



On Research and the Economics Conference

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In 2001, I ‘delivered’ a paper on research¹ at the threefold symposium in Kimberthon, USA, in which I questioned whether in principle ‘anthroposophical’ research is any different to ‘normal’ research when the latter is carried out rigorously, rather than by dancing to the tune of one’s funders or merely dressing up personal untested opinion in objective sounding language. 16 years later, I still have this question, as the following reflection demonstrates.

Research in economics and finance is essentially a matter of thinking clearly – *Philosophy of Freedom* in the raw.² More than that, inasmuch as spiritual science is also a matter of clear thinking, it shares an epistemological base with true economics. And yet, in our movement generally there seems to be little ear for this. Our economic and financial thinking is everywhere clouded and compromised, thwarted by relativism³ and tricked by the idea that there are three conditions for membership (i.e. not pupilship) of the School of Spiritual Science, instead of one – namely, the simple precept of representing ‘die anthroposophische Sache’.⁴

Serious research needs to be conducted in one’s own right, and ideally whatever eventuates should be given a form, language, etc., that enables it to be published by serious as well as (perhaps, rather than) ‘fringe’ publishers outside as well as within the anthroposophical movement – instead of in the anthroposophical world only and not comprehensible beyond it. Otherwise we risk preaching to the converted but not reaching those who need to be converted.⁵

As regards economics and finance, a further problem, in my view, is that much research and teaching – activities that are closely intertwined – in our movement is not up to par because it lacks an entrepreneurial (as distinct from managerial) basis, seldom mounts an effective challenge to today’s orthodoxies, and often makes a serious hash of Steiner’s own contribution. Indeed, in this field anthroposophists tend to be either bourgeois or left-leaning, with neither approach suited to understanding true economics, let alone money – which is why many if not most people stay away from the topic or ill-represent it, often disdainfully.

Credentials

When it comes to serious research, I am not of the opinion that the Goetheanum should be giving out diplomas, for example, other than perhaps in eurythmy or where there is no existence for a field outside of anthroposophical considerations. I do not accept the approach that leads to a degree in Anthroposophy, for example. Far better, and far more Rosicrucian, is it to demonstrate in the world at large that one is knowledgeable

¹ *Concerning Spiritual Scientific Research*. CHB Collected Works Archive.

² A reference to Rudolf Steiner’s foundational work, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1972.

³ Relativism is the claim that standards of truth, rationality and ethical right and wrong vary greatly between cultures and historical epochs and that there are no universal criteria for adjudicating between them.

⁴ See 2014 paper by Marc Desaulles, https://economics.goetheanum.org/fileadmin/economics/Towards_2023/EC_MD_The_Challenges_of_Christmas_1923.pdf

⁵ The exercise also ensures one has made the ideas one’s own and subjected it to some cold-eyed and disinterested scrutiny.

and competent in one's field, and to do so in the world's terms, albeit not with their usual meaning. (An example from the Christmas Meeting is the use of 'body of formative forces' instead of 'etheric body'.)

Concerning 'anthroposophical' diplomas, as a specialist teacher when it comes to money, economics, etc., I have never been required to have teacher training credentials when I do this on a 'supply' basis. My 'normal' degree and PhD evidence the appropriate credentials. In fact, in England, where needed one can take a one year course that 'converts' a Masters into a teaching degree, although, interestingly, in the field of financial literacy it is becoming part and parcel of teaching accounting that one replicates the pedagogy originally used by Luca Pacioli in the 15th century, known today as 'cognitive apprenticeship'.⁶

In my experience with teacher trainings and as a state school governor in England, the issue is essentially twofold. Firstly, that we often think in terms of providing an alternative to education, rather than an extension to or broadening of it that includes today's reductionism within a wider and more sophisticated (i.e. spiritual) scientific perspective, but without falling into the traps of equivocation and relativism.

Secondly, if one sets out to teach economics and finance based on associative economics as a formal discipline or approach, one often immediately comes up against a lack of economic and financial literacy on the part of teachers, coupled with disdain for or incompetence regarding the business side of life. Worse, one can read and hear quite unschooled ideas being purveyed. The challenge of associative economics is that it cannot be talked unless walked and this can throw an uncomfortable light on many of our endeavours.

The 'micro' or existential version of this comes down to, whether as a researcher or teacher, one is employed or self-employed. Generally speaking, most teachers (also in Waldorf schools) are employees, which speaks reams about their relationship to economic life – namely, it is someone else's business to ensure that there is an income stream. This is an 'old chestnut' and a bellwether for financial literacy and the closely related topic of successful funding. Sadly, many anthroposophists resist this modality, and yet – per Steiner, as per common sense – if one's own economic and financial affairs are not conscious and in hand (and also associative) how can one stand before others and make a case for associative economics in general or macro terms? Conventional economics does not have this problem because its theories exist independently of one's deeds. Associative economics will not allow such a separation, however. It presupposes knowing doers.

The question of one's employment status as a researcher or teacher is related to another: How will one's income be treated for tax purposes? In the UK, for example, one can receive a certain amount of donations tax-free provided they are not tied to any specific activity – for example, if a friend or relative gives you money. But if one has asked for it from a foundation, for example, then that donation is treated as taxable income.⁷

⁶ See, for example, Houghton Budd C. (2016) In the Shoes of Luca Pacioli—Double Entry Bookkeeping and Financial Literacy. In: Aprea C. et al. (eds.) International Handbook of Financial Literacy. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0360-8_39.

⁷ One says this aware that it is not unknown for anthroposophists and anthroposophical institutions to ignore or repudiate taxation as something that belongs to 'other' people. Indeed, on such things, the reputation of Anthroposophy often rests – not on its content but on the unsocial conduct of anthroposophists. I know of few enemies of Anthroposophy outside our movement, but several cases where uneconomic or unconscious dealings give detractors an excuse to denigrate Anthroposophy. None of the anti-Steiner websites I know of are grounded on their own thinking. It is not untypical, for example, to find

Nowadays, with more than 40% of the current Michael age behind us, these things become the ground on which one stands, especially in professional and public life. What one avers philosophically is of less concern to the world than that one has one's affairs in order. Worse than dying intestate is to argue that one's affairs are not in order because one is an anthroposophist!

Representing Anthroposophy

When economics and finance are researched or taught by members of the Social Sciences Section, and therefore as representatives of Anthroposophy, it is important not to look to those at the Goetheanum other than as brothers and sisters. They are not higher, apart, or more qualified because they hold office at the Goetheanum. In the first place, it can be that karma rather than competence that finds them there. Secondly, it was never the point of the Sections that they be likened to a normal university. For this reason, also, the Goetheanum ought not to be thought of as a campus, but as a modern mystery sanctuary – the corollary of an esoteric schooling based on membership rather than pupilship.

Importantly, also, spiritual scientific research is collegial, as indeed is research in the non-anthroposophical world. In both domains, insofar as clear thinking is the medium, collegiality – and thus a circle of peers or colleagues – is 'automatically' the process, because clear thinking makes one's own thinking, not someone else's, the basis of authority.

Not to recognise these characteristics is to risk sycophancy on the part of those not in the leadership, and false modesty on the part of those who are. No one is immune to this problem, and because of the special relationship between economics and spiritual science, associative economists will be particularly susceptible to it. They will also be targeted by those beings who fight against Rudolf Steiner – not directly, because they do not have the nerve, but indirectly.

Nowhere is this more obvious than in connection with double-entry bookkeeping when understood as a Christian path. As raw threshold experience, it amounts to anthroposophical praxis writ large. But to meet this challenge we have to be sharp in our understanding. Christ built his Church on Peter; so that there is a certain truth in the authority of the Pope until the Renaissance. But from that moment in history, in principle and in potential, each and every one of us became petrified or en-petered (neither word is a good one!), so that our authority now stems from being ethically individual, meaning ultimately from being a representative of 'die anthroposophische Sache' – but also in command of one's affairs. (See Footnote 3.)

One of the greatest risks run by those joining our movement is that they do not set themselves free of papism, thereby becoming ready-prey to vaticanism.⁸ Indeed, Steiner once said that to become an anthroposophist is to risk defaulting to Catholicism. We, like him, have, as it were, to move on from Thomas Aquinas; move on to spiritual science. Anthroposophy was not Steiner's direct task. He took it on because his own task presupposed it; but the one who was to bring it could not do so – perhaps because he could not think clearly enough. It is for this reason that Steiner took on the presidency of the refounded Society (a position now seemingly forgotten if not destroyed), as the home

their origin in disgruntled Waldorf school parents who have been told their child was ill-treated for karmic reasons that could not, unfortunately, be explained to them.

⁸ I speak as one raised in the Catholic faith.

of an esoteric school based on a circle in which one's authority comes from what one knows and does, from being a knowing doer.⁹

In Conclusion

When the Economics Conference meets in a circle, I like to think we do so mindful of these things.

⁹ The character and dynamics of such circle working is well-described in Ernst Lehr's paper, *Republican not Democratic*, Waldorf Publications, 1970.