



Anthroposophy and Racism

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A Contribution from the Goetheanum Leadership

General Anthroposophical Society

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Translator's Note: If books and articles
are published in German only, the title is
roughly translated into English and then
bracketed [...].

The question of how Rudolf Steiner, anthroposophists and anthroposophical institutions deal with issues of racism and racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance is a very legitimate one following a ‘genocidal’ century and in view of the extreme inequalities in the world today. Racism, racial discrimination, disrespect and moreover, the exploitation and destruction of livelihoods and lives of others are huge challenges of our present time. It is therefore important and right to question what position anthroposophists take on this.

Nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that the question of the anthroposophical position has been raised in public for many decades – and increasingly so recently – not out of an interest in knowledge. It is often part of polemic discourse, a defamation of Rudolf Steiner, anthroposophical institutions and Anthroposophy itself. That the accusation of racism is asserted as a ‘morally irrefutable argument’ (Ballard) has long been recognized. By associating Rudolf Steiner, Anthroposophy or anthroposophical initiatives with it, they become socially stigmatized and marginalized. Differentiated position statements and a variety of carefully prepared articles, studies and books from the anthroposophical perspective have not changed this situation to date¹, nor do they gain nearly the same publicity and dissemination as the sweeping accusations do.

All this has caused considerable frustration, even among people who are in principle interested in or sympathetic to anthroposophical activities, as well as among the members of the Anthroposophical Society itself. In view of this situation, we decided to write a contribution that seeks to address the overall question – substantiating both content and strategy. In the following discourse, we develop in sketch form, historical and ideological contexts, which seem to us to be of importance for the individual assessment of the accusations made. Moreover, we outline the tasks and challenges of the Anthroposophical Society and anthroposophical institutions in a world marked by injustice and discrimination. Resolute rejection of untruthful statements and insinuations within the journalistic debate is both meaningful and necessary; however, the self-critical scrutinization of our own attitude to the extent of injustice in the world – as well as our own contribution to the overcoming of it – seems to us to be of equal importance. In our view, only through both can a development towards the future emerge, within the anthroposophical context as well.

¹ WENZEL, MICHAEL GÖTTE: „Das Verdämmern der Rassen – Rudolf Steiners Individualismus“. [The Dawning of the Races – Rudolf Steiner’s Individualism] In: *Geistige Individualität und Gattungswesen. Anthroposophie in der Diskussion um das Rassenverständnis*. Sonderheft Mitteilungen aus der Anthroposophischen Arbeit in Deutschland. Sommer 1995, S. 4–27 (German only); MICHAEL KLUS-SMANN: „Zum Rassismus-Streit, Teil 1–5“ [On the Racism Controversy, Parts 1–5] In *Das Goetheanum. Wochenschrift für Anthroposophie*. 1996, Nr. 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, S. 341–344, S. 355–357, S. 379–381, S. 393–395, S. 411–413 (German only); MANFRED LEIST, LORENZO RAVAGLI, HANS-JÜRGEN BADER: *Racial Ideals Lead Mankind Into Decadence. Anthroposophy and Anti-Semitism: Was Rudolf Steiner An Anti-Semite?* A study. First English Edition, based on the third, revised and augmented German edition, January 2002, published by the Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen. Available online at [defendingsteiner.com](http://www.defendingsteiner.com) <http://www.defendingsteiner.com/allegations/RS-AntiSemitism.pdf> (accessed Apr 30, 2021); UWE WERNER: *Rudolf Steiner zu Individuum und Rasse. Sein Engagement gegen Rassismus und Nationalismus*. [Rudolf Steiner on the Individual and Race. His Engagement Against Racism and Nationalism.] Dornach 2011 (German only); Translator’s Note: A summary by Uwe Werner: *Anthroposophy in the Time of Nazi Germany* available at waldorfanswers.org. <https://waldorfanswers.org/AnthroposophyDuringNaziTimes.htm> (accessed Apr 30, 2021); DETLEF HARDORP: *Die deutsche Waldorfbewegung in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Rassebegriffe im Werk Rudolf Steiners*. [The German Waldorf Movement in the Time of National Socialism. Racial concepts in Rudolf Steiner’s work] (German only.) In: Inge Hansen-Schaberg: *Waldorf-Pädagogik, Baltmannsweiler* 2012, S.138–180; ROBERT ROSE: *Transforming criticisms of Anthroposophy and Waldorf education – Evolution, race and the quest for a global ethics*. First published by the Centre for Philosophy and Anthroposophy 2013. Available from anthroweb.info at https://www.anthroweb.info/fileadmin/pdfs/RR_Transforming_Criticisms.pdf (accessed Apr 30, 2021); HÜTTIG, ALBRECHT (Ed.): *Kontroversen zum Rassismusvorwurf*, Berlin Wissenschafts-Verlag, Berlin 2017 [Controversies concerning the accusation of racism] (German only); PETER SELG: *Rudolf Steiner, die Anthroposophie und der Rassismus-Vorwurf. Gesellschaft und Medizin im totalitären Zeitalter*, Arlesheim 2020. [Anthroposophy and the accusation of racism] (German only)

1. Spiritual Scientific Humanism and Civil Society

In Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner elaborated the essential features of a science of the spirit and introduced them into public discourse. We are of the opinion that today's civilization lacks the recognition and practice of such a science and that Steiner's approach has the potential to pave the way out of the prevailing reductionism.

The very differentiated image of the human being that Rudolf Steiner presented to the public and his concept of human dignity and the human capacity for development seem to us to be of fundamental importance for a modern society. Rudolf Steiner developed an ethical individualism that can take the place of collective norms. He described principles of new social communities and elaborated a global ethics of responsibility towards the shared environment of humanity and the natural world. We consider these contributions of Steiner essential for the endangered future of humanity and the earth.

We also regard Steiner's socio-political approaches and civil society initiatives, which he conceived and attempted to implement with his co-workers in the first quarter of the 20th century, as methodologically ground-breaking and viable for the future. His unreserved and, from today's point of view, extraordinarily far-sighted advocacy against patriotism and nationalism, against racism and anti-Semitism, against eugenics and social Darwinism, and for the building of a democratic civil society, have been outlined in the history of his work in recent years and their significance published.² After the catastrophe of the First World War, Steiner and his colleagues campaigned for a comprehensive reform programme for the disentanglement of the economic, the state-political, and the spiritual interests and spiritual spheres of life – known as 'social threefolding' – a concept and initiative that can be appropriately assessed and appreciated today with historical distance.³ This draft for a free, democratic and social civil society did not prevail then, but in our opinion, it is still highly relevant today.

The Anthroposophical Society established by Rudolf Steiner and his co-workers from 1912 to 1925 also represents an important model-experiment in the crisis of civilization in the 20th and 21st centuries. The ambitious concept of a free, dialogue-oriented and socially proactive society, capable of acting across countries and cultures worldwide, has been able to be only partially implemented in practice. Nevertheless, many people continue to work

² PETER SELG: *Rudolf Steiner, Life and Work*. Seven Vols, SteinerBooks, 2015–2019.

³ ALBERT SCHMELZER: *The Threefolding Movement, 1919: A History: Rudolf Steiner's Campaign for a Self-governing, Self-managing, Self-educating Society*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2017.

intensively towards this goal. In a similar way and within their own domains, this applies to the exemplary founding of the Waldorf School (1919) in the sense of a free schooling system, the first anthroposophical clinics (1921) on a natural and spiritual scientific basis, the curative education homes (from 1924) and the biodynamic farms (from 1924).

The approach of Anthroposophy is based on the possibility for self-knowledge, as well as on the human being's capacity for development. The self-reflective and also self-critical capacity to learn within a social movement, which never sees itself as complete, is possibly one of the reasons why anthroposophical initiatives have proven to be, overall, a positive social factor in various cultures and life situations across the world, without the claim of perfection. They are imperfect – and understand themselves as such.

A challenging testing period for anthroposophical initiatives and institutions that originated in Germany was the twelve year rule of National Socialism. The behaviour of anthroposophists during this period, which is often and repeatedly brought into public discussion in a very distorted way, has been well researched in large parts, and their results published.⁴ Further work is in preparation and will be published in the coming years.⁵

2. The Political Discussion About Anthroposophy in Germany

The formative years of Anthroposophy, during the first quarter of the 20th century, were marked by an increasingly aggressive controversy surrounding it, especially in the field of journalism. It is documented in great detail that the attacks against Anthroposophy and against anthroposophical institutions after the First World War and until Rudolf Steiner's death (30 March 1925) came primarily from the right-wing nationalist, racist and anti-Semitic movement and were launched with vehemence.⁶ The commitment of Steiner and his co-workers to overcoming the nation-state and nation-state imperialism and hegemony, racism and anti-Semitism, as well as authoritarian forms of decision-making in communities and societies caused outrage among the right-wing nationalist and extreme right-wing groups. In particular, the concept of the 'threefolding of the social organism', the founding of the Waldorf School and Steiner's striking criticism of anti-Semitism (as well as in the *Mitteilungen aus dem Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus*⁷) [newspaper 'Communications from the Association for

⁴ UWE WERNER: *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (1933–1945)*, München 1999. An excerpt from his book, *Anthroposophists in the Time of National Socialism in Germany* available in English at: <https://southerncrossreview.org/82/werner-naziteit.html> (accessed Apr 30, 2021); On the behaviour of the German Waldorf schools during the Nazi period, KAREN PRIESTMAN: *Illusion of Coexistence: The Waldorf Schools in the Third Reich, 1933–1941*. Dissertation. Wilfried Laurier University 2009; open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2079&context=etd> (accessed Apr 30, 2021); VOLKER FRIELINGSDORF: *Geschichte der Waldorfpädagogik. Von ihrem Ursprung bis zur Gegenwart*, Weinheim 2019. Kapitel 3: „Bedrohung, Existenzgefährdung und Schließung der Waldorfschulen im Dritten Reich (1933–1945)“ S. 153–202. [History of Waldorf Education. From its origins to the present day, Chapter 3, Threat, existential threat and closure of Waldorf schools in the Third Reich (1933–1945)] (German only); PETER SELG: <Dass die Keimkraft der Idee durch ihre Existenz gefährdet wird ...> „Anpassung und innerer Widerstand. Die Waldorfschule im Nationalsozialismus (1933–1941)“ In: *Erzwungene Schließung. Die Ansprachen der Stuttgarter Lehrer zum Ende der Waldorfschule im deutschen Faschismus (1938)*. Arlesheim 2019. [“That the germinal power of the idea is endangered by its existence ...”, Adaptation and inner resistance. The Waldorf School under National Socialism (1933–1941)]. (German only)

⁵ PETER SELG / MATTHIAS MOCHNER: [*Anthroposophic Medicine, Curative Education and Pharmacy in the Nazi Era, 1933–1945*] (in preparation). [Research on the Biodynamic Movement during the Nazi era (in preparation)].

⁶ LORENZO RAVAGLI: *Unter Hammer und Hakenkreuz. Der völkisch-nationalsozialistische Kampf gegen die Anthroposophie*. Stuttgart 2004. [Under hammer and swastika. The peoples' nationalist struggle against Anthroposophy] (German only)

⁷ RALF SONNENBERG: Rudolf Steiners Beurteilung von Judentum, Zionismus und Antisemitismus – Fragen, Problemstellungen, künftige Forschungsprojekte. In: LORENZO RAVAGLI (HG.): *Jahrbuch für anthroposophische Kritik* 2000. München 2000, pp. 113–169. [Rudolf Steiner's Evaluation of Judaism, Zionism and Anti-Semitism – Questions, Problems, Future Research Projects] (German only)

the Defence against Anti-Semitism] resulted in fierce journalistic and even physical attacks on Steiner. In addition, the many Jewish members in the internationally oriented General Anthroposophical Society and its executive councils posed a source of contention. After the opening of the Goetheanum in autumn 1920, the press campaign against the ‘national criminal’ Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy was conducted with increasing militancy, originating from early organized national socialist groups. Adolf Hitler himself personally participated in the *Völkischer Beobachter* as early as March 1921.

When the National Socialists took over political power in Germany on 30 January 1933, public defamation of Anthroposophy intensified once again. In November 1935, after long preparation by the Nazi authorities, the Anthroposophical Society was banned in Germany and the society’s members were registered and monitored. The reports of the SS Security Service and the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) show in detail how dangerous and ‘corrosive’ Anthroposophy was considered to be – even although the number of anthroposophists in Germany was comparatively small. The Anthroposophical Society had around 7,000 members in 1933.

Most anthroposophical institutions (Waldorf schools, doctors’ surgeries, farms and children’s homes) were able to continue working for years after the National Socialists seized power, provided they did not engage in political opposition or publicly advocate Anthroposophy. The institutions were tolerated for years, not least because some high-ranking National Socialists held them in high esteem for the quality of their work – despite Anthroposophy. Retrospectively, it has been ascertained that the high-ranking SS officer Otto Ohlendorf of the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) had said that he was not interested in the destruction of ‘living, constructive institutions and research’. Since National Socialist party had not yet succeeded in ‘shaping’ its own models in numerous spheres of life, he felt compelled to ‘exploit’ existing operations ‘in the interests of Germany’ and National Socialism.⁸ It is documented that the agricultural enterprises of the SS, for instance those working in plant cultivation, took qualified anthroposophists with specialist knowledge in biodynamic agriculture into their service. All this, however, does not change the fact that Anthroposophy and the anthroposophical movement were definitively counted by the leadership of the NSDAP, the SS and the state among the enemies of the regime and its ideology. In May 1936, a report by the Security Service (SD) of the SS stated in exemplary fashion:

8 OTTO OHLENDORF: Affidavit. Copy. Archive at the Goetheanum E.15.002.020. For context, PETER SELG: <Dass die Keimkraft der Idee durch ihre Existenz gefährdet wird ...> Anpassung und innerer Widerstand in Die Waldorfschule im Nationalsozialismus (1933–1941). In: *Erzwungene Schließung*, S. 124ff. und S. 260ff. [“That the germinal power of the idea is endangered by its existence ...” in Adaptation and inner resistance in the Waldorf School under National Socialism (1933–1941)...] (Germany only) PETER SELG: *Building a bridge to right-wing extremism? On Anthroposophy in the Time of National Socialism*, lecture at the Goetheanum, online English voiceover on 6 Nov 2021: <https://goetheanum.co/en/news/anthroposophy-during-national-socialism-peter-selg> (accessed Apr 30, 2021)

[....] Anthroposophy detaches the spirit from its connection with race and the ‘Volk’ and condemns the racial and the nationalistic to a lower sphere of primitiveness, of instinct and of drive from prehistoric times to be overcome by the spirit. It thus proves that it is intertwined with the main currents of European intellectual history to date, above all the Enlightenment, German idealism and liberalism of past centuries.⁹

From the 1970s and 1980s onwards, individual political left-wing authors made the accusation that the anthroposophists in Germany had cooperated on a broad basis with the Nazi regime during the Nazi period due to affinities in content and ideological convergences ('eco-fascism'), and had even been a group courted and privileged by Nazi leaders. The main points of criticism were the supposed 'occult' irrationality, the assumed hostility to progress and technology of Anthroposophy, the allegedly conservative, even reactionary thinking in concepts of 'organism' and 'wholeness', as well as a supposed 'elite' thinking, which was primarily based on the existence of 'private' Waldorf schools. This was accompanied by the assertion that Rudolf Steiner's understanding of society and the image of the human being was inherent in an advocacy of 'inequality' or even 'racism'. Furthermore, Steiner had himself been a 'leading figure' within an authoritarian 'sect', which implied an affinity with national socialism and fascism.

The political right-wing critics in the first quarter and the political left-wing critics since the last quarter of the 20th century in Germany have been as polar opposite in their stances of aggression as their methods have been similar, as historical analysis shows. Both groups focus on Rudolf Steiner himself and not only negate the spiritual scientific approach to knowledge that he developed, but have also attacked his integrity. They accuse him of pure eclecticism; in their opinion, Steiner's independent cognitive and research work did not exist. By claiming a radical change from an 'atheistic free thinker' to a 'theosophical occultist', which supposedly happened for economic reasons, Rudolf Steiner has been biographically and morally discredited, according to them.¹⁰ By using arbitrary, out of context, isolated and catching quotations from his lectures, it was and is not difficult for both groups of critics to publicly discredit Rudolf Steiner according to whatever their prevailing sentiment happens to be, without ever engaging in a differentiated, qualitative and historical-work discourse.

Critics who work in this way have also recently achieved great success through strategic 'opinion and outrage management' in media and social networks. Anthroposophy is 'an elitist, dogmatic,

⁹ Quoted from UWE WERNER: *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus (1933–1945)*, S. 383. [Anthroposophists in the Time of National Socialism. (1933–1945)] (German only.)

¹⁰ Zur inhaltlichen Kontinuität in Rudolf Steiners Denken vgl. dagegen zuletzt: KAI SKAGEN: *Anarchist, Individualist, Mystic. Rudolf Steiners frühe Berliner Jahre 1897–1902*. Basel 2020. [By contrast, on the continuity of content in Rudolf Steiner's thinking, see recent: KAI SKAGEN: Anarchist, Individualist, Mystic. Rudolf Steiner's Early Years in Berlin 1897–1902.] (German only)

irrational, esoteric, racist, anti-enlightenment worldview', emphasized a monograph published by a left-wing publishing house in Germany in 2019; Steiner was a 'radical anti-Semite' and represented an unscientific, anti-scientific and 'inhuman' ideology whose further spread must be prevented. 'Anyone who stands up for a truly free society should oppose it.'¹¹

Recently, there have also been isolated attempts at the appropriation of Anthroposophy, individual positions or methodological applications by the political right-wing 'identarian' movement or by 'Reichsbürger' sympathizers, a fact that has been conveniently highlighted in the media, once again activating stereotypical prejudices.

Rudolf Steiner, however, was neither an irrational occultist, nor an 'anti-modern', 'anti-enlightenment' ideologue. His work may be perplexing and provocative to many because it challenges entrenched patterns of thought in an unusual way. In his work, which indeed makes some demands on its recipients, he points out original spiritual scientific paths of knowledge which, if methodically pursued, can lead to an enhancement of the understanding of science and the practice of life, which seems urgently necessary to us. The crisis of culture, science, society and civilization that we are currently experiencing is of considerable magnitude. Rudolf Steiner's work results and methods of cognition – which we want to connect to and advance in a productive way – are in our view part of the solution, not part of the problem. They are in the service of enlightenment and freedom, humanity, social justice and life – and are polar opposite to all nationalist, racist and extreme right-wing thought and sentiment.

3. Worldwide and Intercultural Spread of Anthroposophy

The discussions about Anthroposophy began in Germany and were conducted most intensively and militantly there for many years. As Steiner's printed lectures and writings had appeared for a long time in Berlin, Germany became the historical starting point of his initiative. In its approach, however, anthroposophical spiritual science is universal and oriented to the human being; with this cosmopolitan approach it has appeared internationally in numerous linguistic, cultural and religious settings for a hundred years. Even during Rudolf Steiner's lifetime, there were groups of people in many European countries, and as far away as North and South America, who were engaged in Anthroposo-

¹¹ ANDRÉ SEBATIANI: *Anthroposophie. Eine kurze Kritik*. Aschaffenburg 2019, S. 164. [Anthroposophy. A short critique] (German only)

phy and translated anthroposophical writings into their respective national languages. Rudolf Steiner himself spoke to people in very different contexts – both in workshops for workers and in universities or in spiritually interested circles. Steiner travelled constantly and to many countries. Anthroposophical national societies were founded in Austria and Sweden in 1913 and then in Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Great Britain, France and Italy as well as in what was then Czechoslovakia between 1920 and 1924. Just six years after the founding of the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart in 1919, seven more schools had been established – in Switzerland, Great Britain and the Netherlands.

After the National Socialists came to power in Germany at the beginning of 1933, an emigration of active anthroposophists began, especially – and by no means exclusively – people of Jewish origin, who brought Anthroposophy and its practical applications to many areas of the then free world. By the end of the Second World War, there were already 30 Waldorf schools of various sizes outside Germany, as far afield as Indonesia, Buenos Aires and New York. Today there are 1,187 schools globally. The refugee Jewish paediatrician and curative teacher Karl König set up the Camphill institutions in Scotland during the war years, which by 1948 had over 180 children and young people from various countries in their care (including the former British colonies of South Africa, India, Kenya and Ceylon). Today there are anthroposophical country societies in 35 countries as well as anthroposophical working groups and institutions in over 70 countries. Anthroposophy's anthropological-humanist and consistently anti-racist approach is also proving its worth in schools in very poor regions in Brazil, in urban 'township'¹² schools in South Africa, in intercultural, inter-religious schools in Israel and also in worldwide voluntary work by young people. In the autumn of 1920, Rudolf Steiner already wanted to found a 'World School Association' to support and finance free schooling on all continents; in 1923 in England, he said: "[...] The educational and didactic impulses that are brought forth from real knowledge of the human being are universally human, international and for all classes, for all castes of humanity."¹³ Seven decades on, in 1994, UNESCO certified the Waldorf Education Seminar in South Africa after the end of the apartheid regime as having contributed 'particularly to healing and rebuilding after the racist legacy'. The UNESCO report said: 'The apartheid system of South Africa was very successful in keeping the different communities apart in real terms. The Novalis Institute [for Waldorf Education] was very successful in really bringing these com-

¹² Translator's Note: Townships were legally designated, racially-based separated living areas created for non-Europeans in the apartheid era. The term 'township' is still used today, although no longer legislated along racialized lines. They however retain the name 'townships', as a legacy of apartheid. Townships geographically retain their original character, despite development projects. Today they are separated primarily along economic lines – the rich and middle classes from the poor – but remain essentially inhabited by African people.

¹³ RUDOLF STEINER: *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy* 2. New York, 1996. (Waldorf Pedagogy, Ilkley, 10 August 1923) (GA 304a)

munities together and building a new reality and a new consciousness. [...] It was pioneering and laying a foundation for a new and integrated community.¹⁴ Anthroposophical *Emergency Pedagogy* providing emergency aid for children in crisis situations has also received great international recognition in recent years.¹⁵

Anthroposophy with its approach to freedom, its ethical individualism and work in many spheres of life were suppressed and banned in all communist, fascist or totalitarian states, for example in the entire Eastern Bloc until the 1990s.

¹⁴ *Tolerance: the threshold of peace. A teaching/learning guide for education for peace, human right and democracy*. UNESCO 1994, p.21. ED. 94/WS/8 at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pfooooo98178?locale=en> (accessed Apr 30, 2021) Full Quote: 'The Novalis Institute which trains South African teachers in the methods of the Waldorf schools offers this experience of preparing teachers to contribute to the healing and reconstruction of the racist past of their country. Its report states: 'The apartheid system in South Africa has been most successful in keeping the realities of different communities in the country apart. The Novalis Institute has been most successful in bringing these realities together and facilitating the development of a new reality and consciousness [...] The shift in consciousness and perceptions of individuals and groups who were privileged to participate in the process facilitated by the Novalis Institute has in my opinion been the most important and valuable outcome that could possibly have been achieved. 'It has prepared the way and laid the foundations for a new and integrated [community].'

¹⁵ BERND RUF: *Educating Traumatized Children, Waldorf Education in Crisis Intervention*, Lindisfarne Books, 1 Oct 2013. Anthroposophical basics on emergency pedagogical missions. Emergency Pedagogy's background, history, work and projects available online from freundewaldorf.de, at: <https://www.freunde-waldorf.de/en/emergency-pedagogy/background/> (accessed Apr 30, 2021)

¹⁶ Quoted from: ROBERT ROSE: *Transforming criticisms of Anthroposophy and Waldorf education – Evolution, race and the quest for a global ethics*. First published by the Centre for Philosophy and Anthroposophy 2013. Available from anthroweb.info at https://www.anthroweb.info/fileadmin/pdfs/RR_Transforming_Criticisms.pdf (accessed Apr 30, 2021)

4. *The Accusation of Racism Against Rudolf Steiner*

Against this background, an accusation of racism against anthroposophical spiritual science and against Rudolf Steiner in person and in his work seems more than outlandish.

Discussions about the definition of the word racism continue. As UNESCO emphasized in 2003, 'Racism is an ideological construct that assigns one particular race or ethnic group to a position of power over others on the basis of physical and cultural attributes, as well as economic wealth, involving hierarchical relations where the 'superior' race exercises domination and control over others.'¹⁶ Furthermore, racist thinking claims a biological or genetic determinism, a biological classification or typological grouping of human beings that contends a different significance or even an absolute superiority of individual 'races' (or even just one 'race'). According to this doctrine, biology determines the human being as a whole; any possibility of individual transcendence of biological structure and situation is opposed.

Such an approach is not only alien to Rudolf Steiner's anthropology; it is in fact diametrically opposite to it. Steiner consistently described – from his earliest writings to his last works – the principle of autonomous, self-directed individuality, of an 'I' who embodies himself or herself in various biological, cultural and social circumstances, but whose spiritual entity is distinct from these conditions. We are born into them, socialize in them, often identify with them – or are identified with them – and yet are not one with them. We do not only have a body, although in a certain way also feel we are this body, 'my body'. We do not have unlimited degrees of freedom, but yet we can free ourselves to a large extent from the biological, cultural and social parameters and general conditions we find ourselves in; we can transcend and transform them. We, as I-humans and beings of freedom, are capable of this,

at least in principle. “Determining the individual according to the laws of genus ceases where the sphere of freedom (in thinking and acting) begins.” wrote Rudolf Steiner in his *Philosophy of Freedom* in 1893.¹⁷ “If we would understand the single individual, we must find our way into his own particular being and not stop short at those characteristics that are typical.”¹⁸

Steiner strongly opposed any biological or genetic determinism; he was one of the pioneers of today’s epigenetics and considered a fixation on people based on their physical, ethnic or cultural origins to be a disastrous relapse in the development of humanity, consciousness and civilization. Steiner wrote in 1910 in a book¹⁹ that it was imperative to overcome the ever-persistent “making of distinctions in human beings according to their outward characteristics of rank, gender, race, and so forth”. He never denied the existence of individual circumstances and living conditions; however, he did not count them as a part of the ‘essence of the human being’, but rather as part of the conditions of destiny “in which a human being lives on earth”²⁰. Even the old “idea of race ceases to have any meaning, especially in our age”²¹, Steiner emphasised in 1909.

He never tired of describing the re-activation of a biological or ethnic typification and evaluation of people as a dangerous, regressive aberration in a century which had to stand for freedom, for the encounter of ‘I and You’, for the connection between people and nations, for cultural interaction and cooperation. In 1917, three years after the start of the nationalistic-influenced First World War, he actually said in a lecture:

“... anyone who speaks of the ideals of race and nation, and of tribal unity today is speaking of impulses which are part of the decline of humanity. If anyone now considers them to be progressive ideals to present to humanity, they speak untruth. Nothing is more designed to take humanity into its decline than the propagation of ideals of race, nationhood and blood.”²²

At the end of 1937, in an assessment report on Anthroposophy, Prof. Dr Alfred Baeumler, the leading political pedagogue of the Nazi regime, wrote that Steiner’s thinking and the ideological foundations of Waldorf education were not ‘biologically racial’ but ‘biologically cosmic’. According to Prof. Baeumler, Rudolf Steiner puts *humanity* in the place of the ‘Volk’ in National Socialism; the ‘concept of the national community’ is completely absent from the educational theory of Waldorf schools. It is not the ‘people’s community’ but a ‘community of [individual] spirits’ that Steiner strives and prepares for:

¹⁷ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Philosophy of Freedom*, ‘Individuality and Genus’, Ch. 14, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2011. GA 4 (aka. *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*, Anthroposophic Press, 1986.)

¹⁸ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Philosophy of Freedom*, ‘Individuality and Genus’, Ch. 14, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2011. GA 4

¹⁹ RUDOLF STEINER: *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds. How is it Achieved?* (1904/05). Chapter 3, ‘Some Practical Aspects.’ Rudolf Steiner Press, 2009. (GA 10)

²⁰ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Mission of the Folk Souls*, Lecture 4. 10 Jun 2010. GA 121. Rudolf Steiner Press, 2005

²¹ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Universal Human: The Evolution of Individuality*, (CW 117, 124, 165), Lecture 1, ‘The Ego’, 4 Dec 1909. GA 117, Steiner Books, 1990/01/09

²² RUDOLF STEINER: *Fall of the Spirits of Darkness*: Lecture 12: ‘The Spirits of Light and the Spirits of Darkness.’ Dornach, 26 October 1917. GA 177. Rudolf Steiner Press; Trans. A. R. Meuss; March 2008.

... The fateful turning point occurs through the fact that Steiner replaces the theory of heredity with a different, positive theory. He does not simply overlook the biological reality, but rather consciously turns it into its opposite. Anthroposophy is one of the most consequent antibiological systems in existence. (Prof. Dr Alfred Baeumler)²³

Accusing a public philosopher and publicist, an active humanist and cosmopolitan like Steiner at the beginning of the 21st century – that ‘racial thinking’ was a ‘central component’ in his teaching, that he ‘implicitly’ approved of genocide, that he taught a supremacy of the European white race, linking ‘normality’ and ‘spirituality’ with ‘whiteness’ and that he even had a ‘fascist model’ in mind with his social threefolding²⁴ – seems downright bizarre. Rudolf Steiner was very much of the opinion that differences in the biological, ethnic and cultural circumstances of people’s lives and development exist. He did not believe in deliberately ignoring or levelling them (in the sense of a postulated ‘unity of all humans regardless of race, nation, or colour and so forth’²⁵). However, he always represented the relativity of the otherness of others, difference as a complementary contribution to the human whole and the dignity of the unique self, the ‘I’.

Racist thinking was just as alien to Steiner as was imperial, colonial and hegemonic thinking. Unlike critics like Staudenmeier, the National Socialist Baeumler rightly saw that Steiner was not at all concerned with the ‘white race’ or ‘nation’, with ‘Arianism’ and ‘Germanness’, but with the formation of an individual, social and global ethic for a future world community. The concept of ‘humanity’, the universal concept of ‘being human’, the ‘common nature of humanity’ was not just a cliché for Rudolf Steiner. He emphasised again and again that the global tasks of the 20th century could only be tackled and solved collectively – in the community of nations or the world community and with mutual help and support – which, however, presupposed the overcoming of all racial, cultural, national or religious prejudices and reservations. In the near future, only “if every single individual is on an equal basis with every other single individual”²⁶, as an ‘I’ to ‘I’ in freedom – “Thou art fellow-humans with all the human beings of the earth!”²⁷ – would humanity be able to survive on earth, but in no way through a continuation of national or even racist thinking and acting. (“Nationalism is common egotism experienced by the whole nation.”²⁸)

Through a thorough knowledge of his work, it is evident that Rudolf Steiner saw especially in the highly differentiated anthro-

²³ ALFRED BAEMLER: *Rudolf Steiner und die Philosophie*. Gutachten, 22.10.1938. Kapitel 5; Steiners Methode. The quote is found in Uwe Werner’s English article, *Anthroposophy in the Time of Nazi Germany*, Note 4. From ‘Report on Waldorf Schools’ and ‘Report on Rudolf Steiner and Philosophy’ by Alfred Bauemler. Found on waldorfanswers.org at <https://waldorfanswers.org/AnthroposophyDuring-NaziTimes.htm#4> (accessed Apr 30, 2021)

²⁴ PETER STAUDENMEIER: *Between Occultism and Nazism. Anthroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era*. Leiden/Boston, 2014. Publisher, Brill.

²⁵ RUDOLF STEINER: *Spiritual Science as a Foundation for Social Forms*. Lecture VII: Trends of Souls in People of the East, West, and Middle of Europe. GA 199. Dornach, 21 August 1920. Anthroposophic Press, Sep. 8 1986.

²⁶ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Social Future*, Lecture 3, ‘Legal Questions, Task and the Limitations of Democracy, Public Law, Criminal Law’, Zurich, 26 Oct 1919. GA 332a

²⁷ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Festivals and Their Meaning*, ‘III Ascension and Pentecost’, Ch. II, ‘Whitsun, The Festival of the Free Individuality’, 15 May 1910. Rudolf Steiner Press, Revised edition, 1 Aug 1996. GA 118

²⁸ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Social Future*, Lecture 6, ‘National and International Life in the Threefold Social Organism’ Zurich, 30 Oct 2019. GA 0332a. Publishers: Rudolf Steiner Press, SteinerBooks, Powell’s Books.

pology of spiritual science, also as the basis of a new education and upbringing, an instrument for a deeper understanding of the other human being, their 'I' and their cultural, ethnic, familial, social and any other condition of their background. He focused on tolerance and appreciative recognition of the other – as with all others – through greater insight and knowledge. "Spiritual Science, as we shall realize more and more clearly, will bring an end to the divisions of humankind."²⁹

Steiner's aim was undoubtedly ambitious; undeniably he saw the Anthroposophical Society and its practical institutions play an innovative pioneering role in this direction. He also believed that social threefolding would one day be successful and that it would indeed be possible to end the intertwining of economic, state-political and spiritual-cultural interests and forces, in favour of the creation of autonomous governance of the three different spheres of social life. Everything must be done to end the entanglement of the economic sphere with the political-democratic sphere, and both disempowered from exerting influence and authority over the spiritual-cultural sphere, including the education system. Steiner emphasized the *absolute equality of rights* for all human beings before the law in the political-democratic sphere with the recognition of different talents, abilities and roles (in the sense of the UN Declaration of Human Rights: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights', Art. 1). *Freedom* should determine spiritual/intellectual life, *equality* the political-democratic polity, and *solidarity* should serve the sphere of a completely new 'economy of brotherhood', which should no longer serve private egotism and destructive capitalism.³⁰

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Although the concepts developed by Rudolf Steiner and the anthroposophical institutions have this clear orientation, critics persisted with the accusation of racism at the end of the 20th century, achieving a great deal of public attention as a result. In the 1990s, the General Anthroposophical Society in the Netherlands commissioned a committee led by the lawyer and human rights expert Ted van Baarda to critically examine Rudolf Steiner's complete works with regard to the accusation of racism. The commission arrived at a negative conclusion.³¹ According to the commission's report, Rudolf Steiner's monumental work contains a total of sixteen quotations which, in themselves, would have to be described as discriminatory from today's perspective (mostly from the so-

²⁹ RUDOLF STEINER: *The Mission of the Folk Souls*, Lecture 11. 17 Jun 2010. GA 121. Rudolf Steiner Press, 2005

³⁰ PETER SELG / MARC DESAULES: *Ökonomie der Brüderlichkeit. Zur Aktualität der sozialen Dreigliederung*. Arlesheim 2016. [Economy of Brotherhood. On the relevance of social threefolding] (German only)

³¹ TED A. VAN BAARDA (ed.): *Anthroposophie und die Rassismus-Vorwürfe*. Der Bericht der Niederländischen Untersuchungskommission 'Anthroposophie und die Frage der Rassen' Frankfurt a.M. 5th edition 2009. [Anthroposophy and the accusations of racism, the report of the Dutch investigative commission, Anthroposophy and the question of race]. (German only)

called ‘Workmen Lectures’, which were workshops for non-anthroposophical craftsmen at the Goetheanum, whose questions Rudolf Steiner answered spontaneously). According to the commission’s report, ‘Steiner’s work does not contain any racism or a systematic doctrine of race, nor are there any statements made with the intention of insulting people or groups of people because of their racial affiliation, which could therefore be regarded as racism’.³² The whole subject matter is of little relevance in Steiner’s work:

... proportionally and in terms of content, the attention Rudolf Steiner devoted to the subject of race in his extensive work is so small that the existence of a racial doctrine cannot be considered, even if for this reason alone’.³³

The report also comments on the ‘selective’ perception of this minor aspect of his work for the Dutch public and on the methodological and ethical problems of using quotations in out-of-context isolation. In the summary it says:

The number of pages on which statements occur that could be regarded as discriminatory comprises less than one per thousand of the 89,000 pages of Rudolf Steiner’s extensive complete works. Anthroposophy and Social Darwinism contradict each other. Insinuations that racism is inherent in Anthroposophy or that Steiner was a conceptual forerunner of the Holocaust have been shown to be categorically incorrect. The Commission comes to the firm conclusion that Rudolf Steiner has been the victim of selective indignation compared to other pre-war authors and authors of the 19th and 20th centuries (such as Hegel or Albert Schweitzer).³⁴

However, since the accusations did not cease despite this commission’s report, but rather, critics became even sharper at the beginning of the 21st century, the English philosopher and anthroposophist, Robert Rose presented an extensive study entitled *Transforming Criticisms of Anthroposophy and Waldorf Education – Evolution, Race and the Quest for Global Ethics* in 2013. It was published as an e-book and was published in German by the Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag [Berlin Science Publishing House] in 2016. In this work, Rose succeeded, among other things, in convincingly showing that the few phrases in Rudolf Steiner’s comprehensive opus from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, which are problematic from today’s perspective and faulted by the Dutch Commission, originated from lectures in which Steiner described in a typological way, the genesis of the ancient ancestors of humanity. At that time, Steiner argued that the concept ‘race’ still had meaning and justification because the geographical in-

³² Ibid. p. 347. (German only)

³³ Ibid. p. 312. (German only)

³⁴ Ibid. p. 352. (German only)

fluences of the earthly forces on the human organizational structure (the ‘physical body’) were extraordinarily strong and that the human ‘I’, as the individual essence of being, was barely formed at that time. Robert Rose showed that Steiner’s statements, which are to be understood in evolutionary-biological terms, were not only repeatedly decontextualized, but were deliberately transposed into completely different contexts by the critics. His ‘meticulous clarification of the real meaning of individual statements, which may, at first glance, appear to be very problematic’³⁵ – and have been fabricated by critics to be fundamental statements by Steiner, as if he had been referring to people born *today* (!) in non-European continents in their supposed one-sidedness – has formed an important contribution to anthroposophical secondary literature on this most complex of topics.

In view of the continuing public pressure, the Executive Council of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany recently decided to go public with a dedicated website (*Anthroposophy. On the Critique of Racism and Anti-Semitism. Information, clarification, statements.*³⁶). The plan is to collect problematic passages from Rudolf Steiner’s complete works and to make them accessible with commentaries. However, passages of Rudolf Steiner’s work in which he resolutely spoke out against racism and discrimination will also be documented, as well as statements by anthroposophical organisations and individual authors on the accusations of racism and discrimination. We support these efforts, as we believe it is important to receive Rudolf Steiner’s life’s work in an informed, free and active way, taking into account the contextuality of individual statements as well as the complexity of the anthroposophical representation of the human being. As decontextualized statements, the sentences classified as problematic by the Dutch Commission – as well as some other isolated partial statements – are of course to be rejected; in this form they correspond neither to our view, nor to Rudolf Steiner’s basic attitude and the foundations of his anthropological and ethical concepts.

Since, even the aggressive critics of Anthroposophy, whether they like it not, had to take note of how radically and unequivocally Steiner stood up for ethical individualism and against every form of nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism from 1894 to 1925, and while maintaining their massive attacks, they speak of a ‘contradictory legacy’, without delving deeply into what Rudolf Steiner was really all about.

³⁵ ROBERT ROSE: *Transforming criticisms of Anthroposophy and Waldorf education – Evolution, race and the quest for a global ethics.* First published by the Centre for Philosophy and Anthroposophy 2013. Available from anthroweb.info at https://www.anthroweb.info/fileadmin/pdfs/RR_Transforming_Criticisms.pdf (accessed Apr 30, 2021)

³⁶ www.anthroposophie-gegen-rassismus.de (in development)

5. The Development Potential of the Anthroposophical Society

Even that which Rudolf Steiner intended with the Anthroposophical Society can only be found in distorted forms among certain critics. According to them, the society is a Steiner-centred, authoritarian power structure of a hegemonistically conceived movement. Here too, the accusations miss the mark, indeed turning the reality into its opposite. Nonetheless, after 100 years, the criticism can also be seized as an opportunity to make a self-critical assessment.

If the Anthroposophical Society had really followed Rudolf Steiner's proposals to the letter, it would have been much more clearly engaged in socio-political activities and actively involved in current events long before 1914 and most definitely after 1918/19 than it was. The initiative for social threefolding was only followed or even actively supported by a fraction of the society's members – and so it was with numerous other civic impulses that emanated from Steiner and a smaller core of his colleagues. For a long time, critical engagement with current socio-political issues took up far too little space in the Anthroposophical Society. From the beginning, the Society tended to have a strong inward orientation, as an essentially spiritual study community that was not very concerned with the pressing problems of civilization and social challenges, because it did not consider these to be among its core tasks. In addition, there were obvious shortcomings in the independent handling of, or a creative, free and individualized reception of anthroposophical spiritual science, which included a tendency towards a false 'Steiner worship', as well as a disproportionate preoccupation with internal social problems at the expense of a presence in civil society. It can be shown that all these phenomena already existed before 1925 and were considered by Rudolf Steiner among the heavier burdens of the Anthroposophical Society, which greatly hindered Anthroposophy from becoming effective in civil society and socio-politics.³⁷ It is also well known that Steiner never claimed *infallibility* for himself and his research work. He also resolutely voted against the transcription of many of his lectures, including the Workmen Lectures at the Goetheanum. He engaged with his listeners in these workshop talks, speaking in a conversational way. He was in no way of the opinion that all these spontaneous formulations should be preserved for posterity and declared in toto as part of his spiritual scientific research results, to be put on a par with his scientific works. He did not want to be

³⁷ PETER SELG: 'The Identity of the General Anthroposophical Society, Part 2', in *Crisis in the Anthroposophical Society. And Pathways to the Future*, written with Sergej O. Prokofieff, Part 1. Temple Lodge Publishing, 4 Jan 2013

revered, but understood, including his narrative manner and in the idiosyncrasies of his depictions.³⁸

Rudolf Steiner, however, never broke with the Anthroposophical Society, but worked to the end on its innovative transformation and possible future form; he also always appreciated the commitment and practical idealism of its members. Looking back over the century, there is no mistaking what has been achieved by society members up to the present day, including the building of integrative and ecological social forms in various areas of life and on all continents, the development of initiatives committed to the dignity of the human being and creation, and the taking of action against social discrimination and disadvantage, despite the difficult circumstances and massive obstacles. Furthermore, even during the period of prohibition and partial persecution, the Anthroposophical Society as such has maintained its spiritual work and social cohesion. It has kept the Goetheanum and its School of Spiritual Science alive through all political and economic crises through the enormous personal commitment of its members. Important impulses for change in the endangered areas of civilization – from medicine to agriculture – have emanated from the specialist sections of the School. The School of Spiritual Science facilitates networking and professional development for the anthroposophical vocations engaged on all continents, and forms a place of initiative and encouragement for social effectiveness.³⁹ The anthroposophical world society is increasingly succeeding in developing independent cultural and linguistic forms in dealing with Anthroposophy that are appropriate to the regional situation, and in overcoming its initial German- and Eurocentrism, which is exemplified by the great growth of anthroposophical institutions in South America, Israel and South-East Asia. The upper-middle-class bourgeois character inherent at the beginning of the theosophical and anthroposophical societies was gradually overcome by social commitment, an intensive, direct culture of engagement, a dismantling of the hierarchical structures and an active involvement with the civilizational crises of the present.

Nevertheless, great difficulties and challenges undoubtedly continue to exist in all these areas. The serious economic disparities in the reality of people's lives are also reflected within the Anthroposophical Society. The anthroposophical institutions are still a long way from the goal of providing new forms of education, medicine and agriculture – at least potentially – to *all* people on this earth. As is well known, the Waldorf School began in 1919 as a school for the children of workers in a cigarette factory, and as

38 ULRICH KAISER: *Der Erzähler Rudolf Steiner. Studien zur Hermeneutik der Anthroposophie*, Frankfurt 2020. [The narrator Rudolf Steiner. Studies on the hermeneutics of Anthroposophy] (German only.)

39 UELI HURTER/ USTUS WITTICH (Eds): 'What are the intentions of the School of Spiritual Science at the Goetheanum?', in *Perspectives and Initiatives in the Times of Coronavirus*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2020

such was an opportunity to support those who were not from privileged backgrounds.

The Anthroposophical Society continues to direct itself towards worldwide goals that have been inherent since its founding. The history of the Anthroposophical Society and the Goetheanum is not a pure success story and offers no cause for self-aggrandizement and idealization. The aspirations with which this Society and its School of Spiritual Science began were high and the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality is clear. However, it can be both a task and a motivation to live up to these aspirations ever more and more. Rudolf Steiner emphasized that the Anthroposophical Society has to try and ‘uphold’ what it promises for its entire membership and thus for the world.⁴⁰ From our point of view, in addition to critical analyses of its own social history⁴¹ – as part of contemporary history – and as a commitment to the present time, this also includes making intensive efforts toward anthroposophical spiritual science itself, its inner spiritual substance. Rudolf Steiner quotations can be used and abused for all kinds of purposes – to discredit Anthroposophy and anthroposophical institutions, but also to back up and supposedly legitimize one’s own opinions. The exploitation of singular statements or passages from Steiner’s texts by critics and by followers of Anthroposophy – with diffuse political and a variety of other convictions – has a long tradition. One of the tasks of the School of Spiritual Science is to present work for differentiated reception of the work and to take care of the hermeneutic layers of approach to anthroposophical spiritual science.

Members of the Goetheanum Leadership with other organizational groups and voices of the anthroposophical movement will continue to speak out in the future with contributions and statements and will counter attempts to exploit and alienate Anthroposophy (including for racist purposes) as well as the defaming of spiritual science. “Knowledge of human worth, feeling for human dignity, willing love for humanity: These are the most beautiful life fruits nurtured in mankind when he assimilates what is bestowed on him by spiritual science.” (Rudolf Steiner, 5 September 1921⁴²)

Translated by: Christine Howard

⁴⁰ RUDOLF STEINER: ‘The Statutes of the General Anthroposophical Society and the School of Spiritual Science.’ (GA 260a) https://anthroposophy.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/goetheanum_mitglieder-broschueren_rosa_heft_en-us-2020_06_19-1.pdf

⁴¹ LORENZO RAVAGLI: *Selbsterkenntnis in der Geschichte. Anthroposophische Gesellschaft und Bewegung im 20. Jahrhundert. Band 1. Von den Anfängen bis zur zweiten großen Sezession 1875–1952*. Glücksburg 2020. [Self-Knowledge in History. Anthroposophical Society and Movement in the 20th Century. Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the Second Great Secession 1875–1952.] (German only.)

⁴² RUDOLF STEINER: ‘Anthroposophy’s Contribution to the Most Urgent Needs of Our Time’ (aka: ‘The Gulf Between a Causal Explanation of Nature and the Moral World Order’), Lecture 5, Sep 5, 1921, in *Fruits of Anthroposophy*, by Anthroposophic Press, First Edition, 1 January 1986) (GA 78)