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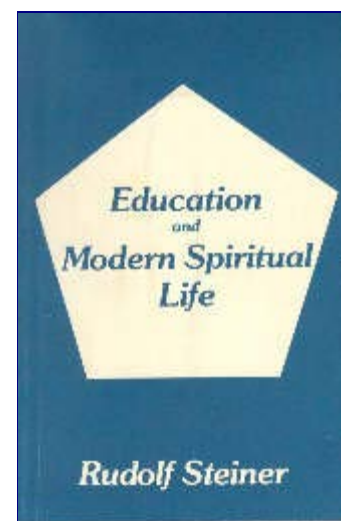


A READER'S JOURNAL

Education and Modern Spiritual Life, GA#307
by
Rudolf Steiner

2004 Edition is titled: "A Modern Art of Education"
Twelve Lectures in Yorkshire, England in 1923
Published by Steiner Books in 1989
A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©1998

This book is a "course of lectures given with the object of describing what Waldorf School education seeks to achieve for the progress of civilization in face of the needs of the present time." My daughter-in-law



gave this to me — she was unable to extract the information she wanted from it about Waldorf Schools. To her, her daughter, and all my grandchildren, now and to come, I dedicate this review of how Steiner sees education fitting into modern life, both materially and spiritually.

Those things we know most about we do not talk about, we do not write about. Steiner makes this point in several places to illustrate that all the talking and writing we see nowadays about education must signal a pervasive lack of knowledge of the process of education. [Note: the indictments Steiner had of education in 1923 sound like they could have been said in 1998.] The solution Steiner offers is to outline what he knows about the human being, how we develop from infancy in body, soul, and spirit, so that by a full knowledge of their students, Waldorf teachers and parents may become agents of their charges's development into maturity in wisdom and knowledge both materially and spiritually.

The human body replaces all of its constituent cells every seven years, casting off its previous whole body, laying it aside. A new-born baby thus expresses its pre-earthly existence in the cells of its chosen mother, and deserves to grow up in the family it was born into. It is a being unified in body, soul, and spirit. See [Table I](#).

When the new teeth push out around seven years of age, it is the signal that the child bears its first earthly body or sheath for the next seven years.

[page 56] he is a being of body and soul with a separate nature of soul and spirit; and from puberty onwards he is a threefold being — a physical being, a being of soul and a being of spirit.

In [Table II](#) we find that the life of thought emerges during the first seven years of the child's life. This is a natural consequence of its development of teeth, which are not only for eating and speaking, but for thinking.

[page 77] The forces that press the teeth out from the jaw are the same forces that now within the soul bring thought to the surface from the undefined sleeping and dreaming life of childhood. With the same degree of intensity as it teethes, the child learns to think.

[page 112] Loving treatment while the child is learning to walk, truthfulness while he learns to speak, clarity and precision as he begins to be able to think - all these qualities become a part of the bodily constitution. The organs and vessels develop after the models of love, truth, and clarity.

Diseases of the metabolic system are the result of unkind treatment while the child is learning to walk. Digestive disturbances may arise from untruthful actions during the time the child is beginning to speak. Nerve trouble is the outcome of confused thinking in the child's environment.

My daughter told me that her daughter Tiffany went to a dance recently with someone other than her boy-friend, and when the boy-friend came to the door to ask for Tiffany, she told him that Tiffany had taken two female French exchange students to the dance. Her report was accurate, but not the whole truth. She related to me that she felt "sick to the stomach" as she told this to Tiffany's boy-friend. This story illustrates that the connection between digestion and truth-telling survives to adulthood.

Here we encounter a remarkable process of Steiner's: his ability to relate actions in the life of the child to its later adult life. In [Table II](#) I have assembled several of these relationships that he discusses in this book. I have for many years been distressed by the actions of parents who mimicked their children's cute baby talk, saying over and over back to the baby some nonsense syllables like, "Da — da — goo — goo". Before reading this book, I had no idea why or how that might be detrimental to the baby. Perhaps the thought that they will be creating digestive problems for their children when they grow up will encourage such parents to speak true adults words for their infants to hear and learn, as well as to speak truthfully at all other times to their children as well as each other. With the prevalence of marketing advertisements for medicines to alleviate stomach distress today, one can only guess at the level of untruths foisted on adults of today during their youth.

The other example that came to mind from my personal experience was of a man who was raised by missionary parents in a foreign country. He grew to be one of the most skeptical adults of all my acquaintances. Undoubtedly he was indoctrinated very early into the tenets of religion by his zealous missionary parents.

Speech sounds betray the essence of the complete human being. Everyone has an innate sense of this, even though most people are not conscious of that fact. The rightmost column of [Table III](#) shows the connection of the types of speech sounds according to the parts of the body they originate from and their relation to thinking, feeling, and will. Here's how Steiner describes them:

[page 97] Dental sounds, labial sounds, palatal sounds do not exist in speech by accident; they are there because in the dental sounds the head, in labial sounds the breast system, in the palatal sounds the rest of the being of man wins its way into speech.

As I was reading this passage I had just been operated on for an umbilical hernia and I was unable to form any palatal sound because it hurt to do so. I thought of the Marine officers who insist that recruits address them by shouting from the depths of their guts, "SIR! YES, SIR!" These are pure palatal sounds coming from the will of these recruits, aged 18 to 21. With each sounding, the will of each recruit becomes more and more bound to the will of their officer and the Marine Corps. The connection of palatal sounds to the will is certainly well-known in the various branches of the armed forces and is utilized effectively during basic training.

To a recruit of today in boot camp, words become living forces just as they were to the ancient Greek, of whom Steiner tells us:

[page 98] Words were to him expressions for the forces of cloud formation, the forces lying in the growth of plants and all natural phenomena. The word rumbled in the rolling waves, worked in the whistling wind. Just as the word lives in my breath so that I make a corresponding movement, so did the Greek find all that was living in the word in the raging wind, in the surging wave, even in the rumbling earthquake. These were words pouring out of the earth.

When did this supernatural power of words disappear from language? Steiner says it began to fade when Francis Bacon of Verulam anathematized the Greek way of thinking of the spirit living in the word, in the Logos, calling it idol worship, and exhorting his fellow scientists to guard against such foolishness. Bacon pointed us towards the things of the sense world, what was external, outside of us, and single-handedly precipitated science's headlong fall into the physical world to the exclusion and complete discounting of the spiritual world, up until now.

[page 103] Fear of the idol in the word arose in men. The Logos disappears. What is called observation, a function which is quite justifiable — but which is now understood to mean sense observation, becomes the decisive factor.

Does Steiner buy Bacon's new program? The answer is a resounding No! as this passage from the end of Lecture V explains: such a program is an abstract principle leading us away from reality, not towards it.

[page 104] What we have to find to-day, however, are the means which will lead us to reality. For no education will develop from abstract principles or programmes — it will only develop from reality. And because man himself is soul and spirit, because he has a physical nature, a soul nature and a spiritual nature, reality must again come into our life — for with the whole reality will the spirit also come into our life, and only such a spirit as this can sustain the educational art of the future.

Steiner points out the basic premise of doyletics in this next passage. In doyletics, the science of the acquisition and transmission of emotions, feelings, and other physical body states, it is postulated that all the sensory states that the human body experiences before age five are stored in the amygdaline structures of the brain and then no new sensory states are stored ever again. Past the age of five, when a person experiences a feeling or emotion, what is happening is that some stored set of body sensory states stored before five is being re-triggered by the amygdaline region so that the person experiences exactly the same sensation as when the original event during which it was stored. [See ARJ: [The Emotional Brain](#) for more details on the amygdala's functioning and the [Introduction Page](#) for practical applications of doyletics.]

[page 106] The first three years, and from then onwards to the seventh year, are much the most important in the whole development of a man, for the child is not at all the same being as in later life. In his earliest years the child is one great sense-organ. The scope of this idea that the child in its first years is wholly sense-organ is not generally brought to mind with anything like sufficient intensity; indeed it is a question of using very emphatic words if the whole truth is to be expressed.

In his landmark work, [The Philosophy of Freedom](#), Steiner lays out for everyone to see the importance of actions that are free from coercion. It is only natural, then, that he reminds these future Waldorf School educators in England of the importance of freedom as a spiritual activity.

[page 108] If we now begin as educators to bring coercion to bear on what human nature itself wills to do, if we do not understand how to leave this nature to itself in freedom and act only as helpers ourselves, we injure the organism of the child for the whole of its earthly life.

It is an injury that will reappear, Steiner says, in advanced age in the form of diseases of various kinds. It appears that the best disease prevention measures may be a good teacher who understands the maturation of the child both materially and spiritually and acts non-coercively to foster that natural development. One of the mistakes Steiner cautions parents against is giving their child toys that are intricately constructed before they reach the age of about 7 to 9 years of age. He dramatizes his advice with the "beautiful doll" story. Such a doll is an offense to the sensibilities of the child which would much prefer at that age to have a doll that is as simple as can be, perhaps only a simple piece of stuffed cloth with dot-eyes drawn by hand. For a boy, the equivalent might be a bag of wooden blocks with which he can build his imaginary structures to his heart's content. How much better for him than an intricately designed beautiful pirate ship with hundreds of pieces to be taken care of.

When I mentioned this to my daughter, who has raised two daughters of her own, she remembered getting them each a "beautiful doll" when they were only three. She recalled how the girls proceeded to gouge their dolls's eyes out and tear off their hair, eventually discarding them completely. If such a pre-mature gift of a "beautiful doll" survives a child's natural desires, no doubt it will be due to extraordinary efforts by the mother to coerce the child against its own wishes to leave the doll alone, by which actions the mother will only exacerbate the difficulties of her daughter as she grows older. As Steiner says so pointedly, "These topsy-turvy ideas show that our civilization simply does not know how to approach children."

How can our civilization ever learn how to approach children from the proper perspective? It will help if everyone had

an understanding of the evolution of consciousness, particularly the evolution of consciousness of the existence of the spiritual world. Steiner talks on many occasions of a time when the average person knew from individual experience that the spiritual world existed.

[page 214-215] These men possessed a much more instinctive wisdom of the inner life of soul and spirit. What we to-day would speak of as the faculty of clear and conscious discernment, did not as yet exist. Man experienced a weaving, moving inner life, the shadowy echoes of which remain in our present dream-life. It was an *inner* life, in which man not only knew with certainty that a soul was weaving and moving through his body, forming part of his true manhood, but in which he also knew: A soul, born from a divine-spiritual existence before a body clothed me in my earthly form, is living within me.

Perhaps with the recovery of that ancient wisdom, parents and educators will cease force-feeding these precious vessels of spirit in their charge as miniature adults and instead begin learning to be helpers of their children's natural development into fully functional, healthy adults — human beings in body, soul, and spirit.

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