

# I and Thou - Aspects of a theory of interpersonal dynamics as contained in Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom

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## 1. A few milestones in the historical development of the idea of interpersonal dynamics

No You, no I; no I, no You (Fichte 1834, SW I, 189).<sup>1</sup> With this statement of principle Fichte – in *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* – establishes that human life is essentially correlative in nature, a condition of being, characterised by the reciprocally determinative effects of I on You, and You on I. Involvement with the Other both defines and forms the existence of the human individual – in a *constitutive* way. This is expressed in Fichte's second statement of principle, which says: "The human being [...] only becomes a human being among other human beings." (SW III, 39)

The question of the ontologically constitutive character of mutually determinative human involvement is considered, in the history of philosophical problems, under the rubric of interpersonal dynamics or inter-subjectivity.<sup>2</sup>

Since its first *philosophical* exposition at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the I-You relationship has been discussed many times, and not only in philosophy, but also in theology and psychology. Its currently best known *philosophical* treatment is probably Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, together with a further development of his thinking, the *Dialogical Principle* (Buber 2009, 5-136). The multi-faceted development of "dialogical thinking", since its inception with Heinrich Jacobi (ibid. 301), then via Fichte and Feuerbach into the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Karl Jaspers and others, has been critically documented by Buber in "Zur Geschichte des dialogischen Prinzips" ("On the history of the dialogical principle") (ibid. 299-320).<sup>3</sup> More recently the line of dialogical thinking has been extended to include the process of the "free-ranging dialogue" and the

1. In what follows the quotations from Fichte will be taken from *Fichtes sämtliche Werke*, ed. by I. H. Fichte. Berlin 1834-1846, cited as SW.

2. The varying designation of the I-Thou relationship either in terms of the inter-personal or the inter-subjective denotes a significant slant in emphasis, both in theoretical and existential terms, in the way the analysis of this subject is conducted. We will have occasion to go into this in more detail in what follows.

3. It is questionable whether Buber's contention that one can only speak of dialogical thinking or a dialogical principle within the explicit context of the I-Thou relationship is tenable. Dialogical thinking, at least as a methodological principle, is present in platonic dialectics and the associated conversational form of the Socratic dialogues. Furthermore, it is a moot point whether in the context of human history the dialogical nature of human interaction is in any way a universal principle of living development that expresses itself in a species-specific manner. The implication of this – if we wished to considerably extend the concept of the Logos – is that the duetting of blackbirds or the songs of whales could be construed as dialogical forms. A further interesting instance of the I-Thou relationship is the "inner dialogue", upon which such stress was laid by the Protestant reformers, and which Kant dubbed "the inner court of justice" in his moral philosophy.

closely related “consensus theory of truth”, both of which have been developed by K. O. Apel (1976) and J. Habermas (1991) within the context of *discursive ethics*.<sup>4</sup>

Outside of philosophy the I-Thou relationship also plays a significant role in theology and psychology. Karl Barth, one of the most important theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century declares: “To be human [is] to have our being defined by the presence of another human being.” (Barth, 1992, p.296) That means the *ens humanum* is not ascribed to the human being as an anthropological constant, but grows out of and manifests in interaction with the other. And for the psychotherapist and anthropologist Viktor Frankl this represents the only possibility of complete self-realisation:

“To be fully human and come to full self-realisation is only possible to the extent that I transcend myself in relation to something or someone existing in the world.” (Frankl, 2018, p.53)

In the history of ideas this theme of reciprocal interpersonal dynamics, the determining of the full meaning of what it is to be human by the self-transcendent relation to a Thou-experience, is connected to a second fundamental aspect of the process of self-discovery, namely that of *acknowledgement*. Subjectively, human beings can think of themselves in a host of different ways – as long as they have attained a certain level of self-reflection. In the inner realms of consciousness there is no limit to the diversity of possible self-images. *Objectively*, however, a person's being is founded upon their acknowledgement by Another, be it in metaphysical-theological terms as the beloved and chosen image of God, or in socio-political terms as an individual with inviolable dignity, or through being appreciated in a social context with which they are familiar.

In the history of ideas there are, in philosophy and theology, also highly influential theories around this acknowledgement dimension in the ontology of interpersonal interaction. This goes especially for the classical period of German philosophy, which had such a formative effect on Steiner. Thus in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in the chapter on the constitution of consciousness, we find: “They [two individuals meeting] acknowledge themselves as each acknowledging the other” (Hegel, 1807, p.147). And it is only through this meeting with the other, the stranger, that consciousness constitutes itself explicitly as the awareness of a particular self, as self-consciousness. The special meaning of the mutual acknowledgement of I and Thou was also portrayed by Fichte, in *Grundlage des Naturrechts*, in the following terms:

“The relationship of free beings to one another is [...] one characterised by the reciprocal effects of intelligence and freedom. For one to be able to acknowledge the other, they both must participate in mutual acknowledgement. And neither can treat the other as a free being if they do not treat each other as free beings.” (Fichte, 1834, SW III, p.44)

However, this largely positive connotation of the acknowledgement and objectification of the other through the mutual affirmation of their freedom and the reciprocally respectful attitude that follows from it, has another side to it. The objectification of the subject through “the eyes of the other” also leads to the “exposure” and “defencelessness” of the self before its counterpart. In “the eyes of the other”, according to J-P Sartre, the Self experiences its freedom to make an object of itself. “Thus for me the other [...] is the being for which I am an object, through which I attain my object-ness” (Sartre, 1991, p.486). The Self, however, experiences its object-ness in “the eyes of the other” as estrangement, as “the death of its potentialities”, as “the decentring of its world”, and all this accompanied by the “discomfiture” of the feeling of “shame” (ibid. p.493). With this motif of the other's objectifying act of looking and the concomitant feeling of shame it calls forth in the Self thus observed, Sartre is making a subliminal reference to the biblical motif of the Fall – to the rendering naked and defenceless of the Self before the voice and eyes of the other, who in that context is God. The creature made in the image of God, the human being, fundamentally transforms his relationship to God through disobeying the divine injunction not to eat of the tree of knowledge. Trying to conceal himself, he becomes God's counterpart. God, in seeking him, addresses him as *thou*: “Adam, where art thou?” And Adam answers him ‘in shame’: “I heard Thy voice [...] and was afraid; and I hid myself, for I was naked” (1. Mo 3, 7-9) This thought of the first man being addressed as Thou by the voice of God is, according to

4. Cf. Apel's theoretical account of “reciprocal acknowledgement among equal members of an argumentation community”, in Apel (1976), p.400. In Apel's writings the Buber connection is explicit. Cf. ibid. pp.87f.

Martin Buber, a “highly significant contribution to our deliberations [on the dialogical principle]” made by another theological thinker on inter-personal dynamics, Franz Rosenzweig. God’s addressing of Adam as ‘Thou’ establishes God as the “author and initiator of the whole dialogue between him [God] and the human soul” (Buber, 2009, p.305).

Thus the Self’s openness to the voice and eyes of the other is ambivalent, insofar as it is thereby acknowledged and objectified as a free self, while at the same time being revealed as something enclosed in its own self-protection, being robbed of this and exposed to the gaze and judgement of the other in the painful openness of its object-ness.

The question to be answered in what follows is where does Rudolf Steiner’s thinking stand in relation to the problems of interpersonal dynamics and mutual acknowledgement? According to Buber’s reading of the history of “dialogical thinking”, this is a theme that was charged by powerful impulses emanating from the very tradition to which Steiner was particularly inclined in his philosophical beginnings. In other words, it was “in the air” and under intense discussion in the philosophy and theology of the beginning of the 20th century.

## 2. Anthroposophy – A Blueprint for “Self-redemption”

It would seem to me that for anthroposophy, as a body of insight into the nature of the human being, all the concepts we have just been considering play no prominent, constitutive or systematic role. It is not couched in terms of the Other, the “Thou” and the type of human understanding, self-realisation and mutual acknowledgement based upon and accruing from the I-Thou relationship. This is no coincidence. The reason for the “blank spot” on this subject in anthroposophy is that in principle its whole approach is oriented towards the “I” or Self. Because anthroposophy – and this includes Steiner’s *Philosophy of Freedom* – is primarily concerned with the discovery, growth and development of “I”-related faculties in relation to knowledge and action, in other words, the autonomous Self and the super-sensible worlds it might open up, such matters as the Other’s view of the Self and the Self’s view of the Other tend to remain peripheral. This does not mean that Steiner completely ignored the world of society and politics. Quite the contrary: society and the traditions that shaped it, the organisation of the state and the economy, and of cultural institutions, the churches and the beliefs they promulgated, all find their place in Steiner’s thinking. Indeed, they find systematic treatment in his three-fold model of society. On the other hand, the field primarily associated with our essential nature opened in the first place by Kierkegaard, namely that of basic human *existence* and the interpersonal “world of immediate co-presence” associated with it, have scarcely any meaning for Steiner’s anthropology and theory of the constitution of self-awareness or the “I”. His main concern, in pursuance of the idea of perfectionism, is more with “the soul’s upward striving towards freedom”, and what interests him is the concept of philosophy as “almost exclusively the province of individual (inner) experience” (Steiner, 1987, 232f).<sup>5</sup> These utterances of Steiner’s, relating as they do to the publication of *The Philosophy of Freedom* in 1894, are paradigmatic.<sup>6</sup> Much later he also expressed himself on the subject of the attainment of anthroposophical knowledge in almost identical words and in the same introspective tone. Thus, in the afterword to the eighth edition of *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* in 1918, we find: “What the human soul goes through on the path intended here occurs entirely in the realm of purely spiritual experience” (Steiner, 1993, p. 216). And on this path the important thing is that “an inner exertion [is possible] which will enable the thinking part of inner life to be experienced as distinct [from all bodily process]”, and this in turn is to render possible the experience of “super-sensible revelations” (ibid. pp. 217-220). On this path of spiritual self-optimisation and perfection the Other as Thou plays no constitutive role, but far rather a peripheral

5. Steiner’s writings are quoted according to the *Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe* Dornach (GA) and *Rudolf Steiner Schriften – Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Christian Clement, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt (SKA).

6. These utterances of Steiner’s and the attitude they express must be viewed in connection with the persistent influence of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* and its ideal of the solitary thinker. Steiner’s letters to Rosa Mayreder and Pauline Specht, written in 1894, expressly draw the parallel between *The Philosophy of Freedom* and Nietzsche, and in such a way that one could be forgiven for thinking he actually addressed the book to Nietzsche (cf. GA 39, pp. 232 & 238f.).

one – that of teacher or instructor (cf. *ibid.* 221f.). Thus, when Helmut Zander speaks of anthroposophy as a method of “self-redemption”, there is something in what he says.<sup>7</sup>

Nonetheless, there is another side to anthroposophy, and the *Philosophy of Freedom* in particular contains a number of noteworthy thoughts on cultural and moral philosophy that counter its dominant, basic tendency towards human self-realisation via the internalisation and vitalisation of the super-sensible. While they cannot completely undermine the previously mentioned impression of anthroposophy as a theory of self-redemption, nor entirely undo its strongly “I”-based monism<sup>8</sup>, they can at least counteract these dominant tendencies.<sup>9</sup>

Systematic consideration of these counteractive aspects opens up a hitherto little known, but nonetheless noteworthy view of Steiner's thinking on the ontological elements of the structure of human interaction. This view of the relationship between I and Thou is both anthroposophical and relevant to the general theory of communication.

### 3. The long reach of Steiner's reply to Eduard von Hartmann's charge of solipsism

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1894 Rudolf Steiner writes a revealing letter to Eduard von Hartmann. It concerns the latter's review of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, which appeared in the same year. The central issue Steiner takes up with Hartmann is his critical assertion that the “ethical individualism” that Steiner advances in the second part of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, “leads inevitably to solipsism, [...] illusionism and agnosticism, [and thus stands in danger] of sliding into the abyss of non-philosophy” (Steiner, 1994, GA 4a, p.420).

What is Hartmann's criticism about? In contradistinction to Kant, Steiner had maintained, and attempted to justify, that the foundation of moral maxims is not to be derived from subjecting them to scrutiny by means of the categorical imperative and thereby converting them into duties; rather, if our freedom is to be real, they should arise from individual moral intuition. (SKA 2, pp.204-213).<sup>10</sup> This individualisation of moral principles by means of a subjective source of knowledge, namely intuition, had evidently given Hartmann the impression that Steiner's position was that the basis of morality is purely subjective. Nor had this impression been weakened in any way by the fact that Steiner sought to protect intuition from the charge of moral arbitrariness by characterising it as the ability to think universal concepts and ideas.<sup>11</sup> But the accusation that *The Philosophy of Freedom* led to “solipsism” and “illusionism” and was in danger of sliding into “the abyss of non-philosophy” was still there. And Steiner could not possibly let it stand.

His reply to Hartmann's complaints is remarkable, both in itself and in regard to its lasting relevance within the history of his works. It consists mainly of two arguments in rebuttal of Hartmann's criticism. In the first of these he grants that he can be seen as guilty of solipsism, albeit only on condition that he holds with Schopenhauer's axiom: “...the world is my mental picture.”<sup>12</sup> But this, he says, is not the case. Against the “immanence theory” (Steiner, 1987, p.226) of subjective idealism imputed to him by Hartmann he maintains:

7. H. Zander (2019), pp. 61f and *passim*, p.207.

8. Cf. Steiner's essay “Der Individualismus in der Philosophie” (1899) in Steiner, 1961, pp. 99-152.

9. In the line of masking out this subject in favour of the primacy of “self-redemption” we find the anthroposophically inspired anthology *Rudolf Steiner's “Philosophie der Freiheit – eine Menschenkunde des höheren Selbst*, edited by K. M. Dietz and published in 1994. Not one of the authors in this volume so much as mentions the subject of interpersonal dynamics, let alone gives it systematic treatment. By contrast, Herbert Witzmann, in his essay of 1985 “Das Erwachen am anderen Menschen” had already drawn attention to “interpersonal” aspects of the *Philosophy of Freedom*, as well as the significance of this subject for “the community life of the Anthroposophical Society” (Steiner, quoted in Witzmann, 1985, p.39). We will be looking more closely at this essay in what follows. I owe my knowledge of this essay to Prof. J. Schieren.

10. Cf. H. Traub 2011, pp.744-791.

11. Hartmann later addressed this argument in a letter of 13<sup>th</sup> June 1897 (Steiner, 1987, pp. 357f.). We will consider this more closely in what follows.

12. Steiner was very familiar with Schopenhauer's philosophy, especially his main work *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. In the 1890's he was in fact working for the publisher Cotta on an edition of Schopenhauer's works.

“I cannot go along with the step by which the given, empirical world is absorbed into consciousness. This is why I am not a phenomenalist either. For me the empirically given content of the world is not the content of consciousness” (ibid.).

This means that Steiner fundamentally insists – and also where it is a question of the individual intuiting of universal moral ideas, in other words, of the content of the “moral imagination” (ibid.) – that he is an empiricist and a realist. Exactly what kind of reality we are talking about in connection with ideas in the field of moral imagination need not be decided here. Here it is only important to point out how things stand. For this clarification lays the foundation for the discussion of a further theme – a theme that, as far as I can see, has been given very little attention in the research literature on Steiner’s philosophical worldview. Nonetheless, it is fundamentally significant for the later unfolding of anthroposophy and its various fields of practical application, education in particular, but also medicine. This is the theme adumbrated in our introduction, namely, that of interpersonal dynamics.

The actual issue the letter to Hartmann is concerned with is a question of moral philosophy, namely, what are the conditions under which the moral intuitions of “individual minds” can find consensus (ibid., p.226)? In this 1894 letter to Hartmann Steiner expresses in a compressed form something which he had already formulated in chapter IX of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, namely:

“It is only because human individuals are one in spirit that they can live their very different lives side by side” (SKA 2, p.187).<sup>13</sup>

Contra Hartmann the letter continues:

“The moral ideal that I [as an individualisation of consciousness] hold in mind is numerically identical to the [ideal] held in mind by someone else. This only *seems* not to be the case, because it [the moral ideal] is connected with certain perceptions of the [sensory] world, which are not numerically identical with the organic individuals concerned. But the only reason these are not numerically identical is because they are spatio-temporal entities. Where the concepts of *space* and *time* cease to have meaning, however, as in the sphere of ethics, that is where it also becomes impossible to speak of the *numerically different*” (Steiner, 1987, p.226).

Steiner now admits to Hartmann that his book has a shortcoming, in that it did not solve this problem of mediation between individuality and universality in a satisfactory way. He nevertheless expresses the hope that Hartmann’s notes would “come in useful if he should get the chance to publish his thoughts on the matter in some new context” (ibid., 228). And this is exactly what happened. In the “First Appendix” to the new edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom* in 1918 (SKA 2, pp.251-256) Steiner turns once more to the loose ends of his dispute with Eduard von Hartmann on the subject of interpersonal dynamics. The appendix’s opening words are:

“Objections of a philosophical nature which were voiced to me immediately after the appearance of this book prompt me to add the following short commentary to this new edition” (SKA 2, p.251).

And in a few sentences Steiner is once more in *medias res*, in other words, engaged in the exposition of the question posed by Hartmann in 1894 as to “the possible effects of the soul-life of another person upon one’s (the subject’s) own” (ibid.). And the problem so “absurdly” imputed to Steiner by Hartmann, that of “solipsism”, the assumption that “other people only live within my mind” (ibid., pp.259f) is once more on the table.

In 1918, twenty-four extremely busy years after the first publication of *The Philosophy of Freedom* – years in which Steiner had developed from philosopher to theosophist to anthroposophist – he feels it necessary to take up once more the old questions of the nature of spiritual and moral interaction, as well as their “epistemological status”, in an attempt to solve this “leftover” problem in some way.<sup>14</sup>

On the context of this idea and its further development, see Traub (2011), p.843. 13.

14. In 1897 Hartmann countered Steiner once more in a letter of 13<sup>th</sup> June. We will return to it later. When Steiner speaks of “Objections which were voiced to me immediately after the appearance of this book” (SKA 2, p.251), then the question is whether in 1918 he was incorporating this 1897 reply of Hartmann’s into his exposition, for this cannot readily be construed as “immediately after the appearance of this book”.

The fact that he took this step at this stage of his life and of the development of his ideas serves to show that this subject of interpersonal dynamics – the relationship between “I and Thou” – is not something artificially tacked onto Steiner's thinking within the context of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Steiner quite evidently felt it was important to place this issue once more on the horizon of his philosophy and of anthroposophy.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately there is nowhere I know of where Steiner has given this theme systematic treatment, or dealt in depth with its implications for philosophy and anthroposophy. Nevertheless, *The Philosophy of Freedom* – in the “ultimate questions” contained in the chapter “The Reality of Freedom” in part two, and in the “Appendix” – and the previously quoted letter offer sufficient material for the development of the basic features of a philosophical conception of interpersonal dynamics. Their further significance and implications are not only worth exploring in the field of personal interaction, but also as they apply to teaching and learning situations in the area of “spiritual leadership” and “spiritual training”, to education and in doctor-patient communication.

#### **4. Strains and dimensions of interpersonal interaction and communication in Steiner's Philosophy of Freedom**

In what follows we will explore in detail three passages from *The Philosophy of Freedom* in order to clarify the extent to which Steiner's main philosophical work (and the basis of his later anthroposophy) can be seen as providing points of departure for an original blueprint of a theory of interpersonal dynamics. The fact that Steiner did not give this important theme of modern philosophy and theology – not to speak of sociology and psychology – a chapter to itself in *The Philosophy of Freedom* does not mean that it does not figure in the book. Immediately after the book's publication Steiner himself admitted that its structure and delivery was full of jumps and breaks, and spoke of the urgency of his “longing to get to the conclusion” (Steiner, 1987, p. 232), to which much in the way of discursive completeness had fallen victim (*ibid.*). One of these untreated themes could well have been that of interpersonal dynamics. Steiner was well aware of having sold this theme rather short, and that it needed a more thorough treatment in the spirit of his philosophical and anthroposophical thinking. This is shown by his taking it up again in the first Appendix of the second edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, by his interpolation of explanations at places pertinent to this theme in the new edition, and in his addressing this theme in connection with the rebuilding of the Goetheanum after its destruction in 1923.

##### *4.1*

Steiner's first answer to Hartmann's solipsism charge relates to a passage in chapter IX of the first edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. There Steiner had expounded his thinking on how there could be a “synchronising” of the intuition of moral ideas in different individuals. What is noteworthy about this passage is that it is not concerned with the problem of solipsism flagged by Hartmann, but with the problem of moral atomism. For the question here is: “How are [...] people to have a social life if everyone is only striving to assert his own individuality?” (SKA 2, p.186) In formulating it like this Steiner is distinguishing his interpretation from that of Schopenhauer, for whom only myself as a perceiving subject exists. Against this Steiner assumes a plurality of self-enclosed, individual moral subjects. Factually this is something different from the solipsism Hartmann imputed to him. Steiner's solution to the atomism problem put forward in chapter IX consists in his alluding to the universality of the world of ideas, to which in principle every individual has access. For “the world of ideas that is active in me [is] no other [...] than that active in my fellow humans” (*ibid.*). Accordingly, moral atomism, egoism or individualism (also solipsism) result from analytical concentration on the accidental differences among situations involving the actions of individuals, as well as from the biographical and personal peculiarities infused into these situations by the persons involved in them. If these morally inconsequential idiosyncrasies are left out of account and only the heart of the particular moral

15. The fact that in 1923 Steiner drew particular attention to “awakening interpersonal awareness” as a central category in the development and organization of the Anthroposophical Society makes clear just how strongly he felt about the dimension of interpersonal dynamics also in institutional contexts.

intuition is taken into consideration – on the assumption of Steiner’s realism concerning ideas – then not only is there no contradiction among the maxims for action of the individuals concerned, but it is even possible in this way to establish a moral and spiritual congruency among them. From this it follows that a “moral misunderstanding, a clash [...] among morally *free* people is out of the question.” By excluding contingent situational influences they can “*meet one another* in the same intention, if they are pursuing the same goal” (ibid., p.186, italics mine).

Within the context of the history of philosophical problems what Steiner says here in *The Philosophy of Freedom* may seem like a rehash of Fichte’s idea of “the synthesis of the world of mind” (Fichte 1962 GA III/4, pp.43-53),<sup>16</sup> or a variation on Leibniz’s “pre-established harmony” (Leibniz 1979, pp.24-35), or an anticipation of K. O. Apel’s “a *priori* community of communication” (Apel, 1976, pp.358-435). On closer examination, however, it turns out to have a special accent of its own. Steiner speaks of *meeting*. And this meeting is between not just any individuals or subjects whatsoever, rather it is a “meeting” between “myself and a fellow human being” (SKA 2, p.186). Here Steiner has something else in mind than the possibility of agreement between hypothetical individual subjects. This becomes clear in the appendix which he felt compelled, by Eduard von Hartmann’s criticism, to add to the second edition. Here Steiner makes the dimension of *the meeting of free individuals*, and the single world of moral ideas it provides access to, subject to the dictates of observation and experience. Access to the unity of the world of ideas that I and my fellow human being have in common is “[...] and *must* be the result of experience of the world. For if it were to be apprehended through anything other than observation, then it would be a realm in which no individual experience would be admissible, but only general norms” (ibid.). The motif of “individual experience” based solely upon experience and observation, or the dimension of ‘pertaining to me’ or ‘pertaining to him’ is what for Steiner here makes the qualitative difference between a situation-bound theoretical description of the problem of interpersonal interaction and the *real* experience of interpersonal meeting. At the same time, the experiential and observational quality of the meeting signifies the difference between a hypothetical and a real experience of freedom. Here also, with this idea of the experience-based interpersonal meeting, Steiner shows himself – as was emphasised at the outset – to be an empiricist.<sup>17</sup>

This thesis, that Steiner here – and not only here – was concerned to distinguish between purely speculative accounts of interpersonal interaction and those saturated with experience, is supported by two further utterances about the fundamental methodological approach employed in *The Philosophy of Freedom*. In the famous and much quoted letter to Rosa Meyreder of 4<sup>th</sup> November 1894, Steiner writes:

“I do not theorise; I narrate the events of my inner life. [...] Everything in my book has a personal meaning, [...] every line a personal experience” (Steiner, 1987, pp.232).

In regard to the theme of interpersonal dynamics, this qualification of the – if you will – epistemological method of *The Philosophy of Freedom* serves to underline the experience-based character of the relationship between Steiner’s “I” and its “fellow human-being”. The second utterance on the experience-oriented methodology of *The Philosophy of Freedom* is directed against Eduard von Hartmann, whose criticism Steiner took issue with once more in the first appendix of the book’s second edition, as already mentioned. Here Steiner addresses both von Hartmann’s theory of the unconscious and the criticisms aimed directly at himself (cf. SKA 2, pp.251-256). Apart from the details of this dispute, which we will consider later, what is of particular interest here is Steiner’s clarification of his fundamentally different method. As in the letter to Rosa Meyreder, Steiner emphasises, in addressing von Hartmann, the crucial distinction between an experience-

16. Cf also C. Klotz 2005, pp.43-56

17. K. O. Apel’s *Transformation der Philosophie*, in reference to Martin Buber, puts forward a concept of empiricism, which not only comes remarkably close to Steiner’s experience-oriented thinking on interpersonal dynamics, but particularly also to the approach to education that follows from this concept of experience. “Empiricism that opens new world horizons and possibilities for socially benign life-styles actually exists” (Apel, 1976, vol. 2, p.87). This always arises at those moments “when we are not – as in everyday life and in science – subsuming the data of experience into systems of ready-made rules, but instead manage to achieve a ‘genuine’ perception [...] particularly of other people and their behaviour” (ibid., pp.87f.). In footnote 97 Apel continues: “What this is about has been worked out, in the idea of education and the humanities inspired by existential philosophy in specific connection to M. Buber [...], as the phenomenon of the dialogical ‘encounter’, in: O. Fr. Bollnow, *Existenzphilosophie und Pädagogik* (Apel, ibid., pp.88).

oriented and a speculative approach to the theme of interpersonal dynamics. Countering Hartmann, he writes:

“This whole problem [of interpersonal interaction] is to be solved, not through artificial conceptual structures [...], but rather through genuine experience [...]. Thinkers should seek the path to open-minded, spiritually oriented observation; instead of which they insert an artificial conceptual structure between themselves and the reality” (ibid., p.253).

In order to clarify this required change from a philosophically speculative to an experience-oriented approach to the theme of interpersonal interaction, Steiner poses a simple question:

“What is it, in the first instance, that I have before me when I confront another person? I see the features of his immediate appearance” (ibid., p.252).

In beginning the subject of the encounter with another person with the dimension of their immediate features Steiner, in terms of the history of ideas, it would seem, is advancing into the existential dimension, which has unfolded into a significant stream of 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, as in the *Philosophy of the Life-World* (Husserl), *Existential Ontology* (Heidegger/Barth<sup>18</sup>) or even Dialogical Philosophy (Buber). That may be something of an exaggerated claim, and indeed would be, were it not for other points of reference in The Philosophy of Freedom that are in keeping with a way of thinking focused specifically on interpersonal dynamics.

#### 4.2 *Communication, participation, the desire to understand*

If the meeting with another person has been conceived in experience-oriented terms, then the question arises, as to how the structure of this situation is to be viewed in the sense of communication and interaction between ‘free spirits’.<sup>19</sup> Conventions and traditional rituals are not going to be of any help for the purpose of determining what is involved in this question. This does not mean that they have no value. It is simply that they cannot grant access to the essential, particular quality of the interactive process in focus here. Steiner deals with this matter particularly in chapters IX (*The Idea of Freedom*) and XII (*Moral Imagination*) and in the chapter called *The Reality of Freedom*.

His analysis on the structure of a process of interpersonal interaction within the context of *The Philosophy of Freedom* comes mainly in passages in chapter XIV (*Individuality and Genus*), in his letter of 1<sup>st</sup> November 1894 to Eduard von Hartmann and in the first appendix to *The Philosophy of Freedom* of 1918.

In the introduction to the passage of the chapter that concerns us in pursuance of Steiner's thinking on interpersonal dynamics, he makes clear, on the one hand, that the analytical method of scientific thinking is not adequate to giving an account of the core of human individuality. On the other hand, with this repudiation he opens up the path to the qualitative features of interpersonal interaction, that mark it as something special: *communication* and *participation*.

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18. So as not to gloss over the historical significance of this fragment of Steiner's thinking on interpersonal dynamics, let us briefly touch on the question of which of these intellectual giants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century his thinking on “meeting”, “fellow human being” and “free spirit” is most akin to. The one that seems to fit most immediately is Barth's existential description of the “being-ness” of the human being, which he characterizes as a “*condition of being subsisting in the act of meeting another human being*” (Barth, 1992, p.296). Barth and Steiner are also in accord in their strong criticism of abstraction in the description of interpersonal interaction, as they are on the nature of the man Jesus, a being conceptualized by Barth as a “free subject” (ibid., p.251). According to Barth wherever “people are not yet or no longer in possession of their humanity they will have been seen as having an abstract existence, i.e. one abstracted from the co-existence with them of their fellow human beings” (ibid. p.270). Whether Steiner would have been prepared to go along with the idea of “the man Jesus having his free and real being through his fellow-man” as the point of reference for the free but nonetheless interpersonal existence of a particular subject is probably doubtful. These doubts – in relation to Nietzsche and Stirner, who were the greatest influences on him on this point at this time – particularly apply to the “early Steiner” of the 1890's. In contrast, Steiner's *Outline of Occult Science* of 1909 treats “Christ Jesus” as the “ideal” of an “all-embracing brotherhood”, which overcomes solipsism and “alienation” (Steiner, 2013, p.294). In this he approaches a theologically sound conception of interpersonal interaction.

19. On the question of where this topic fits into the body of Steiner research, see Traub (2011), pp.849-851.

“Every kind of study that deals with abstract thoughts and generic concepts is but a preparation for the knowledge we [share] when a human individuality [communicates] to us his way of viewing the world, and on the other hand for the knowledge we get from the content of his acts of will” (SKA 2, p.238, italics mine).<sup>20</sup>

For the individual Self (“I”) involved here, through the participation in the communication of the other/s<sup>21</sup> the encounter with him/her/them becomes interpersonal. In seeking to get to the essence of this interpersonal interaction, Steiner’s whole focus is on the “Thou” and what he/she has to communicate. What the Self has to contribute to the situation is a readiness to accept the likelihood that its counterpart is a free individual, who has something original, individual, personal to communicate.

“Whenever we feel that we are dealing with that element in a man which is free from stereotyped thinking and instinctive willing”

then an appropriate reaction is demanded of the Self – and this consists in restraint. In this act of meeting another person

“we must cease to call to our aid any concepts at all of our own making, if we *would understand* him in his essence” (ibid.).

The desire to understand is thus – in addition to communication and participation – the third condition constitutive of the dynamics of interpersonal interaction.<sup>22</sup>

The last step taken in chapter XIV on the formulation of the idea of interpersonal dynamics consists in more closely defining participation in the communicative act of a free fellow-individual in terms of ‘the desire to understand’. Steiner does this by making a distinction between our usual knowledge of an object and ‘the exceptional case of knowledge of another person’. While in knowing an object the thinking subject arrives at the sense-transcending, ideal conceptual structure of the object by means of his own cognitive effort (intuition), understanding another person is constituted by our readiness to “take over into our own spirit those concepts by which he [the other person] determines himself, in their pure form (without mixing our own conceptual content with them)” (SKA 2, p.239). It is the phrase in brackets (“without mixing our own conceptual content with them”) that turns interpersonal meeting into mutual understanding. For – and this is Steiner’s critical conclusion of this train of thought –

“Those who immediately mix their own concepts into every judgment about another person, can never arrive at the understanding of an individuality” (ibid).<sup>23</sup>

#### 4.3 Revelation: “extinguish my own thinking – to truly experience another person’s thinking”

Eduard von Hartmann’s off-hand comments on *The Philosophy of Freedom*, especially on the subject of interpersonal interaction, persistently unsettled Steiner’s thinking. In the new edition of the book in 1918 he devoted a whole chapter to this mental discomfort – the *First Appendix*. Here Steiner attempts once more to clarify the essential aspects of his experience-based approach to interpersonal dynamics in relation to von Hartmann’s objections. There was, however, no likelihood that this attempt would find understanding approval from his opponent at this time. Eduard von Hartmann died on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1906. As a result, Steiner’s considerations acquired a less personal and more systematic character.

20. We would like to point out once more the kinship between R. Steiner and K. Barth in their thinking on interpersonal dynamics. The latter also laid his finger on the qualitative difference between scientific analysis and the experience of really meeting another person. “[W]herever people have been seen as having an abstract existence, i.e. one abstracted from the co-existence with them of their fellow human beings”, according to Barth, “they will not yet or no longer be in possession of their humanity” (Barth, 1992, p.270).

21. In chapter XIV it is also interesting that Steiner, in a remarkable way, speaks out in favour of women’s emancipation: “What a woman is naturally capable of becoming had better be left to the woman herself to decide” (SKA 2, p.237).

22. Elsewhere we have called this Steiner’s “idea of a *theory of understanding* based upon interpersonal dynamics.” See Traub, 2011, p.847.

23. The ‘epoché’ – interpersonal interaction as the desire for mutual understanding – introduced here by Steiner also implies the need for a critical approach to traditional terminologies and established ways of thinking in anthropology, sociology, psychology, not to speak of anthropology. This follows directly from Steiner’s previously described demand for ‘experience-based knowledge’ as opposed to any kind of ‘abstraction in sciences dealing with the nature of the human being’.

We have already spoken about the beginning of the discussion. It makes clear how Steiner means to tackle the problem of interpersonal interaction, namely empirically.

“What is it, in the first instance, that I have before me when I confront another person? I see the features of his immediate appearance” (SKA 2, p.252).

What then follows in the 1918 Appendix takes further and makes more precise what he had already said in chapter XIV (“Individuality and Genus”) in 1894. And this revisiting of the subject certainly gives a much more precise and profound picture of the I-Thou relationship. The encounter with the other, who, as it says in the 1894 text, was “felt” to be a person/individual, is now translated into a terminology of seeing. For

“through the thinking with which I confront the other person, the percept of him becomes, as it were, transparent to the mind” (ibid.).

In both cases this means that in the perception of the other person, insofar as it occurs with due mindfulness (attentive “seeing”), something appears which points beyond the mere sensory image or outward figure. The mindful sensory perception of another person becomes, “as it were”, as “transparent” as something that has not a sensory but an “inner” quality. In 1894 this role was filled by a “feeling” mediated by the presence of the other person, such that

“we feel that we are dealing with that element in a man which is free from stereotyped thinking and instinctive willing” (SKA 2, p.238).

While Steiner's argumentation on both occasions is consistent, insofar as the word “inner” corresponds in anthroposophical terms to the word “feeling”, as used in 1894, this latter term nevertheless goes through a change in 1918. It becomes an obligation, a moral feeling:

“I am bound to admit that when I grasp the percept [the other person] with my thinking, it is not at all the same thing as appeared to the outer senses. In what is a direct appearance to the senses, something else is indirectly revealed” (ibid., p.260).

In “grasping with my thinking” the sensory appearance of another person the immediate sense impression is relativized and “reveals” something else. This relativizing of the purely sensory component in the mindful perception of another person Steiner terms “the [self-extinction] of the mere sense appearance” (ibid.). In extinguishing (or rather “withdrawing”) itself in the act of perceiving another person, the sensory process *reveals* something that is more than a mere sense impression of a human gestalt, namely, the inherent dimension of mind and feeling.<sup>24</sup> That is the one thing. But the moment of transparent transformation from sensory perception to consideration of another's soul-life, which occurs exclusively in interpersonal interaction, does not only relativise sensory perception as my main means of appropriately apprehending the gestalt I am meeting. Rather, on the level of soul perception it precipitates a further “extinguishing”, likewise in the form of a feeling of moral compulsion. This second level of withdrawal in the process of interpersonal interaction should – over and above the sensory appearance and feeling-life - be concerned with apprehending the actual thinking of the counterpart Self (“I”). The presence of the other person before me extinguishes the mere sense appearance, and what this presence

“reveals through this extinguishing compels me as a thinking being to extinguish my own thinking as long as I am under its influence, and to put its thinking in the place of mine” (ibid. p.260).

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24. In saying, in 1918, that the “grasping of the other in thinking” involves approaching him via sensory perception as a being endowed with mind and feeling, Steiner gave this problem a specifically appellative formulation. This notably corresponds to what he says in chapter IX of *The Philosophy of Freedom* about the human being's fundamentally *moral* relationship to the world. Here we find: “From every occurrence which I perceive and which concerns me, there springs at the same time a moral duty”. In addition to the natural laws behind things and events “there is also”, as Steiner expresses it, “a moral label attached to them which for me, as a moral person, gives ethical directions as to how I have to conduct myself” (SKA 2, p.182). Quite apart from the question of whether the apprehension of this duty arises from ethical convention or moral intuition, in other words, either from tradition or from independent thinking, it would seem that for Steiner sensory perception is equally susceptible to having natural laws or moral ideas derived from it. From the point of view of interpersonal dynamics this implies that the human gestalt, as such, has “a moral label”, appellative-ethical in character, “attached to it”. To realise and acknowledge this is the task of interpersonal interaction. Fichte expressed this state of affairs in the theologically heightened sentence: “For the human being the human gestalt is necessarily sacred” (SW III, p.85).

Already in 1894 Steiner had formulated this *Epoché* of Self-oriented thinking within the context of interpersonal interaction as an appeal to “cease call[ing] to our aid any concepts at all of our own making”, and he made this restraint the *conditio sine qua non* of interpersonal understanding (“if we *would understand* [the other person] in his essence”) (SKA 2, p.238).

With the “extinguishing” of the sensory schema, and the alternating mutual “extinguishing” of the thinking of those involved, the ground is prepared for interpersonal interaction to occur as a qualitatively singular experience. This “threshold” may be construed as the transition Steiner had in mind when he wrote in his 1894 letter to Eduard von Hartmann:

“Where the concepts of space and time cease to have meaning, however, as in the sphere of ethics, that is where it also becomes impossible to speak of the *numerically different* [i.e. of separate individuals]” (GA 39, p.226).

In 1918 this transition is referred to in similar terms: “Through the self-extinction of the sense appearance” – this, of course, also has to do with the extinguishing of [my own] thinking, which was mentioned in the previous sentence – “the separation between the two spheres of consciousness is actually overcome” (SKA 2, p.252).<sup>25</sup>

The implications for the theory of interpersonal dynamics of what we have come to so far may be summed up as follows: The other person, insofar as he “places himself before me” in a spirit of genuine meeting, initiates – in contrast to every other kind of confrontation with an object – a unique field of experience: that of real meeting between human beings. What is involved in this field comes to light initially through perception permeated with feeling, which reveals, in this interaction with the other person, something more than merely sensory, and through the Self’s “willingness to understand”. This willingness also has a quality of feeling or inner experience, namely that of the “moral imperative” to hold back on any spontaneous interpretation and judgment of the situation. Only with such openness in the field of experience are the conditions fulfilled, which understanding, as interpersonal experience and as the joint or reciprocal action of free individuals subsequent to understanding-based interaction, makes possible.

#### 4.4 Shared consciousness

Having opened up the field of interpersonal dynamics, Steiner goes on to describe the act of meeting between free individuals, in other words their experiencing of the content of one another’s consciousness.

In 1894 Steiner had approached the experience of interpersonal interaction by speaking of it in terms of the other person *saying* (“*communicating*”) something about his “way of looking at the world” or about “the content of his will” (SKA 2, p.238). And the understanding of this communication was predicated upon “taking over ... those concepts by which he [the free individual] determines himself”, together with the withholding of our own concepts and judgments about what has been communicated. The first Appendix of the new edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom* explains this event as “the extinguishing of my thinking for the duration” of the communication. The analysis of this situation is then intensified and deepened in 1918 by the addition of two further aspects. My Self’s reception of the communication of the other person into the open space (emptiness) created by the extinguishing of its own thinking (concepts) makes it possible for the “other person’s” thinking to be experienced “as if it were my own experience” and to put *their* thinking in place of my own (SKA 2, pp.252). The result of the reception of the content of the one consciousness by the

25. In 1923 Albert Schweitzer’s main philosophical work, *Culture and Ethics*, was published. Here the subsequent winner of the Nobel Peace Prize develops, in the central 11th chapter, “The Ethics of Reverence for Life”, the idea of an “ethics of resignation” (ibid., pp.244-246). As regards the individual, the central concepts here are “inner freedom”, “being free of the world”, “being true to myself”, and as regards one’s fellows: “not judging others”, respect for another’s life” and the “interdependence of self-assertion and respect for another’s existence” (ibid.). For Schweitzer also the central thing about his principle of “reverence for life” is the dimension of individual experience within the context of living things. It would seem that in terms of the history of science – probably reinforced by the war experience – it was part of the current of the times to distance oneself from speculative world-pictures and ideologies and turn towards the existential nature of real human beings. That which in the middle and towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could still present itself, in a philosophical and literary manner, as individualism in the work of Stirner and Nietzsche became concentrated at the turn and early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Steiner and Schweitzer upon the question of how to conduct a responsible individual life under the principle of “personalism” (cf. Heidegger 1927, pp.114-117).

other effectively abolishes their separation as atomised individuals completely closed off from one another: the solution, in other words, to Hartmann's atomism or solipsism problem. "The separation between the two spheres of consciousness is actually overcome" (ibid.). If in this way something communicated by one person replaces the conscious contents of another, then the one can be said to (temporarily) constitute the consciousness of the other, and not as a sense impression, but as a real experience of an individual spirit, as a person.

Steiner compares this experience to that of the alternation between waking and dream consciousness, both of which are real experiences within the realm of consciousness. It is questionable whether this analogy holds. Comparing the contents of another's consciousness to the dream state awakens associations with the unreal, which is surely not the intention. What is helpful about this analogy, however, is the fact that it refers to states which are experienced by *one* consciousness as real, and that in the case of the dream experience the "waking experience is extinguished".

Thus, in relating back to the fact of "the extinguishing of [one's own] thinking" and the "taking over of the other person's thinking" into one's own consciousness, the same intensity is ascribed to the conscious contents of the other person as to analogous dream images in connection with 'extinguished' waking consciousness. Except that

"in perceiving the other person, [...] the extinction of the content of one's own consciousness gives place not to unconsciousness, as it does in sleep, but to the content of the other person's consciousness" (SKA 2, p.253).<sup>26</sup>

According to Steiner, the reason why we are not normally aware of such an immanent feature of consciousness as this alternation between the extinguishing of our own thinking, the taking over of another's, and the 'lighting up again' of our own is that these varying states of mind

"follow one another too quickly to be generally noticed" (ibid.).<sup>27</sup>

On the theme of interpersonal dynamics this is as far as *The Philosophy of Freedom* goes. Nonetheless, Steiner subsequently came back to it once more in taking issue with von Hartmann's criticism, as published "in the *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*; Vol.108, pp.55ff." (1896) (SKA 2, pp.255f.) Furthermore, in part three of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, in the chapter entitled "Ultimate Questions", Steiner sounds out the spiritual context within which interaction and communication between free individuals occurs. We have dealt with this subject elsewhere under the heading "Synthesis der Geisterwelt" (see Traub 2011, pp.868-875).

#### 4.5 Steiner's issue with Eduard von Hartmann – experience versus speculation<sup>28</sup>

Eduard von Hartmann, in the essay referred to by Steiner, constructs a situation involving two people in a room. What concerns Hartmann primarily here is the relationship between the given reality and the mental pictures each person has of the situation – in other words, the epistemological question as to the degree of realism or idealism in play in their view of the situation.

26. The reason Steiner worked with the distinction between dream- and waking-consciousness in connection with explaining the alternation between I-thinking and Thou-thinking in 1918 may be that in his writing of "*Occult Science*" in 1909 he explored the states of dreaming and waking very intensively. Cf. the chapter "Sleep and death" in: Steiner GA 13, pp.80-136.

27. Besides the somewhat problematical comparison of interpersonal interaction with the alternation between waking and dream consciousness there is another question which is not being addressed here; namely, whether this last contention about the rapid and, above all, *unremarked* alternation of states of consciousness represents a contradiction of Steiner's previous argumentation. Here we had both the *awareness* of the original individuality of the other person and the holding back and extinguishing of the protagonist's own thinking portrayed as *conscious acts*; or, at any rate, the impression given that what we had here were conscious, controlled – and therefore ethically relevant – *acts of freedom* and not Hartmannian unconscious processes.

28. In the field of Steiner research the relationship between E. von Hartmann and Rudolf Steiner has still to be investigated in any systematic detail. On the extremely strong influence of Hartmann on Steiner's theory of knowledge and moral philosophy, on his exploration of the theme of dream and the subconscious, see relevant passages in: H. Traub (2011). Recently Eckart Förster has drawn attention to the many-layered and ambivalent relationship between the two thinkers in his "Introduction" to SKA 2, pp.LXII-LXVII. On the Steiner-Hartmann relationship see also: Thomas Kracht: "*Philosophieren der Freiheit*" in Karl-Martin Dietz (ed.): *Rudolf Steiners Philosophie der Freiheit. Eine Menschenkunde des höheren Selbst*, Stuttgart 1994, pp.192f. The following considerations illuminate a specific, albeit fundamental dissension in the discussion between Steiner and Hartmann.

“When two persons are alone together in a room, *how many examples of these persons are present?* Whoever answers, “two”, is a naïve realist; whoever answers, “four (namely, in each person’s consciousness a Self and another)”, is a transcendental idealist; but he who answers, “six (namely, two persons as things-in-themselves and four mental pictures of persons, two in each of their minds)”, is a transcendental realist. Anyone wishing to construe any of these three different standpoints epistemologically as monism would have to give [...] a different answer [to this question]; but I have no idea what it would be.”<sup>29</sup>

Steiner addresses this problem in two ways. Firstly, he outlines his model of interpersonal interaction once more in the light of Hartmann’s epistemological alternatives. Secondly, he expresses his disappointment at Hartmann’s fundamental misunderstanding of the experience-oriented approach he had put forward in *The Philosophy of Freedom*. It was evidently not a matter of indifference to Steiner, that this once so “highly-esteemed doctor” and respected teacher (Steiner. 1987, pp.148f.), to whom he dedicated the publication of his dissertation in 1882 “in warm admiration”, could so completely misunderstand him and even make public his critical “dig” at Steiner’s monism.

The detailed reiteration of the epistemological problem advanced by Hartmann on the subject of interpersonal interaction underlines once more how important the empirical approach to human interaction – considered previously – was for Steiner. He begins by confirming his fundamentally realist approach with the contention that: when two people are in a room together there are two people in the room. That is tautological. Nevertheless, these two persons, it is additionally assumed, each have constructed images in their minds, both of themselves (self-image) and of the gestalt of the other person. This, according to Hartmann, would be the point of view of ‘transcendental realism’. The mental pictures, however – and this is now the remarkable advance in Steiner’s thinking on interpersonal dynamics – are only “unreal perceptual images” (SKA 2, p.255). They are unreal – this follows from Steiner’s theory of knowledge and truth – because they (at this stage) lack the empirically mediated complement of the conceptual or ideal, which alone can render them worthy of being described as *real* mental pictures. In pursuance of this line of thinking on the interpersonal, therefore, the level of *pictorial* representation of the other person is followed by the level of *cognitive* apprehension of the four perceptual images by each person, and out of this alone can the *real* relationship to each other of these two people develop. In “the thinking activity of the two people, reality is grasped” (ibid.). According to Steiner, then, the reality of personal identity in the social context is not established by the perceived presence of the people involved and the mental images formed thereof, but *is generated* through the process of spiritual engagement with a personal counterpart, with a Thou.<sup>30</sup> This engagement follows according to the previously described schema, especially its third level – namely, that of each person’s permitting their reciprocal communications to “come to life” in each other’s consciousness.

This is the point the argument has come to so far. In keeping with how it unfolds the motif of the periodic extinguishing of thinking should now come to the fore. At this point in the first appendix, however, Steiner skips over this, and instead discusses in more detail the dialogical aspect of the “lighting up” or “coming to life” of both “spheres of consciousness”, i.e. the minds of each of the people involved. This more or less corresponds to the “rapid alternation” between one’s own thinking and the taking up of the other person’s thinking, which was spoken of previously. In this dynamic, reciprocal exchange of Self- and not-Self-content, in other words, in “these moments of coming to life”, the people involved – and this could be regarded as a fourth level – are no longer “enclosed within their own minds”, but each mind “overlaps” the other (ibid.). In the reflective phase of the process, when each one returns to their own mental picture, the cognitive experience of the presence of the other person remains in each of their minds, with the result (the fifth level) that “the consciousness of each person, in the experience of thinking, apprehends both himself and the other” (ibid.) – or comprehends or, as it was previously expressed, understands.

It is no surprise that Steiner found the epistemological and abstract model-making exercise of his esteemed teacher, Eduard von Hartmann, somewhat unsavoury in comparison to his own attempt at a true-life reconstruction of an I-Thou experience. Accordingly, he sums up Hartmann’s game of logic as follows:

29. E. v. Hartmann, quoted by R. Steiner, SKA 2, p.254f.

30. Whether this thought can be construed as an anticipation of G. H. Mead’s symbolic-interactionist theory of identity formation is simply noted here as a question, but will not be pursued in what follows. Cf. G. H. Mead 1968, pp.207ff.

“The transcendental realist [E. v. Hartmann] will have nothing whatever to do with the true state of affairs regarding the process of knowledge; he cuts himself off from the facts by a tissue of thoughts and entangles himself in it”. (SKA 2, p.255).

The whole point of what Steiner was trying to say in his experience-oriented analysis of (among other things) interpersonal interaction was, it seemed to him, “ignored by Eduard von Hartmann” (ibid.). This impression of fundamental misunderstanding on Hartmann's part was later confirmed for Steiner in Hartmann's letter of 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1897, to which Steiner briefly refers at the end of the *First Appendix* of 1918. Here again Hartmann is only concerned with schematic classifications of theses in relation to epistemological models within the dynamic of idealism versus realism, on the one hand, and subjectivity and objectivity on the other. Here, to finish, we will briefly consider this.

In this letter von Hartmann contends that it is impossible for the content of the moral intuitions of particular individuals to be “numerically identical” to the objectivity of a trans-subjective idea.

“Subjective-ideal being as conscious content and consciousness-transcending being cannot be predicated of the same grammatical subject at the same time.’ Whoever regards this sentence in this form as invalid, him I must subsume, *insofar* as he regards it as invalid, under the heading of naïve realism” (Steiner, 1987, p.358).

Apparently Steiner had failed to solve the problem of combining universalism and particularism, but since Hartmann's counter-argument in this connection was rather weak, Steiner did not take the bait. Rather, he countered by saying he knew

“that a transcendental realist describes this [Steiner's position] as a relapse into naïve realism.”

But then, in *The Philosophy of Freedom* he had

“already pointed out that naïve realism retains its justification *for the thinking that is experienced*” (SKA 2, p.255, italics mine).

Thus Steiner re-emphasises his interest in an experience-oriented, real-life approach to this theme. His argument for the combining of subjective intuition and the objective reality of ideas from the perspective of interpersonal interaction was given particular attention in the final chapter of *The Philosophy of Freedom*: “Ultimate questions – the consequences of monism”. And here he offers a solution to the problem assumed by Hartmann to be insoluble, namely that of identity between subjective intuition and objective idea “in the same numerical subject”. He does this, however, not in terms of formal, but of transcendental logic, or, as Steiner would no doubt prefer to say, spiritually real logic. The argument runs as follows:

The “conceptual content of the world is the same for all human individuals.<sup>31</sup> [...] According to monistic principles, one human individual regards another as akin to himself because the same world content expresses itself in him. [...] Thinking leads all perceiving subjects to the same ideal unity in all multiplicity. [...] The ideas of another human being are in substance mine also, and I regard them as different only as long as I *perceive*, but no longer when I *think*. Every human being embraces in his thinking only a part of the total world of ideas, and to that extent individuals differ even in the actual content of their thinking. But all these contents are within a self-contained whole, which embraces the thought contents of all human beings” (SKA 2, p.246; italics mine).

That which sounds like a rarified, metaphysical speculation on the *a priori* conditions for the possibility of interpersonal interaction and communication is, however, intended by Steiner as a causally real field of human interpersonal experience, as a world of successful communication and interaction between free spirits “with the foundation of its existence within itself”, as the “universal primordial Being which pervades all men” (ibid., p.246), and which can bring about real meeting between human beings at any time.

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31. With reference to the propositions of formal science, say, of logic, this thesis is self-evident. That Steiner advances this congruence also as the basis for moral and aesthetic thought characterises his philosophy as Realism (as opposed to Nominalism). In terms of the history of philosophy this idea stretches over Schelling's and Fichte's idealist realism back to Plato's doctrine of Ideas. With regard to all of which Steiner always took a critical stance – entirely in keeping with Fichte's “genetic method” – in relation to the strict Realism of “ideas as real-in-themselves”.

## 5. Summary and outlook

Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* does not deal with the theme of interpersonal dynamics as such. Indeed, for critics of anthroposophy it is questionable whether the dimension of the interpersonal can be said to have any kind of a role in the philosophy and anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner, given the primacy accorded therein to individual self-realisation. We have, however, shown here that already in 1894 Steiner had tackled the problem of the harmonising of different individuals' ideas of freedom in several passages of the first edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. The account of this problem develops naturally out of the dynamic between the ethical individualism of Steiner's approach to moral philosophy, which has a tendency to pluralism, and the epistemology of monism, which forms the basis of his philosophy as a whole. This, it seems, was clear to Steiner, which is likely why he put forward the relevant considerations on the problem of interpersonal dynamics just mentioned. Even from the relatively few discussions on this from 1894, aspects of a working, if not yet clearly structured, idea are discernible as the basic features of a noteworthy conception of interpersonal interaction. Steiner's awareness of this subject was then brought into much sharper relief by Eduard von Hartmann's charge of solipsism. The result was that in the First Appendix to the second edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom* in 1918 he quite explicitly took up this issue again. Extracted from their respective contexts, and focused upon a systematic concept of interpersonal dynamics, a six-step model of interpersonal interaction – of relevance to moral philosophy – can be reconstructed from Steiner's various remarks on the subject.

1. The first step is marked by *meeting a human being* as something fundamentally distinct from relating to an object. In seeking to gain knowledge of an object, the Self must actively investigate and discover the concepts and laws of its structure, whereas in human interaction the other person himself makes known the condition of his mind and will, thereby placing the Self in more of a passive role. In human interaction Steiner's concern is more with the quality of the actual experience two people have in meeting one another, and less with a theoretical analysis of the situation.
2. The second step – *extinguishing of the sensory* – accentuates the spiritual dimension of human meeting as opposed to the purely physical encounter of moving configurations of people in a room. Certain considerations from *Occult Science*, although from a different context, can be understood as a continuation of this idea of the “extinguishing of the sensory” in the context of interpersonal interactions – and in two different ways. Therein are described, on the one hand, the element of the “elevation” of the Self in the transcending of the sensory, and on the other the associated idea of “spiritual enjoyment” (Steiner, 2013, p.103). The “sense world”, as he says, “is a manifestation of the spirit hidden behind it. The Self would never be able to enjoy the spirit in the form in which it is able to manifest through bodily senses alone, did it not want to use these senses for the enjoyment of the spiritual within the sense world” (ibid.). As an example of this enjoyable spiritual “elevation” of the Self through knowledge of the spiritual in the sense-world Steiner then introduces the I-Thou relationship in the form of a love relationship. “A person who loves another is certainly not attracted only to that in him which can be experienced through the physical organs. [...] Just that part [withheld from perception] of the loved one then becomes [through the extinguishing of the sensory] visible for the [super-sensible] perception of which the physical organs were only the means” (ibid., 104). This implies that the idea of the “extinguishing of the sensory” occurring when two people meet, as presented in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, also opens up the sphere of “spiritual enjoyment” in the positive sense, and at the same time, it may be assumed, enables them to experience the “elevation” of each other's Self.
3. If the last step has been reciprocal in that the individuals involved have recognised one another as free spirits, then the groundwork has been prepared for the third step – *communication and participation*.
4. To be successful this third step in a process of interpersonal interaction requires, as a fourth step, the *desire to understand*, which Steiner designates as a readiness on each person's part to take on what is being communicated by the other Self as their own thinking, or at least to receive it temporarily as such.

5. And this in turn entails a fifth step, which is the intermittent *extinguishing of one's own thinking*, in other words, the reception of what is being communicated by the other person without 'mixing in one's own conceptual content'.
6. The diversity of such interactions between human individuals possible at any time is now, in a sixth step, harmonised. In keeping with the epistemology of monism, this effectively means that, with sufficient clarification *in thinking*, it must be possible for the diverse individual ideas to be referred back to a common ideal foundation. Out of this, then, both freedom from contradiction in argumentation and the possibility of consensus-based action would arise. For steps four, five and six we can also add in the aspects of "spiritual enjoyment" and the "elevation" of the Self, which were mentioned above under point two, in connection with the "extinguishing of the sensory".

The echoes here in Steiner of classical solutions to the question of the intellectual or ethical harmonisation of a plurality of individualised minds – the idea, say, of a 'pre-established harmony', that of a 'synthesis of the world of mind' or that of an *a priori* community of communication – cannot, however, be permitted to blot out the striking distinctness of Steiner's experience-oriented approach. For this is not arrived at deductively on the theoretical assumption of such a principle, but inductively, through its generation by actual individuals in the realisation of an authentic interpersonal interaction.

From a systematic point of view, however, we must point out that there is a gap in Steiner's model of interpersonal dynamics. In his interpretation of this Herbert Witzmann went some way towards repairing it, albeit not systematically. In his essay "Das Erwachen am anderen Menschen" (a quotation from Steiner) Witzmann discusses extracts from Steiner's *Dornach Lectures* (Steiner 1965), which stress the importance of the relationship to other people for the whole development of the Self and for the furtherance of communication and interaction, particularly among anthroposophists (Witzmann 1985a, pp.38-54). In the text quoted by Witzmann, Steiner very briefly goes over the relevant elements of his ideas on interpersonal dynamics, as are familiar to us from *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Apart from "the need to remember one's spiritual home", there exists, as is stated in the Dornach lecture,

"the other need to allow oneself to be inwardly awakened through the presence of another person. And the impulse of feeling [!] active here – this is the new idealism. When the Ideal ceases to be a mere abstraction, if it is to take root once more in the life of the human spirit, then it will take the form of: *I will awaken to the presence of the other person*".

And he goes on more specifically:

"that can be what is special about the way the community life of the anthroposophical society is conducted, and can establish itself quite naturally" (Steiner, quot. in Witzmann, 1985a, p.39).

What Steiner explains here in this lecture is more or less what he said about interpersonal dynamics within the context of *The Philosophy of Freedom*, with which we are already familiar. Noteworthy is the fact that here he once more accentuates the impulsive dimension of feeling in interpersonal interaction. Furthermore, his specifying this situation as the "new idealism" is a clear indication of his adherence to the tradition of classical German philosophy, whereby he also stresses, as a (presumed) further development of this, the empirical-personal, one could also say, existential-pragmatic or ethical dimension of "communal growth through one another". Herbert Witzmann's commentary on the meaning of this Steiner quotation, while being very frankly esoteric, finally makes clear reference to *The Philosophy of Freedom*, when he sums up with: we may be able to glimpse the

"ultimate source of a modern, spiritually authentic way of building a community or a society through observation of the inner impulses of others, in the sense put forward in *The Philosophy of Freedom*" (ibid., p.51).

Thus Witzmann underlines the fundamental importance of *The Philosophy of Freedom* also for providing answers to issues arising from his own ideas on interpersonal dynamics. Witzmann then expounds in more detail the connection between human meeting – the 'awakening to the presence of the other person' – and the interchange occurring between those involved through their participation in the universal, super-sensible world of ideas. In such a meeting, he says, two things are happening – namely, "community-building from

above”, in other words, the descending “coming into presence of higher spiritual beings” (Steiner’s Christ-Jesus motif, cf. Steiner, 2013, p.294), and a complementary, ascending “community-building from below”. The latter is the initiating and pursuance of the interpersonal “awakening to the presence of the other person”, in other words, the establishing of an (anthroposophical?) “knowledge community” (Witzenmann, 1985a, p.52). The “awakening to the presence of the other person” Witzenmann calls the “minor ontic exchange”. The interchange between the “knowledge communities” and the “higher spiritual beings” he calls the “major ontic exchange”, and describes it as “outshining” the minor one (ibid.). This construction of a horizontal, but ascending ‘minor community-making’ and a vertical, but descending ‘major community-making’ can very clearly be construed as a terminological variation on the themes of interpersonal dynamics and the mediation between individualism and universalism, as found in Steiner’s *Philosophy of Freedom*. What is missing from this construction, however – and this is explained by the source from which it was developed – is, to say it in Witzenmann’s anthroposophical language, a closer description or definition of the “spiritual being” that forms itself out of this community-making in this process of ‘awakening to the presence of the other person’. Witzenmann’s idea of the awakening of “I-beings” in the ‘minor ontic exchange’, and of the ‘interpenetration’ of the individual and the universal “I” (Self) in the ‘major ontic exchange’ remains conceptually caught in the form of “I-relatedness”, and consequently delivers no qualitative, spiritual gain from the sphere of interpersonal interaction. I and Thou remain, from the transcendental perspective, “I’s”, even though each other’s thought content can overlap in the world of ideas they have in common.

“I am I only for myself; for everyone else I am a Thou; and for me everyone else is a Thou.’ This fact is the outward expression of a profound truth”,

says Steiner in *Occult Science* (Steiner, 2013, p.66), thereby confirming the impression that interpersonal interaction as such does not, as it is constituted in itself, represent any kind of spiritual gain. In the act of meeting only mutually “awakening” “I’s” attain higher development.

For Witzenmann, however, this is not the last word on this matter. For in his essay “Die Schülerschaft im Zeichen des Rosenkreuzes” (Witzenmann, 1985b, pp.141-151) he speaks of the “spiritual being” that arises out of the interchange between two individuals in a process of interpersonal interaction. What is to be noted about this idea is – and this links up with Steiner’s “new idealism” thesis – that it has to do with a central category in the thinking of J. G. Fichte, a category which the latter put forward in a chapter of *Wissenschaftslehre* with which Steiner may well have been familiar. It concerns the concept of “we”, and not in a grammatical or linguistic sense, but in its philosophical, interpersonal-constitutive and qualitative meaning. According to Urs Richli in “Das Wir in der späten Wissenschaftslehre”, Fichte uses the concept *We* to designate a trans-individual subject, which by means of “common consent has been fused into a consensual unity”. Fundamental for this ‘fusion into a consensual unity’ is an “intersubjective experience of supporting evidence”, which, according to Fichte, occurs particularly through collective acts of cognition (Richli, 1997, p.360).<sup>32</sup> The kinship of this thought to Steiner’s 1894 conception of a process of interpersonal interaction involving the reciprocal reception of individual thought-content, resulting in the complete congruence of both spheres of consciousness is certainly remarkable. Except that in Steiner’s *Philosophy of Freedom* the consciousness of *We* brought about by this experience is not systematically reflected upon. In Witzenmann’s above-mentioned essay, however, the situation is different. It is true that the basic spiritual experience of “awakening to the presence of the other person” also features here. Nevertheless, the thought is now taken further in the direction of the “We-experience”, which is brought about by the I-Thou relationship. Witzenmann has no doubt that with this experience we have a new dimension of community life brought about by this relationship. “For the state of unity, which expresses itself [for the Self] in the Thou-experience, enables something supra-human to be present, which towers over I and Thou” (ibid., p.145). And taking as given the already familiar idea of the “minor” and “major ontic exchange”, he says: “the [reciprocal] Thou-experience becomes the vehicle of the We-experience” (ibid.).<sup>33</sup> According to Witzenmann, this “We-

32. Cf. also Traub (2011), pp.89-92.

33. We have already referred to the “brotherhood motif” in *Occult Science*, for which Steiner gives a Christological justification. Here, however, it remains open, whether Steiner there was actually aware of the systematic significance of this thought for his idea of interpersonal dynamics, and whether he clearly recognised the qualitative and systematic progress it provided for interpersonal interaction. For the biblical verse with which he illustrates at this point the experience-oriented and individualised “synthesis of the

experience” – in which the “awakening [of the Self] in the presence of another person and the “minor ontic exchange” of the “knowledge communities” all converge and interpenetrate with the “major ontic exchange”, the ‘coming to presence of higher spiritual beings – is the “archetypally human” (ibid.).

With the idea of We a line can reasonably be drawn under Steiner's model of interpersonal dynamics, also the version of it enlarged by various anthroposophical considerations. These considerations were added to by Witzmann, but also by Steiner before him. Either that, or they already implied ideas on a community of practice which goes beyond communities of thought and knowledge. Either way, they are consistent with conclusions which go beyond the six-step model of interpersonal interaction in their organisational structures and practical consequences, but not in their ideational basis. For if Steiner's six-step model is understood as an idea according to which, as stated in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, fully realised human interaction occurs, then substantial guidelines – in keeping with Steiner's philosophy and anthroposophy – for the organisation of any kind of interpersonal interaction and communication processes can be derived from it. This means, it is a model that, over and above its value as an ideal form, would have something significant and exemplary to say especially in fields of practical anthroposophical application, such as educational science and medicine, indeed all those areas of anthroposophical practice where interpersonal communication and interaction are central. But Steiner's model is not only useful in stimulating and giving direction to philosophical and anthroposophical thinking and action. For that which was originally conceived – in a somewhat elitist manner – as a post-conventionalist communication idea for free spirits (i.e. those capable of moral imagination), can – used democratically – be extended in its application in all sorts of ways, and become a guideline for a humane culture of communication for society in general, for all levels of communication and for all shades of public discourse participants. Our public conversations nowadays are light on the universal; instead they are dominated by particular and individual interests, sometimes extremely heated, with little interest in wanting to understand or self-critically take on board the other's thinking. The model is an approach that would do this debate (non-) culture – both inside and outside social media – a lot of good.

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world of mind” through the super-sensible Christ-ideal, namely: “I and the Father are one”, does not lead into a higher category of community-building and of the We, but adheres strictly to I-thinking, to “the name of Christ” as “ultimate foundation” of the “human I” (cf. Steiner, 2013, p.294).

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