

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION A

### 1A: The conceptual context of Steiner's worldview

#### 1A1: Steiner's early interest in spirituality, cognition and drama

Rudolf Steiner was born on the Austrian-Hungarian border in 1861, to Catholic Austrian parents, his father worked as a railway employee. During his childhood and youth the family lived in villages in Lower Austria, in the Austro-Hungarian empire, he undertook his tertiary studies in Vienna. Steiner reports in his autobiography that already as a school child he had an interest in attaining to a spiritual worldview, but one which was inherently rational. His school years were spent in small towns in Lower Austria in state schools, namely, Mödling, Pottschach and Neudörfel. He spent much of his free time at home working on mathematical exercises, which exerted a fascination for him.<sup>1</sup>

In his autobiography he writes that he had an awareness that mathematical truths are precise facts, or realities, which have no physical existence and yet they are discovered by the human mind. This realization opened his mind to the idea that other equally precise and objective facts could perhaps be discovered by the enquiring human mind concerning spiritual realities, if appropriately trained.<sup>2</sup> At the age of fourteen, he avidly read a primary epistemological text of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*).<sup>3</sup> He applied himself to his schooling and won a place in tertiary education at Vienna (the "Technische Hochschule").<sup>4</sup> His tertiary studies included mathe-

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<sup>1</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Mein Lebensgang*, (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1975), 17.

<sup>2</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Lebensgang*, 23.

<sup>3</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Lebensgang*, 22.

<sup>4</sup>Rudolf, Lindenberg, *Steiner: eine Biographie*, (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1997), 43. Lindenberg reports that in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of high

matics, natural history, chemistry, physics, and additionally he attended lectures on botany, mineralogy and geology and also constitutional law.<sup>5</sup>

As a young man his meditative life gave rise to inner experiences, which, he concluded, constituted a basis on which to reject the strengthening scientific-reductionist perspectives of the nineteenth century. Yet there is virtually no report of his involvement in any form of spiritual activity as a young man. A letter of Steiner's from 1881 reveals that at the age of twenty, his enquiry into the nature of human consciousness was in fact connected with the acceptance of the existence of spiritual reality, both within the human being, and 'behind' the sense-perceptible world. In this letter he reports that he had been reading texts of Schelling (Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, 1775 – 1854),

I had been occupied until half an hour past midnight with several philosophical problems, and then I threw myself onto my bed. In the previous year I had striven to determine whether it was true, what Schelling said; 'We all possess a secret, wondrous capacity, to draw ourselves out of the changing flow of time, away from all that comes to us externally and into our innermost being, our unveiled self – there we may behold the eternal in us, in an unchanging form.' I believed, and believe still today, that I had discovered this innermost capacity very clearly in myself – which I had intuitively sensed for a long time. The entire idealistic philosophy was now viewed by me as having an entirely different form; what does a sleepless night matter, compared to such a find! <sup>6</sup>

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school (in Wiener-Neustadt) Steiner was classified as "an advanced student", and was then exempt from fees.

<sup>5</sup>Lindenberg, *Steiner*, 67.

<sup>6</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Briefe 1881-1890*, (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, [hereafter RSV], 1985), 13, „Ich hatte mich bis 1/2 I Uhr mitternachts mit einzelnen philosophischen Problemen beschäftigt, und da warf ich mich endlich auf mein Lager; mein Bestreben war voriges Jahr, zu erforschen, ob es denn wahr sei, was Schelling sagt: 'Uns allen wohnt ein geheimes, wunderbares Vermögen bei, uns aus dem Wechsel der Zeit in unser innerstes, von allem, was von außen hinzukam, entkleidetes Selbst, zurückzuziehen und da unter der Form der Unwandelbarkeit das Ewige in uns anzuschauen.' Ich glaubte und glaube nun noch, jenes innerste Vermögen ganz klar an mir entdeckt zu haben – geahnt habe ich es ja schon längst: die ganze idealistische Philosophie steht nun in

Consequently, it is indicated that already at this age he was focussed on the pursuit of a spiritual reality in human consciousness. However, this interest did not adversely affect his ongoing studies in cognitional processes. It was about this time that he was appointed editor of the text-critical edition of the complete works of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. This work was published in twelve volumes in 1894.<sup>7</sup> Steiner corresponded with notable philosophers in these years, including Eduard von Hartmann (1842-1906) and Friedrich Theodor Vischer (1807-1887),<sup>8</sup> Hartmann had sent Steiner a copy of one of his books, and Vischer had encouraged him in his writing.<sup>9</sup> Steiner's epistemology was taken seriously by these thinkers, but they were not convinced as to the validity of his conclusions. In 1891 Steiner obtained his Doctoral thesis for his study in epistemology. His doctoral thesis, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft (Truth and Knowledge)* contains the first systematic outline of his view of human consciousness in terms of cognition; it does not refer to any specifically esoteric or 'spiritual' elements.<sup>10</sup>

He added a subtitle to the published thesis, which describes it as "a preamble to a 'philosophy of freedom'". His thesis attempts to establish an inherent validity and reliability of cognition, in opposition to the general agreement in philosophical works, that this was an invalid, naïve view. Steiner then wrote his principle philosophical text, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit (The Philosophy of Freedom)*; hereafter, *Die Philosophie*) which was published in 1894.<sup>11</sup> Steiner's academic work in epistemology in the 1880's and 1890's was to form a philosophical perspective which he viewed as

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einer wesentlich modifizierten Gestalt vor mir; was ist eine schlaflose Nacht gegen solch einen Fund!"

<sup>7</sup>Arthur Schopenhauers *Sämtliche Werke in 12 Bänden*, herausgegeben von Dr. Rudolf Steiner, (Stuttgart: Cotta'sche Bibliothek der Welt Literatur, 1894).

<sup>8</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Briefe I*, letter No. 12, 20. June 1882, and No. 124, Autumn 1887.

<sup>9</sup>Lindenberg, *Steiner* 95, 161.

<sup>10</sup>The term, 'Wissenschaft' in the context of Steiner's epistemological thesis, has more the nuance of 'knowledge' than 'science'.

<sup>11</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft: Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Freiheit*, (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Verlag, 1980).

affirmative of the viability of the cognitional dynamics inherent in the experiencing of supra-sensible realities.

Steiner eventually became widely known in central Europe in the late nineteenth century through his epistemological studies and his scholarly interpretation and contextualization of the scientific and literary writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. He also became well known for his various lectures on other scientific topics, including physics, metallurgy, the history of science and psychology. Scientific articles of his in the fields of metallurgy and geology were published in a standard reference work.<sup>12</sup> Through his philosophical writings and scientific articles, Steiner had become a respected academic researcher, and received appointment to the Goethe archives in Weimar, to edit the scientific works of Goethe, published in the prestigious *Kürschners National Literatur* series (1882-1897). He was recommended for this position by a senior academic in Vienna, Karl Julius Schröer (1825-1900). During this time, Steiner was also appointed editor of the *Weimarer Ausgabe* of the Complete Works of Goethe. Steiner's ability to contextualize the writings of Goethe made him a leading Goethe commentator, bringing recognition from such notable thinkers as Gideon Spicker (1840-1912).<sup>13</sup>

In his later years, from 1900 onwards, Rudolf Steiner often elaborated elements in his spiritual worldview with reference to esoteric or mystical passages in the writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) and to a lesser extent, of Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). In essence, Steiner's later worldview presupposes the capacity to attain to perception of non-material realities. It elaborates the nature of the human soul, of spiritual beings, and the interaction between these.

However, none of his academic editorial activities, nor his own writings from the early period of his life, (pre-1901), refer to spiritual or metaphysical doctrines. They focus on human cognitive processes and literary themes. Steiner neither lectured on, nor wrote about, spiritual-esoteric themes until he was in his early forties. In addition to his work with Goethe and Schiller, and philosophical

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<sup>12</sup>In Piers *Konversationslexikon*, 1888, articles by Steiner appeared on Basalt, Alluvium and the Ice Ages.

<sup>13</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Briefe 1*, 155.

interests, Steiner was also active, from his twenties to his late thirties, as a literary essayist, editor and theatre critic in Berlin. During the period from approximately 1884-1902, Steiner was very involved in drama and literature, writing reviews of theatrical productions.

This occurred in his capacity as co-editor of a literary magazine, *Magazin für Literatur* (established in 1832) from 1897 until 1900, and as editor of another magazine, the *Dramaturgische Blätter* (*Dramaturgical Pages*) published in Berlin. In addition, in 1898, Steiner co-produced a play "*Der Ungebetene*" (*The Intruder*) by Maurice Maeterlinck, a well-known contemporary Flemish spiritual-philosophical author. In an article of that year Steiner writes about Maeterlinck's style,

He believes in a subtle, mysterious interlinking, on the level of the soul, between all things. When two people are in dialogue, he does not only hear the general content of what they say, he also perceives a deeper connection, an unexpressed relationship. And this unspoken, mysterious element he seeks to incorporate into the things and people whom he portrays. Indeed, he regards all external, visible things as only a means to intimate the deeper, the hidden soul element ... Whoever is not able through the things and people which he brings onto the stage, to feel the intimated, deeper essence, can not understand Maeterlinck.<sup>14</sup>

Steiner's attitude here to Maeterlinck here echoes that of other German literary figures, such as Hermann Bahr.<sup>15</sup> Quite early in the

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<sup>14</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Dramaturgie*, (Dornach: Verlag der Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, (hereafter, VRSN) 1960), 138, „Er glaubt an feine, seelenartige, geheimnisvolle Zusammenhänge in allen Erscheinungen. Wenn zwei Menschen miteinander sprechen, so hört er nicht nur den gemeinen Inhalt ihrer Reden, sondern er nimmt tiefere Beziehungen, unausgesprochene Verhältnisse wahr. Und dieses Unausgesprochene, Geheimnisvolle sucht er in die Dinge und Menschen, die er darstellt, hineinzuarbeiten. Ja, er betrachtet alles Äußerliche, Sichtbare nur als ein Mittel, um das Tieferliegende, Verborgenseelische anzudeuten ... Wer nicht imstande ist, aus den Dingen und Menschen, die er auf die Bühne bringt, die angedeuteten, tieferen Wesenheiten durchzufühlen, der kann Maeterlinck nicht verstehen.“

<sup>15</sup>Peter Szondi, *Das lyrische Drama des Fin de Siècle*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1975), 355.

body of Maeterlinck literature, this playwright was enthusiastically thought of as belonging more to German than to French cultural circles, and in one dissertation was referred to as a 'German mystic', as Szondi relates. In addition, Steiner's critique reveals his interest in the portrayal on stage of the inner life of the human being.

The interest which Steiner has shown from his youth onwards in the inner life of the human being, is shown in this positive attitude to Maeterlinck's technique of utilizing events and objects on stage to explore the human soul. In the above essay, Steiner comments further, that it becomes clear that the dramatists who are writing more serious works cannot expect their audience to encompass more than a small circle of devotees,

Every gesture, each movement, each word on the stage is an expression of the underlying worldview [of the playwright]. Whoever keeps in mind these truths realizes that Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen, Maeterlinck can only have an effect on a definite circle of people; on those who can find their way into the worldview of these poets, who can think and feel as they do. This is the reason why these artists must have limits [to their appeal].<sup>16</sup>

Steiner's comments are significant with regard to the intention behind his own dramas, which were never placed in the mainstream cultural sphere, but performed for those in esoteric-religious circles which developed around him in his later, spiritual-esoteric phase. This will be examined in a later section.

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<sup>16</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Gesammelte Aufsätze* 138-139, „Jede Gebärde, jede Bewegung, jedes Wort auf der Bühne ist ein Ausdruck der zugrundeliegenden Weltanschauung. Wer sich diese Wahrheiten gegenwärtig hält, wird einsehen, daß Goethe, Schiller, Ibsen, Maeterlinck nur auf einen bestimmten Kreis von Menschen wirken können, auf diejenigen, welche sich in die Weltanschauung dieser Dichter einleben können, welche denken und empfinden können wie sie. Daher rührt es, daß die Wirkung dieser Künstler Grenzen haben muß.“

## 1A2: Steiner's spiritual-holistic epistemology

Steiner had a strong interest in cognition already in his twenties, as we have noted above. His interest in this is further attested to by a comment in his autobiography, concerning a philosophical text from Friedrich Schiller. The Schiller text referred to here is a collection of letters about aesthetics entitled, *Briefen über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (*Letters about the aesthetic education of humanity*.) This reference to Schiller here is important with regard to the question of Steiner's context. There are two aspects to Steiner's debt to the Romantics, one is that of exerting a formative influence, the other is that of providing an affirmative context to his own worldview.

Steiner, speaking and writing as the teacher of a spiritual worldview, from 1902 onwards, (which he termed, 'anthroposophy' a term which shall be examined later in this in Section), frequently draws on material from Goethe and Schiller. However, these references are used to support and elucidate his anthroposophical postulates, and to demonstrate that his own conclusions on spiritual themes are not incompatible with the great Romantics. This is also the case with the incident quoted in Section 1A1, namely, the letter in which he attests to a prior experiential encounter with a spiritual element of human nature, about which he later read in Fichte.

However, in an autobiographical reference to Schiller, Steiner writes that reading this text, at the age of twenty-two, actively assisted his formulation of ideas on cognition. In these writings, Schiller expounds at length on the state of humanity as being subject to dualistic drives, firstly one which he terms the 'form-impulse', derived from intellectuality, and secondly the 'instinctive impulse', derived from the sensory capabilities of the human being. Of the latter he says, "Mit unzerreißbaren Banden fesselt er den höher strebenden Geist an die Sinneswelt, (with indestructible bonds it chains the spirit, which is seeking to elevate itself, to the sense-world) ..." <sup>17</sup> This condition excludes from its subject, all autonomy and freedom. Whilst the former condition, the intellectual state, formulates laws which bind one in an immutable

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<sup>17</sup>*Schillers Werke*, Nationalausgabe, ed. Fricke et al. (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1943) (hereafter, SW), Bd. 21, 345.

condition, "But when the thought once declares, 'this is how it is', it decides for ever and ever, and the validity of its decision is guaranteed by the personality itself, which defies all change."<sup>18</sup> This condition excludes all dependence and passivity.

However, Schiller concludes that there exists the possibility of a third state, which represents the consummation of the human condition. This third state derives from an interplay of the sensory life and the intellectual life, that is, when the specific, 'formed' intellectual consciousness of a person is efficacious in their feelings, and their sensory, emotive life is efficacious in their understanding. Once this condition is attained, then it becomes, says Schiller, "the state of beauty, in the widest sense of this term, because the soul in gazing at beauty, finds itself in a happy condition, between the law and necessity."<sup>19</sup> This is due in part to its situation of being in the balance between the other two states, and hence beauty "ought to *temper*, through uniformly exciting the two other natures, and it ought also to *excite* through uniformly moderating them."<sup>20</sup> (emphasis added).

Steiner further summarizes the Schiller text, recounting Schiller's conclusion that a third, intermediary condition is possible, because from the fact that a human being can develop the aesthetic sense, he can also develop an intermediate state of consciousness. He can develop the "aesthetic mood" which is not given over one-sidedly to either the compulsion of nature nor the necessity of reason. Now, to the young Steiner, this text meant that in this aesthetic state the soul lives through the senses, but, importantly, it carries a spiritual element into the sensory experience and also into actions determined by the sense world, "One perceives with the senses, but in such a way that it is as if the spiritual has streamed into the senses."<sup>21</sup> Steiner concludes his autobiographical comments

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<sup>18</sup>Schiller, *SW*, Bd. 21, 346, „Aber wenn der Gedanke einmal ausspricht, So ist es, so entscheidet er für immer und ewig ...“

<sup>19</sup>Schiller, *SW*, Bd. 21, 357, „Da sich das Gemüt bei Anschauung des Schönen in einer glücklichen Mitte zwischen dem Gesetz und Bedürfnis befindet.“

<sup>20</sup>Schiller, *SW*, 361, „... soll auflösen, dadurch daß sie beide Naturen gleichförmig anspannt, und soll anspannen, dadurch daß sie auflöst.“

<sup>21</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Lebensgang*, 50, „Man nimmt mit den Sinnen wahr, aber so, als ob das Geistige in die Sinne eingeströmt wäre.“



on Schiller's 'third state', now viewing it as supportive of his overall holistic epistemological theories in this way,

Schiller spoke of that consciousness-state which must be there, in order to perceive the beauty of the world. May one not also conceive of such a consciousness state that mediates the truth in the nature of things? If this is a justified concept, then one cannot investigate human consciousness phenomenologically, as it is given in the first instance in order to ascertain whether this might be able to arrive at the true nature of objects. Rather, one should firstly research that consciousness state through which the human being sets itself into such a relationship to the world, that the objects and realities there do unveil to him their true nature.

And I believed that I knew that such a consciousness state is actually attained, to a certain degree, when the human being not only has such thoughts that depict external things and processes, but thoughts that are experienced as thoughts. This 'living in thinking' revealed itself to me as something entirely different to that which one usually exercises in daily existence and in normal scientific research. If one proceeds further in this 'experiencing of thought' itself, one finds that one encounters the spiritual reality.<sup>22</sup> [emphasis in the original]

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<sup>22</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Lebensgang*, 50, „Schiller hat von dem Bewußtseinszustand gesprochen, der da sein muß, um die Schönheit der Welt zu erleben. Könnte man nicht auch an einen solchen Bewußtseinszustand denken, der die *Wahrheit* im Wesen der Dinge vermittelt ? Wenn das berechtigt ist, dann kann man nicht das zunächst gegebene menschliche Bewußtsein betrachtend untersuchen, ob dieses an das wahre Wesen der Dinge herankommen könne. Sondern man müßte erst den Bewußtseinszustand erforschen, durch den der Mensch sich in ein solches Verhältnis zur Welt setzt, daß ihm die Dinge und Tatsachen ihr Wesen enthüllen.

Und ich glaubte zu erkennen, daß ein solcher Bewußtseinszustand bis zu einem gewissen Grade erreicht sei, wenn der Mensch nicht nur Gedanken habe, die äußere Dinge und Vorgänge abbilden, sondern solche, die *er als Gedanken selbst erlebt*. Dieses Leben in Gedanken offenbarte sich mir als ein ganz anderes als das ist, in dem man das gewöhnliche Dasein und auch die gewöhnliche wissenschaftliche Forschung verbringt. Geht man immer weiter in dem Gedanken-Erleben, so findet man, daß diesem Erleben die geistige Wirklichkeit entgegenkommt.“

This attitude of Steiner's is reflected in the primary intentions of his main epistemological work, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*. One approach Steiner takes in *Die Philosophie* to establish what he regards as a valid, accurate epistemology to refute the conviction that sense perceptions are inherently invalid, is to examine the underlying logic in the argument which posits subjectivity to these. Steiner is naturally well aware from his extensive involvement professionally in philosophical writings, that the question of just how sense perception can be possible in view of the fact that sensory stimuli become chemical substances in the body is a major conundrum. In the following extract from *Die Philosophie* he argues with particularly strong conviction against the attitude that sense perception is rendered unreliable by the fact that it is subject to corporeal processes. He comments with regard to epistemological theories in general, that "it would be hard to find another thought structure in the history of human culture upon which a higher level of astuteness has been expended, and yet which, upon closer examination, disintegrates."<sup>23</sup>

In his line of argument, Steiner writes against the general argument put forward by many philosophers for refuting naïve realism, primarily referring to a contemporary philosopher, Eduard von Hartmann. Naïve realism is the assumption that we do actually perceive what we assume we are perceiving, and hence the reality of the environment is beyond question. As Barry Maund states, "naïve realism ... implies that in perception we are directly confronted with the object itself."<sup>24</sup> The conclusions reached by philosophers as a result of their dismantling of naïve realism vary enormously, and need not be considered here. Steiner is concerned solely with invalidating the argument for dismissing the validity of sense impressions. He reviews the argument in general, without referring to a specific philosopher, and then refutes its conclusions,

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<sup>23</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*, (Dornach: RSV, 1977), 59, „Es wird schwer sein, ein zweites Gedankengebäude in der Geschichte des menschlichen Geisteslebens zu finden, das mit größerem Scharfsinn zusammengetragen ist, und das bei genauerer Prüfung doch in nichts zerfällt.“

<sup>24</sup>Barry Maund, *Perception*, (Chesham: Acumen Publishing, 2003), 8.

One starts with what is given in naïve consciousness, with the thing as perceived. Then one shows that none of the qualities which are found in this thing would exist for us had we no sense organs. No eye, no colour. Therefore the colour is not yet present in that which affects the eye. It arises first through the interaction of the eye and the object. The latter is, therefore, colourless. But neither is the colour in the eye, for in the eye there is only a chemical or physical process which is first conducted by the optic nerve to the brain, and there inaugurates another process. Even this is not yet the colour. That is only produced in the soul by means of the brain process. Even then it does not yet enter my consciousness, but is just transferred by the mind to an object in the external world. There, upon this external body, I finally believe myself to perceive the colour. We have travelled in a complete circle. We became conscious of a coloured object.

That is the first thing. At this point, the thought process starts. If I had no eye, the body would be, for me, colourless. So I cannot locate the colour in the body. I start on the search for it. I look for it in the eye - in vain; in the nerve - in vain; and in the brain - in vain once more. I look in consciousness - here I find it indeed, but not attached to the object. I find the coloured object again only on returning to my starting point. The circle is completed. I believe that I am cognising, as a product of my soul, all that which the naïve man regards as existing outside him, in space.

As long as one stays at this point, then everything is in perfect order. But the matter must once again be examined from the beginning. So far I have only been occupied with one thing, with the external perception, from which, I, as a naïve person, had an entirely false opinion. For I had the opinion: the object has, as I perceive it, an objective status. But now I notice that it disappears with my mental image, that it is only a modification of my own psychological states. Do I have any right at all, in my examination, to start with the perception? Can I say of it that it exerts an influence for my soul? From now on I must treat the table itself, of which yesterday I believed that it did have an influence upon me and thus brought forth in me a mental image, as a mental image. Consequently, my sense organs and the processes within them are merely subjective.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>*Philosophie* 59-60, „Man geht zunächst von dem aus, was dem naiven Bewußtsein gegeben ist, von den wahrgenommenen Dinge. Dann zeigt man, daß alles, was an diesem Dinge sich findet, für uns da nicht wäre, wenn wir keine Sinne hätten. Kein Auge: keine Farbe. Also ist die Farbe in dem noch nicht vorhanden, was auf das Auge wirkt. Sie entsteht erst durch die Wechselwirkung des Auges mit dem Gegen-

Steiner then proceeds to argue that the conclusion which this line of thought has to draw, is that all the objects perceived, including one's own nerve and brain substances and processes are mental images, each of which acts upon the other in a non-real continuum, and therefore all these have to be dismissed. The overall attitude of Steiner is one of considerable confidence in his conclusion that sense impressions can not be argued away on the basis of observation of the physiological processes, since observation of these too, is entirely based on sense impressions, "... as soon as it is clear to me that my sense organs and their activity, and also my

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stande. Dieser ist also farblos. Aber auch im Auge ist die Farbe nicht vorhanden; denn da ist ein chemischer oder physikalischer Vorgang vorhanden, der erst durch den Nerv zum Gehirn geleitet wird, und da einen andern auslöst. Dieser ist noch immer nicht die Farbe. Sie wird erst durch den Hirnprozess in der Seele hervorgerufen. Da tritt sie mir noch immer nicht ins Bewußtsein, sondern wird erst durch die Seele nach außen an einen Körper verlegt. An diesem glaube ich sie endlich wahrzunehmen. Wir haben einen vollständigen Kreisgang durchgemacht. Wir sind uns eines farbigen Körpers bewußt geworden.

Das ist das Erste. Nun hebt die Gedankenoperation an. Wenn ich keine Augen hätte, wäre der Körper für mich farblos. Ich kann also die Farbe nicht in den Körper verlegen. Ich gehe auf die Suche nach ihr. Ich suche sie im Auge: vergebens; im Nerv: vergebens; im Gehirn; ebenso vergebens; in der Seele; hier find ich sie zwar, aber nicht mit dem Körper verbunden. Den farbigen Körper finde ich erst wieder da, wo ich ausgegangen bin. Der Kreis ist geschlossen. Ich glaube das als Erzeugnis meiner Seele zu erkennen, was der naive Mensch sich als draußen im Raume vorhanden denkt.

So lange man dabei stehen bleibt, scheint alles in schönster Ordnung. Aber die Sache muß noch einmal von vorne angefangen werden. Ich habe bis jetzt mit einem Dinge gewirtschaftet: mit der äußeren Wahrnehmung, von dem ich früher, als naiver Mensch, eine ganz falscher Ansicht gehabt habe. Ich war der Meinung: sie hätte so, wie ich sie wahrnehme, einen objektiven Bestand. Nun merke ich, daß sie mit meinem Vorstellen verschwindet, daß sie nur eine Modifikation meiner seelischen Zustände ist. Habe ich nun überhaupt noch ein Recht, in meinen Betrachtungen von ihr auszugehen? Kann ich von ihr sagen, daß sie auf meine Seele wirkt? Ich muß von jetzt ab den Tisch, von dem ich früher geglaubt habe, daß er auf mich wirkt und in mir eine Vorstellung von sich hervorbringt, selbst als Vorstellung behandeln. Konsequenterweise sind dann aber auch meine Sinesorgane und die Vorgänge in ihnen bloß subjektiv."

nerve and soul processes, can only be known through perception, the line of thought described above is revealed in its full absurdity.”<sup>26</sup>

Steiner’s intention here is to establish the inherent validity of the perceptual process through which we (apparently) register the existence of our environment, (and of our inner life), and secondly to argue that the limits to knowledge are not absolute. With regard to the former, it was especially some aspects of thinking and volition that Steiner wished to establish as being immediately perceived, and thus not subject to any distorting processes. Steiner was in effect refuting elements of (Kantian influenced) mainstream philosophical attitudes, which argue that a perceived object exists, but its true nature, the thing-in-itself is forever unknowable, and the implied corollary to this statement, that there are the current limits to human cognition are absolute.

As Kant states in his preface to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, “From this analysis of our faculty, it is shown that with it, we can never transcend the limits of possible experience ... that our rational cognition ... has only to do with phenomena, the thing-in-itself possesses a real existence for itself, but is left unrecognized by our cognition.”<sup>27</sup> In the main body of this work, his conclusion is elaborated in detail; in the section, *Remarks on Transcendental Ethics*, Kant declares the outcome of the perceptual act, or ‘empirical data’, to be limited to a surface phenomenon, and thus excludes the thing-in-itself. Taking the example of a rainbow and raindrops, Kant explains that these too are only surface phenomena, and that if one just considers empirical data in general, to see if there is anything in our sense perceptions which represent the

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<sup>26</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Philosophie* 61, „ ... sobald mir klar ist, daß mir meine Sinnesorgane und deren Tätigkeit, mein Nerven- und Seelen-prozess auch nur durch die Wahrnehmung gegeben werden können, zeigt sich der geschilderte Gedankengang in seiner vollen Unmöglichkeit.“

<sup>27</sup>*Immanuel Kants Werke*, ed. Albert Görland, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag, 1913), 19-20, „ ... es ergibt sich aus dieser Deduktion unseres Vermögens ... daß wir mit ihm nie über die Grenzen möglicher Erfahrung hinauskommen können ... unsere Vernunftkenntnis ... nur auf Erscheinungen gehe, die Sache an sich selbst dagegen zwar als für sich wirklich, aber von uns unerkannt liegen läßt.“

thing-in-itself, one will see that nothing of the thing-in-itself can be found,

... not only are the raindrops mere phenomena, but even their circular form, indeed the space itself through which they fall, is nothing in itself, but both are mere modifications or fundamental dispositions of our sensuous intuition.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst the above extract from Kant encapsulates the conclusions against which Steiner was arguing, Steiner himself does not quote Kant specifically on this issue, and instead he refers to the expression 'the thing-in-itself', and briefly reviews a few philosophers who are supportive of this. In his arguments to establish the validity of the perceived world, Steiner assumes that his readers will be aware that a major trend in epistemological thought for centuries has been to regard perception as not fully disclosing the reality to the observer.

Steiner's epistemological writings reflect his extensive involvement with philosophy, and individual philosophers, including, as noted earlier, his editing of the complete works of Schopenhauer in twelve volumes. However, a detailed critique of Steiner's epistemological dialoguing with the relevant elements of major philosophical writers, such of Kant, Spencer, Berkeley, Hume etc, and the correspondence between himself and von Hartmann and others, which underpins his writings on cognition, cannot be examined here.

In his later anthroposophical teachings, Steiner maintains that the conclusion which declares the impossibility of direct knowledge of physical or spiritual realities is incorrect, because perception is carried by a supra-sensible element in the human organism. Additionally, spiritual realities are accessible by the acolyte on the spiritual path because they undertake a meditative process through which they learn to extend their perceptual capacities, thus there are no limits to perception. However, Steiner admits that spiritual perception is subject to possible distortions (as is sense perception).

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<sup>28</sup>*Kants Werke, Kritik 72*, „ ... und nicht allein diese Tropfen sind bloße Erscheinungen, sondern selbst ihre runde Gestalt, ja sogar der Raum, in welchem sie fallen, sind nichts an sich selbst, sondern bloße Modifikationen oder Grundlagen unserer sinnlichen Anschauung ... “

This theme shall be considered further, in connection with clairvoyant experiences of the characters in Steiner's drama, *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (*The Portal of Initiation*, hereafter, *Die Pforte*).

Our concern is to ascertain the principal elements of his spiritual worldview, as expressed in his first drama, *Die Pforte*. The main characters in *Die Pforte* achieve perception of spirit beings, through a meditative process, incorporating soul exercises. In the drama the inherent validity of such 'spiritual perceiving' in spiritual realms is assumed, analogous to sensory perception in the sense world, (except where a visionary experience is considered to be distorted). Therefore we need to note Steiner's view of cognition, and the relationship of this to his esoteric worldview, for Steiner maintained that his conclusions in his early cognitive texts were compatible with his spiritual research and its consequent conclusions.

The question as to how sensory impressions are cognized is treated in Steiner's works as a decidedly non-reductionist one, although as noted above, his early philosophical works, whilst implying this, do not specify any form of spiritual solution. To Steiner, neither his methodology nor the implications of his anthroposophical teaching were incompatible with his epistemology. In a later section, Steiner's elucidation of his theories in this area to Theosophists will be noted.

In his Doctoral thesis (1892), and later in his *Die Philosophie* (1894), he sought to argue for the inherent validity of perception. In the first chapters of *Die Philosophie*, Steiner seeks to refute the various ways in which philosophical thought has argued over the centuries that the perceived reality (termed by Steiner, the 'given world-content') is not reliably perceived. The general argument, historically, is that perception is subject to dynamics in the perceiver's mind and body which render such perceptions unreliable in various ways. Steiner wishes to establish that sense perception is inherently reliable and provides accurate impressions of the outer environment.

Steiner establishes firstly the basic ground plan of his approach, namely that the consciousness processes under investigation are not a material reality, but derive from the 'soul', which inhabits the body. The central tenet underlying his epistemological enquiry is that consciousness does not have its origin in the material body, but

rather derives from an organism which is suprasensible in nature, namely, the soul.

Consciousness, Steiner maintains, is due to the presence of the soul which animates the body during the lifespan. The attitude which takes the opposite stand to this, and argues that the 'soul' is an outcome of the body, and that thoughts therefore originate in the brain, is termed 'materialistic' by Steiner. A passage from Steiner's *Die Philosophie*, in which he refutes the attitude that thinking is only a by-product of physiological processes, illustrates his approach;

Materialism can never provide a satisfactory explanation of the world. For every attempt at an explanation must commence in that one formulates *thoughts* about the phenomena of the world. Materialism thus begins with the *thought* of matter, or of material processes. But, in doing so, it is already faced with two different sets of facts: the material world, and the thoughts about it. The materialist seeks to comprehend the latter by regarding them as purely material processes. He believes that thinking takes place in the brain in much the same way that digestion takes place in the animal organs. Just as he attributes mechanical and organic effects to matter, so he also credits matter, in certain circumstances with the capacity to think. He forgets that, in doing so, he is merely shifting the problem from one place to another. He ascribes the power of thinking to matter instead of to himself [as a soul being]. And he is thereby back again at his starting point. How does matter come to think about its own nature? Why is it not simply satisfied with itself, and accepts its existence?<sup>29</sup> (emphasis in original)

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<sup>29</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Die Philosophie* 25: „Der Materialismus kann niemals eine befriedigende Welterklärung liefern. Denn jeder Versuch einer Erklärung muß damit beginnen, daß man sich *Gedanken* über die Welterscheinungen bildet. Der Materialismus macht deshalb den Anfang mit dem Gedanken der Materie oder der materiellen Vorgänge. Damit hat er bereits zwei verschiedene Tatsachengebiete vor sich: die materielle Welt und die Gedanken über sie. Er sucht die letzteren dadurch zu begreifen, daß er sie als einen rein materiellen Prozeß auf-faßt. Er glaubt, daß das Denken im Gehirne etwa so zustande komme, wie die Verdauung in den animalischen Organen. So wie er der Materie mechanische und organische Wirkungen zuschreibt, so legt er ihr auch die Fähigkeit bei, unter bestimmten Bedingungen zu denken. Er vergißt, daß er nun das Problem nur an einen andern Ort verlegt hat. Statt sich selbst, schreibt er die Fähigkeit des Denkens der Materie zu.



This passage reflects the fact that for Steiner's epistemology, it is critical that he establishes the independence of consciousness from matter. This is an essential basis for his attempts to argue that awareness of independent spiritual realms and beings is possible. There has to be a soul-spirit core pertaining to the human being to enable any encountering of soul-spirit realms to occur, as an organism derived from matter could not perceive spiritual realities. It is axiomatic in Steiner's worldview that such suprasensible elements as those which figure largely in his teachings, are accurately perceived realities, not theoretical postulates, nor hallucinatory. This element of his worldview emerges from his conclusions in primary Steiner texts, such as, *Knowledge of higher worlds, how is it achieved?* Published in 1904, this text will be referred to again in a later section.

Therefore, one strand of Steiner's approach to epistemology is to maintain that perception of the inner life (consciousness processes) can also be immediately given. So firstly, in so far as he dealt with cognitional themes, he seeks to establish that sense impressions are genuine; what we see, hear, touch and smell are what we register them to be. And additionally, he wished to establish that elements in the inner life, especially intellectual processes and volitional impulses, are also accurately, that is, immediately, perceived. Thus perception of both the outer environment and the inner life are equally reliably perceived. The corollary to this – that consciousness faculties can be enhanced to encompass supra-sensible realms – is never mentioned in his philosophical writings. However as we noted above, in his later, anthroposophical, period (1901 onwards), Steiner, as inaugurator of a body of spiritual teachings, argues that such an expansion is possible, and that this mediates equally valid impressions as those accessible by the senses. Steiner's concept of expanding the perceptual horizon will be examined later.

Steiner sees the registering of our environs, whether the external sense world, or the inner life, as the primal cognitive act. He argues that this occurs prior to logical analysis of such perceptions, or any distorting dynamic, and therefore these initial impressions cannot

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Und damit ist er wieder an seinem Ausgangspunkte. Wie kommt die Materie dazu, über ihr eigenes Wesen nachzudenken? Warum ist sie nicht einfach mit sich zufrieden und nimmt ihr Dasein hin?"

be dismissed as in some manner distorted. Again he makes a general argument, refraining from entering into specific philosophical arguments,

“... there have of course previously been people who have doubted the possibility of real cognition. One firstly has to become clear as to whether a science of knowledge is possible ... This possibility is however a necessary postulate of human reasoning. If one denies the possibility of a science of knowledge then one can do no other than place oneself fully on the standpoint of the sceptic, indicated earlier. But something has to be certain, because something *is given*; it is only a question of determining what *is* actually certain. For if one takes the opposite argument and were to say, nothing is definite; then this sentence, if it is to be generally valid, must, because of its own nature, be applicable to itself; that is, it itself is also not certain. So, it invalidates itself, but only in so far as it is itself valid; it is thus a complete contradiction, and one cannot do anything. Therefore we have to allow the possibility as well as the necessity of a science of knowledge as a postulate of human reason.<sup>30</sup> (my emphases)

Although in *Die Philosophie* Steiner's convictions are argued with logical rigour, he does not continue his argument on to provide evidence of any *modus operandi* in the human organism by which this postulated reliability of sense perceptions, which have been

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<sup>30</sup>*Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* Nr. 30, S. 27; „... es ja schon Leute gegeben hat, die an der Möglichkeit des Wissen gezweifelt haben. Man muß sich nun vorerst klar werden, ob eine Wissenschaftslehre möglich sei. ... Diese Möglichkeit ist aber ein notwendiges Postulat der menschlichen Vernunft. Wenn man nämlich die Möglichkeit einer Wissenschaftslehre leugnet, so kann man nichts anderes tun, als sich völlig auf den oben angedeuteten Standpunkt der Skeptiker stellen. Es muß eben etwas gewiß sein, weil etwas gegeben ist, und es handelt sich nur [darum] auszumachen, was denn eigentlich gewiß ist. Denn man nehme das Gegenteil an und sage: es ist nichts gewiß. So muß der Satz, wenn er allgemein gelten soll, vermöge seiner Natur auf sich selbst anwendbar sein, d. h. er ist selbst nicht gewiß. Er hebt also sich selbst auf, das aber nur insoferne, als er selbst gültig ist, er ist also ein vollkommener Widerspruch, und es ist mit ihm nichts anzufangen. Wir müssen also ebenso die Möglichkeit wie die Notwendigkeit einer Wissenschaftslehre als ein Postulat der Vernunft zugestehen.“

transformed into physiological components, can be validated. It is enough for him to establish logically to his satisfaction that sensory stimuli, according to his argument, cannot be dismissed as inherently subjective. Indeed in none of his epistemological works does he provide any suggestion as to how sense stimuli can actually be valid if, as he agrees, the sensory data does indeed become physiological substances and electrical impulses in the nerves. The solution which he offers to this conundrum is only provided in the course of his anthroposophical spiritual-esoteric teaching, as this necessitates elements of his spiritual view of the human being. We shall examine the answer later.

In regard to various themes proper to epistemological enquiry, an holistic-spiritual attitude towards human nature and consciousness processes prevails in *Die Philosophie*. For example, of thinking Steiner says, "In thinking we have given that element which brings into a unity our particular individuality with the cosmos. In that we feel and sense (and perceive) we are individual specific beings, in that we think, we are that All-one Being, which pervades all things."<sup>31</sup> In contrast to the theme of sense perception, where he elucidates his argument in detail, the above substantial remarks are stated, not established.

Looking back briefly to Steiner's doctoral thesis, as a conclusion to his argument, Steiner had maintained that there exists a directly given world-content, that is, the external environs that we register, which we accurately perceive, but in which no trace of cognising as yet exists. Further, he argued that this is one half of the directly perceived given reality in which the human being lives. The other half is the Idea which is intimately linked to the object. Three years later, he now argues this viewpoint in more detail in *Die Philosophie* placing emphasis upon intuitive insights. The human being possesses a faculty for intuitive thinking, and from this derives the second part of the immediately given world-reality,

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<sup>31</sup>Steiner, *Philosophie*, 72, „In dem Denken haben wir das Element gegeben, das unsere besondere Individualität mit dem Kosmos zu einem Ganzen zusammenschließt. Indem wir empfinden und fühlen, (auch wahrnehmen) sind wir einzelne, indem wir denken, sind wir das all-eine Wesen, das alles durchdringt.“

In the contemplative observation of the world, the union of the two parts of the world content actually occurs: of that which we view as a given on the horizon of our experiences, and that which in the act of cognizing has to be produced, in order to be given. The act of cognition is the synthesis of these two elements.<sup>32</sup>

It becomes obvious that a pivotal strand in his epistemology is that concepts can occur simultaneously with sense perception, namely the Idea from which the perceived object derives its existence. Steiner is arguing here that the term, 'thought' can also refer to the occurrence of insights, and not only to normal, logically formulated thinking. He maintains that the given world-content also consists of those intuitive thoughts that simultaneously occur in us when registering a sense impression. One notes that the underlying attitude here is that the existence of the realm of the Platonic Idea is a reality, as is a spiritual aspect to human nature which has the ability to receive insights from this realm,

The perception is not something completed, closed off, rather, the one side of the total reality. The other side is the concept. The act of knowledge is the synthesis of perception and concept. But perception and concept of a thing are required to constitute the thing in its entirety.<sup>33</sup>

Hence Steiner regards these 'intuitive concepts' as that which may be given to us, in the moment of perceiving the world-content, and which through their inherent nature leads us beyond the merely given. So to Steiner, 'ideas' are that which may be given to us, in the moment of perceiving the world-content, and which through

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<sup>32</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft*, (Dornach: RSV, 1980), 62, „In der denkenden Weltbetrachtung vollzieht sich tatsächlich die Vereinigung der zwei Teile des Weltinhaltes: dessen, den wir als Gegebenes auf dem Horizonte unserer Erlebnisse überblicken, und dessen, der im Erkenntnisakt produziert werden muß, um sich gegeben zu sein. Der Erkenntnisakt ist die Synthese dieser beiden Elemente“.

<sup>33</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Philosophie*, 73, „Die Wahrnehmung ist nicht also Fertiges, Abgeschlossenes, sondern die eine Seite der totalen Wirklichkeit. Die andere Seite ist der Begriff. Der Erkenntnisakt ist die Synthese von Wahrnehmung und Begriff. Wahrnehmung und Begriff eines Dinges machen aber erst das ganze Ding aus.“

their inherent nature leads us beyond the merely given. The Idea can lead the observer to an understanding of the full reality of what is perceived, and the other half of reality, the concept which explains it, derives from the archetypal Idea.

That the underlying implication here is that the concept is actually existing in the Platonic realm of the Idea, is indicated in a document written in 1888, a few years before his doctoral thesis. This document, entitled, *Credo*, was found some decades after his death in the Steiner archives in Dornach, Switzerland; it gives the young Steiner's personal creed of life, and commences with the following words,

The world of Ideas is the primary fountain and principle of all being. In it is never ending harmony and blissful tranquillity. Any existence that was not illumined by the light of the world of Ideas, would be a dead existence, devoid of essential being, which would have no part of the life of the universe.<sup>34</sup>

The Platonic realm of the Idea, to which Steiner alludes in his *Credo*, is a general concept shared by many writers with a spiritual-esoteric perspective, from the Neo-Platonists through to the Theosophists of Steiner's time. We shall note the acceptance of this general concept in Romantics whose writings were relevant to the formulation of Steiner's worldview. The concept as such is not presented in any one main passage in Plato's works; in his *Phaedrus*, he makes some clear statements as to the features of this realm. In particular, here he refers to this realm as a realm that transcends the paradisaical realms customarily known to those possessing esoteric knowledge, it is "that region beyond the sky [of which] no bard has ever sung."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Credo, Wahrspruchworte* 273, „Die Ideenwelt ist der Urquell und das Prinzip alles Seins. In ihr ist unendliche Harmonie und selige Ruhe. Das Sein, das sie mit ihrem Lichte nicht beleuchtete, wäre ein totes, wesenloses, das keinen Teil hätte an dem Leben des Weltganzen.“

<sup>35</sup>*Lexikon der Platonischen Begriffe, Idee*, ed. H. Peris, (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1973), 179; and Plato, *Phaedrus, Five dialogues of Plato bearing on poetic inspiration*, (London: Dutton & Co, 1927), 233.

His philosophical arguments, presented primarily in *Die Philosophie*, remain devoid of esoteric-spiritual content, but his *Credo* indicates strongly that already in his twenties, Steiner ascribed to esoteric-spiritual ideas. It is not until 1901 that he provides substantiating bases for his holistic conclusions regarding thinking and perception, through his 'anthroposophical' spiritual tenets.

Summing up his spiritual-cognitive orientation so far, in his thesis of 1892, and in *Die Philosophie* of 1894, Steiner maintains that consciousness derives from a soul, which is supra-sensible. Sense impressions and thoughts – that is, intuitive ideas – and volitional impulses are directly, immediately, given to human consciousness. This process, in terms of cognizing the world around one, thus provides valid sense impression, and also it offers the concept which inherently belongs to the perceived object. That is, every object has a corresponding Idea from which it derives, and the observer may be able to perceive this.

In *Die Philosophie* Steiner has examined cognition from the perspective of the divide which Kantian philosophical thinking postulates, that is the gap between the perceiving human being and its sense perceptible environment, and the causative Ideas which sustains the created environment. As we have noted above, he maintains that the alienating dichotomous situation of the human being viz-a-viz the world-content, actually already has a solution inherent in it, namely, humanity has the ability to cognize the Idea pertaining to the perceived.

But a few years after *Die Philosophie* appeared, in his editorial remarks on Goethe's scientific writings, he proceeds to take the next step in the elucidation of these ideas, with a more pronounced Platonic and spiritual nuance. His remarks were published as a volume in the Complete Works, in 1987 as, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften (Goethe's scientific writings)*. In the chapter, 'Goethes Erkenntnis-Art' (The Nature of Goethe's Knowledge) he writes,

In so far as thinking takes hold of the Idea, it merges with the primal foundation of existence; that which is efficacious from outside, enters into the spirit of the human being. It becomes one with the objective

reality at its highest potency. *Becoming aware of the Idea within reality is the true communion of man.*<sup>36</sup> (Italics in the original)

It is relevant to note here that the quasi-religious nuance of this latter sentence needs to be examined. This sentence echoes a primary ethical tenet of his philosophical thoughts. Namely that ethical behaviour is closely connected to the power of insight – at its finest and most empowered. As is implied in the above elucidation of his epistemology however, such thinking unites the mind with the divine archetypal truths, and hence with their Creator. All of this requires of course, as a solid fundament, the cognitional-epistemological perspective we have been noting.

The latter half of *Die Philosophie* is devoted to establishing the concept that the human being can also perceive the cognitional power active in the will, not only in thinking or feelings, and active within these volitional forces is the human spirit. The kind of cognition carried out by the volitional nature is described as ‘intuitive’, that is, a form of insightfulness, which is not the outcome of a logical process. Steiner maintains in *Die Philosophie* that in the human will are qualities of the highest morality, and perception of them is akin to making them efficacious within one.

By this, Steiner means the human being in this condition – access to which is facilitated by meditation – can attain to an intuitive perception of the inherently moral and then the realization of it in deeds. Acting from such a volitional dynamic is regarded as the primary meaning of the term ‘freedom’. So, Steiner’s second major postulate in *Die Philosophie* is that true ethics only arises when it is perceived within one’s inner being, from the human spirit, and not drawn from any external source. This second postulate requires the first postulate – the inherent validity of perception – for its validation.

This attitude is also exemplified in a statement which he made as young man, in a university questionnaire from 1892, the year in

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<sup>36</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (Dornach: RSV, 1973), 126, „Indem sich das Denken der Idee bemächtigt, verschmilzt es mit dem Urgrund des Weltendaseins; das, was außen wirkt, tritt in den Geist des Menschen ein; er wird mit der objektiven Wirklichkeit auf ihrer höchsten Potenz eins. Das Gewahrwerden der Idee in der Wirklichkeit ist die wahre Kommunion des Menschen.“

which his thesis was published. In this document, as a motto, the young Steiner wrote, "An Gottes Stelle den freien Menschen! (In the place of God, the free human being!)"<sup>37</sup> The term 'free' (frei in German) also has the connotation of 'independent' and unrestricted. Steiner's usage here means, as his work *Die Philosophie* elucidates at length, that the human being who has attained to an intuitive morality, now has an inherent source of ethics.

In his next epistemological book, *Goethe's Erkenntnistheorie* (*Goethe's Epistemology*), Steiner now writes from the position of having attained a firm basis for his postulate that the human being has the ability to perceive an immediately given world content. His focus in this volume is the ability of the human being to perceive a spiritual reality, existing in the Platonic realm of Ideas, which itself derives from God,

When we speak about the nature of a thing, or of the world in general, then we cannot mean anything else than the grasping of reality as *a thought, an Idea*. In the Idea we recognize that from which we have to derive everything else: the principle of things. What the philosophers call the absolute, eternal being, the foundation of the world, what religions call God, we call – on the basis of our epistemological elucidations – the *Idea*.<sup>38</sup>

In 1911 an occasion occurred for Steiner to speak to this point philosophically; at that time the president of the fourth International Congress on Philosophy, Prof. Frederico Enriques (Rome), invited him to present a paper about his spiritual-scientific perspectives on epistemology. During this congress he addressed the crucial point of extending the faculties of consciousness, aware that he was now

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<sup>37</sup>Bettle, Erika and Vlerl, Kurt. Eds. *Erinnerungen an Rudolf Steiner*, (Stuttgart: Verlag FreiesGeistesleben, 1979), 43, „Motto: An Gottes Stelle den freien Menschen!“

<sup>38</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, 162, „Wenn wir vom Wesen eines Dinges oder der Welt überhaupt sprechen, so können wir also gar nichts anderes meinen, als das Begreifen der Wirklichkeit als *Gedanke*, als *Idee*. In der *Idee* erkennen wir dasjenige, woraus wir alles andere herleiten müssen: das Prinzip der Dinge. Was die Philosophen das Absolute, das ewige Sein, den Weltengrund, was die Religionen Gott nennen, das nennen wir, auf Grund unserer erkenntnistheoretischen Erörterungen: die *Idee*.“



speaking academically, but from the social position of a teacher of spiritual matters, an official of the Theosophical Society,<sup>39</sup>

Anthroposophy believes, on the basis of reliable facts of the soul-life, that it may assert that apprehension is not something completed and closed off, but rather something fluidic, capable of development. Anthroposophy believes it can point out that behind the scope of normal conscious soul-life there is another field of consciousness into which the human being can enter. ... However this other state of the soul must first be attained by certain soul-exercises, soul experiences.<sup>40</sup>

Steiner's arguments were not experienced as persuasive to philosophical thinkers of his lifetime. Some of the reviewers considered his theory of inner intuitive morality as far-fetched, or worse. Critical reviews of his *Die Philosophie* included such conclusions as, "Steiner ... goes far beyond Nietzsche, and ends in a theoretical anarchy", or, " ... it would be most delightful, if we were so mature that we only needed to reach into our individual [Platonic] Idea-world to create from it captivating motives ... for action."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>The occurrence of the term, 'Anthroposophy' in this text from 1911, where one would expect 'Theosophy' is due to the editors of Steiner's works, who began producing the Complete Edition in 1961. It was not until 1913 that Steiner formed the Anthroposophical Society, and began referring to his worldview as 'anthroposophy', apart from using it in one lecture in 1902, which was his first year as General Secretary of the Theosophical Society.

<sup>40</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Die psychologischen Grundlagen und die erkenntnistheoretische Stellung der Anthroposophie, Philosophie und Anthroposophie*, (Dornach: VRSN, 1965), 113; „Anthroposophie ... glaubt auf Grund sicherer Tatsachen des Seelenlebens behaupten zu dürfen, daß Erkenntnis nichts Fertiges, Abgeschlossenes, sondern etwas Fließendes, Entwicklungsfähiges ist. Sie glaubt hinweisen zu dürfen darauf, daß es hinter dem Umkreis des normal bewußten Seelenlebens ein anderes gibt, in welches der Mensch eindringen kann. ... Nur muß diese Seelenverfassung erst durch bestimmte Seelenübungen, Seelenerlebnisse hergestellt werden.“

<sup>41</sup>David Marc Hoffmann, ed. *Dokumente zur "Philosophie der Freiheit"*, (Dornach: RSV, 1994), 451, 473; quoting from *The Athenaeum, Journal of English and Foreign Literature, Science, the Fine Arts, Music and the Drama*, London No. 3480, 17, and *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 1895,

Many other readers would have rejected outright the cognitional theories of Steiner that we have been considering above, namely that our sensory perceptions are valid and genuine representations of our physical environment. Such a reader was Eduard von Hartmann, who wrote extensive margin notes in his copy of *Die Philosophie*, rejecting much of Steiner's text on this basis. For example, in response to Steiner's sentence, „Die äußeren Dinge sind wir allerdings nicht, aber wir gehören mit den äußeren Dingen zu ein und derselben Welt (Certainly we are not the external things, but we belong with the external things to one and the same world)“ von Hartmann wrote, “This ‘we’ is inadmissible, it must read, ‘I’, because the other ‘I’s’ exist only in my consciousness, as something which I mentally represent to myself.”<sup>42</sup>

Consequently Steiner's spiritual approach to philosophy did not become part of the ongoing philosophical debate, hence his philosophical writings are widely unknown today.<sup>43</sup> The Kantian perspective prevails widely today, as Strawson notes in his essay in the anthology, *Kant and Contemporary Epistemology*. He examines the major implications in contemporary, Kantian philosophical ideas regarding perception, defining the two possible implications, and then suggests that they are not quite as stark as they may seem,

And so it may seem that in the critical philosophy we are faced with a choice of interpretations. It seems that either things in space and time, including ourselves and our temporally ordered experiences, are real, and things in themselves are merely those same things considered in abstraction from the conditions of our knowledge of them – mere cognitive blanks; *or*, a non-temporal, non-spatial supersensible realm of things in themselves (or noumens) is the only reality and there only

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425-428, “... es wäre ja ganz köstlich, wenn wir soweit gereift wären, daß wir nur in unsere individuelle Ideenwelt zu greifen brauchten, um darin hinreißende Motive zum Handeln ... zu schöpfen ...”

<sup>42</sup>Hoffman, *Dokumente* 370, „Dieses ‚wir‘ ist unstatthaft; es muß heißen, Ich, da die anderen Ichs nur in meinem Bewußtsein als von mir vorgestellte existieren.“

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Mautner, ed. *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, (London: Penguin, 1997), 540, the brief entry for Steiner sums up his epistemology as, “Genuine knowledge, he thought, must always include intuitive and aesthetic elements.”

appears to be anything else. But this is to state the case too starkly. In each case a qualification is called for ... <sup>44</sup>

We don't need to consider further arguments of Strawson's, moderating the implications in the Kantian-influenced view, it suffices to note here the slight nuance of disquiet about the apparently unreal nature of our environs. This same disquiet existed already in Steiner's lifetime, and in his Doctoral thesis he quotes various dissenting thinkers as support for his own epistemology. However the situation remains that Steiner's conclusions were not incorporated into the ongoing debate, and that as he moved into a new phase of advocating an overtly spiritual worldview the prominence of his philosophical work was eclipsed by his esoteric-spiritual worldview.

Today, he is known for the practical applications derived from his esoteric-spiritual worldview, for example in education (the Steiner schools) and agriculture (bio-dynamic farming practises). His philosophical writings have been ignored, as the entry in *Kindlers Literatur Lexikon* notes, "So far, an intensive critical engagement with the *Philosophie der Freiheit* from non-anthroposophists has not occurred".<sup>45</sup> The further implications of Steiner's anthroposophically nuanced epistemology and its consistency or inconsistency to his new spiritual worldview, as expressed in *Die Pforte*, is relevant to the task of identifying the key elements of his anthroposophy. As such it will be considered in the conclusion.

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<sup>44</sup>Peter F. Strawson, *The problem of realism and the a priori, Kant and Contemporary Epistemology*, ed. Paolo Parrini, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 172.

<sup>45</sup>*Kindlers Literatur Lexikon*, Bd. 17, 7470.

### 1A3: Steiner's involvement in Theosophy and esoteric-spiritual drama

In 1902, after Steiner had given various lectures on spirituality to the Giordano Bruno Association,<sup>46</sup> he was invited to join the German branch of the Theosophical Society. He accepted and was appointed General Secretary of the German branch, and was also simultaneously appointed head of the Berlin lodge of that organisation. This society had been founded in 1875 in New York, by several people with an interest in esoteric spiritual teachings; Helen P. Blavatsky, Col. Henry S. Olcott and Mr. William W. Judge. The principle goals of the organization are stated to be, "To form a nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, colour, sex or creed, to promote the study of world-religions and sciences. To investigate the hidden mysteries of Nature under every aspect possible and the psychic and spiritual powers of man."<sup>47</sup>

By 1880, the headquarters of this society had been transferred to India, but there was a growing membership in Europe, and by 1902, there were some thousands of members in Europe and England. The Theosophical Society provided probably the largest and most organized platform for teachings of an esoteric-spiritual nature, at that time. Soon an extensive lecturing activity was underway, which eventually included many public talks. This activity continued up to September 1924. Steiner gave some six thousand lectures in that period, of which about four thousand were recorded stenographically.

In 1907 the international executive of the Theosophical Society, based in Adyar, India, decided that its international conference would be hosted by Germany. Consequently, Steiner, as its General Secretary, was responsible for the program. These conferences were normally devoid of artistic content, and it was Steiner's own decision to introduce for the first time substantial artistic elements into a theosophical conference, including a performance of a drama. Steiner decided upon the performance of *The Sacred Drama of*

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<sup>46</sup>The "Giordano Bruno Bund für einheitliche Weltanschauung" in Berlin; founded by Bruno Wille, 1860-1928, author.

<sup>47</sup>*World Theosophy journal*, centenary number, (Hollywood) Aug 1931, Vol 1, No. 8, 596.

*Eleusis*, a drama written by a French theosophist and mystic, Eduard Schuré (1841-1929), in which the Demeter myth of ancient Greece is explored in a mystical, theosophical way.

Steiner directed the production of this play, the German translation of which he had re-cast into blank verse. Steiner commented in his introduction to the performance that, "In *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis* Schuré has re-established, with the intuition of a genius, the sacred drama of Eleusis – that primal drama, which is at once a work of art and of religious cultic activity."<sup>48</sup> This was an attempt at a reconstruction of what he believed occurred in the ancient Greek Mysteries. Dramatic performances were enacted in ancient Greece in places set aside for the worship of various gods, for example at Eleusis and Samothrace, in which various deities and processes of spiritual development were the focus.

In 1909, another Mystery play by Schuré, *The Children of Lucifer*, was translated by Steiner's closest co-worker, Marie von Sivers. It was performed as part of a German Theosophical conference, and again Steiner gave the introduction to the performance. These performances were only for members of the Theosophical Society, and hence there is no record of comments by drama critics to these plays. Steiner commented that Schuré, as an artist and as a researcher of the mystical path of the soul, is able to be a herald of the truth, and concluded that Schuré's entire creative activity shows how deeply permeated he is with the necessity to again unite modern culture with the soul's intimate mystical experience.<sup>49</sup>

In this sentence, we also have an indication of the attitude of Steiner to such dramatic activity, namely that esoteric spirituality is of necessity restricted to a small circle of adherents, but is nevertheless of great importance to modern times. Schuré's dramas

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<sup>48</sup>Rudolf Steiner, May 1904, re-published in *Luzifer Gnosis*, (Dornach: Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1960), 160; „In den Heiligtümern des Orients hat er mit genialischem Sinn das heilige Drama von Eleusis wiederhergestellt, jenes Urdrama, das zugleich Kunstwerk und religiöse Kulthandlung war.“

<sup>49</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Luzifer*, 161, „Denn ihm ist es gegeben, als Künstler ein Kündler der Wahrheit und als Forscher ein Enthüller der mystischen Seelenwege zu sein. ... Schuré's ganzes Schaffen zeigt, wie tief durchdrungen er ist von der Notwendigkeit, die Zeitkultur wieder zu vereinigen mit dem intimen mystischen Erleben der Seele.“

were taken up only one more time, namely in the following year, 1910. By this year Steiner had begun to write his own dramas, which he described as 'Mystery dramas', all of which portray the influence of spiritual realities in the inner life of his characters, who are seeking esoteric enlightenment. In doing this, it was obvious that he would be interacting with a very limited circle of people, and thereby greatly limit the circles in which his own activity would be appreciated.

Steiner was very informed as to the dramatic context of his times, from his work as a literary drama critic in the 1880-1890's. In this period he wrote about 270 articles, primarily reviews of plays, including those of Shakespeare, Goethe, Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Hebbel, Otto Ludwig, Arno Holz, Maurice Donnay, Max Dreyer, Heinrich von Kleist, Gunnar Heiberg, Franz Grillparzer, Theodor Herzl, Hermann Bahr and many others. But in contrast to such playwrights, Steiner's dramas were to be performed specifically to educate those few people interested in understanding his esoteric worldview, namely members of the Theosophical (later, Anthroposophical) Society.

In August of 1910 he wrote, and consequently directed, the performance of *Die Pforte der Einweihung* (*The Portal of Initiation*), at a Society conference. It was the first of four such plays. The performance was part of a European Theosophical conference in Munich. At this conference, Schuré's play, *The Sacred Drama of Eleusis*, was performed for the last time, and there was the inaugural performance of Steiner's first drama, *Die Pforte*. These theatrical events were not part of the wider social life of Germany, they were 'internal' productions, intended only for participants at the conference. In 1911 he wrote and produced another play, *Die Prüfung der Seele* (*The Soul's Probation*), performed in August of that year. In 1912, *Die Hüter der Schwelle* (*The Guardian of the Threshold*) was written, and performed in August. In 1913, his fourth drama, *Der Seelen Erwachen* (*The Soul's Awakening*) was written, and performed in the summer of that year, a year in which he began to separate his own impetus from association with the Theosophical Society.

## 1A4: The reception of Steiner's spiritual worldview and his break with the Theosophical Society

Steiner's motivation to write his dramas, especially the first one, *Die Pforte*, is connected historically with the divergence between his view of Christianity, and that of the leaders of the mainstream Theosophical Society. His dramas were written in the decisive years when Steiner's own initiative was emerging as inherently incompatible with the attitudes of the executive of the Adyar branch. The protocols of the meetings of the German branch of the Theosophical Society from 1910 onwards clearly show that as early as 1909 the worldwide Theosophical Society was splitting, along the lines of the German section versus the Adyar-based Besant-Leadbeater faction.<sup>50</sup>

In 1910 Steiner was still the General Secretary for Germany, and enthusiasm for his approach had been growing steadily. The leaders of the International Theosophical Society, Annie Besant and William Leadbeater, then announced that an Indian youth, whom they had discovered, was to become the 'earthly vessel' of the coming World Teacher. Members were given to understand that this Teacher was in effect the returned Christ, also referred to as the Maitreya Bodhisattva and various names of high avatar beings, expected in various religious systems.<sup>51</sup> This child had been espied some years earlier, whilst bathing, by Leadbeater in India, and had consequently been subject to a special regimented education and dietetic system in England, under Leadbeater's supervision. Central to Steiner's Christology however, is the view that Jesus will never return in a flesh and blood body, and that the concept of a Second Coming refers to a non-physical event.

The Adyar mainstream founded the Order of the Star of the East in 1910, and held well-attended conferences in India announcing

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<sup>50</sup>Mathilde Scholl, ed. *Mitteilungen für die Mitglieder der Deutschen Sektion der Theosophischen Gesellschaft* 10 (January 1910). In this, Steiner reports on a lecture by A. Besant on the nature of Christ, commenting that precisely this lecture shows that not disharmony, but harmony is there between East and West if people will only view the subject in the right way.

<sup>51</sup>Annie Besant, "The Order of the Star of the East", *The Herald of the Star* (Madras: The Theosophist office, 1912), 80-86.

the imminent return of Christ. Early in 1912 they took the young man, known as Krishnamurti, on an European lecture tour, where he made a considerable impact.<sup>52</sup> Alongside this, efforts were made by the leadership of the Theosophical Society to limit the success of Steiner's work by creating doubt about the inherent integrity of his spiritual teachings.<sup>53</sup> This was followed by surreptitious actions, including cancelling without his prior knowledge, an international conference arranged by him.<sup>54</sup>

Steiner's play, *Die Pforte*, was written at the same time as the founding of the Star of the East, 1910. The establishing of this Order was an action which was to have major implication for Steiner's involvement with the Theosophical Society. It was in response to the founding of this Order that Steiner established an independent society, the Anthroposophical Society. The first performance of *Die Pforte* took place only a few months after the founding of the Star of the East. In this play an episode is inserted which specifically identifies the return of Christ as an 'ethereal' process, not a flesh and blood person. A character called Theodora proclaims this in the first scene of *Die Pforte*. In 1911 and 1912 the political antagonisms intensified, Steiner stood his ground with regard to the Star of the East, and the performance of his second and third dramas, which continued the themes of the first, became a major expression of the independent approach that Steiner was adopting.

The inclusion in the play of the episode with Theodora concerning the Second Coming in the *Die Pforte* is an expression of Steiner's Christology, but in part it was probably also due to

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<sup>52</sup>J. Krishnamurti, "A Tour", *The herald of the Star* (Adyar: July 1912), Vol 1, No. 3, 73-79.

<sup>53</sup>Mathilde Scholl, ed. *Mitteilungen für die Mitglieder der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft (theosophischen Gesellschaft*, 2 (June 1913); "Mrs. Besant hat zuerst etwas fabriziert, was gar nicht in dem Buche steht, wie sie es darstellt, und dann warnt sie ihre Leser dreimal [that is a problem of justification on both sides], man müsse vorsichtig sein gegenüber diesen Angaben, in denen Dr. Steiner als okkult Forscher allein dastehe und nicht mit den andern Forschern übereinstimme !!!" 9. (syntax/orthographics in the original).

<sup>54</sup>Mathilde Scholl, ed. *Mitteilungen für die Mitglieder der Deutschen Sektion der Theosophischen Gesellschaft*, 15 (January 1913), 1-5.



Steiner's wish to correct what he saw as an error promulgated by the Star of the East with regards to Christian eschatology. He felt the need to confront the politically inspired machinations of senior personnel in the Theosophical Society, which he felt were threatening to distort the members' understanding of this theme, as comments in a lecture from 1910 reveal,

Materialism has seized hold of all circles today. It is not only native to the occident; it has also encompassed the orient, except it comes to expression in a different way there. It might happen that the oriental materialism could bring it about that ... materialistic thinking transfers the appearance of Christ into a materialistic perspective. ... Just as little can the Christ-Being be pressed and narrowed by the oriental traditions, just as little can it receive a colouration from the dogmas of oriental dogmatism.<sup>55</sup>

This was a signal that Steiner would soon be setting out on his own path, splitting from the Theosophical Society. In December 1912, after continued manoeuvres against him, and the insistence by Adyar that Krishnamurti was the returned Christ, Steiner emphasized that the teachings of the Order of the Star of the East were contrary to esoteric Christian truths and announced his intention to establish the Anthroposophical Society. He informed the Theosophists that membership in this new society was incompatible with membership in the Besant-Leadbearer society. In the next half-year, several thousand Theosophists, mainly in Germany, went with Steiner, thousands more stayed with the Adyar main stream.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Die Mission der einzelnen Volkseelen*, (Dornach: RSV, 1974) Taschenbuch Ausgabe, 198 and 206, „Der Materialismus hat alle Kreise heute ergriffen. Er ist nicht nur im Okzident heimisch, er hat auch den Orient erfaßt; nur in einer andern Form kommt er da zum Vorschein. Es könnte sein, daß der orientalische Materialismus dahin führen werde, daß ... materialistisches Denken das Erscheinen des Christus in eine materialistische Anschauung umsetzen wird. Ebensowenig darf die Christus-Wesenheit gedrückt und beengt werden aus den orientalischen Traditionen heraus, ebensowenig eine Färbung erhalten durch die Dogmen des orientalischen Dogmatismus.“

<sup>56</sup>Harry Collison, „To the President and members“, *Mitteilungen für die Mitglieder der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft (theosophischen Gesellschaft)* 1 (April 1913), 23.

The term, 'anthroposophy', chosen by Steiner to differentiate his teachings from those associated with the Theosophical Society, is a Greek neologism, which has the general meaning of 'the wisdom of the human being'. It is not a Steiner neologism, it had been coined separately by various writers over the centuries. The *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* identifies P. V. Troxler (1780-1866) as the first German writer to use it, in 1828, where it has the meaning of, "A natural philosophy about human cognition (eine Naturlehre des menschlichen Erkennens)"<sup>57</sup> Prior to this, it was used in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Latin in hermetic-alchemical treatises, for example by Eugenius Philalethes and Henry Moore in 1650.<sup>58</sup> Steiner himself regarded his own teachings as quite separate from any formalized theosophical dogmas. This term historically implied in Germany an ennobled form of knowledge; Steiner quotes its use by I. H. Fichte;

... the sense-derived consciousness ... together with human sense life in its totality has no other significance than to be that place in which the supra-sensible life of the spirit is accomplished ... this fundamental comprehension of human nature henceforth raises 'anthropology' in its end results into 'anthroposophy'.<sup>59</sup>

In 1902 a theosophical conference was held in Berlin, to formally found the German branch of the Theosophical Society, and appoint Steiner as its General Secretary. Steiner absented himself for a time from the conference, and gave a talk on 'anthroposophy' to members of the Giordano Bruno Bund to whom he had earlier delivered various lectures.<sup>60</sup> Hence his 'theosophical' teachings from the very inception of his new phase of life, were in effect, not restatements of the Adyar-based Society's worldview, but his own esoteric-spiritual conclusions.

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<sup>57</sup>*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 1 A-C, ed. Joachim Ritter, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971), 377.

<sup>58</sup>*Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, Nr. 121, ed. Walter Kugler, (Dornach; Rudolf Steiner Nachlaßverwaltung, 1999), 12-14.

<sup>59</sup>Rudolf Steiner "Menschenseele und Menschenleib in Natur- und Geist-Erkenntnis" 15. Mar. 1917, in *Geist und Stoff, Leben und Tod*, (Dornach; VRSN, 1961), 169.

<sup>60</sup>*Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, Nr. 121, „Anthroposophie: Quellentexte zur Wortgeschichte“, (Dornach: VRSN, 1999), 52.

Twenty years after the founding of the German branch of the Theosophical Society, in a public lecture from 1923, he described his understanding of this term, giving emphasis to the intention to present his elucidations in a rational manner, in the hope of avoiding his new worldview being dismissed as indefinable (superstitious) 'mysticism',

Anthroposophy in the first instance, wants to be a knowledge of the spiritual world, a kind of knowledge which can indeed be placed at the side of what we today have in such a magnificent way, as science. It wants to place itself at the side of this science, through scientific conscientiousness, and because it is the case that those who in an earnest manner take up anthroposophy into their heart, don't only want to simply do that, but also want to develop it further – and above all, through the situation that such a person must have utilized the strict and earnest methods which natural science today practises.<sup>61</sup>

At this stage the reception of Steiner's work by the early twenties needs to be noted. Despite his success with those Theosophists who made the decision to join the new Anthroposophical Society, his teachings did not make any noticeable impact in the normal cultural life. His intention to present his spiritual conclusions in a manner which evinced a scientific methodology in his research techniques, and hence a rational, coherent quality in his elucidations, did not result in any substantial response from the community. His philosophical writings and several small books on social and political issues were noted in wider circles in his time, but none of

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<sup>61</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Was wollte das Goetheanum und was soll die Anthroposophie?* (Dornach: VRSN, 1961), 10, „Anthroposophie will zunächst sein eine Erkenntnis der geistigen Welt, eine solche Erkenntnis der geistigen Welt welche sich durchaus an die Seite stellen kann dem, was wir heute in einer so großartigen Weise als Naturwissenschaft haben. Sie will sich an die Seite stellen dieser Naturwissenschaft sowohl durch wissenschaftliche Gewissenhaftigkeit, wie auch dadurch, daß derjenige, der in ernster Weise nicht bloß Anthroposophie in sein Gemüt aufnehmen, sondern sie aufbauen will, daß der vor allen Dingen durchgegangen sein muß durch alle strengen und ernsten Methoden, welche die Naturwissenschaft heute übt.“

his anthroposophical texts were widely received. In addition to his philosophical and esoteric writings, Steiner was astonishingly creative in art. He made one hundred paintings or drawings, created 1,500 choreographed dance movements for his new dance system called 'eurhythmy', designed several buildings in a new organic style of architecture, and sculpted several sculptures. These artistic activities also remained initiatives that were of limited appeal. Hence the interest in his work was limited for decades to the tiny membership of his Society, although briefly in the years 1919-20, when Steiner lectured on social issues, in the aftermath of World War One, large audiences were drawn to hear him. He presented his views on a thorough re-structuring of society, which would reflect the triune nature of the body-social, namely, the commercial sphere, the legislative sphere and thirdly, all other applications of human intelligence.<sup>62</sup> His suggestions would alter the dynamics of the economic and political spheres in a manner which would help prevent many social injustices. He referred to this concept as the 'threefolding of society' (*die Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*). It aroused interest, but did not sway the course of social-political events in central Europe.

There was no critiquing of Steiner's dramas by the wider theatrical public, as they were designed for didactic theosophical-anthroposophical purpose. The dramas had been performed privately in Munich, and a development proposal including architectural plans, was submitted to the city council to construct an international cultural centre for Steiner's initiative. Permission was refused on grounds of architectural incompatibility with the traditional cityscape of that city, and Steiner transferred his activities to Switzerland about 1915.

The proposed centre for his work, the Goetheanum, was constructed there, near the small town of Dornach, in the vicinity of Basel. The construction of this building was not sufficiently ad-

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<sup>62</sup>The depth of Steiner's views here are often not appreciated, as the third sphere of society in Steiner's model is often misunderstood, being seen as referring to spiritual and religious activity. The German term for this sphere, "*das Geistesleben*" is incorrectly translated as 'the spiritual-life', whereas the term refers to creative human intelligence, whether active in the church or a flying school for pilots or technical research by engineers.

vanced to allow it to be used for theatrical purposes until the early 1920's. However, after it was destroyed by an arsonist attack in early January 1923, the dramas were not performed again until 1928, and in a different venue. This is three years after Steiner had died, and before the building had been rebuilt. Although by 1980 the performances of his dramas in Dornach were opened to the public, the preceding history of their performances meant that there were no reviews or articles regarding them, or of Steiner as a dramatist, outside of anthroposophical circles.

Even when prominent persons were drawn to Steiner's ideas, little of this flowed into the mainstream because it was apparently incompatible with current scientific theory. An example of this concerns the decision of several dozen of priests and theologians to join together to form a new church, based on Steiner's anthroposophical Christology. This church, *Die Christengemeinschaft* (*The Christian Community*) was founded in 1922 with the help of Steiner. One of these men was a very highly regarded liberal Protestant cleric, Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872-1938).

Rittelmeyer was a protestant theologian and preacher, well known for his sermons in Nuremberg; he joined the "Neue Kirche" in Berlin. In his autobiographical work, *Rudolf Steiner enters my life* (1929) he describes how at first, in his search for meaning to his religious life, he lectured in meetings of the 'Freunde der Christlichen Welt', whom he described as "a body of people who fully recognized the results of modern scientific research, and who were fighting for freedom and truth in the religious life of the future."<sup>63</sup> Shortly afterwards, he encountered Theosophy through a prominent German Theosophist, Michael Bauer, in 1910, and then soon encountered opposition from colleagues, who were sceptical of the attitude of respect for Steiner's teachings.

A year later he met Rudolf Steiner, who made such an impression upon him, that he gradually became convinced of the validity of Steiner's approach to Christology. Rittelmeyer later wrote *Theology and Anthroposophy* in which he attempts to harmonize theological attitudes with the spiritual-esoteric views of Steiner. Later he wrote a book of contemplations on *The Lord's Prayer*,

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<sup>63</sup>Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Rudolf Steiner enters my life* (London: The Christian Community Press, 1929), 16.

drawing broadly on Steiner's elucidations of this verse, in which he uses imagery drawn from esoteric Christian traditions elucidated by Steiner. For example, the image of drawing near to the castle of the Holy Grail is used when referring to the process of entering into the inner meaning of the prayer.<sup>64</sup>

When Rittelmeyer left his church to join the new Steiner associated church, and as its first highest ranking clergyman, an article was published in the prominent church journal, *Christliche Welt*, in 1938, expressing its regret at his departure. However the article omits any mention of the name of Rudolf Steiner, even though he in effect, inspired the founding of the church. In 1939, in a review of Rittelmeyer's autobiography, wherein Rittelmeyer describes at length why he became an anthroposophist, the editors, in the same church journal, omit to mention Steiner completely.

As Ute Gause comments, writing in a leading German ecclesiastical journal in 1996, Rittelmeyer was described by his ecclesiastical colleagues as "a highly gifted man, around whom at all times was an atmosphere of honour and goodness ... a man who knew how to speak to the heart of listeners about Jesus wonderfully." But as Gause concludes, "Apparently, it was required that anthroposophy and its influence on Rittelmeyer be taboo."<sup>65</sup> This, despite the fact a learned scholar and academic, Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Stählin held a seminar on this topic, which was well-attended at the Münster University in the winter of 1934/35. Years later, in 1953, as Gerhard Wehr reports, Stählin wrote an article inviting discussion to Rittelmeyer's book, *Theology and Anthroposophy* in a theological anthology (*Evangelium und Christengemeinschaft*), but no responses ever occurred.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that Steiner's initiatives were culturally isolated, during his lifetime, and for some decades afterwards, may have been due

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<sup>64</sup>Rittelmeyer, *The Lord's Prayer*, (London: The Christian Community Press, 1931), 81.

<sup>65</sup>Ute Gause, „Friedrich Rittelmeyer (1872-1938). Vom Liberalen Protestantismus zur anthroposophischen Christusfrömmigkeit,“ *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, Friedrich-Wilhelm Kantzenbach, Hans-Joachim Klimkeit, Joachim H. Knoll, Julius H. Schoeps, eds, 48th annual edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 153.

<sup>66</sup>Gerhard Wehr, *Theologie und Anthroposoph – In memoriam Friedrich Rittelmeyer, Mensch und Welt* 3, (1968), 101-102.

to the public perception of his movement as sectarian and irrelevant to mainstream concerns. Steiner's attitude to 'Theosophy' and the Theosophical Society was that the tendency to sectarianism was a problem which required monitoring. As noted above, Steiner viewed the term 'Theosophy' itself in the more encompassing manner, invoking the extended meaning which it had prior of the emergence of the Theosophical Society, namely divinely inspired wisdom of any epoch.<sup>67</sup> By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, 'theosophy' stood for both a knowledge of the divine, as well as magical-hermetic ideas, which in an age of rationalism became increasingly suspect. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Romantics such as Schiller and Ch. M. Wieland were able to see this 'theosophy' with its dual aspects in a positive light – an attitude assimilable and helpful to Steiner's anthroposophy – whilst Kant warned against it, "seeing theology endangered by it", an attitude antagonistic to Steiner's aims.<sup>68</sup>

Hence, Steiner in commenting on Schelling's failure to convince the academy of his spiritual worldview is able to refer to the concepts as theosophical, "Schelling began to teach Theosophy, real Theosophy, in an abstract form certainly, and he had the same result as a person today would have who wanted to teach Theosophy in an university."<sup>69</sup>

Steiner, as General Secretary of the Theosophical Society, taught his listeners that a non-sectarian approach must be striven for,

In true theosophists, it is not words and concepts which live, rather it is the spirit. And the spirit does not have words and concepts, it is fully alive. All concepts and words are only an external form for this spirit which lives in the human being ... then we will perhaps not even speak

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<sup>67</sup>For example, Friedrich Schiller in his Philosophical Letters, refers to the mystical-spiritual teachings of a character, Julius, as 'theosophy', and the writings of an 18<sup>th</sup> century mystic, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803) are commonly referred to as 'theosophical'.

<sup>68</sup>*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, ed. Joachim Ritter and Karlfried Gründer, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), 1158.

<sup>69</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Wege und Ziele des geistigen Menschen* (Dornach: RSV, 1973), 36 „ ... Schelling ... Er begann Theosophie zu lehren, wirkliche Theosophie, allerdings in abstrakter Form, und er hatte denselben Erfolg, den heute ein Mensch haben würde, welcher Theosophie an einer Universität lehren wollte.“

in terms which were valid in the Theosophical movement, and then we will actually be better theosophists ... if we were to differentiate between true-believer and heretics then in that moment we would no longer understand the Theosophical movement.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, despite his attempts to avoid sectarianism, and to propagate his teachings, his activity in this Society, and in the Anthroposophical Society, which he founded in 1913, did not result in a socially significant movement in his lifetime. The inherent distance of modernity from a strongly 'metaphysical' worldview resulted in all such movements – decades before the New Age – being on the fringe of society.

On various occasions Steiner made reference to the ambiguous, and sometimes quite hostile reception of his worldview in various circles. In 1924, he quoted, and then rebutted, a very negative assessment of his writings by Maurice Maeterlinck. The playwright had expressed his view in writing that, in effect, Steiner's teachings may in part be logical and good, but they then deteriorate into virtually insane nonsense,

One can not read without some irony, what an otherwise so promising a spirit as Maurice Maeterlinck has written about me ... just think that in his writings you can find almost verbatim from him; *'in the introductory sections of his writings ... Steiner always shows a capacity for discernment, logic, detail; [but] then in his later chapters it appears that Steiner may be insane'*. Well, my dear friends, what consequence can one draw from these words? For that would mean in fact; first chapter, capacity for discernment, logic and detail. Last chapter; insane. Then that book is finished, now another one comes. And again, at first, capacity for discernment, logic and detail, finally: insane. I have written

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<sup>70</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Spirituelle Seelenlehre und Weltbetrachtung*, (Dornach: RSV, 1972), 421-422, „Im wahren Theosophen leben nicht Worte und Begriffe, in ihm lebt der Geist. Und der Geist hat nicht Worte und nicht Begriffe, der hat unmittelbares Leben. Alle Begriffe und Worte sind nur äußere Form für diesen im Menschen lebenden Geist. ... Dann werden wir vielleicht gar nicht in den Worten spechen, die gültig waren in der theosophischen Bewegung, und wir sind doch bessere Theosophen ... Wenn wir Rechtgläubige und Ketzer unterscheiden würden, so würden wir in demselbem Augenblick die theosophische Bewegung nicht mehr begriffen haben.“



quite a certain number of books [*all of which have this character*], so therefore I must go through this procedure with a certain virtuosity ...<sup>71</sup>

This must have been something of an ironical blow for Steiner, who had, as noted earlier, co-produced a performance of Maurice Maeterlinck's drama, *Der Ungebetene*, in the 1880's. Furthermore, Steiner had written of Maeterlinck, as a playwright, "He is one of the most outstanding experiences of the modern soul".<sup>72</sup>

Steiner's approach to spiritual development is a major theme of his drama, *Die Pforte*, and will be explored in Section 3a. Chronologically, the events in *Die Pforte* occur contemporaneous to Steiner's lifetime, and the drama is set in central Europe, in a circle of people cultivating esoteric-religiosity. The context of the drama is evidently meant to embody the dynamics involved with Steiner and his students. I propose to examine the first play, *Die Pforte*, with the aim of identifying its main thematic content, and to then identify the primary elements of his spiritual worldview expressed in it. In addition I intend to contextualize these elements in terms of Steiner's intellectual roots in the German Romantic tradition, and in terms of their consistency to Steiner's earlier phase, of holistic epistemology, and to his later esoteric worldview. As Steiner's anthroposophical context is clearly an esoteric one, his relationship to mainstream cultural life of his times, such as political, social and

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<sup>71</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Esoterische Betrachtungen: karmischer Zusammenhänge* Bd 5, (Dornach: RSV, 1975), 73-74; „Man kann doch nicht ohne eine gewisse Ironie dasjenige lesen, was ein sonst so hoffnungsvoller Geist wie Maurice Maeterlinck über mich selbst ... sagt. Denken Sie doch, es findet sich bei ihm fast wörtlich der Satz; *In den Einführungen seiner Bücher, in den ersten Kapiteln, da zeigt Steiner immer einen abwägenden, logischen, weiten Geist; dann in den weiteren Kapiteln ist es, als ob er wahnsinnig würde.* Ja, meine lieben Freunde, was hat denn aber das für eine Konsequenz? Das hieße ja: Erstes Kapitel: abwägender, logischer, weiter Geist. Letztes Kapitel: wahnsinnig. Nun ist das Buch fertig, nun kommt ein neues. Wiederum zuerst; abwägender, logischer, weiter Geist, zuletzt: wahnsinnig. Ich habe eine ganze Anzahl von Büchern geschrieben, so daß ich also diese Prozedur mit einer gewissen Virtuosität durchmachen würde ...“

<sup>72</sup>Rudolf Steiner, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Literatur*, (Dornach: RSV, 1971), 230, „Maurice Maeterlinck ist eines der hervorragendsten Erlebnisse der modernen Seele.“

literary movements, is not examined in this thesis. Its focus is his holistic epistemology and esoteric-spiritual views.