

Introduction

In 2020 anthroposophic medicine will be one hundred years old. In this “jubilee” year, many doctors, therapists, and patients will report positive experiences with the healing method they practice or experience. New textbooks and studies will be published and international conferences will take place. At the annual conference of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum in September 2020 alone, over one thousand doctors and therapists from more than thirty countries are expected, all of whom apply anthroposophic medicine successfully, often under difficult conditions in areas of poverty and need. The first doctors’ course held by Rudolf Steiner in March and April 1920 will be republished in 2020 in a new, critically reviewed edition based on the original shorthand reports, together with the wall chart drawings of the eighth edition. Furthermore, a first study commentary volume on this course (comprising more than 560 pages) will be available from March 2020⁴⁸—and further commentary volumes on the course lectures and their contents from a scientific, historical, and clinical point of view will be presented, also beginning in 2020, by Prof. Dr. Peter Heusser and his collaborators.⁴⁹

However, the destructive counter-attack, which has long since begun, will not fail to occur, because what does not fit into one’s own ideological, paradigmatic, or economic concept should not exist. Once again, anthroposophic medicine will be presented as “unscientific” and “esoteric-occult,” as a pseudo-method of healing with “ineffective” homeopathic remedies, which goes back to a dubious personality, Rudolf Steiner, who was not a doctor but had acted in an economic-strategic way, stole foreign spiritual material, amalgamated it eclectically, and held his believing “followers” in a magical grip as a “bulimic speaker and thinker,”⁵⁰ “always driven

by prophecy,”⁵¹ in the form of an “esoteric” sectarian dictatorship.⁵² All this and much more has already been repeatedly put forward. The first to start were demonstrably denominational zealots, right-wing nationalist groups, and dogmatic university scholars in the 1920s (see p. 44f.).⁵³

The argumentation patterns are old, constantly repeated and intermixed, but currently they are once again emphatically gaining in sharpness. Among other things, one can read and hear today on the part of the “sceptics” that it is a matter of “protecting” the ignorant population from “ineffective” and “unscientific” medical procedures that should be banned. The population must also be protected from “ideologies” of dangerous provenance. Anthroposophy was in the process of “preparing authoritarian and fascist forms of rule in people’s minds,” wrote Peter Bierl as early as 1999.⁵⁴ In recent press reports on the work of Waldorf schools—which also celebrated a centenary in 2019—it was not neglected, while moderately acknowledging the educational achievements of today’s institutions, to always mention the “racism” or even “anti-Semitism” of the school system’s founder, Rudolf Steiner, as an obviously well-known flaw—either prominently positioned in the core of the report, or rather “alongside” it.⁵⁵ Almost without exception, this was done without citing literature or concrete results of historical research, but in constant repetition.⁵⁶ In various reports, the Waldorf schools were again called upon to finally distance themselves from their “spiritus rector” and his backward-dogmatic “ideology”⁵⁷; some schools then also wisely refrained from any closer reference to Steiner and Anthroposophy in their celebratory events, out of fear, uncertainty, and consternation.

Anthroposophic medicine will very probably not receive the same recognition in its anniversary year. Rather, its *raison d’être* and legitimacy will be completely questioned—with reference to the alleged lack of clinical studies on the positive efficacy of homeopathic, anthroposophic medicines (and thus to a *de facto* failure to provide help through “belated use of established medical practices”

[Zander]),⁵⁸ and to further deficits and omissions that are imputed to it. Anthroposophic medicine is “unscientific and dogmatic,” works with “karmic speculations,” and pokes around in “biographical fog” and a “fictitious anthroposophic theory of evolution”; driven by “irrational, partly alchemical ideas,” it represents an absurd “magic medicine”—which in the imagination of its followers is “framed against an image of orthodox medicine distorted to the point of caricature”—as a virtual “pseudo-medicine,” which sells “magic as holism” and stands for a “fallback before the Enlightenment” “into an understanding of illness and therapy shaped by occult magical thinking,” as was recently (2019) to be read in a monograph.⁵⁹ The “old battle term *unscientific*” (Eduard Seidler⁶⁰) was used again.

The critics do not mention the fact that there are scientific studies with positive proof of the efficacy of homeopathic medicines and their mode of action,⁶¹ as well as monographs on the scientific concept and content of anthroposophic medicine, on the rationality of its physiological, pathophysiological, and therapeutic thinking and procedures, but also on the behavior of anthroposophists under National Socialism and on Steiner’s extremely critical statements on racism and nationalism, anti-Semitism, eugenics, and racial hygiene. The corresponding works,⁶² if they are considered at all, are disqualified as internal anthroposophic apology (to justify “one’s own faith”) or as “internal contextualization,”⁶³ and shelved. Quite obviously, contrary to the superficial appearance of a “postmodern,” open and critical “discourse,” a real ideational and historical examination of Steiner and Anthroposophy, and an unbiased exploration of their life practice, are not sought by most critics at all. With methods of striking alienation and targeted defamation, they rather propagate a ban on such approaches.

What is demanded “to protect the population” is ultimately a form of authoritarian, repressive disciplining of society.⁶⁴ The population is denied the ability to judge; it is not the plurality of philosophical and scientific-methodological perspectives that continues to be intended here, but the exact opposite. “Critical rationalism” (which

in the sense of Ravagli's terminology⁶⁵ is much better described as "militant rationalism") pretends to want to serve "enlightenment" and expose obscure charlatans who obstruct the "progress of science" and its implementation. In the process, what positivist reductionism and technological materialism have already caused in terms of damage and collateral damage—all the real existing problems in the fields of medicine or pedagogy, not to mention ecology and agriculture—are left out. The serious crises to which anthroposophic medicine, Waldorf education, curative education, or Demeter agriculture try to react, in the sense of concrete counter-models, are ignored in the vast majority of attacks on Anthroposophy; they are of just as little interest as are the life experiences of mature adults who have their children and young people educated in Waldorf schools, not out of naivety and ignorance but consciously. Or it is ignored that there are patients who for good reasons and in freedom⁶⁶ want to be cared for anthroposophically *because*, for them, the soul and the spirit, the individual biography and the body as a bearer of these, are not "irrational" metaphysical aberrations but nothing less than obvious realities, just as obvious as the glaring deficits of "pure orthodox medicine"—which in large part still pays homage to the reductionist body model of the nineteenth century in its disconnectedness, and moves more and more in a goal-oriented and thoroughly economized clinical operation—an operation to whose emergence and functioning its reductionist concepts have significantly contributed.⁶⁷

The aim of many in part extraordinarily aggressive publications critical of Anthroposophy, as well as interviews and talk show segments, is to influence public opinion and the legislature through self-appointed and ideologically rigid experts.⁶⁸ The aim is not only to dismantle methodological and substantive pluralism;⁶⁹ the democratic polity of self-determined citizens is also damaged under the guise of "science" or "enlightenment." "*Less diversity, more monopolization.*"⁷⁰ The formerly progressive Enlightenment is here alienated into the instrument of a reactionary social force that

argues with a normative—instead of a critical—concept of science and a uniformly presented “scientific methodology” that has long been out of date in the history and theory of science.⁷¹ This unquestioned concept of a single, homogeneous and “generally recognized” scientific method thus threatens to become a totalitarian instrument of order, the “opponent of freedom.” According to Lorenzo Ravagli, the militant rationalists (including today’s “sceptics”) not only endanger freedom of action “in our still pluralistic society,” but also discredit science itself “through their fanaticism, by declaring a certain, narrow understanding of science to be universally valid.”⁷²

A commitment of political actors “to a health policy based on scientific knowledge”⁷³ is extremely problematic if such a truncated, normative, and reactionary concept of science is applied. The commentary on the German Basic Law by Theodor Maunz, Günter Dürig, Roman Herzog, and Rupert Scholz states that “the state is barred from any dictate of cultural policy, any attempt at uniformity in cultural policy or any... dirigisme determining the content of science (scientific judgeship).”⁷⁴ When the German pharmaceutical legislation was revised in 1976 and the drug commissions for the various therapeutic directions were established, the Bundestag committee responsible emphasized that the “monopolization of the prevailing doctrine as an [apparently] binding ‘state of scientific knowledge’ must be refrained from”—and that the social minorities represented by the particular therapeutic directions must not be “majoritized.”⁷⁵ In the 1970s, during the time of a democratic awakening in the Federal Republic of Germany (“dare more democracy...”), scientific and therapeutic freedom and patient self-determination were given high priority. The normative arguments of “general scientific recognition” or “international standards” were critically questioned at that time and their problems were seen through. Helmut Kiene pointedly formulated: “‘Scientifically generally accepted’ means that the opinion is accepted by all who share the same opinion; or, that the opinion is accepted by a group that believes itself to be in

possession of the absolute scientific truth or to have the power of the majority.”⁷⁶

Back to Anthroposophy and its medicine. With a few catchy arguments—that of the lack of “scientifically recognized efficacy” of its remedies, that of occult “charlatanry” and the accusation of right-wing, racist, anti-Semitic thinking of the founder and “guru” Steiner—a lot of ground is currently being gained in the public and in the media, including on social media, and all this despite the fact that over seventy percent of the population does not (yet) want to do without complementary medical offerings, including anthroposophic ones. Few other things achieve such easy and quick effects as the aforementioned claims. They cause uncertainty and aversion, especially among intellectually and morally alert people. Who would want their children to attend a private school whose founder was an avowed racist and “radical anti-Semite”?⁷⁷ Who would want to be treated as a patient by unscientific and dogmatically determined anthroposophic doctors who—possibly “racists” in disguise themselves—deal with ineffective placebo medicines and “karmic speculation”? Not only the diminished popularity of anthroposophic institutions, initiatives, and procedures is associated with such defamation. Rather, the goal is restrictions by the legislature, up to and including a ban, and this has already been partially achieved in some countries.⁷⁸

With regard to the accusation of racism and anti-Semitism against Rudolf Steiner, the situation is paradoxical. There was hardly a writer, speaker, and social activist in Germany in the second and third decades of the twentieth century who spoke out as clearly, farsightedly, and vehemently as Steiner did on the abysmal danger of contemporary thinking in categories of racism and anti-Semitism, eugenics, racial hygiene, and selection—and pointed out concrete alternatives to these. Steiner’s statements in this regard and corresponding anthroposophic initiatives—from the founding years of anthroposophic education and medicine, Demeter agriculture, anthroposophic curative homes, and the movement

for “social threefolding,” etc.—are at least partially known to most of the hostile critics of Anthroposophy, but they wisely leave them unexamined or at least underemphasized. The same applies to Steiner’s warnings against the dangers of a “purely scientific” or rather iatrotechnical* approach to medicine in an authoritarian state—warnings that also leave nothing to be desired in terms of clarity and have a special significance against the background of the later Nazi medicine that Steiner saw coming. Rudolf Steiner and the physician Ita Wegman began anthroposophic medicine precisely *not* in a sanctified and hypocritical refuge of “occult” alternative medicine for circumscribed, well-heeled (bourgeois to upper middle-class) sect circles of “Aryan” descent, and far from science in the sphere of herbs, stars, and “elemental spirits”—as this was propagated, for the effect of publicity, by Helmut Zander and others—but rather as a contoured answer to current and future dangers and in the sense of what is today called “personal” medicine of humanistic orientation. However, it is difficult, and in no way opportune (also generally forbidden in “academic circles”), to grant Steiner’s statements—or even his extended understanding of science and modernity—topicality and relevance, or methodological independence and far-sightedness in terms of content, right up to his anticipation of later historical developments.

* TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: *Iatrotechnical*: pertaining to the techniques of modern medical practice: 1. Vital processes are basically physical and chemical processes, although specially organized in relatively complex structures. 2. Relations between these functional units are strictly determined by the laws of nature; in principle, living organisms are organized no differently from inanimate nature. Natural laws are causal laws. The aim is to find the causes or conditions underlying all physiological and pathological processes and explain them in minute detail. 3. To this end the organism must be divided up into its component parts and elements. The investigation must proceed along causal, analytical lines. 4. The means employed to find out how the parts function is the experiment, as in physics and chemistry. But here the experiment must be carried out on a living organism or on isolated, living parts. Thus, experimental medicine using live animals is the standard method upon which iatrotechnical medicine is based. 5. The analysis of the laws governing the relationships in the healthy and diseased body may not be considered complete until every detail needed for repairing these causal relationships has been elucidated. The body is thus viewed as a technically functioning object, to be dissected and manipulated as required.

Because of this, all that will be discussed below falls by the wayside in the vast majority of publications about him (“conceal, omit, suppress”).⁷⁹ Instead, particular sentences from Steiner’s lectures on the history of culture, religion, and humanity, which have been quoted for decades—and deliberately taken out of context and partially alienated from their meaning—are assumed as “evidence” for “obscurantism,” “racism,” and “radical anti-Semitism.” Such sentences or fragments of statements, reproduced in isolation, are *intended* to irritate and alienate; and they do so,⁸⁰ just like other partial statements on minerals or colors, on eurythmy or on mistletoe, which, taken out of their context, seem superficially to prove sectarian “irrationalism.”⁸¹

At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, it is by no means necessary to subscribe to *all* of Rudolf Steiner’s explanations, to consider them good, correct, resistant to error, worthy of support, and linguistically successful, in order to see clearly that the main impetus of his thought and approach, and also the broad line of his spiritual ethics, are completely different from what is suggested by the strategists of polemical discourse with their quotations, comments, constructions, and “deconstructions.” Steiner’s intentions in founding anthroposophic medicine and curative education, the Waldorf movement, the movement for “social threefolding,” and an ecological agriculture were neither irrational nor “inhuman” and reactionary, but distinctly humanistic, critical, innovative, and progressive—a fact that many critics are probably also aware of. For the most part, however, they are not concerned with a more precise understanding of the anthroposophic concerns and methodological approach, but with their deliberate distortions. Anyone who is familiar with Steiner’s complete works will quickly realize, on closer examination of the critical publications in question, which methods of misleading manipulation, propaganda, and deception⁸² are predominantly used here in order to exert a targeted influence on public opinion and political decision-making with journalistic power and skill. The “new image of the enemy in Europe,”

about which Albrecht Müller recently wrote,⁸³ in no way stops with Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy.

The main accusations against Rudolf Steiner and the anthroposophists are directed *first* at the allegedly “ideological,” “inhuman” core of Anthroposophy and *second* at the apparently questionable behavior of anthroposophists during the National Socialist period (whereby a connection of the first to the second is postulated, claiming that their allegedly “racist” ideological ideas were so close to fascism that they brought these alleged fellow travelers to be “protected” by the Nazi regime). Thus, my account turns to both topics, with anthroposophic medicine at the center. First to be presented are Steiner’s anthropological and anthroposophic positions on questions of self-determination and heteronomy, nationalism and racism, as well as his engagement with Judaism, anti-Semitism, and Zionism (pp. 3–58). Then, it will be demonstrated how early the right-wing, national-racist criticism of Anthroposophy began—because of the positions and social initiatives it represented—and how Steiner, Anthroposophy, and the anthroposophists appear in the files of the NSDAP,* the SS, and the Gestapo (pp. 59–74). Next, the guidelines of medicine under National Socialism are outlined and contrasted with the core points of anthroposophic medicine and its medical anthropology and ethics (pp. 75–120). This is followed by a description of Ita Wegman’s position—as Rudolf Steiner’s medical collaborator and longstanding leader of the Medical Section at the Goetheanum—in relation to health policy in Germany after 1933 and the totalitarian Nazi system, and of the developments she attempted to initiate within anthroposophic medical and curative education during this period, including the attitudes of Wegman’s colleagues (pp. 121–148). Lastly, there is a brief consideration of how Nazi

* TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei [National Socialist German Workers’ Party]) was a political party in Germany, active between 1920 and 1945, that created and supported the ideology of Nazism. The SS (Schutzstaffel [Protection Squadron]) was the Nazi Party’s elite paramilitary led by Heinrich Himmler.

medicine was dealt with after 1945, and of Anthroposophy and its reception in the twentieth century (pp. 149–165).

Although the text, which was originally conceived in a concise and thesis-like form, grew in length in the course of writing, I understand it as an essay—in the context of a current research project into the history of medicine at our Institute, which is repeatedly mentioned in the text and in the notes (*Anthroposophische Medizin, Heilpädagogik und Pharmazie in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (1933–1945)* [Anthroposophic medicine, curative education, and pharmacy in the time of National Socialism]).