

## Steiner Waldorf education, Social Three-Folding and civil society: Education as cultural power

Bo Dahlin

*Rudolf Steiner University College, Oslo, Norway*

**ABSTRACT.** Steiner Waldorf education is usually perceived as based on Rudolf Steiner's comprehensive vision of human nature and development, the knowledge of which is the basic element of Steiner Waldorf teacher education. However, Steiner considered it important for teachers to be aware of the social and political issues of the times and his educational ideas can be seen as part of a social philosophy of *Menschenbildung*. This paper relates Steiner's idea of a threefold social structure to various theoretical notions that have appeared recently within social and political philosophy. In particular, Cohen and Arato's concept of civil society is found to be similar to Steiner's notion of culture as a third, relatively independent social sphere, balancing the powers of the state and the market. The power of civil society in general and education in particular is based on the creation of meaning and identity. Steiner Waldorf education supports the formation of a cosmopolitan identity based on the universally human. Such an educational impulse is needed today as a counterbalance to the global market forces.

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG.** Die Waldorfpädagogik wird gewöhnlich aus dem umfassenden Bild vom Menschen und dessen Entwicklung verstanden, wobei dieses Verständnis auch ein fundamentales Element der Lehrerbildung darstellt. Gerade weil Steiner es für die Lehrer als wesentlich erachtet, ein Bewusstsein für die sozialen und politischen Fragen ihrer Zeit auszubilden, können seine Bildungsideen als Teil einer *Sozialphilosophie der Menschenbildung* angesehen werden. Der Aufsatz verknüpft Steiners Idee der Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus mit einigen theoretischen Begriffen, die in der neueren Sozialphilosophie diskutiert werden. Insbesondere Cohens und Aratos Theorien der Zivilgesellschaft weisen eine Ähnlichkeit zu Steiners Begriff der Kultur als einer dritten, unabhängigen Sphäre des sozialen Lebens auf, welche die Kräfte von Staat und Wirtschaft ausbalancieren kann. Für die Zivilgesellschaft im Allgemeinen wie auch die Erziehung im Besonderen ist die Schöpfung von Sinn und Identität wesentlich. Die Waldorfpädagogik fördert kosmopolitische Identitätswürfe, die sich an einem universellen Menschenbild orientieren. Ein solcher Bildungsimpuls bietet ein erforderliches Gegengewicht zu den globalen Kräften des Marktes.

This paper is a discussion of some ideas of *social and political philosophy* which are connected to the principles of Steiner Waldorf education. One of its purposes is to widen the horizon of theoretical perspectives of relevance to Steiner Waldorf education, which so far has been concerned mainly with questions of psychology, physiology and, to some extent, epistemology. In a compilation and discussion of Rudolf Steiner's statements about teacher education, Johannes Kiersch (2006) finds that Steiner's statements can be categorised in four types:

1. those pointing to the necessity of having broad and deep knowledge about human culture and history;
2. those about awareness of and engagement in the social and political issues of the present time;
3. those about having deep insights into human nature and child development; and
4. those about cultivating artistic and aesthetic abilities related to teaching as an art.

Kiersch further notes that institutions for Steiner Waldorf teacher education generally emphasises the third point, whereas the second point about social and political issues, is often completely neglected. It is precisely the social and political issues that will be focused on in this paper, by relating Steiner's social thinking to present discussions within social and political philosophy.

There are many parallels between Steiner's ideas and the theories and perspectives prevalent in social research today. These issues are relevant not only for Steiner Waldorf schools but for the general question of *how to shape politically the relations between the state and the educational system*. By explicating these problems and pointing out existing and relevant theoretical

resources it is hoped that a contribution will be made to a bridge between the Steiner Waldorf movement on the one side and academic educational thought on the other. The critical arguments in this paper are therefore not directed towards the public state schools *per se*, but towards the *general conditions* under which both independent and public state schools exist today, in Sweden and in other countries, where the conditions are similar.

The emphasis placed by Steiner Waldorf education on *Menschenbildung* (formation of the human being), rather than on the dissemination of knowledge, is coupled with its view on the relationship between the individual and society. According to this view a democratic society is characterised by making it possible for each individual to develop his or her own innate potential *and then allowing society to develop in accordance with the abilities and the creativity that is released in this way*. This means that the future development of a truly democratic society is, actually, *unpredictable*. The logical consequence of this idea is that schools are to develop the inherent positive abilities of all children, without considering what the state and/or economical agents currently believe that the nation needs.

## The ideas of Steiner Waldorf education and social philosophy

If schools are to be able to work in this way, they must be allowed considerable degrees of freedom. Rudolf Steiner was fully aware of this. His educational philosophy can be seen as one aspect of a broader social philosophical perspective on the development of society, particularly that of Europe. As the Swedish historian of ideas Håkan Lejon (1997) has shown, Steiner's educational principles can be described as a *social philosophy of Menschenbildung*. Steiner claimed that the historical development of society at the time he was writing, after the First World War, had led to a condition in which it was necessary to create three *relatively autonomous* social spheres: the state or judicial sphere, the economic sphere, and the cultural sphere (Steiner, 1985). The fundamental principle for cultural life should be *freedom*, that of the state and judicial system should be *equality*, and that of economy and commerce should be brotherhood or *solidarity*. Schools and education belong according to this vision to the cultural sphere. Thus a threefold social structure based on these principles will create the conditions required for freedom within the educational system.

Certain aspects of Steiner's social and political philosophical thinking can, as Lejon also points out (*ibid.*, p. 96), be compared with the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt. It was Humboldt's opinion that the economical sphere should *support* cultural life (including schools and education), and the state-run judicial system should *protect* it, but neither should *control* or *direct* it. Under such conditions the inherent potential of the individual human being can be optimally realised in freedom and self-determination (Humboldt, 1993).

As Burrow (1993) remarks, Humboldt is perhaps the first political thinker to point out the risk that citizens become more passive the more the state caters for their needs. Thereby he anticipates that critique of the welfare state which holds that it turns its citizens into clients. Humboldt's ideas about limiting the influence and the commitments of the state can at first glance seem identical to the liberal notion of a "night watch state". It is, however, hard to equate Humboldt's political ideas with such an extreme liberalism. Burrow comments:

[I]t is essential to insist on the difference of Humboldt's political theory [...] from the kind of liberalism whose ideal is (or was) the smoothly running, strictly segregated traffic of a sophisticated motorways system. His ideal of society has in fact more in common with some aspects of socialism. It is an ideal of fellowship in which each individual is both separate yet involved... (1993, p. xlix-l)

It should also be noted that Humboldt did not hold on to the principle of a non-state, completely independent school system forever. He was rather ambivalent in this question; a sign that the governing or the freedom of education always has been a central dilemma for liberalism: how will people become aware of and understand their rights, obligations and possibilities if they do not all first get the same education in these issues?

## Civil society and social threefoldness

Steiner's idea of a threefold social structure has been adopted in recent years by activists within what is known as the "global civil society".<sup>1</sup> Nicanor Perlas (1999) and Yesayahu Ben-Aharon (2004) show how economic globalisation has led to a *de facto* threefold structure at the global level. This is tied up with the growth of a global civil society that acts as a third power factor, relating to the two others: national states and transnational corporations.

The concept of civil society has obtained renewed relevance in the social sciences in recent decades, and there is much literature discussing the concept, which has been interpreted in different ways. A rough generalisation of the various definitions that have been proposed is that those with neoconservative and neoliberal perspectives include everything that does not belong to the

1. Cf. Kaldor (2003) who maintains that the concept of a global civil society grew out of the dialogue between the peace movement in Western Europe and the dissident movements in Eastern Europe before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989.

state as parts of “civil society”. Neoliberalism, in particular, tends to assimilate civil society into the economic sphere. There is a precedent for this among 18<sup>th</sup> century economists, who used the concept of civil society to counteract the growing power of the state over the commercial sphere (Whitty, 1997). Socialists and social democrats, in contrast, tend to assimilate civil society to the institutions and structures that are controlled by the state, and this, when extended, becomes in reality *all of society*.

There is, however, as Alexander (2001) points out, “a growing recognition of, and interest in, civil society as a sphere that is analytically independent of – and to varying degrees empirically differentiated from – not only the state and the market but from other social spheres as well” (p. 19). Alexander divides the history of conceptions of civil society into three phases: 1) as an umbrella concept including all institutions outside the state; 2) as a condescending term only referring to market capitalism; and 3) as a more differentiated and realistic concept in accordance with the quote above.

A civil society concept of the third kind has been proposed by Cohen & Arato (1992), who furthermore associate civil society with the value of freedom. The rights to communicate and associate make civil society a sphere of freedom within which people can collectively discuss common issues and exercise influence on the political and economic spheres. Cohen & Arato’s normative and political position constitutes a third approach in relation to on the one hand the neoliberal idea of letting “the market” rule as much as possible and on the other the left winged ideologies’ idea of putting as much as possible under state rule. They wish to warrant the autonomy both of the state and the economy but at the same time protect civil society from destructive penetration and instrumentalisation by the ironhand forces of the two other spheres. This idea is almost identical to that of Steiner’s vision of a threefold society. Steiner maintained that cultural life is threatened by erosion as long as its needs of protection from economic exploitation and state clientisation are not realised.

Cohen & Arato summarises their conception of civil society in three points:

1. Civil society is clearly distinct from both the state and the economy; it has its core in society.
2. The central institutions of civil society are social communication and voluntary association.
3. The institutions of civil society are stabilised on the basis of rights, the norms of which demand democratisation.

They further maintain that the concept of civil society is needed to capture and describe the character of certain phenomena in societies of today – phenomena that do not belong to the state, nor to the market, but that are central for the understanding of the “crisis of democracy” and how we can work for the improvement of democratic conditions. The most obvious of these phenomena are the so called NGO’s and NPO’s (non-government and non-profit organisations). Independent schools *not run for economic profit* also belong here, especially if founded on a long and world wide tradition, as is the Steiner Waldorf school.

Ben-Aharon (2004) argues that the “dawning realisation” of the reality of civil society in the sense described by Cohen & Arato is emerging not only among academics: it is being expressed with all the clarity that can be desired by those who have an economic interest in the global market. After the “battle of Seattle” in November 1999, in which WTO negotiations were brought to a halt by demonstrating activists from several different international non-governmental organisations (NGO’s), it appears that the managers of transnational corporations, in particular, have come to the insight that the global network of organisations in civil society has become a third, independent, power factor in world politics.

The growth of this third power factor, relative to the state and to economic interests, is compatible with Steiner’s idea of a threefold social structure. The difference is that the process of differentiation seems to take place more at the global level than at the national level. If we disregard, however, the difference in level, the issue becomes in principle the possibility of creating a general balance between *three types of power*: the power of the state, economic power, and cultural power (cf. Normann Waage, 2002).

The means by which the state exercises power are legislation, the judicial system and the system of punishment associated with it. State power is based on the requirements of people for protection and security, or as Zygmunt Bauman expresses it: “Human vulnerability and uncertainty are the foundation of all political power” (2004, p. 85). Economic power has its obvious base in the unavoidable needs of people for the necessities of life. But what is the base of cultural power, the power of civil society?<sup>2</sup> This type of power is founded on another type of human need. It is well-known that man cannot live by bread alone: life requires also *meaning* and *identity*. Culture creates and maintains meaning and identity, this is true of “culture” both in its anthropological and in its aesthetic sense. Meaning and identity are created and maintained both by the various forms of fine art and by “everyday” culture, ideologies and lifestyles. This is a process that occurs both at an individual level and at a collective level.

2. This question is based on an essential link between culture and civil society. See Cohen & Arato (1992) for a more elaborated argument that the institutions of civil society have their grounds in what the German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas calls the *cultural lifeworld*. Habermas argues that the institutional core of civil society consists of the non-state and the non-economical voluntary associations that anchor the communicative structures of the public sphere in the lifeworld (see also Kaldor, 2003).

## Manuel Castells and “the power of identity”

Ethnicity and membership of a religious faith have been the strongest forces for creating meaning and identity through human history. The rise of the nation-state depended on these forces, particularly that of ethnicity. It could be said that the cultural sphere has lent its power to the state so that it was possible for the latter to consolidate itself historically (cf. Cassirer, 1961; Quispel, 1999). However, one important aspect of Steiner’s idea of the threefold social structure is that the state in our time must be based solely on a *judicial* basis, and this in turn is fundamentally based on the equality of all humans, independently of race, sex, ethnicity, etc. All are equal, solely in the light of their humanity. The idea of a nation-state founded on ethnicity is now obsolete, and this idea readily becomes destructive (as happened, for example, during the recent Balkan wars). The power of ethnicity to create identity must be returned to the cultural sphere and it must be decoupled from the formation of the state. John Hoffman (2004) argues along similar lines when he criticise all forms of “state racism” and attempts to delineate a concept of citizenship “beyond the state” (see also the discussion of Benhabib below).<sup>3</sup>

Manuel Castells (2004) holds that ethnicity has actually lost much of its significance for the creation of identity in today’s “network society”. However, the very title of Castells’ second volume of his *magnum opus* about the information age suggests that he regards identity in itself as a social power factor. Castells describes the connections between culture, identity and power in ways like the following:

Along with the technological revolution, the transformation of capitalism, and the demise of statism, we have experienced, in the past twenty-five years, the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization and cosmopolitanism on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their own lives and environment. (2004, p. 2)

The quotation above makes it clear that Castells focuses more on *collective* identity than on that of the individual. In this respect he is not in complete accord with the focus placed by Steiner Waldorf education on individual, rather than on collective identity formation. However, Steiner Waldorf education does not disregard the ethnic and cultural context of identity formation. The collective identity is an inescapable part of individual identity.

Castells, further, sees the collective identity as the source of meaning and experience. To be more precise, identity is for Castells “the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning” (ibid., p. 6). Thus identity is both itself a construction of meaning and the basis for further constructions of meaning. The construction of social identity always takes place in the context of a power structure. This leads Castells to the distinction between three types of collective identity (cf. ibid., p. 8):

1. Legitimising identity: this is created by socially dominant institutions in order to extend their dominance and to give it a rational basis vis à vis the social stakeholders.
2. Resistance identity: this is created by the groups that are located in subordinate and/or stigmatised positions relative to the dominating institutions and their logic (rationality, ideology).
3. Project identity: this is created by social stakeholders who redefine their social position, desiring in this way to achieve a transformation of the overall structure of society.

These forms of identity are not static: they can transform one into another. An important point of Castells’ reasoning is the process by which something that starts as resistance identity can be transformed through historical development into project identity, and then subsequently become legitimising identity. Each one of the three formations of identity, however, leads to different kinds of social structures. The legitimising identity forms the basis of civil society, while resistance identity gives rise to exclusivist “*communes* or *communities*” (ibid., p. 9), the principal goal of which is to *preserve* their own tradition or way of life. Finally, project identity gives rise to social movements, associations or federations that aim at comprehensive *changes* of society. They strive for this reason after expansion, to include more and more members.

Castells associates only the legitimising form of identity with civil society since he uses a different concept of civil society than that presented above. Castells agrees with the descriptions put forward by Gramsci, in which the institutions of civil society exist in total *continuity* with the apparatus of the state, while *at the same time* having deep roots in the general public (cf. ibid., pp. 8-9).<sup>4</sup> This differs from the concept proposed by Cohen & Arato (1992), who would like to see a critical difference between the institutions of the state and those of civil society. Viewed from Cohen & Arato’s perspective, and viewed in the light of Steiner’s

3. It may be of interest to note here that Mitchell and Gerwin (2007), in their follow up study on former Steiner Waldorf pupils in North America, found that these to a high extent felt themselves to be world citizens.

4. However, Castells seems not completely consistent in his use of the concept since he also says that the WTO negotiations in Seattle 1999 were stopped precisely by activists from civil society (ibid., p. 158). Surely such activists must have more of a project, or a resisting, than a legitimising identity.

idea of threefoldness, it may be true to say that the legitimising identity is to be regarded as the basis of one's identity as a *citizen*, and thus to be associated with the state rather than with the civil society.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, both project identity and resistance identity are to be seen as bases of – or based on – the civil society.

Stoer & Magalhães (2002) present arguments in the latter direction, when they talk about an “emergent citizenship, founded mainly on cultural factors” (p. 696). It is a characteristic of this new form of citizenship that:

[t]he sovereignty which individuals and groups ceded to the modern social contract is now being reclaimed to the tune of ‘I want my sovereignty back’. In other words, individuals and groups want to decide themselves [...] with regard to how they live, how they educate, how they care for themselves, how they reproduce, etc. (ibid., p. 696)

At the same time, Castells also appears to believe that at least the project identity has *previously* in history, particularly before the period of “late modernity”, had its basis in the civil society (cf. ibid., p. 11). He gives the socialist movement as an example of this. But according to Castells, the development of modernity has entailed the gradual disintegration of civil society. It is against this background that he proposes the hypothesis that *project identities in our time principally grow from resistance identities*.

It is interesting to examine this hypothesis in its relationship to the Steiner Waldorf school movement. The first question that arises is that of whether the Steiner Waldorf movement belongs to the category of “social movements”, as defined by Castells. Castells defines “social movements” as “purposive collective actions whose outcome, in victory as in defeat, transforms the values and institutions of society” (ibid., p. 3). What would a “victory” for the Steiner Waldorf movement entail? The answer depends on the social and political situation in which the question is posed. “Victory” in Sweden today (and in other countries where the situation is similar) could be the acceptance of an independent Steiner Waldorf teacher education as being on parity with that provided by the state, that is, awarding it the status of an academic degree. Steiner Waldorf teacher education has achieved this status in Norway. Such a victory for the Swedish Steiner Waldorf school movement would also lead to a certain transformation of the Swedish educational system.

If the Steiner Waldorf school movement is a social movement, the next question that arises is what types of collective identity characterise it. It is naturally only project identity or resistance identity, or both, that may be of relevance here. To the extent that the movement is characterised by exclusivist sectarianism, we are dealing with a kind of resistance identity. In contrast, to the extent to which the movement aims at a transformation of the organisation of the school system, we are also dealing with a form of project identity. However, the movement historically does seem to have been principally characterised by a resistance identity: it has been sufficient for the movement to preserve Rudolf Steiner's legacy with respect to curriculum and teaching methods, and to fight for the right to operate schools outside of the auspices of the state. The “dominating logic” in Sweden, that is, the social democratic policy for independent schools, has long been such that it has been difficult to develop “resistance” into “project” identity. Until the beginning of the 90's, laws and regulation made it very difficult to establish an independent school.

However, the project identity of the Steiner Waldorf movement has always been implicitly present as a possibility. But the ultimate goal of the movement is not – or *should not* be – that all schools are to become Steiner Waldorf schools. The ultimate goal must rather be, according to Steiner's idea of threefoldness, to create opportunities for free self-administered education and cultural institutions with different educational philosophies; educational institutions that form parts of a similarly free and self-administered cultural life. In a lecture from 1919 Steiner points out that the state certainly did a “good deed” when it liberated schools from the church and put them on their own feet. But we must also be able to empathize with people who hold other world views than our own and give them the same freedom that we want for ourselves:

It is important that we do not become afraid when, for example, Catholic parents demand that their children receive instruction in Catholicism. We don't have to fear that when we stand firmly on our own foundation. Similarly, we don't need to fear the worldview of another if we are enthusiastic and strong in our own. Such attitudes can develop in free spiritual competition, but certainly not through laws. (Steiner, 1997, p. 213)

The state has a long tradition of claiming to represent “the general”. Pierre Bourdieu expresses this by saying that the state has a monopoly on the universal (1992). It is part of the granting of legitimacy to the power of the state that it considers itself to be above vested interests and to work for the general good and for general justice. This also grants legitimacy to the state monopoly on physical violence. But it means that the state will always have problems in acknowledging “the Other” and the stranger, anything that deviates from the ideological or cultural hegemony that the state itself participates in maintaining. Acknowledging the equality of the Other would entail relinquishing the claim to represent the *general* interest. This becomes particularly problematical when the state is based on national, ethnic or religious principles. But even to the extent to which it has differing cultural or ideological grounds, the question

5. This critical difference between state and civil society concerns the social level. On the individual level there is, or ought to be, an underlying continuity in the sense that the state consists of all citizens of age. Steiner's idea of threefoldness implies giving each human being not only the *right* but also the *possibility* to actively participate in *all three* social spheres. Such active participation could be seen as an essential aspect of *Menschenbildung*.

of its relationship to those groups that deviate or “resist” the prevalent hegemony arises. The state must be decoupled from all cultural and ideological interests in a society that strives to achieve a balance of power between state, culture and economy. *It must genuinely represent the universally human*. Only in this way can it justify its “monopoly on the universal”. “The Folk home” must provide a home for folk in plural, not just for one particular folk.<sup>6</sup>

## The usurpation of cultural power by the economic sphere

The creation of meaning and the creation of identity are fundamentally creative processes that arise from the spiritual nature of humankind. The spiritual is that which is active in the work of the mind or the soul; that is, in thought, emotions, dreams and imagination; as well as in our will, wishes and desires. The creative power of the cultural life, however, easily becomes invisible in a secular society, in which a materialistic worldview dominates.<sup>7</sup> Culture is often equated with “ideology”, which in turn is seen as some form of “superstructure”, as in Marxism. It then tends to be seen as simply a futile shadow of the *real* world, which is considered to consist of material and economic processes.

According to Steiner’s spiritual point of view, creative human activity is involved in all social change. Steiner was of the opinion that this creativity in our time becomes more and more absorbed by the commercial world. Today we see clear examples in the economic sphere of how people consciously strive to exploit the power of the cultural sphere. To be more precise, it is a question of channelling the power present in the creation of meaning and the formation of identity so that this power serves the interests of economic profit. One example of this is advertising, and the emphasis that is placed today on “branding” (cf. Klein, 2000). Another example is the phenomenon of the “experience industry”, which took off during the “new economy” in the middle of the 1990’s, when terms such as “imagineering”, “event manager” and “future magician” were coined. The enormous sums of money invested by companies in advertising and branding are sufficient evidence that culture, in the sense of meaning and identity creation, is a power factor.<sup>8</sup> Marketing consultants can be found today who propose that business companies should consider themselves to be a form of religious institution. Normann Waage quotes Jesper Kunde, author of the book *Corporate Religion*:

I am using as strong a word as “religion” advisedly. [The word “religion”] is derived from [...] “religare” – the act of binding something together in a common expression. A religion is thus a means of giving a group of people a single set of ideas that points in one clear direction. [...] Only when the ideas and values of the employees are bound up with their skills, and only when it is effectively controlled using a Corporate Religion, is the company geared up to seek the ultimate branding achievement: Brand Religion. (Kunde, quoted in Normann Waage, 2002, p. 97)

Schools and education are regulated and controlled by more or less inhibiting bureaucratic regulations, curricula, exams, and evaluations. But they are now also beginning to be exploited by the interests of economic profit (independent schools formed as shareholding companies, and sponsored teaching materials that include advertising). This illustrates how difficult it is for the social power and the creative energy inherent in the processes of meaning and identity creation to function in optimal freedom in the society of today. It makes it almost impossible for culture to function as a third, challenging and balancing power factor, in relation to the state and economic interests.

The creation of meaning and the formation of identity must be seen as fundamental elements in human culture and education. From a Steiner Waldorf education point of view it could be argued that the ultimate goal of human culture and education is an experience of identity that is based on the universally human, without therefore denying that social, ethnic and other local conditions also influence a person’s character and personality. Human culture and education have, when considered in this light, *cosmopolitan* properties (cf. Kemp, 2005), and Steiner Waldorf education has an inherent cosmopolitan ideal. This is a logical consequence of making the universally human the basis of the educational process. Such a universal human identity formation is becoming evermore important in order to counterbalance the negative consequences of today’s processes of economic globalisation.

Seyla Benhabib, professor of political science and philosophy at Yale University, regards these negative consequences as very serious for democratic citizenship (Benhabib, 2002). There is a risk that the global free movement of people, goods, news, and

6. The expression “the Swedish Folk home” was coined in the late 1920’s by the social democrat and subsequent prime minister of Sweden, Per-Albin Hansson.

7. The concept of secularization is a contested one both within theology and sociology. However, it is evident that the church no longer has the same social and political power as it had for instance in medieval times. That does not mean that people are no longer religious, but religion is often seen as something “private”, which again contributes to making the spiritual reality of human life invisible.

8. The exploitation of cultural power by advertising seems to have started in the USA in the 1920’s. Ewen (1976) writes about this: In what was viewed as their instinctual search for traditional ideals, people were offered a vision of civilized man which was transvaluated in terms of the pecuniary exigencies of society. Within a society that defined real life in terms of the monotonous insecurities of mass production, advertising attempted to create an alternative organization of life which would serve to channel man’s desires for self, for social success, for leisure away from himself and his works, and toward a commoditized acceptance of “Civilization”. (p. 48)

information will create a flow of individuals without commitments, a commercial life without obligations, news media without a public conscience and the spread of information without a sense of tact. In this “global.com” civilisation people will shrink to e-mail addresses, and political and cultural life will be spread throughout the electronic world, while real-world associations will be brief, shifting, and superficial. Citizenship of a democratic society is, despite all imaginations of an internet utopia of global democracy, incompatible with such tendencies. Democratic citizenship requires commitment, commitment requires responsibility and loyalty.

It may very well be the case that responsibility and loyalty only arise in the situation that Benhabib describes on the basis of a genuine feeling of being human, and as a consequence of this a participant in global humanity. However, if the cultural power of meaning creation is absorbed by economic and/or state political forces, the basis of such a universal human identity formation is undermined – just as much as it is by sectarianism and dogmatic exclusivism, which belong to the negative aspects of the power of culture.

## The repression of cultural freedom

The repression of culture was obvious in the former Soviet states, at least for those who did not share the worldview prescribed by the state. In contrast, the freedom to adopt a faith and to live according to it has long been considered “natural” in the western world. There is at least a freedom of thought and a freedom of expression that are protected by the constitution. But – do we also have the freedom to *live* according to our beliefs (as long as these do not impinge upon the freedom of others)? The fall of the Berlin Wall and the “victory of capitalism” opened the gates to a globalisation of the market economy and its neoliberal political principles that faced almost no resistance. Bauman comments on the dissolving of the Soviet states:

As long as the enemy was not just another competitor in the same race, but a genuine ‘other’, a carrier of an alternative mode of life, it could induce capitalism to self-limit and self-correct. This is the kind of adversary that is now conspicuously missing. (2004, p. 73)

A significant reinforcement of the *economic tyranny* that Steiner actually pointed to nearly a hundred years ago (Steiner, 1997, p. 151) took place. How free are we in reality, when we are continually reminded of how important it is to be “employable” in a labour market that threatens to exclude ever-increasing numbers, particularly of the young? How free are the youth of today, who are compelled to an ever-increasing degree to adapt to these conditions? Our freedom seems to consist mainly of the freedom to choose consumer products. We can in the wealthy part of the world feel free to purchase cheap clothes from the other side of the world, but how free is the seamstress in Thailand, who has produced these clothes under inhuman conditions? There are many examples that could be given, but they are unnecessary in this context. The point is: can we really discern the repression under which we are living in the “free world”? Václav Havel’s (1985) notion of living “within the truth”, coined under Soviet socialist repression, remains an important strategy of resistance for those who can so discern, not least because the purely political battle against this economic repression has nearly died out.

Steiner actually formulated his idea of a threefold society as a strategy to combat the economic tyranny that he predicted would emerge from the Anglo-Saxon world, powered by the US (Steiner, 1919). Whereas Asian nations can be seen as representatives at a global level of the tendency to allow both culture and economy to be absorbed by the state (theocracy), Anglo-Saxon nations tend rather to allow the economic sphere to absorb both the state and the cultural life. Steiner claimed that a third tendency flourished in Europe, particularly in central Europe; namely that of allowing a free cultural life to constitute the basis of both the state and the economic sphere. He believed that it was particularly important to reinforce this tendency and to arrange European social life according to it, in order to create a counterbalance to the economic forces that arose – then as now – particularly within the US; economic forces that strive for world dominance, inevitably followed by the erosion of culture and of traditional forms of life (Ben-Aharon, 2004).

When Bauman shortly after the quote above asks himself if Europe can be or become an alternative to the US world politics based on market economy and answers that this seemed to be a realistic possibility at least for some decades after WWII, he is actually expressing a similar idea about the role of Europe in the global power game:

Europe set out to work hard, for thirty glorious years, on the great social experiment of mitigating the unacceptable extremes of unbridled capitalism with ‘socialism with a human face’, while averting the unbearable consequences of the raw and uncouth communist version of social equity with ‘capitalism with a human face’. Europe was searching, so to speak, for a ‘third way’ *avant la lettre*. (p. 73-74)

On the basis of Bauman's analyses one can also maintain that the grounds for Europe's "third way" lie mainly in the sphere of *culture*, not in that of the state or of the economy. Bauman points to the following:

1. The social welfare policy, which has its grounds in the idea of social and political rights (with reference to Jürgen Habermas). This in turn has grown out of Christian humanism (but Bauman does not refer to that in this context).
2. The cultural life of Europe is characterized by a hermeneutic translation praxis, in which different languages and traditions have met and merged (with reference to Étienne Balibar).
3. In Europe, values of identity formation have long played an important role. The foremost of these values are rationality, justice and democracy (with reference to Tzvetan Todorov). Their common denominator is the idea of an autonomous society (not state), that is, a society with institutions created by the citizens themselves, not by some external or "higher" power.

In his book about the world citizen Peter Kemp also argues that Europe has something important to contribute in the striving for a global human community:

Let us not be ashamed of the belief that we Europeans, in spite of many passed misdeeds, can give our contribution to a genuine world citizen community by showing that Europe has the cultural experience needed to realize a pluralism in unity and defend the individual in the universal (2005, p. 56; translated from Swedish)

Steiner's idea of a threefolded society, however, never became reality, and a global market economy dominated by the US is today upon us (cf. Hertz, 2002; Chomsky, 2004).<sup>9</sup> These claims must not be taken as an expression of general hostility to the USA. Actually the population of the US itself is affected negatively in some respects by US government policy, just as much as the rest of the world (cf. Bauman, 2004, p. 59f).

## Steiner Waldorf education and the fundamental issues of educational thought

Steiner's "social philosophy of *Menschenbildung*" is unique with respect to its ideational content. It is hard to find any system of educational principles that is so "weird" when seen in the light of the dominating characteristics of currently accepted educational, psychological or social perspectives. Steiner himself was of the opinion that Steiner Waldorf education could not be compared with other educational theories, since it gives answers to questions that lie outside of the frameworks of conventional educational theories. He was referring to questions about the development of humanity on Earth since the beginning of history, how this development is reflected in our current situation, and the seeds of the future that are derived from it. The questions that lie at the centre of Steiner's texts and lectures on educational theory are those of the deeper development of the mind and the spiritual development of humankind – questions that are seldom if ever considered in conventional educational thought (for some exceptions, see Gidley, 2002 and 2005).

The *form* of Steiner's educational thought, however, is compatible to a certain extent with that of *classical* educational theory, based as it is on ideas involving upbringing and teaching whose development commenced as early as the ancient world. It is particularly interesting to compare the educational philosophy of Aristotle with that of Steiner. Practical pedagogy, that is, the specific forms that upbringing and teaching take, is based for Aristotle on broad and deep philosophical grounds. His starting point is the question of the nature of the human being (cf. Reeve, 2000), a topic traditionally called *philosophical anthropology*. The answer to the question of the nature of the human being provides for Aristotle the basis on which we can understand the "purpose" or "meaning" of human life, and this in turn provides a basis on which to answer the question of what it is that constitutes a good life for people. The question of "the good life" traditionally belongs to the field of *ethics*. Insight into "the good life" provides the basis on which to organise a just society, that is, a society in which all people (although for Aristotle this meant only the "free citizens") obtain the opportunity of living the good life. This question traditionally belongs to the fields of *social* and *political philosophy*. It is only after we have achieved clarity into how a just society should be constituted that we can determine the ways in which upbringing and education are to be designed. This design includes determining what is to be taught and how it is to be taught, these being the more specific questions of pedagogy.

Certain similarities appear when we compare Aristotle's reasoning with Steiner's educational ideas. Steiner Waldorf education is based on a well developed view of the human being and of human development (Steiner, 1932). The question of the nature and essence of the human being is central for anthroposophy. The answers to these questions form, together with insight into

9. In the book *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (2004) John Perkins makes astonishing revelations about his life as a "secret agent" for the world economic interests of the US. See also Brzezinski (1997) for a non-concealing discussion of what is needed in order for the US to maintain and increase its political and economical world hegemony. Zbigniew Brzezinski, security counselor to President Carter in the 1980's, spoke already 1969 about the USA as the first global society in history (Kemp, 2005, p. 31). It would probably be a mistake to underestimate the influence that Brzezinski's ideas have on political and economic circles in the US, cf. Escobar (2005).

the development of the child, the basis of the professional skills of a Steiner Waldorf teacher. The good life is one in which the innate abilities and skills of all individuals are given the opportunity to develop. Even if we as individuals are gifted in more or less one sided ways, we should always strive to achieve a *comprehensive* cultivation of our abilities. One of the consequences of this is being engaged in a continuous process of *becoming* human. The just society is a society that makes this possible for all people. It was Steiner's argument that a threefold organisation of society with a free cultural life was that which gave people the best opportunities in this respect.<sup>10</sup> Only in such a society can schools and education be formed without interference from state and/or economic interests, and schools and education can thus be allowed to rest solely on the universally human.

When we consider the specific, didactic design of Steiner Waldorf education, its "what, how, when and why", we conclude that this is always based on insight into the nature of the human being and the development of the child. Ethical concepts of the good life, or political concepts of a just society, play in this case solely a formal role, never a substantive one. It is here that Steiner parts company with his classical predecessors. There is a "logical chain" that forms the basis of Aristotle's theory of education – a chain in which insight into the nature of the human being leads to insight into the good life, which in turn leads to insight into the just society, which in turn leads to the design of a specific educational system. It is possible, however, to lose or forget the philosophical-anthropological starting point of this chain before one "arrives" at the educational system. For instance, it is possible that religious dogmas, norms, or values are allowed a central role in ethics and the notion of the good life. These norms or values may not be founded on insight into the nature of humankind, being instead "supplied" by other interests. Both the Catholic and the Protestant Church have exercised such an influence on education in Europe. It is also true that concepts of the just society often arise on the basis of ideologies or political interests, rather than as a consequence of anthropological insight. The striving of the nation state to consolidate itself as "one nation, one folk" and to justify its power structures by, for example, rewriting history in a favourable light or by patriotic upbringing, may serve as examples. Steiner's educational principles avoid influence from such "external" interests, and the whole of Steiner Waldorf education is drawn from the nature of the human being and her development, both in an ontogenetic and in a phylogenetic sense. It is for this reason more correct to say that for Steiner, ethics, social philosophy and educational theory all have their roots *directly* in anthropology. But, as pointed out in the introduction, this does not mean that issues of a social and political nature should not be considered in the education of Steiner Waldorf teachers.

## Conclusion

In spite of all talk about the value of pluralism and (sometimes) multiculturalism there is in the world today a strong tendency towards uniform ways of living, connected to the spread of a global market economy. Within education, there is furthermore an increase in state control through systems of assessment and accountability. In the words of Young (2006), there is a

...shift from a view of public education as a professional practice with significant autonomy from state intervention, to the present situation when public education is increasingly a state-directed practice under national rules and accountability procedures. (pp. 26-27)

Any culture, traditional or modern, is not just a way of life; it is also a way of cultivating specific forms of thought, perception and apprehension of the world. There are different "cultures of perception" in the world (Sawa, 2004). Steiner Waldorf education is one such particular culture of perception, cultivating specific forms of thinking, understanding and experiencing the education of human beings, as well as the world in general. Such non-mainstream cultures today need active protection and support from the state and the economical sphere – unless we want to end up in a virtually totalitarian world system, a worldwide "monoculture of the mind", as Vandana Shiva (1993) calls the scientific-technocratic world conception that is spreading from the West. In such a world, the potentials for cultivating humanity would be severely reduced.

There is probably an implicit critical awareness of these things among Steiner Waldorf teacher educators, but there is perhaps not the same awareness of the academic resources within sociology and social philosophy which could be used to support a substantial critique of present educational systems and policies.

10. The economical sphere must then also be transformed from a capitalist profit economy to an economy of solidarity, in order for the universally human to flower also in this field of life. According to Steiner there is a big mistake in coupling *wages to work*, since this inevitably turns human capacities into commodities. As a consequence, the human being herself becomes a commodity. But all human beings have the right to the economic means for fulfilling their basic needs, whether they "work" or not. This idea has also been taken up by some political movements, the ideas of a "citizen salary" or a "basic income for all" being two examples; see for instance Van Parijs (2001).

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