

Thoughts to Consider

Extracts from Various Viewpoints
for Final Classes of
Rudolf Steiner Schools

Selected by Conrad Mainzer

Second edition, revised and supplemented

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Editors' Note

In 1978, the first edition of this reader was prepared by Dr. phil. Conrad Mainzer, London, for the use of school-leaving classes (Abitur and Fachhochschulreife). Passages from the writings of modern British and American authors were selected that touch on the deeper and troubling questions of our time. They offer scope for oral discussions as well as for all kinds of written exercises.

In the meantime, a number of texts have been added, others left out. The editors hope that this revised edition will also prove to be useful to young people entering adult life.

Our most sincere thanks are once more due to Dr. Mainzer for his incessant search for suitable material.

Amid all the menacing signs that surround us in the middle of this twentieth century, perhaps the one which fills thoughtful people with the greatest foreboding is the growing general sense of meaninglessness. It is this which underlies most of the other threats. How is it that the more able man becomes to manipulate the world to his advantage, the less he can perceive any meaning in it? This is a paradox which has often been noted and has sometimes been attributed to a fundamental perversity, a sort of 'pure cussedness', in human nature. In fact, however, it arises from a clearly identifiable and comparatively recent bit of history. 5

Most people are well aware that, with the advent of the Scientific Revolution about three hundred years ago, the mind of man began to relate itself to the world around it in an entirely new way. The habit then first arose of meticulously observing the facts of nature and systematically interpreting them in terms of physical cause and effect; and this habit has been growing ever since, with incalculable and largely beneficial results for the accumulation of practical knowledge, or knowledge enabling the manipulation of nature. What is less clearly realized is the precise nature and significance of a certain further step which was taken in the nineteenth century. It was then that this habitual practice in the pursuit of knowledge was formulated as a dogma under the name of the 'positive' philosophy, or positivism. 10 15 20

Positivism is the philosophical name for the belief now more widely known as 'materialism.' It is the doctrine — propounded originally by Auguste Comte* — that the above-mentioned method of interpreting the facts of nature is not merely a useful but the only possible one. Obviously a proposition that only one method of scientific investigation is possible cannot itself (except for devout believers) be based on scientific investigation by that method. The proposition is, therefore, in fact a dogmatic belief; although it has been so thoroughly absorbed into the thought stream of Western humanity that it has come to be regarded, not as a dogma, but as a scientifically established fact. 25 30

*Auguste Comte (1798—1857), French philosopher and sociologist

Man had run out of places, had run out of geographical solutions for his problems and changes of scene as a cure for his restlessness. The journey in the world without as an answer to our searching and resolution of our failings was dismally bankrupt.

- 5 There was only one thing which could lead to an answer and that was to let the sense of journey expressed for so long in travelling the world without become a journey within the spirit of man. Statesmen, scientists, philosophers, even priests and the whole intellectual trend of the day put up a plausible pretence that our troubles were due to imperfect political systems, badly drawn frontiers and other environmental and economic causes. The whole history of man as he, Mopani,* knew it, had tried all those approaches over and over again and at last, as far as he was concerned, they were proved utterly bankrupt. The real, the only crisis out of which all evil came was a crisis of meaning. It was the terrible invasion of meaninglessness and a feeling of not belonging invading the awareness of man, that was the unique sickness of our day. And this sickness, he was convinced, was the result of the so-called civilized man, parting company with the natural and instinctive man in himself. Never had the power of the civilized over the natural been so great and never had power corrupted man within himself so dangerously.
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20. For that reason the journey within could not be resumed soon enough, the journey of what he called the exiled Jacob back to the Esau, the hunter, whom he had betrayed and with whom he had to be reconciled before he could come home again to inherit his full self.

- This journey to total reconciliation within depended on man standing fast at last in his surroundings and there refusing to give in to any assault on his integrity. He had been horrified by the extent to which people were leaving Africa, saying that they were leaving it for the sake of their children and going back to other amply discredited geographical points of departure and patterns of behaviour as a way out of their problems. Yes - no we had to stand fast and in standing fast bring out into the world around us what was revealed to ourselves on a new journey within and make it part of our here and now; make what was first and oldest in us, new and immediate. Man had to give all his imagination, all his devotion, before it was too late, to whatever was nearest at hand, refusing nothing, however humble or insignificant or even distasteful that came out of him and at him from his immediate surroundings, but accepting all as the raw and only material,
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* Mopani is the hunter friend of Francois, to whom he addresses this 'Hunter's Testament'.

then we must find an alternative to war. In a day when vehicles hurtle through outer space and guided ballistic missiles carve highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can claim victory in war. A so-called limited war will leave little more than a calamitous legacy of human suffering, political turmoil and spiritual disillusionment. A world war — 25
God forbid — will leave only smouldering ashes as a mute testimony of a human race whose folly led inexorably to ultimate death. So if modern man continues to flirt unhesitatingly with war, he will transform his earthly habitat into an inferno such as even the mind of Dante could not imagine. Therefore, I venture to suggest to all of you and all who hear and may 30
eventually read these words, that the philosophy and strategy of non-violence become immediately a subject for study and for serious experimentation in every field of human conflict, by no means excluding the relations between nations.

The Need to Work for Peace

Martin Luther King

We will not build a peaceful world by following a negative path. It is not enough to say we must not wage war; it is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but on the positive affirmation of peace.

There is a fascinating little story that is preserved for us in Greek literature 5
about Ulysses and the Sirens. The Sirens had the ability to sing so sweetly that sailors could not resist steering toward their island. Many ships were lured upon the rocks and men forgot home, duty and honor as they flung themselves into the sea to be embraced by arms that drew them down to death. Ulysses, determined not to be lured by the Sirens, first decided to tie 10
himself tightly to the mast of his boat and his crew stuffed their ears with wax. But finally he and his crew learned a better way to save themselves: they took on board the beautiful singer, Orpheus, whose melodies were sweeter than the music of the Sirens. When Orpheus sang, who bothered to listen to the Sirens? 15

So we must fix our visions not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but upon the positive affirmation of peace. We must see that peace represents a sweeter music, a cosmic melody that is far superior to the discords of war. Somehow we must transform the dynamics of the world power struggle from the negative nuclear arms race which no one can win to a positive 20

contest to harness man's creative genius for the purpose of making peace and prosperity a reality for all of the nations of the world. In short, we must shift the arms race into a peace race. If we have the will and determination to mount such a peace offensive, we will unlock hitherto tightly sealed doors of hope and transform our imminent cosmic elegy into a psalm of creative fulfillment.

All that I have said boils down to the point of affirming that mankind's survival is dependent upon man's ability to solve the problems of racial injustice, poverty and war. The solution of these problems is in turn dependent upon man squaring his moral progress with his scientific progress and learning the practical art of living in harmony.

Worldwide Brotherhood: Man's Only Chance of Survival

Martin Luther King

This means that more and more our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. We must now give an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in our individual societies.

This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This oft-misunderstood and misinterpreted concept so readily dismissed by the Nietzsches of the world as a weak and cowardly force, has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love, I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response, which is little more than emotional bosh. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the First Epistle of Saint John:

Let us love one another; for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us.

Let us hope that this spirit will become the order of the day. As Arnold Toynbee* says, "Love is the ultimate force that makes for the saving choice

*Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975), English historian

Nightfall of the Spirit

Laurens van der Post

One of the most striking features of the desperate age in which we live is its genius for finding good reasons for doing bad things. We, who are its children, can never be altogether free of this characteristic. Consciously or unconsciously, we live not only our own individual life but, whether we like it or not, also the life of our time. We are our own dark horses. All day long we avow motives and purposes that are oddly at variance with the things that we do. For example, we have talked more about reason — we have, on the face of it, loved, honoured and obeyed reason more in the last century and a half than at any other epoch, and yet cumulatively and collectively, in the grand total of all our individual lives, we have produced more unreason, 5
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bigger and fiercer wars than any other age in history.

The theme needs no elaboration. I can only say that it has become almost axiomatic with me to look for a person's overriding motive, his wider purpose, his deepest plan, in his achieved results rather than in the eloquent avowals that he makes to himself and to others. The outer trend confirms 15
the inner pattern. We all obviously have motives and forces inside ourselves of which we are stupendously unaware: I believe that it is the strongest motive, irrespective of our degree of awareness of it, which produces results. I am not suggesting that outside influences, the world of demonstrable fact and circumstance, have no bearing on the matter, but that is a point of view 20
which has been so long in favour and enjoys the patronage of such powerful and distinguished intellects, that it can well be left to take care of itself. What needs our understanding and friendship at this restricted moment in time is this other side of life, so brutally locked out of our awareness that it can only draw attention to itself indirectly, humbly and secretly in the 25
joylessness of the results around us. In this nightfall of the spirit, I have only to look over my shoulder to see this other side of life coming up over the horizon of our consciousness, like a dark Homeric hull sailing before winds blowing from the uttermost limits of time.

The Increasing Complexity of Society

John Holloway

Yet about all those times of national crisis, or humiliation, there is one thing, anyhow, which makes it not harder but easier to be alive and to meet the problems of life; and it is something that we do not have now. There are

times in the history of a people when the major issue that confronts them
5 seems to be perfectly straightforward; and this is true — or has been — when
the issue is resisting a foreign invader. Also there are other times when the
major questions have this simplicity and directness, even though more views
than one may perhaps be taken over them. This is true when some decisive
10 issue strikes public opinion as simply one of justice and, over the last
hundred years, most of our political crises have been of this kind: the claim
of the working class, or of women, for the vote; of the Irish for Home Rule¹;
of the poor to a welfare society. No doubt one could hold sincere convictions
on either side; one thought the claim was just, or one didn't. But the key
15 point is that when a decisive political issue is of this kind, every normal
adult feels entitled to an opinion, and able to form one; and it was because
in the past most of the great issues have usually been justice issues that the
ordinary voter felt he could bring them together into the decisive issue:
which of the parties was fittest to govern.

Today we are no longer in this position, partly because the decisive issues
20 have changed in themselves, and partly because a more sophisticated kind
of public opinion wants to take more into account in thinking about them.
But whichever it is, the fact remains that the great problems of the day
seem in many cases to have grown beyond the powers of not just the
ordinary but also the intelligent man-in-the-street. I am quite prepared, by
25 the way, to concede that they are beyond the expert, too: that is not the
distinction my argument requires. In the end, we know that we do not
know how to build any effective defence against nuclear attack, or to solve
the world food-and-population problem before there are major famines.
And the same, surely, has been true about our economic difficulties. Indeed
30 it is the experts themselves who have been playing stop-go for years while
knowing it was a superficial remedy, but not knowing how to break through
that into a more radical remedy; so the point about the intelligent plain man
follows from that.

Not long ago, *Encounter*² asked thirty-one prominent members of the
35 intelligentsia to give their views about Britain's entry into the Common
Market. The common answer was a frank admission of inability to take a
rational decision on a matter so intricate and — here is the real point —
technical. I say this is the real point, because the change has perhaps been
this: that enlightened public opinion now definitely wants to take the
40 technical questions as the key questions, while at the same time realizing
that it is ill-equipped to solve them. Moreover, even the right solutions (or

1 '... the Irish for Home Rule ...': self-government for the Irish

2 *Encounter* is a magazine

listen to his voices, and learn to speak a little of what they speak to him. He asks to be left alone that he may contemplate the mystery of life itself and bear witness to it.

The Value of Literature: Dramatizing Insights

Richard Hoggart

I value literature because of the way — the peculiar way — in which it explores, re-creates and seeks for the meanings in human experience; because it explores the diversity, complexity and strangeness of that experience (of individual men or of men in groups or of men in relation to the natural world); because it re-creates the texture of that experience; and because it pursues its explorations with a disinterested passion (not wooing nor apologizing nor bullying). I value literature because in it men look at life with all the vulnerability, honesty, and penetration they can command . . . and dramatize their insights by means of a unique relationship with language and form.

'Exploring human experience' is a useful phrase, but not quite sufficient. It is too active. 'Contemplating' or 'celebrating' human experience might be better for a beginning, to indicate the preoccupied passivity before life in which the imagination often starts its work. And 'exploring' can sound too much like wandering for its own sake, as though literature simply opens up successive territories of human response. 'Searching' or even 'ordering' would be better, so long as we didn't imply by either of them an 'irritable reaching after fact and reason'. Every writer — not necessarily in an obvious sense nor necessarily consciously, and whether in a tragic or comic or in any other manner — means what he says. Sometimes he will deny that there is a meaning. "I only wanted to write an interesting tale," he will say, ignoring that the interest of a story almost always comes from seeing the human will in action against chaos or against order. Sometimes the meaning he intends will not be the work's achieved meaning. The ebb and flow of imaginative power within the work may reveal attitudes hidden from the writer himself. But there will be a meaning, a kind of order — expressed or implied. Whether he knows it or not, the writer will be testing the validity of certain ways of seeing life; he will be offering, no matter how provisionally, a way of ordering the flux of experience. By his choice and arrangement of materials, by the temper of his treatment of them, a writer is implicitly saying: this is

one way in which we can face experience or succumb to it or seek to alter it or try to ignore it.

The attention good literature pays to life is both loving and detached. It frames experience and, in a sense, distances it. But it always assumes the importance, the worthwhileness, of human experience even when — as in tragedy — it finds much in that experience evil. So, if a writer is imaginatively gifted, his work helps to define and assert that importance, to bring experience up fresh before us. This is not a way of saying that a good writer makes an evil experience good. But his exploration is good, since it defines more clearly the nature of the evil we suffer and perform. It helps to make us believe more in the freely willing nature of man; and it helps us to feel more sharply the difficulties and limits of that freedom. Good literature insists on 'the mass and majesty' of the world, on its concreteness and sensuous reality, and on its meanings beyond 'thisness'. It insists on the importance of the inner, the distinctive and individual, life of man, while much else in our activities and in our make-up — fear, ambition, fatigue, laziness — tries to make that life generalized and typecast.

Hidden Magic in Music

Benjamin Britten

The wording of your Institute's Constitution* implies an effort to present the Arts as a counter-balance to Science in today's life. And though I am sure you do not imagine that there is not a lot of science, knowledge and skill in the art of making music (in the calculation of sound qualities and colours, the knowledge of the technique of instruments and voices, the balance of forms, the creation of moods, and in the development of ideas), I would like to think you are suggesting that what is important in the Arts is *not* the scientific part, the analysable part of music, but the something which emerges from it but transcends it, which cannot be analysed because it is not *in* it, but *of* it. It is the quality which cannot be acquired by simply the exercise of a technique or a system: it is something to do with personality, with gift, with spirit. I quite simply call it magic: a quality which would appear to be by no means unacknowledged by scientists, and which I value more than any other part of music.

*This speech was made at the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies in Aspen/Colorado in 1964. The Aspen Award is given to honour "the greatest individual anywhere in the world judged to have made the greatest contribution to the advancement of the humanities."

step to the breeder-reactor – means that the world's indestructible nuclear wastes will steadily accumulate.

A Future Source of Energy

Barbara Ward

What is certain is that mankind could be on the verge of a different kind of breakthrough which would make fusion, with its vast costs and uncertain effects, entirely obsolete. This is the very rapid development of solar cell technology by which electricity is produced directly from the sun's radiance
5 and can first supplement and finally take the place of the world's present reliance upon fossil fuels. At present the cost and reliability of the process is not fully established. The turning point, expected within a decade, will be the production of solar electricity for less than \$ 500 a kilowatt, which would be under half the present nuclear costs and could be even lower ten
10 years hence. Solar power could be essentially decentralized – either in small power stations serving the new 'clustered' communities or attached as energy units to individual buildings. They could be connected to a traditional grid which would be used as a sort of energy store or back-up system. This could be drawn on when houses or communities or industries need
15 more than their solar plants can supply and could be turned down or used to convert electricity into other fuels that can be stored – such as hydrogen – when the solar plants produce more electricity than is needed. The excess electricity could be fed back into the grid so that both charges and credits are registered. So flexible a system would have the added value of delivering
20 communities from the single knockout blow of a flicked-off switch at the central generator – by accident or design.

Communication: New Emphasis on Society

Raymond Williams

What do we mean by communication? The oldest meaning of the word, in English, can be summarized as the passing of ideas, information, and attitudes from person to person. But, later, communication came also to mean a line or channel from place to place. Since the Industrial Revolution

unfortunate experiment. Meanwhile, we must hope that no accident occurs in the reactors or in the disposal of lethal wastes. No one denies the care and vigilance of the managements concerned. Yet it is disconcerting that the two largest nuclear power plants in operation — at Brown's Ferry, Alabama — had to be closed down precipitately in April 1975 to avoid the risk of a major 'melt-down.' The cause of the accident would be almost comically trivial were it not so horrifying. Here is a contemporary account of the accident:

"A workman was using an unshielded candle to detect airflow and accidentally set light to cables under the control room. More alarming than the fire itself was the fact that the emergency systems, designed to keep the reactor cool in the event of an accident, appear to have failed. When his instruments began to show something was wrong, the operator 'scrammed' — shut down — both reactors as quickly as possible. Later he noticed that the water level in reactor one was dropping, creating a danger of overheating in the core and possible fuel meltdown. He operated the emergency core cooling system (ECCS) but nothing happened, apparently because the control cables had been damaged by the fire. The plant operators brought the reactors under control by using other pumps, not intended as safety systems, to maintain the water level. But the accident has renewed anxieties about American-designed nuclear plants, which have suffered a long series of accidents and setbacks."

For scientists or nuclear engineers or public officials to reassure the public by saying that every precaution is being taken is not the same as saying that every precaution will work. Indeed, the risks are obliquely admitted because no private corporation in the United States will carry on in the nuclear business without the special insurance of \$ 560 million for each reactor provided in the Price Anderson Act. Moreover, some nuclear problems have not yet even been considered. No nuclear power station has yet come to the end of its working life. When it does, how can it be safely decontaminated or sealed off? Nobody knows:

In spite of the gravity of these problems, they are as nothing compared with the central and terrible reality of the so-called 'Faustian bargain'. It is not technical. It is not scientific. It is historical, human, and moral. There is no society on record in which, at some point, public order has not broken down, and we can be absolutely sure that in the future, undisturbed good order will not last out the 24,000 years of plutonium's half-life. Yet the nuclear option, through fission — using conventional reactors or the further

**The Observer* (English Sunday newspaper) April 5, 1975

shall and *will*, or *that* and *which*, are more and more ignored. If it continues 50
to develop along its present lines English will ultimately have more in
common with the uninflected languages of East Asia than with the lan-
guages of Europe.

Speaking English: Art or Science?

George Orwell

The greatest quality of English is its enormous range not only of meaning
but of *tone*. It is capable of endless subtleties, and of everything from the
most high-flown rhetoric to the most brutal coarseness. On the other hand,
its lack of grammar makes it easily compressible. It is 'the language of
lyric poetry, and also of headlines. On its lower levels it is very easy to learn, 5
in spite of its irrational spelling. It can also for international purposes
be reduced to very simple pidgin* dialects, ranging from Basic to the '*Bêche-
de-mer*' English used in the South Pacific. It is therefore well suited to be
a world lingua franca, and it has in fact spread more widely than any other
language. 10

But there are also great disadvantages, or at least great dangers, in speaking
English as one's native tongue. To begin with, as was pointed out earlier in
this essay, the English are very poor linguists. Their own language is grammati-
cally so simple that unless they have gone through the discipline of learning
a foreign language in childhood, they are often quite unable to grasp what 15
is meant by gender, person, and case. A completely illiterate Indian will
pick up English far faster than a British soldier will pick up Hindustani.
Nearly five million Indians are literate in English and millions more speak
it in a debased form. There are some tens of thousands of Indians who speak
English as nearly as possible perfectly, yet the number of Englishmen 20
speaking any Indian language perfectly would not amount to more than a
few scores. But the great weakness of English is its capacity for debasement.
Just because it is so easy to use, it is easy to use *badly*.

To write or even to speak English is not a science but an art. There are no
reliable rules: there is only the general principle that concrete words are 25
better than abstract ones, and that the shortest way of saying anything is

*'Pidgin English' is a simplified form of English influenced by Chinese. — '*Bêche-de-mer*' (sea-slug) English, also known as '*Sandalwood English*', is a dialect of Pidgin English which appears in Polynesian Islands in the South Pacific (like Tahiti and Samoa). — Basic English is a modern form of simplified English.

always the best. Mere correctness is no guarantee whatever of good writing. A sentence like 'an enjoyable time was had by all present' is perfectly correct English, and so is the unintelligible mess of words on an income-tax return. Whoever writes English is involved in a struggle that never lets up even for a sentence. He is struggling against vagueness, against obscurity, against the lure of the decorative adjective, against the encroachment of Latin and Greek, and, above all, against the worn-out phrases and dead metaphors with which the language is cluttered up. In speaking, these dangers are more easily avoided, but spoken English differs from written English more sharply than is the case in most languages. In the spoken tongue every word that can be omitted is omitted, every possible abbreviation is used. Meaning is conveyed quite largely by emphasis, though curiously enough the English do not gesticulate, as one might reasonably expect them to do. A sentence like *No, I don't mean that one, I mean that one* is perfectly intelligible when spoken aloud, even without a gesture. But spoken English, when it tries to be dignified and logical, usually takes on the vices of written English, as you can see by spending half an hour either in the House of Commons or at the Marble Arch.*

Ingsoc: Newspeak versus Oldspeak

George Orwell

Newspeak was the official language of Oceania and had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc, or English Socialism. In the year 1984 there was not as yet anyone who used Newspeak as his sole means of communication, either in speech or writing. The leading articles in *The Times* were written in it, but this was a tour de force which could only be carried out by a specialist. It was expected that Newspeak would have finally superseded Oldspeak (or Standard English, as we should call it) by about the year 2050. Meanwhile it gained ground steadily, all Party members tending to use Newspeak words and grammatical constructions more and more in their everyday speech. The version in use in 1984, and embodied in the Ninth and Tenth Editions of the Newspeak Dictionary, was a provisional one, and contained many superfluous words and archaic formations which were due to be suppressed later. It is with the final, perfected version, as embodied in the Eleventh Edition of the Dictionary, that we are concerned here.

*"Speakers' Corner", Marble Arch, London, where anyone may speak in public