing each art in practice would do justice to these themes.

Out of similar considerations, I was unable to include the whole complex of the workers' lectures, the cosmology, the scientific courses on light and warmth, and much more. Yet I think that this biography, into which readers can insert their own particular study and insights in the proper places, will meet some measure of the need for an overview of Rudolf Steiner's life and work.

This biography is the result of spending forty years collecting what has been handed down and scattered in many places while, at the same time, deepening myself ever again in the areas of the theory of knowledge, philosophy, knowledge of the human being, Christology, the view of history, Steiner's social thinking, and many other questions. Each time, where possible, I gave priority to the authentic source—that is, to Rudolf Steiner's written work.

My book *Chronik* (chronicling the significant events in Rudolf Steiner's life) was published in 1988 and, along with published and unpublished

* *Philosophie der Freiheit* [Philosophy of Freedom] was the original title. It is now also available as *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path: A Philosophy of Freedom*, SteinerBooks. In this biography the title will be given as *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, or at times simply as *Intuitive Thinking*.

** This number results from also including the documentations of the Blackboard Drawings, the artistic work, and so on.

studies, arose from the preparatory work for this biography. With the *Chronik*, I tried to present the facts of Rudolf Steiner's life and let them speak to the reader. The intention behind my other works, and above all this biography, is to make visible the spiritual actuality. My way of working (with few exceptions) was to examine very little other biographical presentations on Steiner's life. I do owe thanks to Emil Bock's foundational studies, however. Guenther Wachsmuth's book, *Rudolf Steiner's Life and Work*, in which a great deal of material is collected, seemed to me more of a resource than a biography. On the whole, my presentation finds its orientation almost exclusively from the work of Rudolf Steiner, as well as from existing records. This book was not written out of examinations of other Steiner biographies or interpretations of Steiner.

I strove not to bias the questions that naturally arise out of Steiner's life toward one or the other side, but to make Steiner's thoughts, processes, and manner of behavior understandable. Of course, I brought to expression all the critical points of Steiner's life that I knew of. The love of truth demands this. But with these critical points, I also tried to understand Steiner's thinking and behavior. I abstained from extensive psychological interpretations, but I attempted to show how these critical points can be understood from Steiner's whole life, his bearing, or his character. The way I understand the task of the biographer and the writer of history is not to judge but to understand and to describe spiritually. This does not mean that the writer abstains from every judgment; but where a judgment is expressed, the reader should be able to see that it is the writer's judgment, and not confuse it with the facts.

When I place this biography before the reader, I do not do so lightly. I do not claim any authority from the fact that I occupied myself with Steiner's life for forty years, because one can indeed spend forty years stuck in bias and misunderstandings. I draw the courage to publish this work, not from my studies of the intellectual and historical environs in which Steiner's life took place, but quite simply from the fact Rudolf Steiner always expressed himself clearly and understandably in all the essential points. It is, therefore, necessary only to read exactly and to duplicate inwardly what is being spoken of, in order to conceive of Steiner appropriately. I believe one does Rudolf Steiner a grave injustice by acting as if Steiner cannot ultimately be understood, believing that we must limit ourselves to presentiment and belief.

I wish to apologize to the reader who is dismayed by the size of this book. I have kept it as short as possible and eliminated much from my previous drafts. Beyond this, the chapters are arranged to be clear. For example, the chapter on Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* presents the development of the idea of freedom (or spiritual activity) from 1882 on. The chapter on the threefold nature of the human being attempts to outline the history of research into this idea from the beginning onward. In this sense, the orientation of many of the chapters is thematic. The chapters are arranged chronologically only with the beginning of events in 1922.

I have tried not to repeat my earlier presentations. A full biography is subject to different rules than a specialized study is. Therefore, for some specific questions, I allow myself to refer to my earlier works.

Finally, I have the pleasant duty to thank all who have helped me with this work. First, there are those I already named in my *Chronik* and whose work provided the foundation for this biography, as well as those who allowed me to examine documents. Also my gratitude goes to all of the people who gave of their time and effort to reading through the text and offering suggestions, which helped me in many ways. And not forgotten are all of the people with whom I could have conversations and thereby have many questions explained. Above all, however, I thank my friend, Götz Deimann, who constantly encouraged and supported this work.

Christoph Lindenberg

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INTRODUCTION

When Rudolf Steiner began to write his *Autobiography* in December 1923, he turned to memories of the events and experiences that determined or distinguished his path of development. Thus, his presentation was limited mainly to describing the questions that moved him inwardly, the thoughts he formed, and those who inspired him. Nevertheless, he did not focus on the outer obstacles and difficulties that accompanied his inner development. Nor did he complain about the lack of spiritual stimulation from his parents. He barely mentioned the poverty that lasted through his childhood and until he was forty-five years of age. Steiner simply passed over the miserable honorarium for his literary work and did not write at all about the financial crisis connected with the publishing of the *Magazine for Literature*. Readers of his *Autobiography* will not find any description of the outer conflicts, the bitterness, and the dashed hopes with which Steiner had to wrestle. He could easily have made his autobiography into a story of going from poverty to a lack of recognition and then to success, but it was nothing like that.

Nor was it Rudolf Steiner's intention to portray his times in his autobiography—Vienna in the 1880s, life at the Weimar court, or theater life in Berlin at the turn of the century. He could easily have woven in witty anecdotes or a bit of color concerning the cultural history. It would have been quite easy for him to write a humorous chapter about the Theosophical Society. Many comments in his lectures hint that there was a great deal of material about the Theosophical Society for a storyteller, and Steiner could tell stories. All of these things were mentioned only inasmuch as they played a role in Steiner's path of development or distinguished the milieu in which he lived.

In *Autobiography*, Rudolf Steiner says, "I do not wish to relate private matters in this account of my life, except when they are connected in some way with my spiritual development" (28, p. 192).^{*} And a little further on it says even more clearly, "As for the rest, a person's private life does not

* Where page number are given, quotations are from a current English edition.

belong to the public. It is of no concern to them” (28, p. 192). His relationships with his mother and siblings apparently fall into this area of private life; he was totally silent concerning them. For all that, the relationship was extremely harmonious. Just as soon as Rudolf Steiner could, he began to support his mother and siblings, and even during the last days of his life, he was concerned about the care of his siblings. Yet nothing is said about them in his autobiography. Steiner remained silent in this way about many other facts and circumstances, or mentioned them only in passing. He also wrote only briefly about his marriage to Anna Eunike and was completely silent about their separation.

The reader of Steiner’s *Autobiography* must guess at the difficulties of his collaboration with Otto Erich Hartleben in publishing the *Magazine for Literature*. The yearlong suffering under the pedantic nature of his superior, Bernhard Suphan, at the Goethe Archive was condensed into this sentence: “I cannot deny that I often felt disturbed by what Suphan did—the way he handled the management of the archives and his supervision of the editing of Goethe’s works—and I never made any secret of this” (28, p. 107). He was just as brief in mentioning Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche’s intrigues, to which he fell victim. In the end, he said he was grateful to Mrs. Förster-Nietzsche for bringing him into Nietzsche’s sickroom—an unforgettable experience for Steiner. In this sense, he always turned his memory to what furthered him in whatever he encountered, even when circumstances brought an obstacle or disadvantage. Thus, a great deal that fills other biographies is missing in Steiner’s autobiography.

There is also not much in *Autobiography* about Steiner’s inner struggles and experiences. This is connected with the fact that Rudolf Steiner initially published his autobiography in installments in the weekly publication, *Das Goetheanum*. These installments were intended to be excerpts of a future book. In a lecture, Rudolf Steiner commented, “I could relate only the outer aspects of these things in *Das Goetheanum*, and the articles will be published as a book with annotations in which also the inner aspect will be taken into account” (238). How Rudolf Steiner would have described these inner aspects of his development can best be gathered from indications given in the chapters he wrote in 1924/25 from the stillness of his sickbed. On the whole, however, what would fully clarify the inner struggles and problems are often lacking. Steiner’s autobiography follows his life up to 1907. One misses two elements: first the intended

continuation beyond 1907, and second, the description of specific inner aspects of the life story.

Although Steiner's autobiography is incomplete, and although much of his intended expansion of details are missing, one must acknowledge *Autobiography* as the foundational source for every Steiner biography. Everyone who wishes to study Steiner's life seriously must read his *Autobiography*. It would also be senseless merely to paraphrase what was given there for the content of this book; the reader would be better served by the original. The autobiography covers especially Steiner's development during his childhood and youth, and this is known for the most part only through his descriptions. For this reason, this biography will summarize Steiner's childhood and youth in broad strokes and supplement it only somewhat from other, mostly unknown sources.

Biographers who want to describe Steiner's life are faced with several tasks and difficulties. They do not have to hold back the way Steiner did concerning his struggles, sufferings, and deprivations. They have every reason to portray the life of the subject—as far as the witnesses allow it—the way it was most likely lived, from the perspective of the experiences of that time. Steiner's letters from 1881 to 1925 provide some insight that makes it possible to give a fairly reliable description of his personal experiences. The biographer can also attempt to search for hints of the hidden biography of Steiner in his lectures and in the few existing records, but here one must be very careful and can only formulate questions from much of it. In our time of voyeurism when people would be very interested in Rudolf Steiner's private relationships, what is said about them must be what is important and what can be seen as well-founded, otherwise people could suspect that something is being covered up. But one should not overestimate the significance of Rudolf Steiner's private life that in itself is not very informative.

What is essential in this biography may be found in his development and work. An abundance of evidence exists for all to see, and it must only be *seen*. The task of this biography will be largely to make Rudolf Steiner's path visible on hand of what his contemporaries had to say. The statements of his contemporaries come from letters and early essays, in the first editions of many of his works, and later from lectures and records. These are in many respects quite informative, because they add to Steiner's later self-interpretation. For example, through the eyewitness accounts, Steiner's sudden change when he was thirty-six years old—he merely mentions this in his *Autobiography*—became

quite vivid. This seems to me to be legitimate, because Rudolf Steiner's condensed interpretation of his development is explained by the eyewitnesses in such a way that makes it much clearer for the reader. In this biography I quite consciously avoid making any esoteric speculations and dispense with such speculations by other authors. I do this, not because it would not be fascinating, but because respect for Rudolf Steiner on the one hand and for the reader on the other demands that this be left up to the efforts of the reader. Just as soon as esoteric insights are translated into popular concepts and ideas and then fixed in writing, they open a door for innumerable misunderstandings, because others then interpret them all too easily in their own sense and connect them with ideas that are not accurate.

Above all, esoteric connections are so alive and flexible that it is not good to express them once and for all with finality and to formulate them in such a way that they are simply accepted. For this reason, I stick with Goethe who commented in his maxims and reflections, "The esoteric causes harm only when it tries to become exoteric." Rudolf Steiner gave a very helpful commentary concerning this maxim. He said, "A concept is esoteric, when it is considered in connection with the manifestations out of which it was attained. It is exoteric when it is separated out as an abstraction and is considered on its own" (1e). In this sense the ideas and concepts shall remain esoteric; they are not formulated abstractly in themselves. It is my intention with this biography to let the spiritual, soul, and outer facts speak for themselves, *leaving the interpretation of those facts to the reader.*

Finally, I must point out two peculiarities of Rudolf Steiner's *Autobiography*. He did not always present the events in the correct chronological order. He had brought out the first volume of Goethe's Natural Scientific Writings (they were published initially in five volumes) *before* he worked as a teacher and private tutor in the home of Ladislau Specht. In *Autobiography*, however, the description of his work on Goethe comes after the narrative on entering the Specht home. In other places, namely in lectures, Steiner tended to give dates that were too early for events, even dates that could be ascertained exactly.* In this presentation the dates are reported without further comment.

* Steiner mentioned twice the day of the founding of the Austrian Social Democratic Party that took place near Neudörfel in 1874 (330 & 354). The second time he mentioned it, he said, "At that time I was eight, ten or eleven years old." But he was already thirteen years old. Concerning his first Kant readings, he said in his autobiographical lecture of February 4, 1913, that at that time he was "between

Second, the reader should take into account that from 1916 on Rudolf Steiner was vehemently attacked. Among other things, people uncovered his early writings and essays, compared the first edition of *Intuitive Thinking* with the second edition and decided Steiner had completely changed his mind. In *Autobiography*, as in other connections too, Steiner stressed the inner continuity of his spiritual development. He does this—change and transformation are after all not a disgrace—because in his understanding, the continuity is more important than the change. Therefore, one meets in many paragraphs of the autobiography the defence against certain interpretations of his development. Had these many attacks that spoke of a break with his earlier works or a change of mind not happened, Steiner could have more freely presented the steps of his own development, transformations or trials in *Autobiography*.

The last chapter of Rudolf Steiner's *Autobiography* begins:

It will be difficult to separate what follows as an account of my life from the history of the anthroposophic movement. Nevertheless, I do not want to bring any more than is necessary of the society's history into this description. (28, p. 237)

Rudolf Steiner was not able to write this last part of his autobiography. However, there are enough of Steiner's own records in existence, in order to be able to write more than just an outer description of his further path. Of course, the biographer has the difficult task, in the first place, of not writing a history of the Anthroposophical Society or of Steiner's work within the anthroposophic movement, but first and foremost, to describe Steiner's life and experience, and where possible, his further development. For this reason, the reader will not find a detailed presentation on the financial initiatives, *The Coming Day* (*Der Kommende Tag*) or *Futurum, Inc.*, or the history of building the first Goetheanum. One will find only what Rudolf Steiner did or experienced in connection with these, as far as the source can yield the information. One could doubt whether this is even possible, but it must be attempted. We can hope that in the future other

fourteen and fifteen years old." The Reclam edition, which Steiner always mentioned using, of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* came out in spring 1877. Steiner got it in May 1877, at the earliest. Thus he was sixteen years old. Further, Steiner mentions that his first visit with Nietzsche in Naumberg took place on May 26, 1894, at the latest. However, there is a record in Rudolf Steiner's handwriting that shows the first visit was on January 22, 1896.

authors will come along who can bring more comprehensive and unforeseen viewpoints to such a presentation. But a beginning had to be made. That is the purpose of this book.

Certainly, I do not intend to repeat here the many details and dates already contained in my book *Rudolf Steiner—eine Chronik* [Rudolf Steiner: A Chronicle]. When this chronicle is issued again, it will be expanded a great deal to include new information that has come out since its first publication in 1988.