



The meeting of poles depends on us

Marc Desaulles

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Living together becomes difficult as the anti-social character of individualization in modern society takes over and prevents us from meeting. At the same time, a multiplicity of viewpoints leads to all kinds of life projects which often collide. In the world at large, this leads to today's armed conflicts with their unspeakable suffering and desolation. In the case of the anthroposophical movement, it leads to internal strife and the development of opposing actions that cause us to lose sight of the wonderful perspectives that anthroposophy provides, and diverts us from the tasks that fall to us when faced with the rapid and dramatic developments of a civilization that has lost track of the meaning of things and facts.

I don't think it is by increasing the administrative and statutory 'apparatus' of the Anthroposophical Society that we will become better suited to promoting a brighter human future. Indeed, I would say there is very little to modify in the actual constitution of the Society! It is elsewhere that we must concentrate our attention and focus our efforts – by working on our way of seeing and doing. And through our own commitment to this task. Statutory or not, even if it is agreed by a majority in a general assembly, any rule that we want to fix and then obey is an instrument of the past, and unsuitable for our consciousness soul time. In other words, let us be careful: let's not let statutes dictate our behaviour; first let's change our own ways of being and doing. And only then if need be, adapt the constitution – as we still can't live without it.

Threefold. Yes, but how?

I have always felt uneasy when hearing people talk of the threefoldness of the anthroposophical movement in terms of the School of Spiritual Science, then, outside in the world, the fields of application, and in the middle, the Anthroposophical Society. This image comes up very often, it is almost omnipresent. And yet, in my soul it resonates like an abstraction.

Thinking like this is perhaps even what led us to the situation in which we now find ourselves: one that prevents the ordering impulse of the 1923/24 Christmas Conference from influencing the Society, and so separates it from the flow of life of anthroposophical activities, and diverts us into sectarianism. Rudolf Steiner spoke about this danger already in April 1919: 'I have been asked whether threefoldness could not be introduced within our Anthroposophical Society, by creating three distinct domains, an economic life, a rights life and a spiritual life. One can very well formulate such thoughts, while belonging to our movement with great conviction, in all good honour. And yet (...) to think that our society can organise itself in a tripartite manner, as a sect would do, means that one has understood nothing of my teaching on the social question.'¹

Approaching threefolding requires a completely different route. It begins by distinguishing polarities, then looking for where they meet, a middle element that is often of a completely different nature. We find an example *par excellence* in the words of the Foundation Stone: "you live in the limbs" on the one hand; "you live in the resting head" on the other hand, two opposite places in the body. But the third, "you live in the beat of heart and lungs", is first of all not a place in the body, but a momentum, an activity: a pulsating. The third element is not of the same nature as the other two! In the same spirit, the first Goetheanum did not have three domes, but only two. It was polar: the small and the large. The third element has to be sought elsewhere, in the meeting between the stage and the hall, in the shared activity of speaking and listening. Or, to take a very different example from the field of medicine, Cardiodoron is essentially composed of two plants, also polar: Donkey Thistle and Primrose, meeting through a third, toxic one, Black Henbane, which would be a poison if it were not highly diluted, one could say, activated.

This principle of a polarity transcended by meeting in the middle, which becomes movement and life – that is the key to threefolding.

¹ *The Spiritual Background of the Social Question*. Rudolf Steiner, Zürich, 14 April 1919 (GA 190).

The Society and the School

What of this polarity in the anthroposophical movement? Without looking too hard, one can find it in the founding statutes of the Society. Its social architecture is like that of the first Goetheanum with its two domes: two spaces of polar qualities, that of the Anthroposophical Society and that of the School of Spiritual Science, with two kinds of members – some willing to know more about anthroposophy, others willing to represent anthroposophy in the world.

How is the meeting established in this case? Let us look first at the situation of those responsible in each of these spaces. On the side of the School, there is a college of section leaders, who, through a form still more implicit than explicit, together assume responsibility for the leadership of the School. On the side of the Society, there is the Vorstand, which undertakes its administration, since 2011 with its members confirmed at regular intervals by the members in general assembly. These two groups of people are called to lead respectively and autonomously the School of Spiritual Science and the Anthroposophical Society. What then happens when they meet? They form the management of the Goetheanum, and take care of the life and influence of the activities there: a centre for research work, conferences and archives, receiving visitors, looking after the grounds. In short, a host of activities that embody and manifest the cultural potential of anthroposophy when concentrated in one place – as a field of application.

If we broaden our horizon, we can find the same pattern. We can think of active members of the School specializing in a particular field – of medicine or agriculture, for example. They become involved in life by opening a medical practice or running a farm. They arouse interest around them through their practical work, their practice, giving rise to people discovering a relation to anthroposophy. Isn't this an echo of the 'mother house' with its two domes with their different qualities: professional commitment representing the anthroposophical 'cause'² met by recognition of this in its surroundings? Each time, as it were, a small Goetheanum living in the world?

What, then, of the fields of application 'outside in the world'? I don't see them outside the organization of the School and the Society, added as if to make a threesome, but in fact separated from both. No, the fields of activity are born through the meeting precisely of the two poles School and Society. In this sense, the fields of activity are themselves the very means whereby the anthroposophical movement fertilizes modern civilization – each time replicating or echoing, and so reinforcing, the Christmas Conference.

It's because I live with this image of the anthroposophical movement that I feel uneasiness every time I hear about the Anthroposophical Society as the middle element of a threefolded arrangement. I believe this image is false, and its effect is far from trivial: it separates in thought the Society and the anthroposophical movement, a thought which – like any thought, even the most abstract – ends up becoming a social reality.

Part of the difficulty we have with questions concerning our constitution originates in this abstraction. The first thing, therefore, is to take seriously the polarity between School and Society, but also to recognise the self-evident fact that one pole cannot have power over another. Otherwise, it is no wonder that many members of the Society seek to control the life of the School from a general assembly. The error is however striking.

Two streams differentiated

Once this overall picture of the organization of the School and Society has been sketched, one can take a further step. Two streams share one completely different dynamic in the School. As also, although more difficult to perceive, in the Society. Rudolf Steiner's 'grid' drawing of December 27, 1923 makes this clear:

Two gestures meet there. There is the one gesture of *horizontal* lines distinguishing between the Anthroposophical Society and the three classes of the School. And there is a second gesture of *vertical* lines differentiating the Sections. By their different directions, these gestures express dimensions that have

² The German word is 'Sache', which is variously understood as 'thing', 'matter', and 'cause'. Here, cause is used, but one might also think in terms of 'for the sake of Anthroposophia', which in German translates as for her willing. In this sense, to be a 'representant' (the French word used by Steiner) can be understood as doing one's best to do her bidding, to aligning one's will with hers. – CHB.

nothing to do with each other. And yet they intersect and are thus called upon to interact. What are these two gestures?

The vertical gesture one can discover prefigured in the deed of December 15, 1911 establishing, to use the provisional name given to it, a ‘Society for a Theosophical Art and Way of Life.’³ During a very special lecture by Rudolf Steiner, roles are interpreted (this is the term used) to different personalities for branches of public life, arts in general, the art of painting, architecture, music, literature. It is specified that, under the protectorate of the individuality of Christian Rosenkreutz, a *way of working* is established that cannot be expressed, because in doing so we would distort its character, as if one were to say the words, “I am silent.” . One can see here a germ of what will only come true later with the sections of the School of Spiritual Science. How very different this *way of working* must be than one defined by statutes.

This attempt by Rudolf Steiner did not succeed. However, we find – and this is certainly not by chance – a link through several of the people involved in the first board of directors of the ‘Johannesbau Verein’, the association created the same year to assume the land ownership, construction and financing of what would become the Goetheanum. There were less than ten of them called on to bear this great responsibility; they alone had the right to vote. When in 1918 this association was renamed, it is not surprising, therefore, to find a reference to the School: ‘Association of the Goetheanum of the School of Spiritual Science’, prefiguring here also the work of the sections.

It is characteristic of this vertical gesture, which we can call Rosicrucian, to find a small number of people, chosen for their proven abilities, experts in their field and committed to a *way of working*.

The horizontal gesture is completely different. Its horizontality suggests a gesture open to everyone, which bears a cosmopolitan signature linked to the spirit of our time; we can call it Michaelic.

This gesture of openness to the world was already expressed in 1912 during the founding of the Anthroposophical Society in Cologne, Germany, as evidenced by this extract from its principles: ‘this society is open to anyone who considers as a basis for cooperation, a common spirituality to all human souls, however different they may be in terms of faith, nation, conditions, gender, etc.’ The same gesture is restated in article 4 of the statutes approved during the 1923/24 Christmas Congress: ‘Anyone can become a member, without regard to nationality, social standing, religion, scientific or artistic conviction, who considers as justified the existence of an institution such as the Goetheanum in Dornach, in its capacity as a School of Spiritual Science.’

This gesture of openness based on the individual is confirmed again regarding access to the First Class of the School. It is up to each member to take the initiative. There is no question here of being called or selected! It is out of one’s own decision that the request to join is made, expressing oneself willing to become a representative of the anthroposophical ‘cause’. And the School in which we then enter is named the School of Michael.

It is characteristic of this horizontal, Michaelic gesture, that one finds the greatest imaginable openness and that decisions concerning joining it are made by those individuals themselves.

In this way, this drawing on the blackboard, as abstract as it is at first sight, starts to make sense. How, though, does the meeting happen here of the Rosicrucian stream and the Michaelic stream?

An unsuspected potential depends on us

It is up to us, as members, to make this meeting happen.

Within the School, relying on the horizontal gesture, even though things are beginning to change, we still talk too often as if the School were the contents of the First Class. In doing so, we forget an existential component. One cannot enter the School without also being part of the General Anthroposophical Section (Section for General Anthroposophy), that is to say, without integrating in oneself this Rosicrucian way of

³ *Rudolf Steiner's Endowment: Centenary Reflections on His Attempt for a Theosophical Art and Way of Life, 15 December 1911*, Virginia Sease, Temple Lodge Publishing, London 2012.

working, which after 1924 can be formulated as willing to be a worthy representative of the anthroposophical 'cause'. But even more widespread is another situation: starting from our link with the vertical gesture of belonging to one section, we forget the other. It is not possible to enter a section without being part – in principle at least – of the most open society there is, which asks no more than that something like the Goetheanum be considered justified. Both by the first attitude and by the second, we obstruct the meeting of the two streams within the School of Spiritual Science, hindering its impulses from entering the world in the way they could – at the best making this difficult, at worst having no effect at all.

Within the Society, we also find these two gestures. But it's more complicated, and here one finds the source of most questions concerning the constitution. There, the horizontal Michael gesture of the Anthroposophical Society of the Christmas Meeting 'rubs shoulders' with the contrasting Rosicrucian vertical gesture of the Goetheanum Association, further renamed on February 8, 1925 as today's General Anthroposophical Society. Let us recall in passing that the clinic, the publications and the administration of the Anthroposophical Society were integrated into it, such that these enterprises had section leaders at their head. The changes of February 8, 1925 are often thought to be an error, but I think the opposite is true. I see this complex matter as the last, perhaps desperate, act of Rudolf Steiner to bring together in the Anthroposophical Society also the Michaelic with the Rosicrucian stream as he did for the School.

To move forward, we must rediscover how to distinguish these two qualities in today's Society through the way we are members of it. Legally, there is only one society listed in the Trade Register: the General Anthroposophical Society. On the one hand, even if it no longer shows it explicitly or statutorily, the Society has the Michaelic quality of being horizontal, open, cosmopolitan, alive to each member taking initiatives in complete freedom, without however constraining anyone else through the exercise of this freedom. Nothing in the usual and formal law of associations belongs here. On the other hand, and here too even if it is not explicitly or statutorily apparent, it has the vertical Rosicrucian quality necessary for undertaking entrepreneurial initiatives and dealing with real estate ownership and financial affairs, where only those, because of their know-how relative to the tasks to be accomplished, have a true right (and also a duty) to decide matters. If we follow the evolution of these two gestures in the history of our Society – not literally, but in their spirit – then we can see that neither the first horizontal quality nor the second vertical one justifies the obstinate insistency on asserting a right to vote as a member as used today.

Ultimately, only we, the members, can allow the Michaelic stream and the Rosicrucian stream to meet in the Anthroposophical Society so that its mission of peace can ray out into, and become fruitful for, the world. This may well entail changes to statutes, but we will not arrive properly at this possibility other than by renouncing our will to exercise power where this does not have its rightful place, and learning a new *way of working* together based solely on trust.

Ever and again, we will then draw from this the strength to engage and commit ourselves

*So that good may be,
What from our hearts we would found
And from our heads direct
With single purpose.*