

## EDUCATION AND DEMOCRACY

The following is an English version of the article which was originally written and published in Russian in 1986. It was prompted by another Russian article, *Chaos instead of Democracy*, devoted to the problems of school education. In my response I addressed the two issues discussed in that article: the process of education as such and democracy within the school.

The state of affairs in modern pedagogy was characterised in the above article as follows: it is impossible to comprehend fully all aspects of education, and in any case there is practically no precise knowledge in this sphere; therefore the process of education throughout the world is working blindly; since it is so, any attempts at a conscious, purposeful solution of global educational questions is nothing other than an ignorant imposition, its only alternative being an intuitive search for partial solutions. In other words, since there is not, and cannot be, a fundamental science of education based on precise knowledge whereby a teacher can be guided, nothing else is left to him but to struggle through pedagogical jungle purely on his own by means of his own spontaneous search.

It seems to me that spontaneity, which the author of the article spells out as intuitive solutions and free searching, i.e. as *creativity*, should always accompany any activity including physical work. What does make the difference, however, is whether such creative work bases itself upon precise knowledge and understanding or is based on instincts only. The latter does not necessarily have to be regarded as something of a lesser value, but they alone would not take you very far. This is particularly evident in education where, as the author of the article rightly emphasised, everything is working blindly. But it is working blindly not because it is impossible to acquire sight in this sphere, i.e. to acquire understanding and knowledge of the fundamental principles in the educational process. Unfortunately most educators are ignorant about the existence of such a knowledge. They do not search for it persistently enough or even avoid it. But such a knowledge and a comprehensive science of education do indeed exist. This science is not a theory about how, quoting the article, "to correct radically everything and once and for all." It is not a set of abstract dogmas or a list of salutary methods. It is rather a living source from which, through *creative* efforts, one can obtain answers to the three fundamental questions of the educational process, What? How? When?, at the same time always knowing *why*.

This science named Waldorf education after the first school based on its principles (opened in Stuttgart in 1919), was founded by a European scientist, philosopher and educator Rudolf Steiner. Hundreds of Waldorf Schools exist today all over the world, and thousands of books and articles have been written about Waldorf education. Only some general sketches concerning its sources and essence can be given here.

An educator can only obtain conscious answers to the above three questions – What to do? How to do it? When to do it? – out of his clear understanding of the object and purpose of his activity, i.e. out of his clear understanding of what man is and what the meaning of the educational process is. There is no lack of theories on both subjects, which arrive at completely different or even opposite conclusions; from the one which sees the human being as a social animal and his purposeful education as the main task of society, to the one which regards any education whatsoever as altogether harmful. What we see nearly everywhere today is the manifestation of either of these two extremes, or of a mixture.

If these manifestations are so distressing then the reason should be sought in their common element, namely, a materialistic outlook which unites most of these different theories. This materialistic outlook marks the fundamental difference between these theories, as well as the materialistic science as a whole, and that put forward by Steiner. His scientific and educational work took place at the time when materialistic science was flourishing and when a materialistic view on man, world and evolution prevailed. Steiner who mastered the heights of materialistic scientific knowledge in the most varied fields, made known, at the same time, its incompleteness and one-sidedness precisely because

it deals with the material-physical world only. This physical world, cognizable by means of sense organs and characterised by notions of measure, weight and number, is but a part of our existence, moreover a derivative and limited part. The basis, however, the primal basis of everything existing is a spiritual, non-material, supersensible world; not only not less real, but immeasurably richer and more complicated than the physical. Every physical phenomenon, whether object or event, is born out of spiritual and has its spiritual prototype.

As for man, he consists of the most complicated spiritual substances, and his physical body is but their vehicle. What is more, man has latent within himself, undeveloped organs of supersensible perception, which he can and should develop for cognition of the spiritual world and for active participation in it, i.e. in the whole of existence, and not simply in its physical part. Steiner himself had these abilities developed to the highest degree, which made it possible for him to cognize and investigate the spiritual world throughout his life, alongside his researches in the physical world. He shaped the results of his investigations in the form accessible to modern man's thinking, and he gave it the name of Spiritual Science or Anthroposophy. Here I will limit myself to those basic teachings of Spiritual Science concerning man and his development, which are necessary for a right upbringing and education of the child.

Man in his essence is a three-fold being with physical, soul and spiritual elements. Most of the people, who do not possess supersensible perception, can only know about the two latter elements by their manifestations, such as character, temperament, soul qualities, sympathies and antipathies, interests, abilities. These two elements, soul and spiritual, as well as the physical, are in continuous development, and if this development is to be healthy they need appropriate conditions. Just as adult food might kill a baby and hard physical work might kill a man with a heart condition, so might premature or wrong intellectual development have a pernicious effect on man's soul, spiritual or even physical health. In order to bring up a physically healthy child, it is necessary to create for his physical organism appropriate conditions. This is only possible through knowledge of the human organism and of the methods for strengthening it. In order to bring up a child, healthy in spirit and soul and in the moral life, it is necessary to develop harmoniously his mind, feeling and will, which requires, in its turn, knowledge of these supersensible elements and of methods for their correct development.

Spiritual Science possesses in full this precise knowledge about man and his development, and on this knowledge the Waldorf pedagogy is based. But Anthroposophy also places at an educator's disposal its knowledge about the evolution of man and the earth; about the most intimate connection of man with everything living; and about the relationship between different periods of man's life and certain cultural-historical epochs in the development of mankind. It is this knowledge and not fantasy or whim, which is the basis of the Waldorf teaching process. This knowledge teaches an educator to understand with what inclinations and abilities and with what aspirations and tasks every child enters life. It thus ensures that the educational process serves these needs of the child and not the aims of some ideology or someone's whims. Spiritual Science also investigates problems and tasks of our time and ways of solving them. No pedagogical process today, especially Waldorf pedagogy, can afford to ignore these problems. The essential purpose of this pedagogy is very well expressed by the following words from the curriculum of the first Waldorf School: "The Teaching of the Waldorf School is founded on a spiritual knowledge of man, so that there are sent out into the world pupils who understand what it means to be a true human being and to serve the holy tasks of humanity."

Turning now to the main theme of the article *Chaos instead of Democracy*, the problem of democracy in school, the author saw it as part of a wider problem of the whole society. Hence the importance of solving it at the school level, not for school only, but also for society.

Agreeing absolutely with the author's fundamental conclusion that there is a connection between school and society and that there are problems common to both, I

think nevertheless that a clear line should be drawn where the analogy ceases and where the problems, though identical in their external symptoms, require completely different solutions by school and by society. This requires, in its turn, that we should clearly define the content of the concepts we use and also, which specific concept corresponds to the phenomenon in question. It would be better still to start with reality rather than concepts and even further, that basic aspect of reality on which the life of modern society has been built – man's needs.

These needs come under three basic categories, material, spiritual and legal. Material needs, such as food and other goods, are primarily determined by man's physical existence. These needs are satisfied by people's joint work, which consists in the transformation of natural resources into goods and in the delivery of those goods to the consumer. This, the economic process, is characterised by division of labour and by interdependence through which everyone enjoys the fruits of other people's labour. If people were willing to acknowledge this fact, then in the economic sphere where everyone participates, often as producer and always as consumer, they would build their relationships on agreement, co-operation and mutual assistance rather than on blackmail and coercion.

Man's spiritual needs are intrinsically individual. They are not determined by other people's needs. They do not depend on the way other people view them. The only determining factor is man's own individuality. Therefore this sphere precludes interdependence, egalitarianism and conformity. To satisfy his spiritual needs man must enjoy unconditional freedom, whether we speak of his ideas, his education or his creative activity.

Man's legal needs are determined by his desire to enjoy equal opportunities in various spheres of life; equal rights in solving problems concerning all and equal responsibilities with regard to others and society as a whole. These needs – to be equal among equals – depend neither on man's abilities, nor on his attitudes or interests, nor on his profession or other individual or social distinctions. They can be satisfied only on the common basis – equality of all before the law.

Although these three types of needs reflect different categories of man's interests, almost every life situation man finds himself in constitutes a focal point in which they all meet. Therefore they should be met not only on the scale of society as a whole, but also on the scale of each situation. Met not arbitrary, but on the basis of the three principles which correspond to them – fraternity, freedom and equality. However, if these three principles and their corresponding relations do not find their proper place in life, chaos inevitably results. The present state of our society is just that chaos.

The pedagogical impulse is a corner-stone of the school's existence. That is why the conditions are so important in which the pedagogy and the pedagogical process, brought to life by this impulse, can live and develop. The pedagogy and the pedagogical process are nothing other than a practical expression of the teachers' creative individualities. Therefore no-one is or should be in a position to order them as to what and how to teach, just as no-one should tell an artist what and how to paint. A teacher, as well as an artist, or any other creative individual for that matter, should enjoy unlimited creative freedom and have the possibility of expressing it. The teacher himself knows and decides what upbringing and education should be like today and how the teaching process is to be practically organised. If he does not know and expects orders from others, he should not be a teacher. If however, these others are really concerned with the problems of education and know better than teachers what should be done in this sphere and how it is to be done, then, instead of giving orders, they themselves should become teachers. (It is difficult to imagine an artist who, even in the conditions of a totalitarian regime, would mix paints and dab them on canvas on the orders of others. Why is it then, that a teacher who teaches at someone else's bidding is a typical phenomenon even in the freest of countries?)

But individual spiritual freedom has yet another aspect. As each should be free in his creative work, he should be equally free in his attitude to the creative work of others. Free to like and encourage the creative work of a free artist, equally free to reject it. The same goes for education. Each should be free in their choice of education for themselves and their child. If each teacher and each pupil has an unlimited possibility, the former to create and offer to the society and the latter to choose and accept, the system of education which in their opinion is the best, then, and only then, will there obtain a realisation of equal rights to free education. So far such a possibility has been a rare exception, for governments impose on education various restrictions, ideological and financial. If the government determines what education should be like, this means that there is no free education. If on the other hand, the government allows such freedom, but at the same time by means of financial and legal measures makes it accessible for a part of society only, then it means that there are no equal rights to free education.

These are factors concerning the school's relationship to the state. But what is the situation within the school itself, or rather what should it be? Who takes part in the school process and in what capacity? What relationships do they enter into and what principles should these relationships be based on? Finally, upon what principles should various school problems be solved?

The following four categories of people take part in the school process: pupils – the centre of the school 'universe'; teachers – the creators of this 'universe'; non-teaching staff – teachers' indispensable helpers; and finally parents who belong in all three categories, as educators, as helpers of professional educators, and as pupils – in the sphere of pedagogy.

The school is primarily a meeting place for a teacher and a pupil where the former brings his free gift – pedagogy, and the latter who needs it so much, accepts it in the same free and creative way. If the reality is far from being so idyllic, nevertheless the essence of the relationship and of the process is defined by the very concepts of *freedom* and *creativity*. This cannot be possibly based on obligation or coercion.

But in the pedagogical process of the school as a whole all teachers, parents and non-teaching staff participate together, and here their functions and mutual relations, both pedagogical and administrative, should result from a *concerted agreement*. This agreement about their co-operation should be based upon mutual trust, upon understanding the school process and a definite role for every participant, rather than upon dry legislation.

It must not be forgotten that all participants are also citizens of their country and come under its legislation where it concerns their *legal relations* with each other or with somebody outside the school.

Thus the life of a healthy school organism is based on the three spheres of man's interests, on the three life processes which support and compliment each other, though each is independent and functions in accordance with its own inherent principles. (Is not the same taking place in the human organism whose viability is maintained by the independent but interconnected processes of the rhythmic/breathing, nerve/senses and metabolic systems?) If this real fact is not reflected in the school process, if the participants have no clear view about the basic difference of its components and to which of them exactly one or the other of the school's tasks and problems belongs, then the school will hardly be able to manage them. How then do matters stand in this respect with that complex of school problems denoted by the concept of 'discipline' and which is today, as observed by the author of the aforesaid article, inseparably linked with the concepts of individual freedom, human rights and democracy?

These latter concepts are far from being synonymous as is so generally assumed today. In fact they belong to quite different categories. Thus individual freedom might only mean spiritual freedom, for freedom by definition can only be unlimited and unconditional. While human rights regulating relationships are always concrete, limited and conditioned by man's duties, by the rights of other people and by many other factors. In school, human

freedom, primarily that of teacher and pupil, should find its expression in the creative participation in the pedagogical process; while human rights should find their expression firstly in the possibility of such a participation, and secondly, in the equality of all participants of the school process in everything pertaining to their civil status and human dignity.

If we talk about democracy as applied to the school, we should be absolutely clear about what we understand as democratic principles, which of them can and should be implemented and in precisely what aspect of school life. We should separate all that which, although often coming under the concept of democracy, belongs in fact to the sphere of freedom or human rights. That which remains as inherent exclusively in the concept of democracy and which might be of interest to us in the context of the school, is nothing other than the democratic form of government. Under such government the decisions are not the result of a creative act of a free individual, and they do not arise in a clearly defined mode from some legislation or other, but they are achieved by the consciously expressed will of all concerned in accordance with the procedure established by themselves. This is the nature of school democracy.

One can talk about 'government by all' only where these all partake in the common task. Such a common task in the school is pedagogical and administrative work – we spoke about it and its participants above. Undoubtedly, every school should have a possibility to establish its own form of administration in accordance with its conditions and needs. Obviously, an administrative structure arrived at in this way cannot be free from imperfections and flaws, as any other human creation. But at least its creators and participants know what they have called to life and why, are responsible for it and are free to introduce whatever changes they might deem necessary to improve it. Nobody can do it for them. This is school democracy at work.

But to what sphere of school life does discipline belong? What is the nature of that magic remedy whereby this problem of problems in education can be solved? It is quite obvious that discipline, the behaviour of a pupil, or more broadly, the whole complex of his school activities, lies at the very centre of the pedagogical process and that by no means, other than pedagogical, can and should this problem be solved. I realise very well how comparatively easy it is to arrive at such a conclusion with which every sensible person can agree in principle. But how difficult or even impossible it is sometimes to put it into practice. However, if the path is difficult it does not mean that it is wrong. Since the path is right but difficult, it is only natural to start looking for means of facilitating one's efforts. If a teacher has nothing whatever to base his work on, except as a last resort, the method of trial and error, then his own situation and that of his pupils is very poor indeed. But if he also bases his work on scientific pedagogical knowledge, then he has a reliable helper on his arduous way which in any case he has to make himself. Perhaps an example can illustrate how true knowledge about the nature of man could help a teacher to manage the problem of discipline in a classroom.

An experienced Waldorf teacher possesses most intimate knowledge about the four temperaments which live in man, acting together and metamorphosing. He knows that one should aspire towards their harmonious development, but within the human being, especially within the child, as a rule, one or two temperaments prevail. One should take this fact into account and be able to use it in education. A teacher would seat the children in the classroom according to their temperaments, in such a way, that the interaction of their individualities through their joint activity can blend into a harmonious melody rather than produce an unbearable cacophony. Violation of discipline would also be dealt with in an individual way. The teacher might divert one child, shout at another, praise the third, make the fourth his assistant, overload the fifth with work, or ignore the sixth.

Undoubtedly, such or other pedagogical methods are used, sometimes very successfully, by teachers of others, than Waldorf, schools. Real miracles in handling children are often achieved by those who might be called born teachers, even by some who themselves have not received pedagogical education. Or we can take as an example

such an educator and teacher as Makarenko<sup>\*</sup>, whose educational method was based on the combination, far from being the best, of scientific materialism and party ideology. But guided by his natural pedagogical intuition he very often found right solutions and achieved wonderful results.

But what shall one do in situations when no pedagogical methods and no pedagogical talents are able to deal with disrupters of the pedagogical process? Is it not permissible, in order to restore and maintain it in such cases, that an outside regulator be introduced, if not in the form of legislative measures, then as strict rules approved by and compulsory for all concerned? After all, society does have in special cases even to isolate juvenile offenders by placing them into special institutions and to apply to them special measures.

But even for these special measures to be successful, they have to be educative and healing rather than punitive and suppressive. If above all the children we are dealing with are not those with mental and other disorders, but are normal, then the true significance of using unpedagogical measures might become immediately apparent by comparing the school and the family.

The relations within the family, as well as in the school and in society as a whole, have also a threefold nature. It is, first of all, something intrinsically individual, spontaneous and unique, namely, a mutual love and inner bond on the basis of which two people take a free decision to unite and form a family. This relationship is a corner-stone of a family existence. Having formed a family they, by means of mutual agreement (by which I mean a living process rather than a formal 'contract'), arrange their family life and allocate their duties, etc. This agreement is based on mutual love and respect, on their understanding of what the family is and what their roles within it should be. Finally, as citizens, they both fall under the legislation which regulates the relations between citizen and citizen, and between spouse and spouse.

If a conflict arises in a family, it is only natural that loving spouses try to resolve it on the very basis of their mutual love and common sense. If, however, a family conflict goes so far as to need resolving in a court of law, then it signifies the end of what the family is in its very essence – a union of heart and spirit. Externally such a family can continue to exist and function by virtue of inertia, or for legal reasons, or on the basis of a 'gentleman's agreement', or because of prestigious, financial, religious or other considerations. But without its unique content – without love – it turns into a featureless civil institution.\*\*

The same goes for school. As soon as the solution of disciplinary and other pedagogical problems is attempted by administrative/legalistic rather than pedagogical measures, it signifies the end of pedagogy which means the end of the school too, though externally, as a public institution, it continues to function. The fact that many schools and families do indeed carry on today such an external existence signifies a very poor state of affairs in our society. While the fact that this is the only existence possible for the majority of them, is a sign of a tragedy for our society.

As for the school, there are three reasons for this tragedy, as there are three ways to overcome it. Firstly, pedagogy itself. Modern pedagogy leads the teacher up a blind alley, leaving him helpless and lonely at the mercy of chaotic and uncontrollable forces whose victim he inevitably becomes. Only the pedagogy, capable of equipping the teacher with an integral picture of the world and the ways of its development, provides him with enough strength and knowledge for the most difficult struggle for the future of each child and mankind as a whole. Secondly, the teacher himself. No pedagogical system, even the best one, is capable of helping a teacher for whom education is a fortuitous profession and who, lacking a genuine pedagogical calling and talent, does not wish to or cannot become

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<sup>\*</sup> Makarenko, A.S. (1888-1939) – a famous Soviet teacher and educator. In the 1920's and 1930's he achieved much success in the rehabilitation of waifs and young offenders.

<sup>\*\*</sup> There are, no doubt, some people who would dismiss the very existence or importance of such a content, as there are those who consider education useless or harmful. It is not my task here to enter into polemics with these or other viewpoints. I am only trying to present and elucidate my own.

a real teacher. But on the contrary, the right pedagogical system can help even a man with very modest pedagogical potentialities to become a genuine teacher if he is prepared to lay on the altar of pedagogy the sincerity of his intentions and the perseverance of his efforts.

But even the best teachers and educational systems are unable on their own to solve the problems of education. Teachers and educational systems do not exist in a vacuum, but in a certain spiritual, social and economic environment, which is our society. This environment should be favourable to the living activity of pedagogy and receptive to its influences. But here we find ourselves in a vicious circle: the state of society depends on the system of education, while the latter itself depends on the state of society.

It is useless to contemplate what should change first, or to wait passively for possible changes. There is always a possibility for everyone concerned with the state of education and society to act, regardless of their profession or position in life. However severe and numerous the problems and ills that afflict our educational system and society are, there are also available, to cure them, great educational and social ideas and ideals. So it is not a lack of them, but our inability to recognise and implement them, to generate our own educational and social impulses and aspirations, that is responsible for the present state of affairs. Can we do better for the future – of our children, of ourselves, of the whole of humanity?