

PREFACE

Rudolf Steiner, 1861-1925, was known until 1901 as a Goethe scholar and author of epistemological texts which argue for the inherent validity of sensory perception, and for ethical individualism. In 1902 he began teaching a spiritual worldview, arguing against the prevailing reductionist attitudes. Steiner's views did not become part of mainstream debate in his lifetime, but his views do have an influence in society today, through the practical application of his ideas. This includes the international Steiner school movement, bio-dynamic agriculture, and his medical therapies. But, as of August 2004, Steiner's worldview had not been academically assessed.

This text is a slightly revised doctoral thesis, undertaken on a scholarship awarded by Monash University (Melbourne), which identifies and contextualizes the primary tenets of Steiner's 'anthroposophical' worldview by an examination of the didactic intentions in his play, *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (*The Portal of Initiation*), written in 1910. This play is Steiner's dramatization of a fairy tale by Goethe, *Das Märchen*. It is substantially modified in Steiner's drama, to reduce the allegorical element, and to allow the process of spiritual development to be portrayed in personalities.

Spiritual themes examined by Schiller and Goethe were either formative for his earlier phase, or affirmative for his later phase. In particular, Goethe's notion of an 'Urpflanze' and his 'Proteus', are significant to Steiner. He sees the former as indicative of the Platonic realm of the Idea, and the latter as an 'ether energy', which provides validation of sensory perception. The problem of interpreting Steiner's texts and rendering these into English is also considered. The thematic and rhetorical elements of each scene in *Die Pforte* are examined. Elements in its plot which deviate from the Goethean 'template' reveal significant aspects of Steiner's anthroposophy.

Major elements of Steiner's 'anthroposophical' worldview, expressed in the rhetoric of *Die Pforte*, include reincarnation and karma. These are seen as real dynamics affecting human life, and are viewed as compatible with Christianity. Additionally, human cognitional power can be extended beyond its present boundary, through meditation. The Kantian limits to knowledge are therefore

invalid because meditation gives access to higher consciousness states. Further, human life is seen as unfolding on Earth as a microcosmic reflection of a sevenfold macrocosmic evolutionary process.

The attainment of spiritual consciousness is made dependent upon the ethical improvement of the human being. A significant aspect of human spirituality is the conscience. Although the role of religion is minimal in *Die Pforte*, the conscience is subject to enhancement by influences from Christ Jesus. In addition, to Steiner the continuance of unethical activity and attitudes in humanity is harmful to the Earth as a living being, or an organism possessing subtle levels of being.

In the quest for spiritual development, the triune human soul (consisting of thinking, emotion and will) is caught between the influences of not one, but two fallen spirit beings. However, the soul can bring to expression in itself a triune spiritual quality (of wisdom, purity and goodwill), and attain to the realm of the Idea.

The message of *Die Pforte* is also that the arts offer a valuable method for the instruction in spiritual themes, and artistic experience provides valuable assistance in attaining to spirituality.

In so far as this text is an assessment of a written work by Steiner, *The Portal of Initiation*, it is also the first academic critique of one of Steiner's anthroposophical literary texts; the author wishes to thank Assoc. Professor Walter Veit (Monash University) for his invaluable advice in this task.

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