

# Steiner/Waldorf education and anthroposophy – A literature review

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**ABSTRACT.** In recent research the need for studies that provide comprehensive and systematic reviews of specific topic related to Steiner/Waldorf education has been highlighted. One such area is the relationship between Steiner/Waldorf education and anthroposophy where a significant amount of writing has been done over the years. The article focuses on two issues. First to provide an initial systematic review of the literature and second to look at how the discussion has evolved over time. The article reviews journal articles, books and research stretching back to 1968. The main findings are that the core of the discussion has largely remained the same: that anthroposophy is a method not a world view and that its importance for Steiner/Waldorf education lies in how it becomes a path for individual transformation not in it being a teaching or dogma. There is, however, a clear increase in writing from 2010 onward and with this a significant nuancing and deepening of the arguments from previous decades. Intersecting with that are different styles and approaches, one termed “maximalist” and one “minimalist” in the analysis, the former employing a style thick with Steiner quotes and anthroposophical content and the latter more focused on the epistemological aspects of anthroposophy with less emphasis on quotes from Steiner and content discussion.

*Keywords:* Steiner/Waldorf education, anthroposophy, esotericism, literature review.

## Introduction

Die Frage, die mancher stellt, ist: Kann heute die Waldorfpädagogik nicht auch ohne die nicht jedermann zugängliche und eingehende Anthroposophie existieren?

The question that some are posing is: can't Steiner education exist today without anthroposophy given how difficult anthroposophy can be for the average person to approach.

\_Christoph Lindenberg 1975.

In a recent review article discussing postcolonial perspectives on Steiner/Waldorf<sup>1</sup> education (Tyson 2023a) two things became clear. First, that this controversial theme regarding Steiner education had been extensively discussed in various scholarly and semi-scholarly publications. Second, that these publications seldom included each other in a comparative discussion. This impression was underscored by a pair of comprehensive literature reviews regarding theoretical and empirical research on Steiner education (Tyson 2023b, 2024a). In these it became apparent that there has been a significant amount of research on various topics but that there's an absence of literature reviews where the disparate articles, papers, books and dissertations regarding an issue or theme are considered together.

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1. I will use the term Steiner education or Steiner pedagogy throughout for what is also known as Waldorf education. I understand this to encompass any educational initiative based more or less in Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy.

One of the areas where there is extensive and long-lasting discussion, is the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy. A significant amount of literature has been produced over the years regarding this matter (eg. Kiersch 2010, 2015; Schieren 2015; Tyson 2023c; to name just a few of the essays published in the journal *Research on Steiner education*). But a systematic review and evaluation has not been written. Given the contentious issue that this represents, a treatment of the subject, especially from an historical perspective examining the (possibly) shifting ways in which this relationship has been conceived, is both warranted and important.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, to provide a systematic literature review of the scholarly, semi-scholarly and non-scholarly<sup>2</sup> literature discussing the issue. Second, to look at how this discussion has evolved over time. The issue to be explored is not what the answer *should* be regarding the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education but rather what the answer *has become* over time as it is reflected in writing. What do Steiner educators and scholars themselves say about this? This means that external critical views such as Ullrich (1987, 2015), Prange (2000) and Skiera (2010) have not been included. Not because their perspectives are irrelevant but because the aim here is to document and review the differences in point of view that can be discerned internally. The external views tend to disregard such differences and to focus directly on Steiner's books and lectures on anthroposophy. This also ignores the issue of historical change.

As the founder of the first Steiner school, Emil Molt, remarked in the 1930s when defending the school against Nazi encroachment, being an anthroposophist and a Steiner teacher could not be separated (see eg. Barkved 2010, p.11; Esterl 2012, p. 229f.). At the time this likely contributed to saving the schools from becoming collaborators with the regime. It is not a given that the answer would be the same today. It is also not clear that the rhetoric regarding what anthroposophy is has remained the same.

An important contribution that this study provides is to demonstrate if there are different perspectives that have been brought to the question over the years and what this might mean if there are (and what it means if they have remained the same). As such it serves as a case-study of the variations in conceptual understanding that exists within Steiner education. That there are rich variations across practice should be clear (cf. eg. Tyson 2021). If there is similar variation across theory seems less explored and critics such as Ullrich (2015) and Prange (2000) generally assume that there is little internal difference in perspective among Steiner educators. This is discussed further in the concluding section.

## Research questions and design

As stated above, the aim is twofold:

1. To provide a literature review.
2. To look at how the discussion has evolved over time.

This is a comparative study of texts. As such, it straddles the area between theoretical and empirical research. The texts are, in a sense, empirical data, but their topic is decidedly theoretical. As a comparative literature study, the design is relatively straightforward and the aim is to provide an overview of how the theme is discussed in Steiner educational contexts, which arguments are brought forth and if there are any tensions, changes, variations and the like that emerge from such an overview. This can then be brought into a more critical concluding reflection.

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2. The terms are not meant as a normative distinction but more of a formal one. Scholarly, in the context of this article, means peer-review articles and similar publications. Semi-scholarly means essays written by academics with a clear intent of engaging in an academic discourse but published in non-peer-review formats. Non-scholarly means texts written with little or no reference to other works (apart from Steiner). This distinction says little about the quality of each text, that needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

## Methodological considerations

A systematic search for books and articles discussing Steiner education and anthroposophy has been conducted and a comparative, explorative, reading done. The categories and themes that are presented below are based on that reading. The search has entailed going through the publication history of *Research on Steiner Education* to look for articles and essays on the topic. It has also entailed searching through the catalogues of the larger publishers in English and German as well as using the search terms: Steiner, anthroposophy, Steiner education (and their equivalents in German) in google, google scholar and Eric. Finally, some publications were also found through a scan of the reference-lists in articles and books. The review has a number of limitations and boundaries that are considered below.

The question of non-scientific periodicals has been an issue. The anthroposophical movement contains a multitude and even though most are focused on general anthroposophical issues there is a significant overlap with Steiner education. There are also several journals published directly by Steiner school communities in various countries. It would be practically unfeasible to cover all periodicals even just in English. Thus, a choice has been made to focus on the German journal *Die Drei* published from 1921 until today, the Swedish Steiner educational journal *På Väg* (On the road/way) published from 1960 to 2017, the British journal *Child and Man* published from 1936 to 2005 and the US *Waldorf Journal Project* published from 2002 until 2012. A non-representative selection of articles from other journals such as the Norwegian *Steinerskolen* have also been included. These choices were largely pragmatic. The publications that were systematically reviewed were available in print or online in full where other's such as the German *Erziehungskunst* were not. They also represent a fairly wide spread across different languages and countries. This is an issue in itself given how many journals there are in German. Perhaps a large part of this discussion has been a mostly German affair, something that is supported by most articles and books being by German-speaking authors. More on this below.

The journals covered have not been read from cover to cover, rather, in the case of all but *Die Drei* their table of contents has been reviewed looking for titles including the term “anthroposophy”. In the case of *Die Drei* it was possible to conduct an online search in the journal using the search terms “Waldorf” and “anthroposophie”.

Regarding books only a few have been included, limited to those where the focus has been on this specific topic. Any introduction to Steiner education will contain at least some reference to the issue but including all of these would make the study much more extensive. It can be assumed that this has had the consequence that some relevant and novel arguments have been overlooked. Two further categories of relevant book-length texts that have not been systematically included are dissertations on Steiner education (which often contain more or less extensive sections on anthroposophy, eg. Büchele 2014) and curriculum texts (which often contain some kind of presentation of anthroposophy in their initial chapters). In both cases because this would go beyond the article-format and also because few have as their primary objective to discuss the present theme (the two exceptions have been Marques 2020 and Wiehl 2015). That said, especially the various dissertations (of which, according to the surveys in Tyson 2023b, 2024a there are at least 50) deserve a separate study to explore and compare how anthroposophy has been discussed in an academic Steiner educational context.

Some other relevant sources have been entirely excluded. These are: homepages and other electronic resources, as well as recorded presentations from eg. youtube. These practical limitations are serious given that much of the discussion has taken place in journals and online. For example, the International campus Waldorf (<https://www.international-campus-waldorf.com/>), which hosts online lectures on various Steiner educational topics since 2021, has two that explicitly focus on the subject (Wiechert 2021; Lutzker 2022).

Some conceptual boundaries have also been drawn. As noted above, the focus has been strictly limited to texts thematically discussing the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy among “insiders”. Thus, apart from excluding texts written by both critical and friendly outsiders, texts that mainly argue for anthroposophy in Steiner education against “outsider” critique (eg. Kranich & Ravagli 1990;

Altehege et al. 1992; *På Väg* no 1-2 1991) have also been excluded.<sup>3</sup> Texts that simply touch on the issue or that consider it implicitly have also not been included.

A closely related topic concerns the several texts (eg. Kiersch 2008; Heusser 2016; Schieren 2011) that discuss the scientific validity of anthroposophy. These are generally closely related to the present theme given that the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy is also to a large degree an issue of the scientific credibility of Steiner education. This, in turn, partly hinges on the scientific credibility of anthroposophy. To the degree that texts explicitly discussing Steiner education and anthroposophy broach the subject of scientific validity it is considered below. But to include the literature on the matter even if the focus is limited to those texts in which Steiner education is discussed explicitly would expand the study beyond the scope of a single article.

There is also an interesting field to be explored regarding the interpretation of Steiner's philosophy by his followers. Since the works of Traub (2011) and Sijmons (2008) in particular, there exists a foundation of interpretation with which to compare. It is not first and foremost an issue of understanding what Steiner truly meant and how valid his arguments are, but to see how he has been understood by others. For example, Schneider (1985) bases the main part of his introduction to Steiner education on Steiner's *Philosophy of Freedom* and also draws links from it to anthroposophy.

A final demarcation was necessary and emerged during the research process. This concerns the degree to which various journals reflect institutional politics, something that is hinted at in the way different authors publish in different journals (at least the German ones). If this is interesting or not from a research perspective is an open question. I have refrained from any speculation on the matter in what follows although I assume readers knowledgeable of a particular context might read such institutional and perhaps also personal differences into the text.

The article is structured as follows. First, a brief discussion is made regarding Rudolf Steiner's own professed view on the subject after which a summary of the various publications is given. This is then brought further through a thematic discussion where tensions, changes, variations and the like are outlined. The article then concludes with a critical reflection.

## Steiner's view

Anthroposophy was, Steiner repeatedly emphasized (eg. 2020, p. 54, 2019, p. 19), not to be taught as a world view (*Weltanschauung*) in Steiner schools. He stressed that the role of anthroposophy was to provide the methods for teaching, not the contents. But how did he conceive of this? "Method" was not just a matter of didactics and instruction methods. It was also about the teacher's "Gesinnung" or frame of mind, it was about gaining the right intuitions and also about practice/*Übung* in the sense of meditation. Although what constitutes meditation in an anthroposophical context is not straightforward given that Steiner on the one hand characterized meditation as the one true free act a person can engage in (Steiner 1991, p. 79) and this covers a very liberal field of activities and on the other provided an extensive catalogue of concrete and specific meditations (*Sprüche*), including two teacher meditations. So, what Steiner understood with the term "method" is not so simple.

A suspicious reading of his statements could make a case that Steiner's distinction between method- and "Weltanschauungs"-school is mostly a matter of rhetoric rather than substance. The repeated stress on this distinction made by others in the Steiner educational movement is also for the most part just stated, with reference to quotes from Steiner, without taking the time to define how the term "method" is to be understood (Wiehl 2015 is the most elaborated exception I have found and is discussed below).

3. These texts are often concerned with trying to counter criticisms of occultism, hidden influences, pseudoscience, and the like. They do say something implicitly about how anthroposophy is understood and as such could have been included but that would have gone beyond the scope of this article and would also have required a more extensive interpretive work in order to access that implicit understanding.

A less suspicious reading of Steiner's statements could at least conclude that Steiner himself did not want his educational impulse to consist of teaching a world view. Perhaps also that in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Germany this was implicitly understood by him and others in the sense of not actively promoting a religious faith in school. This is not entirely implausible given that the first Steiner school in Stuttgart was founded in a region where it was one of five non-denominational (ie. non-catholic or non-protestant) schools out of a total of 2320 (Frielingsdorf 2019, p. 66). However, even if that argument is accepted as reasonable, this only means that the issue was clear in 1919. What constitutes a "Weltanschauungs"-school today is more ambiguous and also varies from country to country.

Furthermore, it is difficult to separate method from educational content and world view in practice (see also Goldshmidt 2023). This is well exemplified in the case of the history curriculum. Strictly speaking the "method", understood as a matter of didactics, is perhaps possible to describe as comparative cultural history (Zech 2020). However, the contents of the history curriculum, especially in the early grades, have largely reflected the anthroposophical cultural epoch progression from India (sometimes even including Atlantis as a precursor, cf. eg. Kovacs 2008) and Persia over Egypt to Greece and Rome (Barkved 2018). This, at the very least, muddies the waters regarding the distinction between anthroposophy as a methodological source and as a source of contents and, apparently, dates back to Steiner himself (Zech 2012, p. 137, 153) meaning that his distinction is even more open to critique. This is not the only example, others could be given, eg. regarding the subject of eurhythmy or the so-called morning verses.

To summarize, much depends on the level of trust one is willing to put in Steiner's own statements. It also depends on how one understands the terms "world view" and "method". There is no obvious and commonly accepted definition here so Steiner's view will appear more or less reasonable depending on one's understanding. This article does not attempt to solve that issue, it seems to me that the answer is different depending on context, not least if it is about deciding if Steiner schools are legally to be understood as religious schools or not (an issue that can have far-reaching consequences in some countries).

## Results

The results have been structured in a straightforward division of early texts; the 1990s; and contemporary arguments from 2010 onwards. However, some general remarks need to be made initially. As noted in the methods section, several journals were covered. Of these the two in English, *Child and Man* and *Waldorf Journal Project* did not contain a single article specifically covering the topic. But eg. Wember (2008) writing on *Reincarnation and Pedagogy* in *WJP* shows that the boundaries are not always so clear. His essay entails a clear standpoint on the subject where the anthroposophical views on reincarnation and karma are viewed as essential to Steiner education. However, the topic here is more about a kind of explicit meta-discussion regarding the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education and less about all the ways in which this is also expressed more implicitly in some texts.

Generally speaking, the discussion seems to begin in the 1990s, then subside somewhat and regain steam in the 2010s and onwards. There are two early journal exceptions, Westerberg (1968) and Lindenberg (1975) and one set of book-chapters (Weirauch et al. 1987). These three represent a kind of historical baseline for this article and constitute "the early texts". These three contributions are discussed in relative detail in what follows. They will then provide the backdrop against which the rest of the publications will be considered.

### *Early texts*

Westerberg's text from 1968 (reprinted in *På Väg* no 1, 2003) is a two-page long discussion in which the problematic theme of method- vs. Weltanschauungs-school is raised. He argues, initially using the concept of reincarnation, in a similar vein to later writers that one can think of the concept heuristically, ie. in the sense of how productive it is in pedagogical practice. He likewise writes about the Christ-impulse and how the anthroposophical understanding that is brought to this subject can lead to a kind of faith in life that



brings with it an optimistic view of development. He then translates this into the practical work of teachers, writing that such an optimism is an important element in a teacher's "Gesinnung" or character. Finally, Westerberg also mentions how the anthroposophical path of schooling can work both to heal and to liberate the teacher. In this sense he implicitly characterizes anthroposophy as a path of *Bildung* for the individual teacher (see Tyson 2023c).<sup>4</sup>

Lindenberg's 1975 article entitled: *Anthroposophie – der Lebensgrund der Waldorfpädagogik* [Anthroposophy – the foundation or life-source of Steiner education] covers about four pages in the journal *Die Drei*. In it he initially raises the question that is quoted at the opening of this article: given the difficulty that anthroposophy presents to many, wouldn't it be possible to conceive of Steiner education without it moving forward? Lindenberg then argues in a way similar to Westerberg that anthroposophy is more than just a world view and is better understood as a method for comprehending life and both of them emphasize how working with anthroposophy transforms thinking, making one's thinking more focused and life-filled. Lindenberg also goes on to describe how the feeling life can be transformed through inner schooling into a kind of sense-organ, describing the value that this can have for the teacher. He concludes his article with a discussion where he writes that anthroposophical concepts are valuable because they support us in becoming aware of aspects of reality that we would otherwise have passed by without noticing. In this he is close to the argument of Westerberg, mentioned in the previous paragraph. Both have a kind of heuristic approach where they are not so much discussing the absolute truth of the anthroposophical ideas but rather their productiveness in practice. Finally, Lindenberg asks if it is possible to be a Steiner teacher without being an anthroposophist and answers this in the affirmative, noting that this was the case already during Steiner's lifetime. But, he notes, it is at the same time not possible, in the long run, to remain a Steiner teacher unless one is committed to actively working with oneself in order to transform one's consciousness for the purpose of a deeper understanding of the children one is teaching.

With these two brief texts from the 1960s and 70s several recurring themes are articulated. More than a decade later, a publication (Weirauch et al. 1987) appeared in the series *Flensburger Hefte* containing both essays and interviews on this topic. The issue seems to have met with interest, less than a year after the first edition was published the editors published a second one (ibid, p. 3). Not all of the contributions are directly concerned with the issue discussed here, several are more focused on countering the critique of outsiders. The first essay is by Linde and directly discusses the topic, beginning with a question regarding the possible risk that Steiner education becomes watered down as time passes and its roots in anthroposophy are increasingly distant to its practitioners (ibid, p. 4). Like Westerberg, Linde also brings up reincarnation. In one way their reasoning is similar, reincarnation needs to become a practical concept, a contribution to the living educational activity of the teacher. Their rhetoric however, differs. Westerberg's is something of a suggestion, an appeal that anthroposophy has this potential. Linde's directly engages with several quotes from Steiner and makes more of an authoritative truth-claim. Not just that anthroposophy *can* become an impulse towards *Bildung* but that the anthroposophical concepts are *necessary* for this and that there is a clear path towards the kind of living practicality that is under consideration. This path is described as meditation, meaning all three authors touch on the same question.

What separates Linde's argument the most from the Westerberg's and Lindenberg's is the second half of Linde's chapter where he also discusses "the spiritual background of Steiner education" (Weirauch et al. 1987, p. 9). In this section he provides a brief outline of the anthroposophical view of human evolution and the great struggle (*Geisteskampf*) between progressive and retardant spiritual impulses that each individual is involved in. Here he includes a discussion of the centrality that the Christ-impulse holds (using Steiner's

4. The concept of *Bildung* is understood here in the sense of character and personality formation. An intense *Bildung*-experience in life is one that made a strong impact on what one has become. Whenever anthroposophy is discussed as a developmental path this implies that anthroposophy has the potential to be a source of *Bildung*-experiences. Words such as "life", "living thoughts", etc. overlap significantly with what could also be called a process of *Bildung*. I have chosen, in the following, to point this out, because it clarifies an important common denominator among several of the contributions to the subject at hand even though few if any of the authors introduce the term *Bildung* themselves to describe this. Why then make the connection at all? Because *Bildung*, as Rittelmeyer (2012) has noted, is a foundational concept for pedagogy, and it can support us in thinking about the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy from an educational perspective.

term: “the mystery of Golgotha”) for Steiner education. This section clarifies the rhetorical difference between Linde and the previous two authors. As a particularly vivid example Linde writes (*ibid*, p. 15) that *only* anthroposophy can provide one with the necessary knowledge foundations to deal constructively with spiritual matters (*geistigen Wirkenskräfte*). This claim to exclusiveness is made without any argument. As a discourse, Linde’s text has a pronounced coercive structure that differs from the other two even though they are largely in agreement regarding contents.

The second contribution is an interview with Stefan Leber (Weirauch et al. 1987, p. 20-45) which covers more than just the relationship between Steiner pedagogy and anthroposophy. When Leber touches on the topic his emphasis lies on anthroposophy as a path of development (a path of *Bildung*), and that as such it is to be expected that a Steiner teacher who has this need to grow beyond him- or herself would also work with anthroposophy. He further discusses the recurring theme of *Weltanschauung* vs. method. He notes that anthroposophy is not only a method but also contains eg. statements about the evolution of the earth and past lives of various people. Leber says that there is a danger here of anthroposophy being understood less as a method and more as a collection of contents. As an example, Leber takes Steiners suggestions about the “soul-gestures” of plants and says that if a teacher simply adopts these and teaches them, then anthroposophy has become a kind of ideology. Steiner meant this and other statements as suggestions, as impulses to set the teachers own inner activity in motion, Leber says in the interview, not as contents to be learned and then repeated in the classroom.

Jürgen Smit makes a case that is similar to Leber’s in the following interview (Weirauch et al. 1987, p. 46-59). He says that anthroposophy cannot be a source of “recipes” for how to enact education but needs to be understood as an activity that enlivens a teacher’s educational imagination. Smit also notes that this means it is difficult to separate specific elements that have been developed in Steiner pedagogy, eg. the main lesson format, from their source in anthroposophy. It is possible, he says, but requires more inner activity of a teacher than to just parrot the outer forms, in order to work. Smit also discusses the issue of the quick expansion of the Steiner school movement and the resulting lack of teachers deeply familiar with anthroposophy. His judgement at the time was that this did not constitute a danger to the anthroposophical substance of Steiner education but should be seen as a grand task or mission for the schools to deal with. Throughout the interview Smit repeatedly emphasizes the importance and responsibility that the individual teacher has with regards to the relationship of anthroposophy to Steiner education. Implicit in his argument is the view that there is no general solution that can be offered beforehand but rather that the question can only be dealt with through an increase in individual inner activity. The rest of the publication is more oriented towards a discussion of the critique that Steiner education at the time was facing in Germany.

Apart from these three publications I was unable to find anything else from these decades. This doesn’t mean that nothing was said or written but it is interesting that eg. both the Swedish Steiner school journal *På Väg* and the Norwegian journal *Steinerskolen* devoted a whole issue to the question of anthroposophy in the 1990s (1994 and 1997 respectively). This is at least an indication that something changed with the 90s. Neither publication refers to anything specific behind their choice to explore the topic, so it largely remains a matter of more or less qualified guesswork as to why this became an issue there and then.

## **Anthroposophy and Steiner education, the 1990s debate**

As noted above, the 1990s saw a more extensive internal discussion than the previous decades (Weirauch et al. from 1987 might be considered part of this given that it appeared just a few years earlier lending the argument even more weight). Although not strictly focused on the issue at hand, Rittelmeyer (1990, p. 64) offered an elaboration of the perspectives already mentioned by Westerberg and Lindenberg when he proposed that anthroposophy be considered less as empirical fact and more in the sense of heuristic principles (see further in Kiersch 2010 who continues this line of argument). With “heuristic principles” Rittelmeyer means that anthroposophy is used pragmatically to guide one’s action and that it proves its value in the practice that it engenders.

In the thematic issue of the Swedish Steiner school journal *På Väg* from 1994 the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy is once again described in terms of leaving the world view stage behind and arriving at a personal, transformative (Bildung-related) understanding of anthroposophy (echoed also in a brief discussion by Liebendörfer in *På Väg* 4/95). Apart from this the issue of declining numbers of Steiner teachers being anthroposophists is also brought up with the worry that this might lead to a stagnation in the development of Steiner education.

In 1995 Querido (2003) published the first edition of a book called: *The esoteric background of Waldorf education. The cosmic Christ impulse*. In it he argues in a way very similar to Linde in 1987, down to using some of the same quotations from Steiner in support.<sup>5</sup>

In 1997 the Norwegian Steiner school journal *Steinerskolen* published a thematic issue on anthroposophy. Surprisingly (perhaps) the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy was not made an explicit theme, at least not in any way similar to the texts discussed thus far. Mathisen (1997) has an essay with the title *Antroposofien i Steinerskolen* (Anthroposophy in Steiner schools), however his way of discussing this is through a historical and conceptual contextualization of how Steiner education developed. Apart from a brief mention that anthroposophy is not taught as such in Steiner schools Mathisen has chosen to, in a sense, let anthroposophy be subsumed in a wider discussion on Steiner education and some of its contexts.

To summarize, although on the surface the discussion appears more extensive a closer look indicates that this might not really be the case. However, given the many journals that were not consulted this is a very provisional conclusion and it also depends on if one chooses to include Weirauch et al. (1987) here rather than in the preceding section. For the most part the texts echo what was stated in the previous decades with the possible exception of Mathisen who, under a similar headline, has provided a very different approach. If this was intended or not is another matter.

Two arguments are repeated almost invariably:

1. Anthroposophy is not a world view but a method in the widest of senses.
2. Its importance lies in how it becomes a path for individual transformation not as a teaching.

Intersecting with these two arguments are two kinds of rhetoric or style of presentation:

1. A style thick with Steiner quotes and anthroposophical concepts including core anthroposophy like the Christ-impulse and reincarnation.
2. A style which leans more into philosophical Steiner quotes (if any) and with less or no emphasis placed on anthroposophical concepts.

Importantly, both styles are largely making the same arguments, at least on the surface. But perhaps this reflects underlying differences in how anthroposophy is understood or how it should be talked about. Differences that are not articulated in contrast to how others view it but are rather left implicit. In the third and final part of the survey it remains to see if these arguments and styles continue to repeat themselves and to what degree, and if, variations or as yet unarticulated arguments are introduced.

### *Contemporary arguments*

The first decade of the 2000s yielded no results in the search, this changes from 2010 onward. From then until 2024 the main articles are: Deschepper & Schmelzer (2024), Fant (2010), Goldshmidt (2023), Hueck (2019, 2023a, b), Kiersch (2010, 2015), Rawson (2023a, b), Schieren (2015, 2022), Tyson (2023c, 2024b), Zdrzil (2023a, b, c, d, also available in English translation). Apart from these Linde (2021) has written a book discussing the theme and Marques (2020) a doctoral dissertation exploring the issue from an empirical

5. See also eg. Gerwin (2007), *And who shall teach the teachers? The Christ impulse in Waldorf education*. The connection between Steiner education and the Christ impulse has remained a matter of more or less constant internal discussion.



standpoint as it relates to the Australian Steiner educational context. Wiehl's (2015) dissertation also considers the matter from a more theoretical standpoint. The section is largely structured chronologically.

Fant (2010) presents a very brief discussion on the topic in *På Väg* which largely reiterates what was previously stated. Kiersch's (2010) article published in the second volume of RoSE represents a crucial development compared to what has previously been considered. It does so by continuing Rittelmeyer's (1990) suggestion about treating anthroposophical concepts heuristically and turns it into a whole sketch about the kind of hermeneutics or interpretation that is needed for the understanding of anthroposophy in relation to Steiner education. Briefly put, anthroposophy, especially as presented by Steiner in his courses for teachers, needs to be understood as a source of living concepts, as invitations to meditative (transformative) processes. Kiersch concludes (2010, p. 69):

The meditation motifs in Steiner's esoteric courses for teachers do not primarily deliver knowledge in terms of 'anthropological' research. They encourage us to make our own observations in concrete teaching situations. As provisionally formulated conceptual structures they dissolve, as it were, into intuitive courses of action.

Kiersch's article represents a significant development of the arguments advanced during previous decades. His final reflection, that the educational lectures of Steiner need to be reinterpreted through this heuristic lens deserves its own study, not least because the years after the publication of his article have seen a number of books discussing them from various viewpoints (eg. Demish 2014; Zdrzil 2017; Schmelzer & Deschepper 2020).

## 2015

A watershed moment seems to be 2015 when Wiehl's dissertation was published as well as two articles in RoSE by Kiersch and Schieren. These are clearly connected to a wider discussion regarding anthroposophy and science (eg. da Veiga 2011, in English 2013; Kiersch 2011; Schieren 2011). Kiersch (2015) builds on his previous article from 2010 to discuss how Steiner's esotericism for teachers can be understood productively. In a series of theses Kiersch outlines the various internal and external issues that stand in the way of a dynamic discourse eg. the common occurrence of anthroposophy turning into a kind of revelatory religious content (ibid. p. 29). Here, as in the previous article, the relationship between anthroposophy (or esotericism) and Steiner pedagogy is considered as a transformative (Bildung-oriented) one.

Schieren (2015) begins by outlining the critique that has been levelled against the role anthroposophy plays in Steiner education. He then outlines the world view vs. method argument before going on to discuss various ways in which anthroposophy can be understood in relation to (natural) science. In relation to Steiner education, Schieren (ibid, p. 144) argues that central anthroposophical perspectives such as the temperaments, the developmental phases, reincarnation, etc. are "scarcely capable of communication", creating a dilemma: either a Steiner pedagogy that is open to criticism of being caught in anthroposophical dogma or one that is diluted and unaware of the foundation of its traditions and practices. At this point Schieren's main argument is introduced, the epoché of anthroposophy or, a restrained, "minimalist" approach to it in relation to Steiner education. This is done with reference to phenomenological philosophy where anthroposophy is viewed as a valuable contribution to pedagogy in the form of a kind of phenomenology of consciousness. In effect, an emphasis on method much more than on content. As such it is also relevant as a source of inner transformation (Bildung) for the individual teacher.

Thus far, the texts display a remarkably similar line of argument, the differences lying mainly in scope (Kiersch 2015 & Schieren 2015 being more elaborate than most of the earlier texts) and rhetorical style. The theme of world view vs. method is almost universally reiterated regardless of how the various texts position themselves in other respects. The negative aspect, anthroposophy as a world view, receives much more space in the discussions than the question of anthroposophy as method. It belongs to the contribution of Wiehl's (2015) dissertation that it takes a closer look at precisely these aspects.

Wiehl's (2015) dissertation describes the core of Steiner educational methodology and didactics as practice (Übung). In it she considers the various ways in which practicing is understood, including the

practice or meditation (the term understood here in a liberal sense) that teachers might engage in. The dissertation is unique in its extensive discussion of method not only from a Steiner pedagogical perspective but also situated in the context of contemporary educational research. Wiehl defines Steiner pedagogy as a method based in anthroposophical-philosophical and anthroposophical-anthropological understanding (ibid, p. 63f.). In this Wiehl develops the restrained or “minimalist” approach further. She discusses Steiner’s epistemological foundations for anthroposophy and anthroposophy as a path of knowledge (Erkenntnisweg) as the direct methodological source of Steiner pedagogy. In Wiehl’s account working with anthroposophy is predominantly a question of developing a kind of knowledge-process-meditation-practice. In this she connects the argument explicitly with Hadot’s (1995) *Philosophy as a way of life*, where philosophy is presented as containing spiritual exercises in the sense of the I, or self, working on the development of itself (Wiehl 2015, p. 19f., 85).

### 2019-2024

The next watershed moment is connected to a comparable avalanche of texts from the years 2019-2024 where the internal differences come to the fore and a more explicit critical discussion ensues. Here it makes sense to separate the articles and other writings into a German-section and an English-section given that the German language articles move in a shared (and somewhat self-sufficient or closed) discourse environment.

Hueck (2019) develops an argument in which it is posited that Steiner education cannot exist without anthroposophy. This is then briefly supported through an outline of the human being as she exists before birth and after death in relation to the development of intellect and will. He concludes that only through a real understanding of such connections is it possible to give ever new life and fire to Steiner education and to protect it from becoming dogmatic or watered down. Without explicit reference to Schieren’s (2015) essay, it is clear that Hueck represents a more “maximalist” perspective where anthroposophical contents are given greater importance.<sup>6</sup> Hueck develops a similar argument in a later article (2023a) writing that the value of the anthroposophical conceptualizations of eg. reincarnation, the spirit, the sheaths of the human being, etc. lies in how they can direct the teachers gaze towards qualities and processes that would otherwise remain unseen. In effect the concepts serve to widen and enrich a teachers’ educational imagination, a repetition of the heuristic argument. Linde’s (2021) book largely reiterates his arguments from 1987 and needs no further discussion here, it has a rhetoric similar to Hueck’s articles.

Another recent set of discussions have been initiated by Schieren’s (2022) article where he argues, similarly to his 2015 essay, that Steiner education needs a minimalist approach to anthroposophy, what he calls a kind of esotericism-abstinence. Furthermore, he bases this on an argument that Steiner himself practiced a minimalist approach in his pedagogical lectures, rarely mentioning spiritual hierarchies, cosmic evolution, etc. This has caused something of an internal debate. Hueck (2023b), in his contribution, critiques the suggestion that Steiner education should adopt a minimalist approach to esotericism and thus refrain from the more “esoteric” aspects of anthroposophy. Hueck’s arguments follow those outlined above, eg. that reincarnation is a central concept for teachers in Steiner schools because it is needed in order to give depth to the understanding that Steiner pedagogy is oriented towards supporting the spirit-soul of the child to incarnate in the body. He calls Steiner education “spiritual reincarnation-assistance” (Hueck 2023b, p. 72). He is also highly critical of Schieren’s assertion that Steiner himself practiced such an abstinence in his pedagogical lectures, going to some length in order to provide passages from Steiner’s educational lectures where Steiner spoke of just the kind of esotericism that Schieren claims he didn’t. In this Hueck is echoed by Zdrzil (2023a, c) who makes the exact same argument in an explicit critique of Schieren’s article. In Zdrzil (2023d) this is stated in terms of anthroposophy being the necessary content for teachers to meditatively transform into a renewal of pedagogical intuition, the teacher’s will and character (Gesinnung).

Both Wiechert (2023) and Kiersch (2023) defend Schieren’s proposition against Hueck’s critique and these highlight a contentious point in the internal discussion. Wiechert does this in stronger words than

6. The terms “minimalist” and “maximalist” are intended to be as descriptive and neutral as possible.

Kiersch, who takes a more mediating position. Wiechert makes the point that the quotes from Steiner that Hueck refers to were (at least in part) made before a very small audience composed largely of some of his closer pupils. From this it cannot be concluded that what he said has a more general validity across audiences and across time. This historical and sociological relativization of Steiner's statements is rarely made and yet central to any nuanced discussion. Zdrazil (2023b) attempts something similar by distinguishing two different audiences Steiner spoke to: an interested public and the Steiner school teachers respectively. In relation to the former, Zdrazil argues, it is appropriate to discuss Steiner education in a way similar to Schieren's minimalist perspective. However, in relation to active teachers and in teacher educational contexts, anthroposophy as the dynamic life of Steiner pedagogy needs to be more directly discussed. What remains taken for granted is that Steiner's way of speaking to the original teachers in 1919 – 1924 is directly transferable to a contemporary context. For example, Zdrazil (2023d) quotes Steiner from one of the conferences with the teachers where he entreats them to remain aware that in doing something (in the context of the school) they are enacting the will of the gods and that they, in a sense, are hosts through which those spiritual impulses flow, that need to be realized in the world. He then immediately states, without providing reasons, that we still have the task of understanding this (and other) indications made by Steiner.

One issue that emerges from this dispute and also from the other texts surveyed is that the term "anthroposophy" is used in what appears to be somewhat different ways. This is the starting point for the article (based on a lecture) by Deschepper & Schmelzer (2024) who briefly summarize the above differences before moving to discuss this question. In considering anthroposophy, the authors first use a couple of examples from Steiner's introductory lectures *Allgemeine Menschenkunde* (Steiner 2019) and then go on to consider anthroposophy as a path of development. Where most other texts only mention these two aspects the authors use their article to explore examples of this in practice. Anthroposophy isn't so much defined through this as characterized. Their article concludes that anthroposophy cannot be meaningfully separated from Steiner pedagogy but the salient point, that is only implicitly made, is that their examples are all connected to anthroposophy as an inner activity and as a philosophical, almost existential, perspective on the human being. What is tacitly omitted from their discussion is anthroposophy as a cosmology, questions about the Christ-impulse or spiritual beings in nature and the heavens, etc.

Moving now to the English language discourse we have the dissertation by Marques (2020) followed by a series of essays from Goldshmidt (2023), Rawson (2023a, b) and Tyson (2023c, 2024b). Marques' dissertation differs from all the other writing presented here in that it represents an empirical exploration of how Australian Steiner teachers conceive of the relation between anthroposophy and Steiner education (in the wider scope of being interested in the developmental needs of Steiner schools that a group of teachers perceive).

Marques, in his study, identifies a number of categories in his respondent's discussion of how they view anthroposophy's relation to Steiner education in their respective schools. These categories are (2020, p. 182-186): anthroposophy as informing the teacher's *Gesinnung* (eg. love towards the children); social threefolding (in particular the non-hierarchical organization of the schools); Steiner has all the answers, ie. a religiously oriented world view; anthroposophy as a source of identity and the resulting fear of a loss of that identity; a special set of terms or professional jargon and, finally, anthroposophy as a sign of spiritual knowledge with a resultant hierarchy. Marques also identifies some counterexamples to this like Steiner being fundamentally against anthroposophy becoming dogma (ibid. p. 186). Generally, the empirical data confirm most of the critical issues discussed in the above literature and raises serious questions about the repeated claims that anthroposophy is a method more than a world view in Steiner pedagogy. In effect the dissertation indicates that even though this might be the ideal, in practice Steiner teachers have often failed to achieve this separation or transformation. That this would turn out to be a largely Australian issue is unlikely. Another recent empirical dissertation (Swartz 2022), done in the anthroposophical context of Järna in Sweden, confirms much of what is said in Marques at least regarding issues of leadership. Finally, Marques' conclusion reiterates the most common statements generally made (2020, p. 299, emphasis in original):

Three predominant issues emerge as tasks that follow from these observations: the need to situate Steiner within historical and contemporary Western culture; the reorientation towards anthroposophy as an *epistemological*

methodology; and the concomitant reorientation or re-emphasising of SWE [Steiner/Waldorf education] as an educational *methodology*.

Moving on, Goldshmidt (2023) mainly repeats the arguments already outlined and draws on, among others, Schieren (2015) in doing this. What stands out is that his article is the only peer-reviewed text published in a non-Steiner-educational journal. Rawson (2023a, b) is a two-part essay that seeks to reevaluate the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education. Rawson belongs to the few who attempts to distinguish between different meanings of the term anthroposophy and takes another approach to this than Deschepper & Schmelzer (2024). He differentiates between anthroposophy as a narrative in need of interpretation; anthroposophy as a charismatic foundation myth that runs the risk of becoming institutionalized; anthroposophy as a transformational path; anthroposophy as a process of spiritual research, ie. an epistemology; and anthroposophy applied as a basis for Steiner education.

These five forms of anthroposophy are a way of ordering, conceptually, what Steiner (and others) are saying at one time or other and Rawson engages in an extended critical discussion of them, one at a time. Not least the anthroposophical grand narrative is seen by him as in need of serious revisions, reflection and even bracketing. In this Rawson appears as one of the strongest critics of that form of anthroposophy that is largely identical with what Steiner said. He writes (2023b, p. 10): “Is it possible to imagine a pluralistic anthroposophy independent of Steiner, or at least not identical to his version of it?” This is not meant as a critique of Steiner but rather in the sense that if anthroposophy is to be understood as a method, then its practitioners need to be able to also produce content using it, without recourse to what Steiner said. Tyson (2023c, initially written in 2017) largely reiterates elements of Rawson’s position but focuses on interpreting anthroposophy as a source of Bildung-processes. Tyson (2024b) can be viewed as a response to Rawson’s question. It is unique among the reviewed writing in that it presents an account of how personal experiences relating to reincarnation and karma have contributed to the author’s educational practice. The essay relates how this practice has led to an experience of reincarnation and karma largely independent of Steiner’s words on the subject. It concludes with a reflection on the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education that asks if one of the main issues is perhaps the fact that very little writing by Steiner teachers present any kind of firsthand spiritual experiences being content instead to consider the spiritual more as an object of discussion.

With this, the literature review is complete, bearing in mind the various limitations mentioned in the section on method. Where does this leave us?

## Concluding discussion

In the concluding discussion I will begin with an analysis of the results after which I will move on to some issues and questions that have emerged from the review. The analysis stays fairly close to the survey and does not attempt to draw any partisan conclusions. The second part of the section focuses more on the judgments that I think are warranted based on the survey.

### *Analysis*

To begin with there are some clear lines of argument that have changed little since the 1960s and 70s, even in the contemporary discourse. These were identified as follows, after the section on how the discussion continued in the 1990s, and have remained largely the same thereafter:

1. Anthroposophy is not a world view but a method in a wider sense.
2. Its importance lies in how it becomes a path for individual transformation not as a teaching.

Intersecting with these two arguments are two kinds of rhetoric or style of presentation:

3. A style thick with Steiner quotes and anthroposophical concepts including core anthroposophy like the Christ-impulse and reincarnation.

4. A style which leans more into philosophical Steiner quotes (if any) and less or no emphasis placed on anthroposophical concepts.

However, this obscures the fact that much of the recent writing has added significant depth and variety to the issue. As an example, Wiehl (2015) delves extensively into the issue of what the concept of “method” implies, and Tyson (2023c) extends the discourse about anthroposophy as a path of transformation with an explicit and extended connection to the Bildung-tradition. A first conclusion then, is that the issue has received a major impulse through the establishment in the first decade of the 2000s of academically based Steiner teacher education. More specifically, the founding of the journal *Research on Steiner Education* (RoSE) and the development of a research school at the Alanus University where a community of practice has been created around doctoral research in the field. Most of the authors who have contributed over the last 15 years have an academic background. This does not automatically mean that they all agree, rather the opposite. It has led to a much more varied and nuanced discussion compared to previous decades.

It also seems that a discourse-arena has emerged where some anthroposophists argue from a position that places strong value on the anthroposophical conceptualizations of the human being (Hueck, Linde, Zdrzil), what I chose to call a “maximalist” approach. In effect the claim is made that anthroposophy as presented by Steiner is tightly linked to the contemporary educational practice of teachers and without it this practice will wither. This claim is historically closer to the origins of Steiner education and can be supported by statements from Steiner himself who also expressed worry that the “daughter-movements” would lose their foundations in anthroposophy (Steiner 1989, p. 21). In the contemporary discourse, most other authors present a nuanced difference from this in their views, what I chose to call a “minimalist” approach. A common thread in these texts is that there is a need today to achieve a certain critical reflection regarding the relationship between Steiner education and anthroposophy. The judgment that Steiner education must necessarily wither and become watered down without the anthroposophical conceptualizations (the esotericism) as they were provided by Steiner is subject to different takes here. Some authors, for example Tyson and Rawson, appear to argue that this is not necessarily the case whereas Kiersch, as an example, appears to view the issue with more concern. However, these differences in judgment should not be overemphasized. The texts we are dealing with here are, for the most part, so extensive that their conclusions are much less important than the various nuances and reflections they contain.

Finally, there exists clear disagreements among anthroposophical “insiders” regarding how to conceptualize anthroposophy. Should it be more maximalist, including the entire oeuvre of Steiner (and mainly of Steiner)? Or should it place an emphasis on Steiner’s more methodological and philosophical perspectives (and include more of what other anthroposophists have written) – a more minimalist approach that is argued for with various degrees of severity.

To summarize: Looking at the discussion from an historical perspective, the main arguments have changed little since the 1960s and 70s. However, the nuances and depths that have been brought to the discussion in the last two decades are important. Especially Wiehl (2015), Schieren (2015) and Kiersch (2010, 2015) present significant elaborations on these topics. As a case study on variations in conceptual understanding mentioned in the introduction it can thus be said to demonstrate some, and increasing, variations across theory. Clearly, as the introductory quote from Lindenberg (1975) demonstrates, the question of anthroposophy has been seen as an ongoing problem for at least 50 years now. A suspicious reading of this (Josselson 2004) might conclude that anthroposophical “insiders” are stuck repeating and defending what Steiner said 100 years ago. A more trustful (ibid. 2004) reading might conclude that the details of the texts demonstrate important developments and changes in the discourse. This leads me to the final section of the article, discussing some issues and questions that have emerged through work on this topic.

### *Issues and questions*

A significant problem, both for Steiner schools and Steiner teacher education institutions, is that the repeated claim that anthroposophy represents a method in Steiner pedagogy and not a world view is, at least in



part, contradicted by practice. Both the practice of individual teachers and the practice as it is enacted in curricula and educational content. Marques (2020) dissertation is recent, and although one might object that it is not representative, this does not mean that it can be dismissed out of hand. Given that the claim is central to almost all arguments about how anthroposophy relates to Steiner education (two texts, as far as I can tell, make no mention at all of it, Tyson 2023c, 2024b), it can be viewed as one of Steiner education's foundational myths. Kiersch (2010, 2015) and others, point out how fragile this distinction actually is, and how easy it is that it devolves into dogmatic ideology rather than becoming a transformative conceptual experience. After more than 100 years it can reasonably be concluded that Steiner underestimated the difficulties in drawing this distinction and that he contributed to those difficulties by mostly just stating it as a fact without really detailing what the distinction implied. Instead, in conferences at the first school as well as elsewhere, it seems as if the concept of "method" was understood very liberally (including significant lesson content) and the concept of "world view" rather narrowly, ie. mainly refraining from directly lecturing about anthroposophical cosmology, bodily sheaths, etc.

This is compounded by a rather complex internal difference in how anthroposophy as such should be understood. Reading Steiner already presents difficulties (see eg. Kaiser 2020; Rittelmeyer 2023). Distinguishing between his various statements and the degree to which their contents should be understood as more or less generally valid, particularly those made in lectures before smaller, well-known, audiences of anthroposophists is also an issue. I have seen this question raised (eg. by Wiechert 2023 in this context), but not systematically explored in the sense of really going through Steiner's various lectures and outlining how this awareness influences interpretation. The "Steiner-thick" discourse identified in the survey is especially affected by this since the habit of frequently quoting Steiner without discussing the context of the lecture quoted from (we are seldom dealing with quotes from his written works) creates a double uncertainty about how to interpret anthroposophy. By double I mean that anthroposophy is conflated with what Steiner said and the reader is seldom made aware of the need to consider this and furthermore, what Steiner said is also decontextualized and the reader is, again, seldom made aware of the implications in this.

The "maximalist" and "minimalist" approaches to anthroposophy have already been discussed. However, here too, there are further issues relating to how anthroposophy is understood. The maximalist version appears, at least from the texts considered; to be content with anthroposophy as Steiner presented it (it is no exaggeration to note that close to all positive references to anthroposophical contents in these texts are to works by Steiner). Apart from the above-mentioned issues of interpretation, this makes anthroposophy appear rather static. To take an example, in his anthroposophical writing and lecturing Steiner develops the concept of the "consciousness soul". This has recently been the subject of at least two relatively comprehensive studies that contribute significant independent research (Ewertowski 2007; Kiersch 2021). These illustrate several matters at once:

1. That there is a meaningful literature on anthroposophical subjects whose authorship is not Rudolf Steiner and where core elements of anthroposophy are developed further in a systematic fashion.
2. That this is seldom referenced in maximalist accounts.
3. That anthroposophical concepts require significant work to become dynamic.
4. That there is also, compared to Steiner education, much less independent writing done on purely anthroposophical subjects.

One possible conclusion from this is that there is a potential for a nuanced maximalist approach that is less reliant on the word of Steiner but still involves core anthroposophical conceptualizations in its view on how anthroposophy relates to Steiner education. The caveat here is that since these concepts require a lot of work, it is also important to consider which ones a teacher education institution has enough time to truly develop. A superficial acquaintance with them increases the risk that they are simply taken as dogma. This is more damaging to Steiner education today than it was 100 years ago given that we have had some amount of time since then to develop a responsible and critical-reflective practice. Again, Steiners suggestions on how to conceptualize the human soul-faculty could well be considered one such area where significant work

is warranted. In that case, it would follow that the content of such study proceeds foremost from the most recent research (ie. Kiersch 2021), and then, if need be, moves backward.

The lack of references to this kind of work in many maximalist accounts is a problem since it reinforces the impression that the anthroposophy argued for in them is a dogmatic and static system of truths communicated only by the founder of the anthroposophical movement. One need not conclude from this that Steiner is “outdated” or that he needs to be supplanted, but a vibrant community of practice with a systematic approach to its own knowledge claims will exhibit greater interest in the work of its members. The situation can be read as a sign that there is a lack of interest in the anthroposophical movement today, not just in the research being done outside of its discourse-community but even within.

The comparative lack of systematic studies in this area further complicates the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education because the latter has moved so much faster into academic discourse than the former that there is now an issue with how to deal with anthroposophical content. Is it the task of Steiner teacher education institutions to do this research as well? To what extent? Perhaps, as Schieren (2011) intimates, there is a need here to take different views depending on the timeframe. In the long run anthroposophy might “catch up” but this is unlikely to happen very soon. And this is a generous remark. Given the issues that surround some of the work within, and in near proximity to, the anthroposophical society (eg. predilection for conspiracy thinking, closeness to right-wing political thought and agitation, general unwillingness to concede other points of view) it is not inconceivable that the anthroposophical movement (or at least its institution, the anthroposophical society) loses credibility and practically forces Steiner education institutions to divest themselves of any connection to it. Time will tell in this case, but there are already examples of it in relation to specific topics.

One such case, discussed extensively in Marques (2020) and Tyson (2024b) has to do with the concepts of reincarnation and karma and their pedagogical relevance. As Marques notes, both from personal experience and from the informants, there have been several instances where the concept of karma has been used to defend not intervening when children have been bullied or teachers have been unable to interact with their students in a functional way. Steiner, in his day, did something radical when he suggested that karma and reincarnation could be concepts that sensitized teachers to the developmental needs of their students in a way that ordinary (more philosophical) concepts couldn't. Considering how these concepts have been used in practice, and only a few instances of such non-intervention or callousness are really needed, it is clear that Steiner teachers, in their daily practice, have not risen to the challenge that his suggestion posed. Today, I would say (and of course this is open to disagreement), that these concepts have been spoiled by pedagogical malpractice for the foreseeable future, at least in the sense that they could have been vibrant enriching concepts in the community of practice of Steiner teachers. A sign of this is that teacher education institutions, representatives of Steiner school federations and the like, more and more have felt the need to distance themselves from such concepts (see eg. Hildebrand 2024, who reports such denials in a critical article on Steiner teacher education in the major German newspaper *Der Spiegel*).

Another tension within anthroposophy, that transcends that of method or world view, is that between being a spiritual teaching or an experience. It can seem, sometimes, that anthroposophists are content with writing and theorizing *about* the spiritual experience of others (mostly Steiner) rather than reporting on their own experiences. This is a problem that goes beyond the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education, but an example can serve as an illustration. In several publications (see eg. Gerwin 2007; Querido 1995) the Christ impulse and its centrality for Steiner education is argued for extensively and from various viewpoints. However, not once, as far as I can tell, has an author even mentioned if this is grounded in their own experience of the Christ (not unthinkable, there are both anthroposophical and non-anthroposophical studies in this field, eg. Ben-Aharon 2007; Hillerdal & Gustafsson 2016). This creates the impression that the authors are engaged in theological theorizing rather than speaking as witnesses themselves. The suggestion in Tyson (2024b) that those engaged in Steiner pedagogy might consider exploring the actual supersensible or spiritual experiences of practitioners was made in connection with this. From one point of view the relationship between anthroposophy and Steiner education is a matter of method rather than world view. But perhaps the maximalist critique is trying to communicate that driving this line of reason to its end, risks

turning anthroposophy into a kind of meditative philosophy akin to how Wiehl discusses it in connection to Hadot (1995). Perhaps, if one might re-phrase the maximalist argument, it could be something like:

Anthroposophy is a way of inviting actual, lived and perceived, spiritual or supersensible experience into life. This experience and how it enriches pedagogical practice is what ultimately nourishes Steiner education. But we know almost nothing about the shape that this takes among practicing teachers and if it is a common occurrence. Lacking this, we fall back on what Steiner said.

If anthroposophically engaged Steiner teachers are not able to testify that their engagement with anthroposophy has resulted, not just in personal development, but also in spiritual experience as well as a clear enrichment through this experience of educational practice somehow, then practice as such has demonstrated that anthroposophy is not needed. In that case the situation today, when Steiner education as a practice is more than 100 years old, is that this practice has become sufficiently established to develop further independent of anthroposophy. In this case anthroposophy was the historical source of Steiner education and its intuitions or concepts were needed as the original substance for the pedagogical imagination of those enacting it (including Steiner himself). This brings me to a final reflection that, as far as I have been able to determine, remains untouched in all the texts. It is one of directionality.

Is anthroposophy only possible to conceive of “from above”, as a regulatory method and set of concepts or intuitions that shape Steiner pedagogy? Or is it perhaps also the case now, 100 years after its foundation, that anthroposophy is methodologically enacted or present in existing pedagogical practice and can, as it were, be resurrected from this in new forms. “Practice” meaning the direct interactions between teachers and students in Steiner school environments. This question is supported by a reading of Steiner’s *Philosophy of Freedom* by Röscher (2013) where he discusses the concept of moral imagination. In this reading (ibid. p. 12ff.), Röscher notes that Steiner initially argues that free ethical activity requires that we have a moral intuition adequate in relation to a specific situation and that we need moral imagination in order to create an image of how this intuition could be enacted in the concrete situation. The first way that Steiner presents this is thus quite in line with the direction “from above” and the discussion outlined in the preceding paragraph. But then, in the same chapter (12), Steiner writes about the emergence of wholly new moral intuitions directly out of our moral imagination and in the next chapter Steiner adds that we strive towards moral ideals when our moral imagination is active enough for us to experience such intuitions. This represents a different direction where the imagination that both informs practice and is kindled by it reaches upward. Could it be that a similar movement in relation to anthroposophy as it has been enacted in Steiner educational practice is possible?

It is clear that in 1919 there was little except anthroposophy and the general educational culture in which Steiner pedagogy was born to shape its educational practice. In 2024 one can at least ask if the practice of Steiner education in the above stated sense doesn’t contain an implicit source of anthroposophical ideas that our pedagogical imagination, if it is active enough, has the potential to access. But perhaps the kind of moral-pedagogical intuitions that emerge from such an active imagination would have little in common with how the intuitions informing Steiner education were articulated at its inception. The question is just that, a question. And it may well be that what is meaningful to ask in the context of morality is less so when it comes to an established pedagogy.

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