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TRANSFORMATIONS OF NATURE

Science, Knowledge and Freedom in the Early Thinking of Rudolf Steiner.

Perspectives on Waldorf Education in the light of the History of Ideas

Waldorf Education is based on the world view that Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) developed to a wide-ranging anthroposophical movement in the first decades of the 20th century. This thesis takes as its departure the early thinking of Rudolf Steiner that precedes anthroposophy, and its main purpose is to uncover the tradition of ideas represented in Steiner's early life and which, in different ways, have emerged in the practice of Waldorf Education.

Through systematic analysis I attempt to bring to light different aspects of Steiner's early thinking: his concept of science, his epistemological starting points and his philosophy of freedom. By departing from J. W. Goethe's qualitative concept of science, Steiner strove in his early works to formulate a monistic world view which appears to be closely related to the Romantic Movement and its philosophy of nature. Characteristic traits of his thinking are, on the one hand, a critique of a one-sided enlightenment and, on the other hand, an aspiration to see the world as a living organic unity. Human beings can, by developing our intuitive faculties, get a deeper understanding of the indissoluble relationship between man and nature.

Against this background Steiner's early thinking can be read as a special kind of romantic development narrative. Steiner's early thinking also opens the way for romantic perspectives on Waldorf Education. It appears that many central aims and conceptions in Waldorf Education can be illuminated by the epistemological perspective upon which Steiner elaborated early in his life. An organic curriculum, phenomenological didactics and high ideal of freedom can be considered seen as educational applications of conceptions that played an important role in Goethe and his age. Thus, Waldorf Education provides in our contemporary society an exceptional set of educational values: a holistic education with romantic undertones.

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