EDUCATING SOCIAL THREEFOLDING IN UNIVERSITIES

Seth Jordan & Nigel Hoffmann

To heal is to make whole – to renew that which has lost its integrity, to restore balance and harmony. But how do we *heal* social life? How do we make society-at-large *whole*?

Unfortunately, the social sciences faculties of our universities don't usually ask this question. Instead they focus in narrow ways on sociological analysis and theories. These theories may consider the issues of equitable distribution of food, or the need to educate the next generation of kids, or the fight for a higher minimum wage. But these things are all part of the whole. They're all interconnected, all tied together. They all *pull* at each other.

For example: if we raise the wage for farm workers, then the cost of food goes up, which means teachers will have to pay more to feed their families, which means they'll have less money to pay rent. We need to understand how everything affects everything else. If we want to build a building, we shouldn't blindly take stones from one wall in order to raise up another. Here's how the social scientist Rudolf Steiner describes it:

> The individual stone is useless if it does not fit into the overall (building) plan. Reform the law, religion, or anything else — as long as you only take account of the particular item, without having an understanding of the whole, it only results in demolition… All separate reform movements… are only useful if they all work together.[1]

Of course it's not easy to develop an "understanding of the whole," but

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[1] R. Steiner, *The Temple Legend*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2002, pp.145-146.

Frans Floris, ***Solomon Building the Temple*, 1558.**

Steiner's extensive research at least makes this possible. He shows how all social life is threefold in nature — it has a cultural aspect, an economic aspect, and a governance aspect — and he shows, in detail, how these three functions need to come into right relationship in order to heal society. It's this harmonising activity that people refer to as "social threefolding."

This is the difference between a university education which teaches theories and an education which stimulates the social will. An understanding of the whole inspires the social will, just as grasping a work of art in its wholeness uplifts and brings enthusiasm.

One aspect of an education toward inspiring the social will can involve looking at what threefolders have already done. In the past, threefolders have worked in two main directions. The first is into areas already fructified by "anthroposophy" (Steiner's larger spiritual worldview). Threefolders have taken their social ideals and worked them into the fields of education (Waldorf schools), agriculture (biodynamic farms), and disability (Camphill communities), to name just a few.
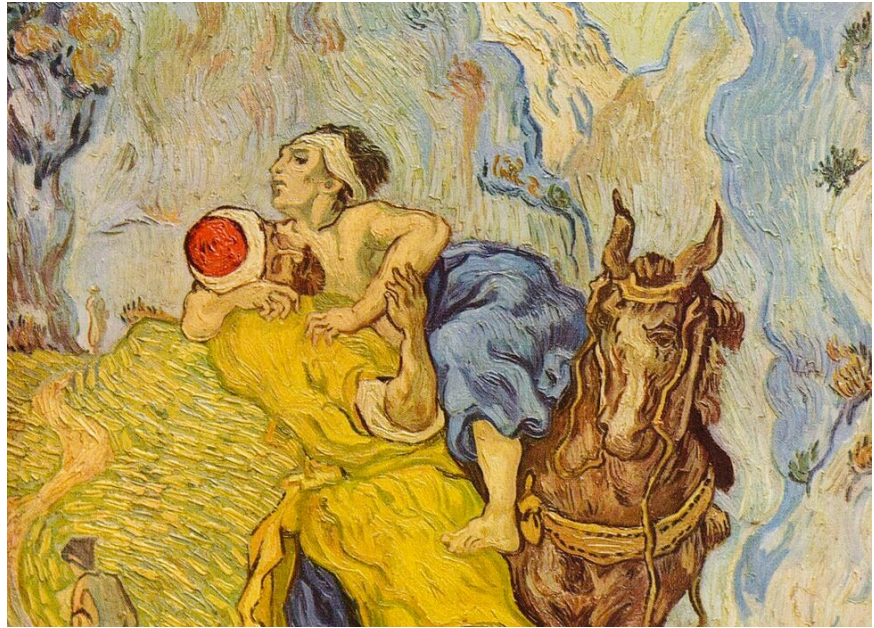
In those places they've focused largely on the question of *accessibility*. Why shouldn't everyone — regardless of their wealth and class — be able to eat healthy food and send their children to the school of their choice? Out of such questions arose the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) movement in the United States, as well as the ATA (Accessible to All) funding model for schools. The basic idea behind these initiatives was: "We all want this farm (or school) to produce food for us (or teach our kids), so how much money do they need, and can we all pitch in to make it happen?"

If you bring the community together around this question, and everyone writes down what they can give, and then you tally up all the pledges… well, you usually don't have enough. There's a shortfall. But then, if you ask everyone to dig just a *little* bit deeper into their pockets for a second (or third, or fourth) time, then the group usually comes up with the money. And the beautiful thing is: Everyone gave freely what they felt they could give. Some gave a lot, and some gave a little.

At least, that's how it used to work. Though some farms and schools still use this model, for the most part it's become harder and harder to build up the sense of community (and excitement) that such an initiative requires. Really, it's hard just to get people in the same room these days.

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The other ideal that's connected to these initiatives is *decommodifying labour,* which means not working for a wage — not selling oneself, one's labour-power, as if it were a commodity. This buying and selling of labour degrades the human being and gives us the mistaken impression that we're working for ourselves (for a wage). Instead, this ideal helps us to be clear that our work is selfless, it's for others: We work to meet *their* needs,

Vincent van Gogh, *The Good Samaritan***, 1890 (detail).**

they work to meet *ours*. So, in a CSA, the farmer doesn't get paid an hourly wage; she produces goods for the community and the community meets her needs in turn.

Besides working into existing fields, threefolders have also created new fields of anthroposophical work, specifically in organisational development and finance. The work with organisations started in Holland back in the 1950s, when Bernard Lievegoed founded NPI (the Netherlands Pedagogical Institute), and continues into the present day through initiatives like the Association for Social Development as well as the work of Otto Scharmer and the Presencing Institute.

The work in anthroposophical finance started in the 1970s and played a key role in jump-starting the field of sustainable banking. The GLS bank, founded in 1974, was the first "ethical bank" in Germany, and was followed in 1980 by the Triodos bank in Holland and, in 1984, by the Rudolf Steiner Foundation in the US (now RSF Social Finance). Such institutions have focused on lending to sustainable and ethical businesses as well as supporting schools and other cultural initiatives.

This gives us a very, *very* basic idea of what threefolders have been working on for the past century. It should be noted that it's from an American-centric perspective and glosses over a *huge* amount of significant work done all over the world.[2] But still, it's important to see that the focus of most of this work has been on applying healthy social principles to individual undertakings. As impressive (and even revolutionary) as this work has been, it's *not* the work of transforming society-at-large.

So we've done great work on our own piece of the puzzle, but we've lost sight of the whole.

But why? It would seem it's because it's incredibly challenging to figure out how to work on this larger scale. There are no job openings for people passionate about understanding and healing the whole of society. There's no

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[2] The bulk of this work has happened in Europe, but there are also a number of amazing initiatives worldwide including the Community Association Monte Azul in Brazil and the Sekem community in Egypt. A list of some existing projects can be found on the Social Science Section website: https://social.goetheanum.ch/en/fields-of-work

vocational path to follow and very few people to support you. This is one of main reasons to bring about a new kind of social science education in a new kind of university.

Such an education would prepare people to work in the field on threefolding. What could this look like? As a first step, we can imagine a kind of threefold consulting. The organisational development work has been fruitful in the past, but incomplete. Now we need to ask *not* just how organisations can be healthy, but how they can contribute to a healthy threefold society.

As an example, if you're a teacher: How can your school connect with other schools and work towards the ideal of *educational freedom*? In exploring such a question, maybe you create a coalition of schools. And now the question becomes: How can that coalition work with other coalitions of artists, doctors, journalists — really, *all* cultural workers — to work towards the larger ideal of *cultural freedom*? And once that's in place, once a cultural council has been formed out of all these different coalitions, how can that cultural council connect to economic associations and the government to build a healthy relationship between all three spheres? These processes will need facilitators and consultants with a special kind of development.

Such consultants could develop their work in many ways. They would aim to speak, write, and teach about threefolding as much as possible so people understand it. There should be videos on YouTube. There should be regular workshops and ongoing trainings. And there should be diverse publications where people can write about different aspects of social life from a threefold perspective. The social threefolding consultant would aim to show that this is a task for each one of us — in whatever field we're working. For too long we've focused on how our individual organisations can survive in a broken system, but we've failed to ask, How can our

organisations help *fix* that broken system? As Krishnamurti said, "It's no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society."[3]

This certainly isn't the only form of threefold consulting that's needed. Steiner himself spoke about the need to create bank-like institutions that would lend money to healthy cultural and business initiatives. He wasn't imagining such initiatives being judged by a set of "green" criteria, but instead by people capable of understanding how they could contribute to the healthy growth and harmonisation of society.

Once this work starts really building, there will be no end to the ways we can work for threefolding. We'll need passionate and insightful people to help create and work within economic associations to meet everyone's needs (not as part of a top-down "command" economy, but organically, out of the work and initiative being done on the ground). And we'll need passionate and insightful people to help build the connective tissue between the three realms of society. Here we have the essential task of a university education which deeply and creatively educates the social will.≈

> Seth Jordan has created a distance-learning course on threefolding called Transforming Society (educaredo.org/transforming-society) and writes regularly about contemporary events at thewholesocial.substack.com

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[3] This quote is attributed to Krishnamurti, and he did say things similar to it, but the Krishnamurti Foundation Trust hasn't actually been able to find these exact words in any of his works.

THE DIVORCE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE FROM SPIRITUAL CONCERNS

Anthony Kronman

The new social sciences, which emerged as distinct disciplines in the second half of the nineteenth century, were disconnected from the question of life's meaning. In one important respect of course, the social sciences bore a close relation to the humanities, for the subjects they studied – the nature and workings of government and of human society generally – had been topics of observation and analysis in the humanistic tradition for centuries. But practitioners of the social sciences claimed to have something their

"Anthropologists! Anthropologists!"

humanist predecessors lacked: a set of methods that made it possible, for the first time, to study these age-old topics in a rigorous and systematic fashion. The great humanists who had written about the nature of human society, had done so on the basis of their own, unsystematic experience of the world and their personal judgements of it. Their findings had necessarily

been incomplete and anecdotal. The new social science began with the ambition to study the various aspects of society – its political, cultural and economic dimensions – in a more impersonal and organised way, with the aid of novel quantitative methods that enabled them to achieve a previously unattainable degree of precision and objectivity both in the empirical description of human society and in the analysis of its governing laws.

It was this drive toward greater rigour and objectivity, more than anything else, that set the new disciplines of political science, economics and sociology apart from the older humanistic disciplines of philosophy, history and rhetoric. Like their humanist counterparts, the social scientists who first self-consciously identified themselves as such hoped to understand the social life of mankind. But in contrast to the humanists, who had only their own experience, taste and judgement on which to rely, the social scientists who took up the humanists' questions were equipped with a panoply of methods that enabled them to search for answers of a more impersonal and ethically neutral kind. This new approach produced remarkable results. But at the same time it severed the social sciences' connection to the personal and value-laden question of what living is for. For the new methods of the social sciences necessarily directed attention away from the struggles of the individual soul toward the general structures of society – toward man in the aggregate. Those who embraced these methods postponed, or eliminated entirely, the questions of ultimate value around which these struggles revolve and put a passion for objective knowledge in the place of spiritual concerns.

This displacement was not an accident, but a deliberate adjustment of outlook essential to the social sciences' success. For only by eliminating all personal questions of value from their scholarly work could the practitioners of the new

social sciences associate themselves, however loosely, with their colleagues in the natural sciences, who achievements set then, as they do today, the standard by which the objectivity of all knowledge is measured. Only in this way were the social sciences able to accumulate the tremendous authority and prestige they now enjoy under the aegis of the research ideal. But this very adjustment of outlook and method, which brought the social sciences closer to the natural sciences and dramatically increased their intellectual authority, depersonalised and despiritualised these disciplines in a way that disabled them from providing organised help in the search for an answer to the question of the meaning of life.≈

> Excerpted from A. Kronman, *Education's End: Why our Colleges and Universities have given up on the Meaning of Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, pp.67-8.

A university class, Bologna university, 1350s

UNIVERSITY LECTURING TO AWAKEN THE SOCIAL WILL

Rudolf Steiner

It has come to this, that our universities lie half asleep on the outermost fringes of culture. The following can be experienced— that in our universities, during the hour appointed for some particular science, a lecturer gives his lecture from a notebook and the student listens. He—the student—will then buy himself a copy of some kind in order to read it up for his exam. This is quite a usual procedure. But what is it in reality? In reality the young man when he sits there listening is completely wasting his time, for actually he gets the information needed by reading the copy he has bought. Merely by that he would have done everything in the matter that has any reality. This means that the lecturer taking his place at the reading-desk and reading from his notes is an entirely unnecessary factor, absolutely superfluous.

Now it will be easy to say: Here is a fellow longing for the suppression of all lecturers. But no, that is not the case. I most certainly do not long for the suppression of lecturers; I am only calling attention to how lecturers nowadays give their lectures with no regard to the fact that printing has been invented, and that what they give out in their lectures penetrates a student's brain-box better when read in a printed book. All the same, I point out that the best one can gain from a well written book is hardly worth a tenth part of what comes from the immediate personality of the teacher in such a way that a connection arises between the soul of the teacher and the soul of the one who is taught. This can happen, however, only in a life of spirit with a basis of its own and its own administration, in which the individuality can fully develop and traditions do not hold sway for hundreds of years—as in universities and other

centres of higher education—and where the individual man is able to be himself in the most individual sense.

Then from this instruction by word of mouth will come something of which we can say: We have broken with everything coming to men even through the arts of printing and illustration, but just by doing so we gain the possibility of developing quite new teaching capacities, which today are dormant in mankind. All this belongs, indeed pre-eminently belongs, to our present social questions. For only if we have the heart and mind for it shall we be able to enter into what is necessary for our present age.

Now let us look at what for the general social situation arises from the perverted nature of our higher education. Yesterday in a public lecture I had to draw attention to how, strictly speaking, neither in the national economy of the bourgeoisie nor in that of the proletariat have we any reflection of the real social conditions, because we simply have not had the ability to arrive at a true social science.

What then has arisen under the bourgeoisie in place of social science? Something of which people are very proud and never tired of praising, namely, modern sociology. Now this modern sociology is the most nonsensical product of culture that could possibly have arisen; for it sins against all the most elementary requirement for a social science. This sociology

seeks to be great by taking no account of anything that could lead to social will, social impulse, merely noting historically and statistically the so-called sociological facts, to prove, or so it appears, that the human being is a kind of social animal living within a community. It has furnished strong evidence of this, unconsciously it is true, furnished it by not advancing anything but the most insipid sociological views which are the common property of everyone—mere trivialities.

Nowhere is there the will to discover social laws and how they must affect the social will of man.

Hence in this sphere the force of all life of spirit is crippled. We must calmly admit that all levels of society today that are not proletarian lack anything in the way of social will. Social will is non-existent just because, where it is meant to be cultivated, namely in centres for higher education, sociology has replaced social science—an ineffective sociology in place of a social science which pulsates in the will and stimulates the human being. These matters have their roots deep in the cultural life; it is there that they have to be sought if they are ever to be found.

Let us reflect how different our situation would be in life if what we have previously discussed here were to be carried out. Instead of our gaze being turned back to the most ancient epochs of culture, which took their shape from quite different communal conditions, from the age of

"The most serious problem facing academic sociology may be similar to that facing anthropology: we have come to look at human beings differently in recent decades. It is increasingly distasteful to many people to look at other people (or peoples) as objects of study and observation. We are becoming aware that there is something dehumanising to both observer and observed in looking at individuals (or social groups) like creatures under a scientist's microscope. We enter into sacred precincts when we approach the "other". By what right do we "study" *them*?"

P. Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America,* Penguin, p.233.

fourteen or fifteen upwards, when the sentient soul with its delicate vibrations is coming to life, the human being must be led directly to all that touches us most vitally in the life of the time. He should have to learn what has to do with agriculture, what goes on in trade, and he should learn about the various business connections. All this ought to be absorbed by a human being. Imagine how differently he would then face life, what an independent being he would be, how he would refuse to have forced upon him what today is prized as the highest cultural achievement, but which is nothing but the most depressing phenomenon of decadence.≈

Excerpted from: Rudolf Steiner, "Social Basis for Primary and Secondary Education", Lecture III. Lectures in Stuttgart, 1919, GA192.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE NEWLETTER

To help develop an international community of people together striving to shape a new kind of university. **Please share this newsletter widely.**

To share insights and information which will help to develop the content, methods and organisational principles of this kind of university

BACKGROUND – ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE UNIVERSITY

The university, since its inception in the medieval people, has become a central organ of the cultural and spiritual life of society. It has been called a "little city", a melting pot for new ways of thinking and for shaping the world creatively.

All knowledge in the medieval university was unified by faith in a transcendent God. During the time of Renaissance humanism, and later in the early-modern Kantian and Humboldtian universities, the human rational faculty became seen as the unifying power. The university came to be thought of as a centre for universal knowledge. The modern university can better be called a "multi-versity"; faith in God or the rational striving toward the universality of knowledge is not its central concern. It is essentially materialistic in outlook, serving mainly practical ends through its teaching and research.

SHAPING A NEW FORM OF UNIVERSITY

This means stepping toward a future in which the university is completely free of the state –

financially, in terms of course content, and in relation to the awarding of degrees. This freedom is the responsibility and duty of this central organ of the cultural-spiritual sphere of the threefold social organism; it is already recognised in academic freedom. Ways this freedom can be further achieved can be discussed and advanced through this newsletter.

Following the indications of Rudolf Steiner, the aim of lower and higher schooling is not to educate but to awaken – to help awaken the modern human being to the spirit, the spirit working in the human being itself. What can be achieved at the tertiary level will fructify the whole field of education into the future.

Thus we can state boldly: the aim of the new university is to help open the "eye of the spirit" to the working of creative spirit in all forms of nature and the human world. In every faculty, in every aspect of teaching and researching, the task will be to advance human life towards an understanding of the world as a manifestation of spirit.

For this reason the orientation of the new university is fundamentally phenomenological. This is the method which is taught, guided and inspired by what others have perceived in this way. Modern individuals need to learn to see for themselves.

Seeing is grounded in physical perception, in what appears to us in the world (phenomenon literally means – "what appears"). But physical appearance hides what is invisible and essential. When teaching and researching focuses one-sidedly on the physical we have everything technical, the approach which considers what is "real" as only observable, empirical phenomena. Academic thinking then becomes highly materialistic and objective. However, when teaching and learning reaches through what appears to us physically, it rises to the artistic through a "knowing of the heart". In the works of the later Heidegger and the later Merleau-Ponty we have the vision of the invisible within the visible. We find that "more appears than appears to appear".* The appearance hides the innate idea (*eidos*) which may nevertheless come to presence through the pathway of phenomenology; this innate idea Plato equated with *to ekphanestaton* ("what properly shows itself as the most radiant of all is the beautiful").

The new university is focused on a highly practical, applied phenomenology, on all the phenomena which come within the scope of the different faculties. Different minerals and soil forms; plants and animals; the forms and structures of the human body and human consciousness; the different stages in the growth of children, their different soul gestures and temperaments; all the disease and health appearances; social forms and social processes – and so on. For this advanced practical phenomenology, we look mainly to the indications of German philosopher and artist Rudolf Steiner, who in turn drew greatly on the artistic phenomenological natural science of the poet Johann von Goethe.

<div style="text-align:right">Editor</div>

* R. Bernasconi, "The Good and the Beautiful" in *Phenomenology in Practice and Theory*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1985, pp.179-184.