

Aesthetic Knowledge as a Source for the Main Lesson

by

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The main lesson of the Waldorf school is different from a double lesson. It is a unity of three parts, composed like a sonata.

The classical sonata form is three movements. The first movement, the “Head movement,” presents the theme, forms it out, turns it around or mirrors it, submits it to many dismemberments and distortions (*Verrückungen*), and through the variations makes the listener once more aware of the drama of these transformations. The second movement brings a totally new atmosphere, in a slower tempo and a changed key, however, still totally related with the musical “substance” of the first movement. Here the task is less a working through of the theme than the direct touching of the inner space of the soul. Finally, in the third movement, the restrained drive for movement is let go. Quickly, the rhythmically accentuated, thematically light-footed, final movement plays itself out. Here too it arises from what was laid down in the first movement, but it still has something of its own. Like something freshening, the playful *scherzo* (joke) that often slips in, so may no main lesson go by without the weight of the content, at least once being lightened and relaxed by laughter.

The main lesson and the sonata are both artistic compositions in which the three sections go out from a middle point organically. They are not simply put together in an additive way, but arise out of transformation of the foregoing. Between the sonata movements are small pauses, but without interruption of the musical flow, instead a deep drawing in of the breath, a short repositioning of oneself, a thoughtful clearing of the throat. The applause and coughing come only after the final movement. There lies recess.

We begin to realize, that these three parts, which build a whole, are somehow related to the three parts of the human organism, which is why the sonata is so healthy. The main lesson too should be health-giving, not only instructive. We can understand it as an aesthetic phenomenon, like the sonata. Rudolf Steiner spoke of the ‘art of education,’ and practice shows that the main lesson must be artistically formed. With this the question is raised about a kind of ‘aesthetic’ concept for school teaching. The concept ‘aesthetic’ is used for a process which is artistic and which has as a product, a piece of art. How do I teach artistically?

The three sections of the main lesson are determined by the threefold constitution of the human being, in which the bodily division into the nerve-sense system (head), rhythmic system (chest) and metabolic-limb system are related to the differentiation of the soul in thinking, feeling and willing. This threefoldness is also related to the three steps of the logical process —conclusion, judgment, and concept—which Steiner (1919) presented in his ninth lecture of *The Study of Man*. Here, he reversed the usual Aristotelian logic and put the word conclusion in a provocative way, at the beginning of the logical operation. It does not mean ‘conclusion’ in the sense of ‘end’ and also not in the sense of *conclusio*. It does not mean a thought process has come to an end and a deduction is being made. It refers more to the process wherein the human being and the world encounter each other, where phenomenon and sense perception meet or where the phenomenon appears through the world colliding with the human being without swallowing him or carrying her away in a sleep condition. World will pushes up against the dark self will, which the human being carries out in his embodiment. The ‘I’ touches through the sense perception, those deeper levels of being, from which all phenomena press into appearance. And the human being does not fade away in that great fire; instead, because she experience herself so closely connected to the world, she closes herself off, protects herself from becoming one with the world in the act of conclusion. Goethe expressed it

When I at last come to rest with the archetypal phenomenon, it is still only resignation; but there remains a great difference, if I resign at the limits of humanity, or within a hypothetical limitation of my narrow minded individuality. (Goethe 1817, Verse 138)

Yes, the conclusion is the amazing moment of phenomena emergence, before defined representation (mental picture), before the wandering judgment, before that ‘hypothetical limitation.’ Steiner (1919) states laconically: “The lion is a conclusion.”

The judgment links itself to the conclusion, or, the act of the conclusion awakens the movement of judging. And at the end of the judgments—weighing up, comparison, affirmation, and so forth—stands the concept, which created the quiet in Goethe’s soul. The fiery seconds of the conclusion stand in polarity to the constancy of the worked out, not misunderstandable word formulations of the thought form. Now that the long practiced, joyfully suffered syllogism has been overthrown, and so that the old meaning of *conclusio* does not shadow the ‘conclusion,’ the conclusion stands in the middle of the main lesson. Something new from the content of the main lesson is presented, in the most various ways: A physics experiment is demonstrated, a historical event is described, a botanical drawing is observed, a new problem type from trigonometry is presented or a

literary text is read, and so forth. The teacher is active, the students take it in, silently. They do not write, they are totally sense organ. In this moment the pure inner will activity of the students prevails. The emerging appearance of phenomena is prioritized above all understanding. No question is allowed. The world touches the student, who lets him/herself be touched. The student becomes 'world' and not only an 'observer of the world.' The student forgets himself and is totally 'in' the thing (interest).

The total absorption in the Archetypal phenomena sets up in us a kind of anxiety: "We feel our inadequacy." Goethe (1817, Verse 137)

This does not mean that there is always something of the archetypal phenomena in the teacher's presentation. However, the emergence of a phenomenon has something fundamentally numinous, and the feeling of inadequacy awakens the need to judge, to take a position, to reject or to become enthused. So, after the teacher has completed his presentation, there begins the judgment and the third section of the main lesson 'sonata' is played. It ends open-ended and the students go with the opened up and unsolved problem into the recess. The Waldorf teacher tries to take into account that in the coming night the noticed riddles are taken into the sleep. What that means, is 'withdrawn from our usual consciousness,' and shall not be further explained here. What matters here is that, when the students appear in the main lesson the next morning, they are in a completely changed relationship to the content of yesterday. With quiet, almost serenity they now go with the teacher into the thoughtful business of working the concept to the phenomenon. That is the first movement of the new main lesson, which again is followed by the 'conclusion' event and the third movement of judgment. Each main lesson begins, therefore, with the concept part, which works with that which has arisen from yesterday. This gives the sequence: Concept—Conclusion.

Judgment

The logical cognition process on a topic, however, runs with the structure: Conclusion—Judgment—Concept. The night is taken in between Judgment and Concept. In this way there are always three days of main lessons following each other that belong together. When the teacher forms the main lesson with this in mind, there lies within it a spiritual dynamic of its own.

From where does the nourishment of this process proceed? It comes from the event in the middle part of the main lesson, from the encounter of the student with the reality of the world, not from a speaking about a somehow imagined reality. Everything depends on whether or not an actual 'connection' (*schliessen*)—a happening (conclusion)—happens for the student. Out of this insight arises the task of furthering the concept of 'aesthetics' in relation to the main lesson. That it is related in its structure to the musical sonata, makes it,

when successful, an artwork. However, the actual aesthetic process is grounded in the being of the conclusion.

To understand this it is necessary to release the concept of aesthetic out of its traditional frame of meaning. There have been a series of researchers who have tried to do this in the last few years in connection to A. G. Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (Baumgarten 1750/58).

Wolfgang Iser (1990) described how, in the time after Baumgarten, "there was a restriction of the concept of aesthetic predominantly to art or even to only what was beautiful. That, in my opinion needs to be turned around today." (Iser 1990, p. 9). Especially the work of Hans Rudolf Schweizer has brought recognition of Baumgarten's original aesthetic concept and paved the way to an understanding of aesthetics, not as a theory of beautiful art, but as a philosophy of sense experience. He has formulated Baumgarten's fundamental principles, into the language of our time in the following way:

1. Aesthetics is not a specialized area within the whole of life's process, but the basis for the experience of reality.
2. Aesthetics brings the unbroken phenomenality of 'things' to validity. It is, as 'pure phenomena,' the unrepeatable, individual happening in time.
3. Aesthetic cognition is a purely intuitive cognition, which at first remains without conceptual treatment. It is that knowing on which one must rely in daily life.
4. Aesthetics is a field of relationships between the human being and the world, subject and object. If one denies it having any objective meaning whatsoever and ascribe to it a simple subjective feeling or a subjective 'forming power,' then one has lost its content and its being." (Schweizer, 1976, p. 74)

With this we understand that the happening of the 'conclusion' is the moment of aesthetic experience (Barth 1999, p. 111). Here there is no limitation to a specialist area; this is not only about the observation of art! Here we glimpse the existential moment of world encounter in the pure perception. We are standing at the spring for all teaching.

In reality, can there be such a moment in the practice of a school? Is not each pedagogical activity narrowed to the discursive symbolism of a science-orientated theoretical cognition, which limits necessarily 'the life' out of school—something, which in fact all the students of the world experience when they are older than twelve years? The concept of 'conclusion' as the moment of the aesthetic condition (Schiller, 1793/94, Letter 20 and 21), in which the world and human being stand before each other naked, really means that just in the

center of the lesson, 'life' touches the student in the most intimate way, much more strongly and purely than in ordinary existence. This ordinary existence presents itself mainly simplified for trivial aims or modified through desires of all kinds and is seldom presented unclouded. Generally, the everyday person goes on his way in a fog in regard to the meaning of things. Actually, more than that, he does not even know the names of the plants which grow in front of his door. So then, this center of the main lesson is always a special 'space' in which the beings of things can show themselves: the shiny silver pearl of molten tin, a quince leaf, the description of the sea battle of Salamis, or the sudden illumination of the connection between the pentagram and the golden mean. The objects of teaching are not won from conventional ideas of a canon for general education, but from a sense for the 'symbolic meaning' (Cassirer, 1982, p. 235) of things or processes, which as archetypal phenomena of the experience of meaning can speak—in a more fundamental way to the sense cognition of the student.

If such a demand is hard enough to fulfill in a natural science lesson, then lurking in the humanities subjects are even more awful conditions, which threaten to lure the teacher off the track. Chief among these conditions is the opinion and the longing that everything must be 'interpreted.' What is the meaning of Hamlet? To this question, there can be as little a satisfying answer as to the question of the meaning of a mountain stream after a thunderstorm (cf. Schadewald, 1974, p. 206). Yes, but how can we then read one of the greatest tragedies of antiquity, with our students and allow them to experience directly what Hölderlin tried to express in the words:

The presentation of the tragic depends mainly on the unspeakable, of how God and the human being are paired, and the boundless nature power unites in rage with the most inwardly human, thereby understanding that the boundlessness becoming one, purifies itself through boundless separation.

The heart piece of our 11th grade main lessons, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*, reveals most clearly what is actually demanded. *Parzival* is not a book 'about the Grail.' In fact, it is not a 'book' at all, as the author emphasizes: "Who wishes to hear of further adventure, should please not take it as a 'book.'" (Wolfram von Eschenbach, verse 115, 25–116, 4). The reading of this book is itself an approach to the Grail.

Rudolf Steiner said: "No one gets near to the Grail with words or indeed with philosophical speculation. The Grail is approached, if one allow, all these words to be transformed into sensibilities (*Empfindungen*)." (Steiner 1914, p. 109)

The transformation of words into sensibilities in the soul of the teacher during his/ her preparation allows a process to begin, which allows reality to emerge for the student. The student communes with this reality in the 'conclusion' happening of the main lesson. Then finally, comes the scene, in which Parzival redeems the suffering of Amfortas, with the question: "Uncle,

what ails thee?”(Wolfram von Eschenbach, verse 795, 29). This question is the archetypal phenomenon. To it there is no answer. It heals directly.

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