

## FOREWORD

*Henry Barnes*

A long and terrible war had just ended, a war that caused untold suffering and was to set the stage for the twentieth century. During those years, Rudolf Steiner, restricted in his outer movements, was able to conclude three decades of intense inward, spiritual-scientific research into the nature of the human being. In 1917, around the time that the German High Command secretly sent Lenin into Russia, and Woodrow Wilson led the United States into war, it finally became clear to Rudolf Steiner how the human soul and spirit are engaged in the human physical organism. That the brain and nervous system are the instrument of consciousness had long become evident to natural-scientific research, as well as to those who sought to understand the human being from the aspect of soul; but the question of how human feeling and human volition were grounded organically was, at best, a matter of speculation. There were schools of thought that attributed feeling to a subtle sympathetic vibration of the nervous system, and it was assumed that the will was merely a function of the motor nerves, controlled and stimulated from corresponding centers in the brain. But, even if an objective existence to the soul were admitted, the possibility that either feeling or will might be independent functions of the soul and have direct access to the organism as their bodily instrument was not even given theoretical consideration.

Into this situation Rudolf Steiner introduced the results of his years of research. These described the threefold human organism as the basis for the soul's life of willing, feeling, and thought. Only in thinking, he maintained, can we look to the brain and nervous system as the physiological instrument. If we look for the instrument of willing, Steiner said, we must look for it in the activity of the *metabolism*, while the bodily basis for feeling should be sought in the rhythmic pulsation of *breathing*, which is closely intertwined with the circulation of the blood. Therefore, to understand how the soul—and through it also the human spirit—works into earthly life through the instrument of the body, we must come to recognize that the soul, as a being of thinking, feeling, and willing, engages itself *as a whole with the whole physical organism* as metabolism, rhythmic breathing organism, and nerve sense system.

Summarized in this way, these conclusions appear highly theoretical and remote from life; but as Steiner first presented them in two lectures in Berlin during March 1917 (included in their first English translation in this volume), and which he reformulated in the autumn of that same year in his book *Von Seelenrätseln (Riddles of the Soul)*,<sup>1</sup> and further developed in far greater detail in the fourteen lectures newly translated for this edition, his research results provide an anthropological basis for understanding the soul, spirit, and bodily nature of the human being. Thereby we come to realize that these challenging, difficult concepts are what made possible the development of a radically new approach to education, medicine, the arts, and many other fields. And it was just these insights that enabled Steiner, in May 1917, to respond to the

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1. Translated and edited by Owen Barfield in *The Case for Anthroposophy*; Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1970.

appeal by a keen observer of the political and social situation in Germany<sup>2</sup> for ideas on which a genuine and lasting peace might be founded when the war finally came to an end. Thus not only did the results of this research make it possible for Rudolf Steiner to describe what he saw as the direction in which forces were working beneath the surface of the chaos and desolation in Central Europe at the time, but it also yielded the conceptual basis for building a practical art of educational renewal—embodied two years later in the founding of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart, Germany, in the autumn of 1919.

Steiner saw beneath the social chaos accompanying the war's end the striving of the social organism to re-constitute itself as the working together of three independent, but interactive, spheres of life. He recognized that economic life on one hand, and cultural-spiritual life on the other, were struggling to free themselves from the centralized political control of the state. Steiner saw the same threefoldness of forces at work in the social body that he had come to recognize as working in the form and function of the human organism. The social struggle into which Steiner plunged in a heroic effort to awaken his contemporaries in German-speaking Middle Europe during the months immediately following the end of the war, led his long-time student Emil Molt,<sup>3</sup> the owner-director of the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory, to ask Rudolf Steiner the fateful question: Would he be willing to guide and direct a school for the children of the workers in

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2. Otto von Lerchenfeld, at that time secretary to the Bavarian ambassador to the imperial court in Berlin.

3. Dr. Emil Molt (1876–1936), was an industrialist with a deep concern for social conditions, and was well-regarded by his employees. See *Emil Molt and the Beginnings of the Waldorf School Movement: Sketches from an Autobiography*, Floris Books, Edinburgh, UK, 1991.

his factory? This question led directly to the founding of the Waldorf School four and a half months later.<sup>4</sup>

The coming together of these two streams—the stream of insight and research, and the stream of outer social action—bore fruit in Steiner’s immediate and wholehearted acceptance of the challenge implicit in Emil Molt’s question. His response was based on the understanding that four basic conditions would be met. These conditions were, first of all, that the school be open to *all* children; second, that it be co-educational; third, that it be a comprehensive school—in contrast to the prevailing system where the intellectually gifted were sent to academic schools around the age of eleven, while their schoolmates completed their education at fourteen and then entered into apprenticeships or vocational training—and, fourth, that the conduct of the school be entrusted to those who would work with the children every day—that is, the children’s teachers.

It was Molt’s immediate, unhesitating agreement to these conditions and his rapid, practical engagement in bringing about the school that enabled Steiner—in such an astonishingly short time—to meet the group of prospective teachers who responded to his call, and to begin the work with them that culminated, sooner than anyone could have believed possible, in the opening of the school. The teachers gathered on August 21, 1919, in what had been a favorite restaurant-café for the citizens of Stuttgart until Molt bought it for the site of the new school. The two weeks that followed were weeks of almost unimaginable concentration.

Every day during this time Rudolf Steiner gave three courses of fourteen lectures each, and these three courses, together, constitute the initial cornerstone upon which the

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4. For a detailed account of the development of Waldorf education see Gilbert Childs, *Steiner Education in Theory and Practice*, Floris Books, 1991.

new educational venture was to be built.<sup>5</sup> The course presented in this volume was, it might be said, “the cornerstone of the cornerstone.” It introduced its hearers to the radically different way through which one can come to understand human nature by striving to know the human being not only from a physiological-biological point of view—with certain psychological attributes deriving from the physical—but also from an open-minded consideration of the results of spiritual-scientific research. To do so, however, requires that one be prepared to extend the scope and method of scientific inquiry into realms of experience beyond sense perception and ordinary intellectual analysis. In fact, such extended spiritual-scientific inquiry, as practiced by Rudolf Steiner for many decades, leads to the recognition that human beings, after a life of earthly experience, enter after death into a world of spiritual being from which they descend once more into a new birth. It is from this perspective then that Rudolf Steiner describes how human individualities gradually penetrate and take possession of their inherited organisms, and thus prepare—through the educational process—to awaken as morally responsible human beings who become capable of finding their own direction in life. Indeed, reading these lectures, it becomes clear that Rudolf Steiner saw the essence of teaching as service to this process of human incarnation in our time.

With one exception, the first Waldorf teachers-to-be had been students of Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy before gathering in Stuttgart to prepare for the founding of the school. Nevertheless, the three courses in which they participated each day—and especially the course presented here—challenged them to think and experience anew everything for which their own education

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5. These three courses include, in addition to the lectures in this volume, *Discussions with Teachers* and *Practical Advice to Teachers* (see bibliography for the complete list of Rudolf Steiner’s educational courses).

and training had prepared them. They had to “turn themselves inside out,” as it were, in order to re-enter in imagination, as conscious, intellectually-oriented adults, the world out of which they had been born, which was the world of experience from which the children, soon to be entrusted to their care, were just in process of emerging. And this task, they soon discovered, required the awakening of meditative, artistic capacities that had, perhaps, long been dormant in them. Yet it is just these artistic, meditative capacities that we, as students of this work over seventy-five years later, must also awaken within us if we are truly to serve the children who come to meet us.

Yet, for Rudolf Steiner, the honest struggle for self-transformation on the part of every individual—which, in a real sense, was what qualified them to assume their places as colleagues in this initiative—was only part of a greater whole. For Steiner himself, the school that was coming into being was called upon and intended to demonstrate that men and women could unite in free initiative to create and guide an enterprise for which they carried inner and outer responsibility. In other words, it was Steiner’s hope that the Waldorf School would pioneer the establishment of an independent life of the spirit within the totality of modern social life. He saw clearly that the renewal of culture—for which four and a quarter years of World War I had convincingly and cruelly demonstrated the desperate need—could originate only in a society in which creative individuals were free to work together out of insight in institutions that owed their existence to neither political nor economic control. Only from such initiatives—whether educational, artistic, scientific, or religious—could one hope for the ideas on which a genuine and lasting peace—rooted in social justice—might eventually be founded. And because he saw all too clearly that Western society was headed in the opposite direction, Steiner during the last years poured all his energies, indeed his very life,

into the renewal of both education and social life as a whole. The mere fourteen years that it took to bring Adolf Hitler to power in Germany and to virtually guarantee an even more terrible war, tragically confirms the realism of Rudolf Steiner's reading of the direction of world events.

Steiner saw that his was a time for far-reaching decisions—decisions that all individuals would have to make for themselves. Either Western humanity would continue to commit itself blindly to one-sided materialism—the Nazi doctrine of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Land) was only one crude example of such commitment—or humankind would have to wake up to its own innate human spiritual potential. The chips were down: there was truly no other option than to come to terms with this radical choice. This was the challenge with which Rudolf Steiner initiated his new educational effort, and with which he greeted the prospective teachers on the first morning of the course:

Dear Friends, we can accomplish our work only if we do not see it as simply a matter of intellect or feeling, but, in the highest sense, as a moral spiritual task. Therefore, you will understand why, as we begin this work today, we first reflect on the connection we wish to create from the very beginning between our activity and the spiritual worlds.

In this same lecture he characterized the basic task of education as overcoming egoism. “When you turn to your work, do not forget that all of modern culture, right into the spiritual areas, is based upon human self-interest. . . . We live in a time when we must combat this appeal to human selfishness in all areas if people are not to go even farther down the declining cultural path they now tread.”

Steiner saw that to accomplish this task humanity must turn from its self-absorbed preoccupation with death and the

significance of death for one's personal existence, must turn its attention toward the other end of life, toward the process of birth. "We must become increasingly conscious of the other end of earthly human development—birth." He saw that this would lead to the recognition that the task of teachers is to learn how to continue the work of higher spiritual beings, done before birth, within the life of the children we have to teach.

Although we can physically see children only after their birth, we need to be aware that birth is also a continuation. We do not want to look only at what the human being experiences after death, that is, at the spiritual continuation of the physical. We want to be aware that physical existence is a continuance of the spiritual, and that what we have to do in education is a continuation of what higher beings have done without our assistance. Our form of educating can have the correct attitude only when we are aware that our work with young people is a continuation of what higher beings have done before birth.

Thus, without mincing words, Steiner directed the attention of his listeners to the fullness of human existence where the soul, spirit, and body must be engaged at every step of the way. Students of these lectures, following this challenging beginning, are led, through characterizations of soul life, to considerations of how the spirit awakens in the soul as human beings mature and, finally, in the concluding lectures, to an entirely new way of seeing the body as instrument for both soul and spirit.

At the conclusion of this arduous conceptual pilgrimage, Rudolf Steiner reminds us that what we know is not what truly educates, but *who* we are; this is what awakens, within children, the human beings toward which they are struggling to grow, struggling to *become*. For the teacher, three qualities are essential

if the relationship with the child is to be alive and, in the true sense, educational. The first is *imagination*, which transforms the intellectual content of one's teaching into a language of experience that speaks directly to the child's soul; the second is *courage for the truth* of world realities; and the third is a *feeling of responsibility* toward what is truly human in the children entrusted to our care. At the end of the final lecture, Steiner expresses it this way:

What forms human intellectuality has a strong tendency to become slow and lazy, and it becomes most lazy when people constantly feed it with materialistic ideas. However, it will take flight when we feed it ideas received from the spirit, but we receive these into our souls only through the indirect path of imagination.

How people ranted and raved against including imagination in education during the late nineteenth century! In the first half of the nineteenth century we had such brilliant people as Schelling, for example, who thought more soundly about education. You should read Schelling's exciting discussions in *Concerning the Method of Academic Study*,—which was, of course, not intended for elementary school, but the early nineteenth-century spirit of pedagogy lives in it. During the second half of the nineteenth century, people understood this spirit in a masked form. Then, people were cowardly about the life of the soul and complained about whatever entered the human soul through the indirect path of imagination, because they believed that if they accepted imagination, they would fall directly into the arms of untruthfulness. People did not have the courage for independence, for freedom in their thinking and, at the same time, for a marriage to truth instead of lies. People feared freedom in

thinking because they believed they would immediately take lies into the soul. To what I just said—that is, to filling their lessons with imagination—teachers must therefore add *courage for the truth*. Without this courage for truth, teachers will achieve nothing with the will in teaching, especially with the older children. We must join what develops as courage for truth with a strong sense of responsibility toward truth.

A need for imagination, a sense for truth and a feeling for responsibility—these are the three forces that constitute the nerves of pedagogy. Those who would take up education should write this as their motto:

Enliven imagination,  
Stand for truth,  
Feel responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

From what has been said, it will have become evident that the lectures published here require a different kind of reading than a text that makes no demands on the reader beyond intellectual comprehension. If readers are to gain anything of real value from the study of this material, it will have to be digested and transformed into their own experience. When this effort is brought to them, however, students may well discover what many others have already discovered—that it becomes a source of life within the soul and leads toward the wellspring of creative teaching.

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6. This motto has also been translated as:

Imbue yourself with the power of imagination,  
Have courage for the truth,  
Sharpen your feeling for responsibility of soul.