

## **From Speaking Well to Speaking Good. Rudolf Steiner's Contribution to an "Ethics of Speaking"**

**Philip Kovce**

*Humboldt University of Berlin, Department of Philosophy, Germany*

**ABSTRACT.** This essay is the fruit of work on Rudolf Steiner's contribution to an "ethics of speaking", a topic that had lain fallow for almost 100 years. The article contains an overview of the three most important courses on public speaking conducted by Steiner. It situates these courses in their respective historical contexts and concentrates on their crucial thematic motifs, before ultimately connecting them with the ethical impulses in Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom*. These remarks must necessarily remain sketchy. They can nevertheless provide renewed impetus both for contemplation of Steiner's lecturing style and for a new critical appraisal of these texts, all of which were originally delivered via the spoken word.

*Keywords:* Ethical individualism, linguistic turn, philosophy of freedom, pragmatism, public speaking, rhetoric, social threefolding

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG.** Dieser Essay widmet sich Rudolf Steiners Beitrag zu einer "Ethik des Sprechens", der fast 100 Jahre unbeachtet blieb. Der Aufsatz sichtet die drei wichtigsten Rednerkurse Steiners und konzentriert sich vor deren historischem Hintergrund auf entscheidende inhaltliche Motive, die er mit den ethischen Impulsen aus Steiners *Philosophie der Freiheit* verbindet. In ihrer Kürze müssen die Ausführungen skizzenhaft bleiben. Doch sie können dazu anregen, Steiners Vortragsstil erneut ins Auge zu fassen und die besondere Wirkung dieser ursprünglich gesprochenen Texte neu zu würdigen.

*Schlüsselwörter:* Ethischer Individualismus, linguistic turn, Philosophie der Freiheit, Pragmatismus, Redekunst, Rhetorik, soziale Dreigliederung

### **Speaking on Speaking**

Basically, the scenario has the impact of a bad joke: The year is 2008, media-favorite and philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has been bestowed with the Cicero Speaker's Award by the Publishing House of the Deutsche Wirtschaft AG. The award ceremony is a gathering of dignitaries in which board member Helmut Graf, Gert Ueding, professor for rhetoric at the University of Tübingen, and artist Bazon Brock take the rostrum as keynote speakers, and read their prepared texts out without a trace of enthusiasm. Not for a single moment – not even when the person of honor himself is standing on the stage directly next to the tenured professor for rhetoric, poised to receive the certificate and the bust of the Roman rhetor – does Uedings raise his eyes from his manuscript to meet the gaze either of the audience or the addressee.

Change of scene: "I once heard a lecture given by the famous scientist Helmholtz in a major assembly. His delivery was as follows: He pulled his manuscript out of his left pocket and read it out. Afterwards, a journalist came up to me and asked 'Why wasn't this lecture just printed out and a copy of it given to each person present? Then Helmholtz could have just gone around and shaken hands with everyone'.

This combination handout/handshake would probably have been worth more to the listeners than being sentenced to sit on those awfully hard chairs and having something read out to them for a longer period of time than it would have taken them simply to read it for themselves” (Steiner, 1984, pp. 12 f.).

The situation Rudolf Steiner suffered during the Helmholtz lecture and the one endured by the guests at the ceremony in honor of Sloterdijk are by no means uncommon. As early as 1816, the long-forgotten philosopher and diplomat Adam Müller published twelve addresses *On Eloquence and its Deterioration in Germany*, in which he expressed his doubts concerning the success of most public speaking events, and lent particular importance to “the moral character” (Müller, 1816, p. 171) of public speaking. Such a remark is revealing. After all, it hints at the fact that whenever a public speaking situation fails, there is more at stake than a mere aesthetic or logical problem; it is every bit as much a matter of ethics, as well. But how to go about schooling our overtaxed faculty of attention for the ethical dimension of speaking? How does an “ethics of speaking” (Steiner, 1984, p. 38) even function?

### *Course on Promoting Political Ideas*

Rudolf Steiner’s three lecture cycles devoted to these questions all took place in 1921, and are just as different from each other in terms of their content as they are in terms of the respective circumstances under which they came about. On the first two days of that year, there was a meeting in Stuttgart between Steiner and persons from Upper Silesia who advocated the idea of Social Threefolding. The following March 20<sup>th</sup> had been set as the date on which a referendum was to take place as to whether Upper Silesia would belong to Germany or to Poland. Instead of this pseudo-alternative, it was important to Steiner that genuine solutions be sought in the spirit of Social Threefolding, as Steiner-editor Walter Kugler remembers: “... after all, the idea of threefolding implies that what will matter in the future is not a continuation of the traditional principle of national statehood, but rather the creation of new social territories, carried by an intermeshing economic life, a democratic legislative life, and a self-administered and independent intellectual, spiritual, and cultural life” (Steiner, 1986, p. 316).

The guests from Upper Silesia could only stay in Stuttgart for two days, since they had a campaign planned, to be launched on January 4<sup>th</sup>. And so only two lectures (including question-and-answer sessions directly following the lectures) could take place, both of which Steiner held in the forenoon. In addition, he issued a *Call to the Rescue of Upper Silesia*, which was to be published in both German and Polish. As to the “ethics of speaking”, it is worth noting that in the course of the two lectures Steiner touches only once – at the beginning of the first lecture – on elements of lecturing. Otherwise, he dwells on political, historical and geographic reflections. The contributions in the concluding discussion sessions, made by persons asking questions and by Steiner himself, follow this direction as well. At the beginning of the course, though, he does make the following – virtually programmatic – statement: “The first thing we need today ... is the conviction that for anyone genuinely wishing to restore health to the present-day civilization, it is no longer possible to establish links with old forms of the public life. And the second thing I would designate by saying: Today we need substance in the material we use to promote political ideas, real substance” (Steiner, 1986, pp. 198 f.).

Were the listeners lacking in substance, such that Steiner felt he needed to create it first? Or was he dealing with expert speakers to whom he needed to speak not so much about delivering speeches, as on Social Threefolding? Whatever the case: in this miniature cycle, given under enormous time pressure, political and economic discussions predominate – likely also because Steiner, in an effort to resolve post-war and pre-war problems of European scale, hoped to utilize the politically charged situation in Upper Silesia to achieve a precedent-setting breakthrough. However, “these efforts met with no success ... in the hate-scarred, warlike situation in Upper Silesia” (Lindenberg, 2010, p. 449; cf.: Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, 1986, esp. pp. 4-10).

### *Course on Public Speaking*

The differences between the Course on Promoting Political Ideas and the Course on Public Speaking, which was held a scant two months later, extend even into the outer circumstances under which they were held. Whereas in the beginning it was a number of Upper Silesians to whom Steiner gave instruction suited to their immediate situation, some fifty interested parties – fifty less than he had hoped for – assembled for the Course on Public Speaking, which took place from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 1921 (Steiner, 1986, p. 315; cf.: Lindenberg, 2011, p. 730; Lindenberg, 2010, p. 454). After several attempts to set up a course for public speakers within the scope of the *Bund für Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus* (“Association for Threefolding the Social Organism”, founded in 1919) had failed due to lack of participation and to excessive demands on Steiner, the cycle envisioned for so long was now finally able to take place. Nevertheless, Walter Kugler is right in saying that this cycle “include[d] valuable ideas for preparing speeches to be held in public, but [its] main focus [was] a basic introduction to the problematic of the threefolding of the social organism” (Steiner, 1986, p. 315).

Much as the two courses resemble one another in this respect, though, the later one (also held in Stuttgart) contains fewer direct questions pertaining to the delivery of public lectures; Steiner seems much rather to want to sensitize his listeners to “how we can gain a stance toward the tasks at hand” (Steiner, 1986, p. 17). To be sure, this question is by no means irrelevant to public speaking – on the contrary: precisely the *attitude* toward speaking figures in eminently with the *influence* a speech is able to exert. But it must be borne in mind that what is peddled as Steiner’s course in public speaking is no kind of instruction in classical (cf.: Aristotle, 1999; Baumgarten, 1998; Fuhrmann, 2007; Knappe, 2000; Lausberg, 2008; Ueding, 1995; Ueding & Steinbrink, 2005) or modern (cf.: Barthes, 1988; Blumenberg, 2001; Hetzel, 2011; Lusseyran, 2003; Peters, 2011; Tucholsky, 1993; Ueding, 2009) rhetorical customs, but rather a discussion of Social Threefolding. The core of the course is not coaching for speakers, but much rather the question depicted in the original German title of the corresponding volume of from Steiner’s complete works: *How Does One Actively Promote the Threefolding Impulse of the Social Organism?*

While the third, fourth, sixth, eighth and ninth lectures deal with economic and sociological problems in current and historical contexts, the remaining lectures contain resolute indications pertaining to compositional and mental conditions prerequisite to successful public speaking. In the very first lecture, Steiner makes clear that “genuine love of the cause ... and love of humanity” (Steiner, 1986, p. 19) are the pillars of such speaking. At the same time, he demands that “right thinking replace false thinking” (Steiner, 1986, p. 21). The problems facing humankind are problems in thinking, and cannot be solved in the insular fields of economics or politics, but only comprehensively. Furthermore, Steiner characterizes deficits both in the capacity of spiritually productive insight and in insight into the needs of others as a plight typical of the times, a plight every public speaker needs to bear in mind.

In the course of the second lecture, Steiner unfolds the thought that not intellectual logic, but rather experience and observation, thus references to concrete events, provide the foundations for judgments people make today. From this he derives the advantages of speaking in pictures and the superiority of historical example over theoretical expertise, and demands that the lecturer make use of them (Steiner, 1986, pp. 36-53).

The fifth lecture stands out inasmuch as it is the only one that deals throughout with methodical questions relevant to public speaking: with avoiding linguistic repetitions and allowing repetitions in content; with fashioning the speech’s beginning and conclusion; with the meaning of the rhythms of speaking and the attitude of the speaker; with the sense of responsibility the speaker is required to develop; with avoiding pedantic definitions in favor of vivid and descriptive characterizations; with the necessity of using key *sentences* rather than key *words* to prepare a speech; with confrontational disputes based on hostilities directed toward one; with an inner connection to the impulse of Anthroposophy (Steiner, 1986, pp. 93-109).

In the seventh lecture, besides criticizing strongly the “era of the slogan” (Steiner, 1986, p. 129; cf.: Steiner, 1960, pp. 146-148), Steiner once again underscores the necessity of connecting depictions of Social Threefolding with the rest of Anthroposophical activities – at the same time renouncing any and all crusader’s mania.

In the tenth and final lecture, he enjoins: “You have to get people to have trust, to have faith in their own being and substance. ... The way you do this will, today perhaps, depend on your abilities. But if you give yourselves over to the cause with good will, it won’t be long before not you are dependent on your abilities, but rather *they* will be taken hold of by the exigency of the times. And you will grow beyond yourselves precisely by bringing faith to people, so that in place of unbelief in the human being, faith in humanity will take hold of them. This is what I wanted to say to you today before you go forth to give your lectures” (Steiner, 1986, p. 194).

Not only here, but throughout the entire cycle Steiner seems to want not only to school his listeners in speaking, but first and foremost to call on them and encourage them to stand up for the Threefolding impulse *on their own responsibility*.

The people Steiner believed in and in whose engagement he placed his hopes set out after the cycle’s conclusion, and over the ensuing weeks gave about 200 lectures (Lindenberg, 2010, p. 454). “In net terms, the Echo was negative” (Lindenberg, 2011, p. 731), as Lindenberg succinctly states. Or, as Steiner himself puts it in more drastic terms on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1923: “There was this course I gave in public speaking before a horde was unleashed on the German public. Have a look at the resonance from the havoc wreaked by this onslaught! All the rubbish that was talked out there. Some of it far surpasses everything in the way of preposterousness” (Lindenberg, 2010, pp. 454 f.).

Whatever may have prolapsed in the way of thoughtless or incompetent scenes, “the very massive objective core” of this mobilization has been ascertained as follows: “the last attempt at a large-scale operation on behalf of Threefolding caused substantial damage” (Lindenberg, 2011, pp. 730 f.).

### *The Orientation Course*

The third of Steiner’s lecture cycles on the art of public speaking and Social Threefolding came about in October of 1921. This time it was two Swiss Anthroposophists, Willy Stokar and Willy Storrer, who, inspired by the courses that had taken place in Stuttgart, hosted a cycle in Dornach in the name of the *Schweizer Bund für Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus* (“Swiss Association for Threefolding the Social Organism”) and the *Bund für anthroposophische Hochschularbeit* (“Association for Anthroposophical Academic Activity”). On this occasion, from October 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup>, Steiner gave six lectures to an audience of 58 (Steiner, 1984, pp. 121 f.) on the topic of *Anthroposophy, Social Threefolding, and the Art of Lecturing* (Steiner, 1984).

The composition of this orientation course in six parts is an exact mirror image of the Stuttgart course on public speaking. Whereas in the latter only the fifth lecture – thus at about the middle of the cycle – is devoted explicitly to preparing public addresses, while this central lecture is framed by political and economic observations and admonitions, by contrast the Orientation Course deals only in the middle, in lectures three and four, with circumstances directly relevant to Switzerland. Otherwise, a concentrated mood predominates, in which the lecturer elucidates public speaking only sparsely in terms of short-term politics, and all the more under the aspect of anthropology (Kühlewind, 1991). To be sure, the connection between promotion of and reflection upon political ideas does come up repeatedly, but the main focus is clearly on the latter approach.

Moreover, Steiner goes beyond the topic of using rhetoric *in favor of Social Threefolding*, taking a step further to deal with its employment for *the promotion of Anthroposophy* as a new, overall cultural impulse. This as well makes for a depoliticisation of the Orientation Course, rendering it more of the anthropological metamorphosis of the political issue which was the cycle in Stuttgart; for here one has to do with the “soul-foundations of the art of speaking” (Lindenberg, 2010, p. 470). As was stated above: “Particularities concerning the formal elements of a lecture, such as sticking to key sentences (rather than key words), the formulation of the first sentence and the final one, stage fright etc., correspond to the remarks made in the fifth lecture of the Stuttgart course on public speaking” (Groddeck, 1972, p. 36).

Furthermore, this cycle clarifies in concrete detail the influence that speaking has on thinking, feeling and willing, and on the four-fold organization of the body. On this topic, Steiner cites that “what lifeless

bodies give off in the way of tones ... the ear hears in a more external way. Human speech, by contrast, is 'actually heard in such a way that the listener pays attention to what reaches the ear from within'. When a person listens to a lecture, it is not just with the ears, but with his or her own speech organ as well; indeed, 'the etheric body [of the listener; Ph. K.], while listening, is actually always speaking, and even doing eurythmy along with the speaker, actually executing movements that are fully analogous to those of eurythmy'" (Groddeck, 1972, p. 38).

The range of these lectures follows the actual chronology of a public lecture: the first lecture addresses preparations for the presentation of a speech, in addition to emphasizing the inner difference that separates the speaker and the listener. Ways of bridging this gap are explicated in the second lecture, which at the same time delineates historical epochs in which eloquence (aesthetics) and correct speaking (logic) formed the center of a person's experience of language. For present and future times, Steiner hints at ethical speaking as this center of language experience.

In the fifth and sixth lectures, as a follow-up to a number of remarks on the historical and in the current situation of Switzerland, Steiner classifies different styles of speaking (lyric style for the intellectual life, dramatic style for the juristic life, epic style for the economic life), develops a good number of speech exercises, drafts alternative sentence positions and uses of words, and in the end gets back at his point of departure – the discrepancy between the speaker and the listener – by citing listening *while speaking* as a capacity that is indispensable for the public speaker.

In the sixth lecture, finally, Steiner – ever and again in a humorous mood (Eppinger, 2000) – makes a case for energetic, courageous participation in the world process: "But above all what we need is energy, courage and insight, and interest in the grand events of the world! Not isolating oneself from the world, not weaving oneself into narrow interests, but being interested in everything that goes on in the whole world today. This puts wings on our words, it makes us proper co-workers in the field in which we have chosen to be active. It is in this sense, my dear friends, that I wish to have addressed you" (Steiner, 1984, p. 119).

## From Speaking Well to Speaking Good

Now that a few observations pertaining to the Course on Promoting Political Ideas, the Course on Public Speaking, and the Orientation Course have defined a field "that has barely" (Zander, 2007, p. 1345) or "for all intents and purposes not been documented at all" (Lindenberg, 2011, p. 730), I will endeavor to give a more systematic depiction of the suggestions as developed by Steiner in these three courses. As a guiding principle we will use a distinction, put in play by Steiner in the second Dornach lecture on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1921, between temporal epochs and timeless dimensions of aesthetic speaking, of correct speaking, and of ethical speaking.

This threefolding of speech and language can be deepened in different ways. For instance, the relationship between human beings and language can be examined on various *historical* levels: how does the incarnated subject relate to language in Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece or the Roman Republic (Steiner, 1985; cf.: Hiebel, 1965)? Steiner's epoch-making sketch on this topic – yet another thing he formulates in the Orientation Course – cannot be gone into in detail here, since our object of discussion with respect to the threefoldness of language is not the aspect of time (*chronos*), but rather the aspect of bringing something about (*kairos*), thus the situation in which these three dimensions shape a person's relationship to language – a relationship on which every public speaker exerts an active influence. The question is: How does one go about gaining a proper relationship to the proper dimension of language at the proper time?

### *Eloquence*

The first of the phenomena Steiner examines in the second lecture of the Orientation Course is eloquence, or speaking in an aesthetically pleasing or relevant manner, which, according to Steiner, predominated in the ancient Orient at a time in which the human race "first came to use thinking, and only after it had acquired the use of language" (Steiner, 1984, p. 32). Steiner asks – waiting for his own answer –: "How were people



expected to speak during this period, a time in which the thought, the content of sensing, snapped into place within language? They were expected to speak beautifully! That was the primary task: speaking in an aesthetically pleasing manner. This is why it is only possible to learn to speak in an aesthetically relevant or pleasing way by immersing oneself into the old manner of speaking. ... And beautiful elocution is definitely a talent that came to humanity from the Orient. One could put it this way: People were expected to speak beautifully to such degree that the actual ideal of speaking was singing, the singing of speech” (Steiner, 1984, p. 33).

Since today’s anthropological disposition no longer in the least corresponds to the archaic one, Steiner calls on his listeners to re-learn consciously these speech qualities for use in public speaking – for instance when he recommends speaking on issues of the life of spirit in a lyrical manner, that is, with enthusiasm. “Obviously, it must not be falsely-mystical, sentimental, artificially produced enthusiasm” (Steiner, 1984, p. 84).

To this end, no autosuggestive rituals of generating enthusiasm are required, but only soul sensitivity; a capacity of one’s own to become enthusiastic. To be sure, there are also technical, acoustic details that are part and parcel of speaking aesthetically, details that pertain to the words to be articulated. To equip oneself for this, Steiner suggests a sequence of practical exercises for the acquisition of capacities of articulation and modulation – such as “Klipp plapp plick glick / Klingt Klapperrichtig / Knatternd trappend / Rossegetrippel” (Steiner, 1984, p. 94).

Seeing language and speech as an aesthetic phenomenon and convincing oneself that as such a phenomenon they predominated an entire historical epoch and remain hallmarks – albeit increasingly fading ones – of language even today, this is the primary point of departure for a study of the aesthetics of speaking.

### *Correct Speaking*

Having dealt with aesthetic speaking, Steiner now turns toward a phenomenon that caused language to “become abstract” (Steiner, 1984, p. 35). The speaker finds his way into aesthetic language as one does into a “garment” (ibid.), which preserves its own objectivity; instead, language now seems more like “a second skin of the soul. ... I speak now of the level of speech at which what mattered most was not speaking aesthetically, but rather correctly or properly, not rhetoric and eloquence was what counted, but logic. At this level, grammar itself had reached such a high degree of logic that the forms of logic were simply developed, that is, abstracted from the grammatical forms – a process that gradually got underway in Aristotle’s time. Everything drifted together at that time: thought and word. The sentence became a person’s point of orientation for developing judgments. That being said, though, the judgment is actually merely situated in the sentence such that one no longer experiences it separately. Correct speaking, that became the main characterizing feature” (ibid.).

Even today, correct speaking is the chief characteristic of the human relationship to language and speech. Things like people’s penchant for all kinds of disputation over the meaning of words or for expressing one’s own subjective opinion or belief are achievements of the enlightenment – on the one hand. On the other hand, these achievements darken the light of the soul by situating thinking, as it were, within speech, localizing it there.<sup>1</sup> The linguistic turn, accomplished at the latest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Mauthner’s and Wittgenstein’s language criticism (Mauthner, 1986; Wittgenstein, 1963) – which does found pragmatic currents of analytical philosophy, but is neither altogether without literary predecessors (Sam, 2011 & 2010) – has its origin in just the anthropological constitution mentioned above.

To anticipate misunderstandings: Steiner is neither resisting logical structure along with the obvious validity of its conclusions within the field of logic, nor is he demanding illogical drivel from anyone (Steiner, 1984, p. 108). But he does criticize the narrowness of these operations, since for one thing they are *epistemologically too tentative and undifferentiated*, and for another they have *too sclerotizing an effect in social contexts*.

1. Worthy as the topic is of discussion, it is not possible here to deal more in depth with the relationship in recent decades between the linguistic turn and the (not only neurophysiologically but also popularly favored) belief in the notion that thinking arises in the brain – and thus has its material cause not only within speech, but in the very physique itself.

Steiner was well aware that opponents of Anthroposophy tended, precisely in disputes or arguments, to behave in this manner, and for him this was the place to bring to bear “the talent of setting things straight” (Steiner, 1984, p. 80): “You only need to be aware that in a debate you can never refute your opponent. All you can do is show that the other speaker is contradicting either himself or reality. The only recourse you have is to go into what your opponent has said. ... If in a debate all a person wants to say is what he already knows, mentioning it will be sure to be meaningless” (Steiner, 1984, pp. 80 f.).

### *Ethical Speaking*

“But even in the present day”, as Steiner formulates following his characterizations of speaking aesthetically and speaking correctly, “we see the dawning of a new element of speaking – only everywhere it is used it is in the wrong place, applied to the absolutely wrong field” (Steiner, 1984, p. 35).

What Steiner senses as displaced is the pragmatism that was becoming more and more popular among the British and the Americans, and which Steiner rigorously rejected for the field of epistemology; “but similarly to the way that things otherwise become corrupted in the end, something is showing here that is corrupt at the beginning, something that now needs to be developed in a higher sense for dealing, of all things, with public speaking on Anthroposophy, on Social Threefolding and so forth. ... For what is at stake is that we are going to have to raise the pettiness that says ‘we need concepts because they are practical for life’, this triviality of a materialistic theory of utilitarianism into the sphere of ethics, maybe even from the ethical into the religious sphere. After all, the task awaits us – provided we want to become active in the spirit of Anthroposophy and Social Threefolding – of learning beyond what history can teach us, of learning, in addition to aesthetic speaking and correct speaking, ethical speaking. We must acquire an ear for ethical, for moral speaking” (Steiner, 1984, p. 38).

To be sure, pragmatism’s epistemological sell-out and its chumminess with utilitarianism are loathsome to Steiner, and it does indeed impart a corrupt approach to social relationships that arise in conversations or during speeches; all the same: in Steiner’s estimation it is an absolutely fruitful approach. This is because what matters pertaining to pragmatism is that one recognize “how in a concrete context one can say something or refrain from saying it, hold back from uttering it; we need to cultivate a sense for the fact that, when we say something, what matters is not merely that it be correct, but that in the context within which it is spoken it be justified, and that it can be good in a particular context, or it can be bad in a particular context. We must learn to go beyond rhetoric, beyond logic, to a genuine ethics of speaking. We must know the way in which in the one concrete context we may allow ourselves to say what in a different context would not be permissible” (Steiner, 1984, p. 38).

Owing to the experience borne out by Steiner again and again in thousands of lectures (Schmidt, 1978) that an enlivening of speaking and an actuation of attention are necessary in order to promote social contact within the medium of speaking, he spent his entire life “struggling for a new language” (Sam, 2004; cf.: Steiner, 2000). If we bring essential characteristics of this “new language” – whose characteristics Martina Maria Sam worked out with great care in 2004 – to bear on the three lecture cycles we are examining here, we can discern definite parallels between what Steiner demands and what we can observe to be his own conduct in this field. This bears witness to the fact that he is serious about the “ethics of speaking” that he both demands and promotes. As he states in the second lecture of the Orientation Course: “Speaking from out of the context of life is something different than finding an adequate or correct linguistic context for a given thought or feeling context. Having an adage or something similar arise from a living context in a particular place, that is what leads from the beauty, from the correctness of language to an ethos of language, in which one senses when one utters a sentence whether one is allowed to utter it or not allowed to utter it within the entire context. ... This is what I would like to call ethical or non-ethical, moral or non-moral speaking; the third form. Beside beautiful or ugly speaking, beside correct or incorrect speaking, ethical or non-ethical speaking now takes its place, in the sense in which I have presented it” (Steiner, 1984, p. 39).

## Ethical Speaking and Ethical Individualism

Rudolf Steiner does not localize thinking and knowledge within language, but much rather concedes to the latter a mediating function. This functional view of his notwithstanding, he is no language sceptic – though he is indeed a language critic and expander. For if, in terms of concepts and knowledge, language can be a mediator at best, in actual ongoing human interaction it is nevertheless the most direct possibility there is of exchanging with others what goes on within oneself.

The following lines, which dispel the myth of a widespread colloquialism, bring home clearly the weight of the word as Steiner perceives it: “Over and over I hear well-meaning contemporaries say Words don’t matter, actions talk! Whenever that happens, a feeling or mirth comes over me swiftly and awfully: ... Because everything in the world that goes on in the way of deeds depends on words! It is evident to a person who sees through the matter that no deeds are ever performed that have not been prepared in advance by someone’s words” (Steiner, 1984, pp. 81 f.).

Steiner distinguishes himself not only as a brilliant speaker, but as an attentive listener as well – a quality that, in his mind’s eye is an extraordinary aid for any speaker.<sup>2</sup> Impressive comparisons drawn by Gunhild Kacer-Bock bear witness to the fact that Steiner was able to include the corresponding regional, historical, emotional and social constellations in his speeches and lectures (Kacer-Bock, 2009, esp. pp. 174-194). Moreover, innumerable accounts given by well-known and lesser known contemporaries of Steiner tell of his fascinating gift as a public speaker (Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung, 1988a & 1988b; Belyi, 1990; Friedmann, 1950; Hecker, 1999; Kannenberg, 2010; Kleeberg, 1990; Kühne, 1989; Leinhas, 1950; Neider & Schukraft, 2011; Rittelmeyer, 1983; Vögele, 2005; Zumdick, 2010).

Of these contemporaries, we will give the Russian artist Andrej Belyi his say: “For both of us [Assja Turgenieff and Belyi; Ph. K.], Steiner’s first entry was *an appearance of light not ‘in a manner of speaking’, but in a literal sense*: but then the apparition disappeared... Three minutes later, Steiner entered (by now no longer an appearance of light), small, gaunt, sharply contoured, with a trace of the expression we had seen on the face of the gentleman in the streetcar, ... went to the lecturer’s rostrum and started speaking; what he spoke about – that would fill ten pages (and still not be everything). Steiner speaks wrathfully, wryly, in bass register, sometimes he starts shouting, sometimes singing in a velvety texture, but he speaks in a way that each and every word becomes engraved in your soul like an inextinguishable sign. Everyone I have ever heard is an infant compared to Steiner, as far as sheer external ability to make an impression is concerned; sometimes he thrusts the palms of his hands severely toward the listeners, and the gesture of his palms is a nearly physical blow to the face. Upon his countenance his face is rent; from this place a different one gazes forth, which is rent in its turn, only to release a third face. In the course of the lecture, ten Steiners passed before me, each one emerging from the previous, none of them resembling the others, and yet each of them shot through with a single coherency: in the course of the lecture he was a Spaniard, Brand, a Catholic cardinal, a school teacher, Nordic valiant. The power and might of his gaze were like *none I have ever seen in anyone else*. ... In that face the enormousness of purely human suffering, a blend of tenderness and crazed boldness. That was the first impression” (Vögele, 2005, pp. 204 f.).

Speaking ethically has a great deal to do with practicing a “good eye” (Brotbeck, 2007) and not so much in common with the ideology of “positive thinking” (Ehrenreich, 2010). Furthermore, it has manifold links to Steiner’s early work, that is, to the ethical individualism he developed in the writings of his younger years. For in 1921 Steiner repeatedly makes admonitions that a linguistic form be found that treats the Other as an individual in speaking and listening and takes this Other as a potentially free spirit, as depicted in *The Philosophy of Freedom* in 1894. Forming gestures of speech that bank on permanent collaboration on the part of the listener, forming linguistic spaces in which the intimacy of encounter is not constantly disrupted because ignored – these are motifs that show up in Steiner’s early works already.

2. Steiner’s extraordinary talent for observing shows in exemplary fashion in the way he traces and characterizes the path of Franz Brentano (Steiner, 1983, pp. 78-127; cf.: Vandercruysse 2010 & 2009).



To be sure: as a *social philosophy* *The Philosophy of Freedom* is in large part a book that has been neither *written* nor *read*, as its main thrust is how the individual can find and found a basis for freedom that lends him certainty for all his further knowledge and action. This dimension is at the same time of the greatest social-anthropological significance; after all, whenever an Other appears before me, I am always having to reckon with a potentially free spirit.

In order to know another human individuality, different laws are in force than for all other contexts in the world; there are elements in force that resemble the situative “ethics of speaking”. Chapter 14 of *The Philosophy of Freedom* states pertaining to this: “Anyone wishing to understand the single individual must enter into this individual’s particular nature, and not stop short at typical characteristics. ... And all pursuit of knowledge having anything to do with abstract thoughts and generic terms is nothing more than a *preparation* for the one knowledge imparted to us whenever a human individual communicates its manner of looking into the world, and for the other knowledge that we gain from the content of this individual’s willing. Wherever we have the sense: we are dealing here with that part of a human being that is free from typical modes of thinking and generic volition, there we must stop taking recourse to any concepts from *our own* mind, if we intend to understand *the other’s* nature. Knowledge consists in connecting concepts with percepts by means of thinking. For any and all other objects of knowledge, the observer must gain the corresponding concepts through his own intuition; *the only possible way to understand a free individual is to fetch this individual’s own concepts – the ones according to which it has determined itself – in pure form, i.e., untainted by the content of our own concepts, over into our own mind.* People who always instantly insert their own concepts into their judgment of an other can never attain to understanding of an individuality” (Steiner, 1987, pp. 240 f.).

Ethical individualism is a constant challenge, as is developing an “ethics of speaking”. The latter has the power to underscore the dimension of social philosophy inherent in the *Philosophy of Freedom*, both on a conceptional and an existential level. Steiner’s achievement, concealed behind his “ethics of speaking”, is that he puts the Other, which is constantly conceived of as a purely secondary phenomenon, on equal footing with the independent mind, and formulates, rather than a rhetoric of seduction (Ruede-Wissmann, 2009; Thiele, 2007), one of esteem – in the process acknowledging the Socratic thought that everyone has the power to be the midwife of the Other (Plato, 2008, 149a-151d; cf.: Dietz & Kracht, 2011). In this sense, the end of the *Philosophy of Freedom* as *a book to be read* is the beginning of a philosophy of freedom as *day-to-day living* – in view of the Other who, “seen spiritually, ... is a species of his or her own” (Steiner, 2005, p. 61).

As early as the Age of Enlightenment and German Idealism, the Other was present as an aesthetic phenomenon, and became evident as an epistemological problem, to be sure; but as an ethical extreme it was absent for a longer period of time. While the 20<sup>th</sup> century took a *linguistic turn* and at the same time began gradually to discover the Other (Kapusinski, 2008; Levinas, 2007, 2005 & 1998; Honneth & Rössler, 2008), paths are open for the 21<sup>st</sup> century to take a *social turn*, an inter-individualism, which is every bit as possible as its total negation: a bondage to science, technology and language that impedes human encounters and literally causes words to fail us.

## Acknowledgements

For advice and criticism I am indebted to Hartmut Andermann, Birgit Bockemühl, Stefan Brotbeck, Peter Dellbrügger, Karl-Martin Dietz, Jörg Ewertowski, Lydia Fechner, Lilia I. Galarza Orcada, Joachim Grebe, Benediktus Hardorp, Sebastian Jüngel, Vera Koppehel, Christine Kovce, Thomas Kracht, Salvatore Lavecchia, Johannes Nilo, Bodo von Plato, Martina Maria Sam, Robin Schmidt, Wolfgang G. Vögele, Stephan Widmer, and Agnes Zehnter. This article, which originally appeared in German in *Die Drei* (No. 1/2012, pp. 15-28), was generously translated into English by Joseph Bailey.

## References

- Aristotle (1999). *Rhetorik*. Ditzingen: Reclam.
- Barthes, R. (1988). Die alte Rhetorik. Ein Abriss. In *ibid.: Das semiologische Abenteuer* (pp. 15-101). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Baumgarten, H. (1998). *Compendium Rhetoricum. Die wichtigsten Stilmittel*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Belyi, A. (1990). *Verwandeln des Lebens. Erinnerungen an Rudolf Steiner*. Basel: Zbinden.
- Blumenberg, H. (2001). Anthropologische Annäherungen an die Rhetorik. In *ibid.: Ästhetische und metaphorologische Schriften* (pp. 406-431). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Brotbeck, St. (2007). "Stellt euch nicht dem Bösen entgegen". Eine Einladung zur Erübung eines guten Blicks. In *Die Drei*, 8-9, 54-74.
- Dietz, K.-M. & Kracht, Th. (2011). *Dialogische Führung: Grundlagen – Praxis. Fallbeispiel: dm-drogerie markt*. Frankfurt am Main & New York: Campus.
- Ehrenreich, B. (2010). *Smile or Die. Wie die Ideologie des positiven Denkens die Welt verdimmt*. München: Kunstmann.
- Eppinger, H. (2000). *Humor und Heiterkeit im Leben und Werk Rudolf Steiners*. Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.
- Friedmann, H. (1950). *Sinnvolle Odyssee*. München: C. H. Beck.
- Fuhrmann, M. (2007). *Die antike Rhetorik. Eine Einführung*. Ostfildern: Artemis & Winkler.
- Groddeck, W. (1972). Zu neuen Bänden der Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe. 'Gedankenfreiheit und soziale Kräfte' – 'Anthroposophie, soziale Dreigliederung und Redekunst'. In Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Ed.) (pp. 27-38). *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, 39, Michaeli 1972.
- Hecker, J. (1999). *Rudolf Steiner in Weimar*. Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.
- Hetzel, A. (2011). *Die Wirksamkeit der Rede. Zur Aktualität klassischer Rhetorik für die moderne Sprachphilosophie*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Hiebel, Fr. (1965). Rhetorik und Moralphilosophie im Rom der Cäsaren. Zur Frühgeschichte der Schönen Wissenschaften. In *Das Goetheanum* 1965, 51-52.
- Honneth, A. & Rössler, B. (Ed.) (2008). *Von Person zu Person. Zur Moralität persönlicher Beziehungen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Kacer-Bock, G. (2009). *Wie hat Rudolf Steiner gesprochen? Studien zur Entwicklung und Geschichte der Anthroposophie und der Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft*. Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben.
- Kannenber, M. (2010). *Rudolf Steiner in Berlin. Rudolf Steiners Impulse, Begegnungen und Wirkensstätten in Berlin 1897-1923. Einträge in die Zukunft*. Dornach: Verlag für Anthroposophie.
- Kleeberg, L. (1990). *Wege und Worte. Erinnerungen an Rudolf Steiner*. Stuttgart: Mellinger.
- Knape, J. (2000). *Allgemeine Rhetorik. Stationen der Theoriegeschichte*. Ditzingen: Reclam.
- Kühlewind, G. (1991). *Der sprechende Mensch. Ein Menschenbild aufgrund des Sprachphänomens*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- Kühne, W. (1989). *Die Stuttgarter Verhältnisse*. Schaffhausen: Novalis.
- Lausberg, H. (2008). *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik. Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.
- Leinhas, E. (1950). *Aus der Arbeit mit Rudolf Steiner*. Basel: Zbinden.
- Levinas, E. (2007). *Zwischen uns. Versuche über das Denken an den Anderen*. München: Hanser.
- Levinas, E. (2005). *Humanismus des anderen Menschen*. Hamburg: Meiner.

- Levinas, E. (1998). *Die Spur des Anderen. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Sozialphilosophie*. Freiburg: Alber.
- Lindenberg, Chr. (2011). *Rudolf Steiner. Eine Biographie*. Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben.
- Lindenberg, Chr. (2010). *Rudolf Steiner. Eine Chronik*. Stuttgart: Freies Geistesleben.
- Lusseyran, J. (2003). *Das Leben beginnt heute. Erinnerungen und Begegnungen eines Blinden*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Mauthner, F. (1986). *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*. 3 Bde. Berlin: Ullstein.
- Müller, A. (1816). *Zwölf Reden über die Beredsamkeit und deren Verfall in Deutschland*. Leipzig: Göschen.
- Neider, A. & Schukraft, H. (2011). *Rudolf Steiner in Stuttgart*. Stuttgart: Belsler.
- Peters, S. (2011). *Der Vortrag als Performance*. Bielefeld: transcript.
- Plato (2008). *Theätet*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Rittelmeyer, F. (1983). *Meine Lebensbegegnung mit Rudolf Steiner*. Stuttgart: Urachhaus.
- Ruede-Wissmann, W. (2009). *Satanische Verhandlungskunst und wie man sich dagegen wehrt*. München: Langen-Müller.
- Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Ed.) (1988a). *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, 101, Michaeli 1988.
- Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Ed.) (1988b). *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, 99/100, Ostern 1988.
- Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung (Ed.) (1986). *Beiträge zur Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe*, 93/94, Michaeli 1986.
- Sam, M. M. (2011). Rudolf Steiner und die Sprachkritiker seiner Zeit I & II. In *Rundbrief der Sektion für Schöne Wissenschaften*, 7 & 8, 20-26 & 29-62.
- Sam, M. M. (2010). Die Aufgaben der Sprachkritik und die Sprachkrise im Beginn der Moderne. In *Rundbrief der Sektion für Schöne Wissenschaften*, 6, 37-49.
- Sam, M. M. (2004). *Im Ringen um eine neue Sprache. Rudolf Steiners Sprachstil als Herausforderung*. Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.
- Schmidt, H. (1978). *Das Vortragswerk Rudolf Steiners. Verzeichnis der von Rudolf Steiner gehaltenen Vorträge, Ansprachen, Kurse und Zyklen*. Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.
- Steiner, R. (2005). *Theosophie. Einführung in übersinnliche Welterkenntnis und Menschenbestimmung* (GA 9). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (2000). *Mein Lebensgang* (GA 28). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (1987). *Die Philosophie der Freiheit. Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung* (GA 4). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (1986). *Wie wirkt man für den Impuls der Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus? Zwei Schulungskurse für Redner und aktive Vertreter des Dreigliederungsgedankens* (GA 338). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (1985). *Die Rätsel der Philosophie in ihrer Geschichte als Umriss dargestellt* (GA 18). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (1984). *Anthroposophie, soziale Dreigliederung und Redekunst. Orientierungskurs für die öffentliche Wirksamkeit mit besonderem Hinblick auf die Schweiz* (GA 339). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (1983). *Von Seelenrätseln* (GA 21). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.
- Steiner, R. (1960). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Dramaturgie 1889-1900* (GA 29). Dornach: Rudolf Steiner.

- Thiele, A. (2007). *Argumentieren unter Stress. Wie man unfaire Angriffe erfolgreich abwehrt*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Tucholsky, K. (1993). Ratschläge für einen schlechten Redner. In *ibid.: Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 8 (pp. 290-292). Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Ueding, G. (2009). *Moderne Rhetorik. Von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart*. München: C. H. Beck.
- Ueding, G. (1995). *Klassische Rhetorik*. München: C. H. Beck.
- Ueding, G. & Steinbrink, B. (2005). *Grundriss der Rhetorik. Geschichte – Technik – Methode*. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Vandercruysse, R. (2010). *Sonnenaufgang. Von der Geschichte zum Wesen der Philosophie. Eine Studie zu Franz Brentanos Bedeutung für die Entstehung der Anthroposophie*. Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.
- Vandercruysse, R. (2009). Wissenschaft als Schicksal. Zur Bedeutung von Franz Brentano in Rudolf Steiners Werk. In *Die Drei*, 4, 71-74.
- Vögele, W. G. (Ed.) (2005). *Der andere Rudolf Steiner. Augenzeugenberichte, Interviews, Karikaturen*. Dornach: Pforte.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1963). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Zander, H. (2007). *Anthroposophie in Deutschland. Theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche Praxis 1884-1945*. 2 Bde. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Zumdick, W. (2010). *Rudolf Steiner in Wien*. Wien: Metro.