



Newsletter of the Economics Conference

Part of the Social
Sciences Section of the
School of Spiritual
Science

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Editor

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The aim of this publication is to encourage colleagues within the School of Spiritual Science to meet, share their work with one another, and where possible build a common culture in this field. It offers commentary, reports and news from a spiritual scientific point of view and provides a link between those who approach modern economic life in this way.

Associate does not proselytise or establish a 'party line' as regards the School of Spiritual Science and modern economic life. Responsibility for the views expressed, as also for their accuracy, rests solely with their authors.

Contributions should be as succinct as possible. Where appropriate, the editorial right is reserved to publish abstracts with a fuller version available on request. Contributors are asked to provide their name, profession and address.

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7th Economics Conference & Associative Economics Festival August 2008 in England

This year's annual meeting of the Economics Conference is combined with the Associative Economics Festival that will take place (*in English!*) 10th – 14th August near Canterbury, England (see cfae.biz/festival for programme and registration details). In the first 7 years of meetings at the Goetheanum, the focus gradually passed from general considerations about the relationship between economics and spiritual science, to Rudolf Steiner's *Economics Course* itself (culminating for many in the Pomona Gathering in January 2007 in the USA), and then to an initial look at the finances of the Anthroposophical Society per se.

As a next step, the idea arose to locate this year's meeting in England in order to connect to the work undertaken there by the likes of Daniel Dunlop, Walter Johannes Stein, Owen Barfield and many others, who sought in the 1930s to bring Steiner's ideas to the attention of the Anglo-Saxon world.

The Festival will provide an opportunity to review the prospects for associative economics influencing modern economic life. Its link to the Economics Conference will be based on that fact that its overall concept and certain of the content will be provided by members of the Economics Conference while its format will be a circle of collaborators who come together to develop insights based on sharing their experiences born of their engagement in practical activities.

In this way, its modest scale notwithstanding, the Festival will provide an opportunity for those concerned to bring spiritual science to bear upon their work not only through ideas but through the work of a collaborative circle, with the hope that they in turn will then influence the economic life of their times in a leavening manner. This can be by the way they do business, through financial initiatives, in academic contexts, or 'merely' by influencing their understanding of economic events.

Financing the Society and the School / 20-21 September 2007

The 6th annual meeting had as its main topic the financing of the School of Spiritual Science and the role of the Anthroposophical Society in that connection. It looked at three interrelated subjects:

- Funding of the work of the School of Spiritual Science and its Sections
- Funding of the Anthroposophical Society
- Providing and funding premises for the School/Society

That such questions should be formally addressed within the context of a Section meeting is perhaps an example of what is needed: that those concerned with current arrangements come together in the Michael School to share their understandings and discover, out of the diversity that they bring, a unifying image that can inform their work. In this case, building a picture of how the School and the Society are related to economic life, especially as regards the currently predominant Anglo-Saxon approach.

The question is not academic, for if the Anthroposophical Movement is to contribute anything to a contemporary understanding of finance, surely it can only do so by exemplifying in its own arrangements a certain anthroposophical logic, one, moreover, that leads rather than follows the world's understanding of such matters.

Central to our deliberations was Rudolf Steiner's own conception of economic and financial matters at the Christmas Foundation Meeting. Because they are based on a spiritual scientific approach to finance, might his insights not provide a benchmark of good practice?

The nine sessions covered a number of key questions:

Are the Sections national or worldwide?

Is the School to be funded through or outside the Anthroposophical Society?

Should the Society take title to money given for Section research?

How are individuals to be funded?

What is the effect of making the Society a not-for-profit legal entity in terms of the constraints that it must then operate under?

To what use should compulsory dues be put, as opposed to freely donated ones?

What is the effect when legacy money is put into buildings rather than research?

Do we use structures that control or those that trust?

If we understand that the School is the soul of the Society, then what is its spirit, and how is the Society as a body able to become a fit vessel for its Soul-Spirit?

A mixture of pre-distributed texts, spontaneous contributions and blackboard sketches provided a wide-ranging perspective, within which, however, two images in particular came into focus. At first they appeared distinct, but as the meeting progressed they seemed to merge. One¹ was the body, soul, spirit analogy of the Society to the human being, resulting in Society (body), School (soul) and Michael (spirit).

The other was of a 'bank for the sections',² meaning not the kind of bank that takes title to its money flows or seeks to grow its own balance sheet, but a channel for funds intended for so-called 'professional' sectional activity. A main point of this arrangement is that the Society thus offers a legal, earthly vehicle for the School so that the School may be in but not of the earth, just as one's body provides an earthly home for one's soul-spirit.

1 From Marc Desaulles, treasurer of the Swiss Society.

2 Introduced by Marion Briggs, a representative of the UK Arts Section.

Accounting and the Anthroposophical Movement

At the September 2007 meeting of the Economics Conference, the idea was introduced of an accounting template which would not only serve to clarify the relationships between the School of Spiritual Science, the Anthroposophical Society and the world in general, but also provide a foil to the international accounting standards now becoming a worldwide requirement through the agency of the European Union and through their adoption by Wall Street. They do not, for the moment, touch the world of 'not-for-profits', where for the most part the Anthroposophical Movement locates itself, but it is clear that they will in the end do so. But first the intention is to establish them in the so-called 'for profit' world, where their strong emphasis on promoting asset values and cash extraction goes unchallenged.

Given that this bias clearly contrasts with that recommended by Rudolf Steiner, the question is whether the Anthroposophical Society, through the manner of its own accounting – and especially the fact that it is the earthly worldwide vehicle of an esoteric school – can not only protect itself from the forces that will come to it via the International Accounting Standards, but rather influence their very formulation.

To date, the Anthroposophical Society (as also the wider Movement) is largely of the view that it is a 'spiritual activity', funded from individuals and commercial entities (albeit via foundations). That is to say, it does not see itself as an economic activity in its own right, let alone the source of real economic value – the kind of value, moreover, that modern economic life desperately needs if it is to overcome its addiction to 'real credit'. Yet without real credit, today's so-called 'credit crunch' cannot be understood, for it is but a contraction (by banks) of prior credit expansion linked directly to the capitalising of land.

Hopefully, by way of its own accounts – provided these do not merely accept the Anglo-American bias that underpins the carefully named *international* standards –

the Anthroposophical Society and thence the larger Anthroposophical Movement can show the world how to develop an economic life grounded in 'personal credit' instead.

The FondsGoetheanum

At the Christmas Conference, a discussion took place about how much the Anthroposophical Society would need to receive if it were to underwrite the work of the School of Spiritual Science to the extent that its potential for humanity warranted. Steiner's response was clear and concrete: if 75 million francs could be raised, the work of the School could be intensified up to tenfold. He was then asked by the Dutch member, Mr. van Leer, about creating a fund designed specifically for people generally to give money for the School via the Society. Though Steiner doubted the prospects for public take up of such an idea at that time, he nevertheless endorsed it.

84 years on, on 9 March, the Swiss Society, whose treasurer is Marc Desaulles, took up this challenge by launching in a national newspaper the FondsGoetheanum (www.fondsgoetheanum.ch/en/home/). Focused on specific areas of practical activity beginning with farming, the FondsGoetheanum functions much as the World Wildlife Fund – as a means whereby individual citizens can freely give money for the work of the Goetheanum.

Along with the Anthroposophical Society owning Weleda, this development clearly carries Rudolf Steiner's imprimatur. Moreover, if one makes an image of the Anthroposophical Society as being in receipt of freely given money for research on the one hand and an investment vehicle for the practical outcomes of Anthroposophy on the other, one can see very directly a world in which neither credit crunches nor the manipulated circumstances to which such things belong would arise.

Young Economist Course

In July, Tiemen Woutersen is part of a group putting on a three-day course at the Goetheanum concerning the teaching of economics to young people. The idea behind the Young Economist Course is to let successful and experienced Anthroposophical businessmen and scholars give a living picture of the Anthroposophical thoughts and practices concerning business and economics. Topics will include the development of living thinking in economics, the law of true price, threefolding, the fundamental social law, the balance between idealism and realism in Anthroposophical business. The course is especially intended for students who study economics and (young) people who are active in business. However, everyone with a strong interest in economics is welcome to attend.

See www.anthromedia.com/articles/economics/events/?L=21

Steiner in the City of London

Arthur Edwards has recently been accepted as a PhD Candidate at England's Buckingham University, where his supervisor is also the financial advisor to the Bank of England. His thesis asks the direct question: Does Rudolf Steiner's concept of three kinds of money have practical relevance for today's monetary policy? This is part of a concerted activity in the UK to bring Steiner into modern policy debates in the mainstream world.

* For all enquiries and comments, please write to economics@goetheanum.org.