

Love Enables Knowledge

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Two ideas—or should we rather say, world powers?—revolve around the biography of Rudolf Steiner: Knowledge and Freedom. Knowledge is based on, and culminates in, Freedom. The source and completion of Freedom is Love.

*The rainbow mirrors human love and strife;
Consider it and you will know:
In many-hued reflection we have life.*
Goethe, *Faust*, Part II

For Steiner, knowledge always had a mystical, religious dimension: Its implementation is, first and last, Theophany. “Becoming aware of the idea in reality is the true communion of Mankind.” (CW 1, *Goethe: Natural-Scientific Writings*, 1887). “The life filled with thought content in reality is at the same time a life with God.” (CW 4, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1893). “Anthroposophy is a path of knowledge that would like to lead the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the cosmos.” (CW 26, *Anthroposophic Guiding Principles*, 1924).

The essence of freedom is love, devotion, and humility—they also point beyond the isolated existence of this world and bring a person closer to something that is greater than himself. “Not insofar as a human being investigates some laws of God is he acting according to the intentions of God, but rather insofar as he acts according to his own insights. For in [his own insights] live the intentions of God.” (CW 2, *Outlines of an Epistemology of the Goethean Worldview*, 1886). “Only an action arising out of love can be a moral one. . . . Only the person who acts out of love for the deed, who directs his devotion to objectivity, is truly free in his actions.” (CW 1, 1887). “The event of Golgotha is a free cosmic deed of love within the history of the earth; it can only be grasped by the love that a human being can summon to this comprehension.” (CW 26, 1924).

Whoever takes a look at the public life of Rudolf Steiner will be able to see easily that the driving force in the first half of his life (from 1883 to 1904) was the idea of Knowledge, and that the second half (1904–1925) was dominated by the idea of Love. The two halves of his life, each of 21 years, mirror each other on a vertical axis that lies in the year 1904. This is the axis around which, in the life of Rudolf Steiner, the eternal broke through into the temporal, and the temporal stood before the countenance of the eternal, the eternally-present: “The evolution of my soul rested upon the fact that I stood before the Mystery of Golgotha in most inward, earnest joy of knowledge.”¹ (CW 28, *The Story of My Life*, 1923).

In the light of this remarkable fact one could speak of two streams: One comes out of the past, hastening towards the future, while the other flows out of the future and strives towards the past. The stream out of the past is the stream of knowledge, through which the human being lives more and more into the foundation of the world. The stream from the future is the stream of love, through which the human being more and more grows out of the foundation of the world. This observation calls to mind the memory of an aphorism of Walter Benjamin’s on a picture by Paul Klee, titled *Angelus Novus*: “It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. ... This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned. ... What we call progress is this storm.”²

But we could also see the angel of history in another way. Paradise lies not in the past, but in the future, and the storm is not driving the angel, but rather pulling him. What is pulling him is the love that is working out of the future. And the angel is not moving through time, but rather time moves through the angel, while he stands in the eternal present with a backwards glance. The great secret of human existence that makes it all possible is now: How does knowledge become love and constantly renew itself out of love? We could also formulate it so: How does “the science of freedom” become “the reality of freedom”?

The two indicated aspects are found in the life of every human being; they are just a bit more clearly pronounced in Steiner’s life because his life as a whole had something of a paradigmatic character. They are actually to be found in every wakeful moment of life, for knowledge always goes over into action, and action into knowledge. We do not change the world through our knowledge. Through our actions, on the other hand, we do change the world: We would not act if we did not want to change it.

To the truly seeing-eye of the angel, the context of the world appears not only as a succession of disasters, but also, at the same time, as order, full of wisdom, a cloth woven of hidden harmonies. The closer our knowledge comes to the ground of being, out of which all relationships emerge, the more this knowledge is transformed, along with its subject and the one who knows. What first appears to us as lawfulness, turns out in its depths to be formative will that shows this lawfulness.

The laws of nature, according to Steiner, are in reality, living relationships among beings of the hierarchies. And the more that the seeing-eye adapts to this formative will of the world, all the more will it be gripped and moved by it. Wisdom will become love, and this love comes from out of the future to meet him. Love that embraces the past and the future makes it possible for us to act out of knowledge.

Notes:

1. Translation of quote from Rudolf Steiner's biography was taken from: http://wn.rsarchive.org/Books/GA028/TSoML/GA028_c26.html;mark=210,38,57#WN_mark Feb. 7, 2012.
2. Translation of Walter Benjamin quote taken from: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/shadowtime/wb-thesis.html>, Feb. 7, 2012.