

# From the Principled Life to the Moral Life

By Richard Cooper



Those young eyes looking up to us, eyes of trust but also of questioning: perhaps an analogous image of for family members and friends for whose responsibility physically and mentally we have been more actively involved with during lockdowns. Or perhaps older family members, facing fears of health and isolation in care homes, unable to see relatives. In times where not only distance has separated us through restrictions to travel, but where opinions separate, we are challenged socially and perhaps spiritually as never before. Indeed, in the last 2 years, in a world for some that has increasingly since early 2020 been lived within one's own four walls or within those digital four walls of the computer screen, orienting to this new normal is a process like navigating a storm, wondering when it might abate, asking perhaps again of the stars we might trust and navigate by, if and when this process of transition will be over.

Rudolf Steiner describes pralaya as the period of rest, a time of duration, between ages where all, as it were, all as it was, lies dormant, before again the previous world is recapitulated in a new formation. The term is used extensively in his book *Occult Science*<sup>1</sup>, for the time in cosmic evolution between the former earth embodiments of Old Moon, Old Sun and Old Saturn, and their succeeding periods, there being the latest pralaya between Old Moon and our current embodiment Earth. Rudolf Steiner describes how through this process he perceived how the various beings of the spiritual hierarchies are thereby able to unfold their activities and go through stages of development, which in turn shapes the human being in relation. We can have an experience of this in meditation as well as in the unfolding of history. In the transition between two ages, we can recognize when the coordinates of an 'old' world seemingly pass over into a new one. With the current pandemic of 2020/21, one could indeed be struck by timely events currently unfolding in world history as we transition from an old world an *old* 'normal' to a new one.

We may take for example, the post 1945 world that emerged after the Second World War, characterized by: The United Nations, the United States emerges as a dominant force in the world and the ensuing split of Europe between east and west, with Russia and China forming a Communist counter pole to Capitalist America. Yet with hindsight, among reflections on the changing shape of societies through rebuilding after the war, we may see that a synthesis *out* of this polarization occurs, for when we behold the coordinates of this post 1945 world, we see that underneath the transition to the second half of the twentieth century, underneath the apparently incompatible societies of west and east, a new rationale for governance of socio economic systems, a new structure for the management of civil society was emerging, Neoliberalism.

"Understanding Neoliberalism: Neoliberalism is related to laissez faire economics, a school of thought that prescribes a minimal amount of government interference into the economic issues of individuals and society. Laissez-faire economics proposes that continued economic growth will lead to technological

innovation, expansion of the free market, and limited state interference. Neoliberalism is sometimes confused with libertarianism. However, neoliberals typically advocate for more government intervention into the economy and society than libertarianism.”<sup>ii</sup>

Neoliberalism is a way of structuring society where the government defends any challenge to the economic system by regulating away any threats to its functioning. In so doing it seeks to avert changes to the economic system by opening up ever increasing fields of economic activity within that system. A taken for granted assumption is that an optimised economic structure will be of benefit to all. Moral questions as to the efficacy of such a system are effectively side-lined (or rendered obsolete) in two ways: firstly, in the smooth running of the stories which are maintained in this system focussed on a materialistic world view of the human being and life itself, and secondly, through the incessant pace of change and crises, which facilitates state intervention to perpetuate ongoing economic health in response to crises.

Walter Eucken, writing in 1952 exemplifies the social scope of neoliberal world view:

“there is no doubt a limit to the action of economic policy on global facts: but each of them can be influenced. Even the climate of a country can be modified by human intervention. A fortiori other factors, like the size of the population, its knowledge, its capabilities, etcetera: The broadest field of action is offered by the sixth fact the legal and social order.”<sup>iii</sup>

So, the adage “what comes after the storm”, could be applied to the post 1945 world, as much as the previous crisis of the post 1920 world, as much as the new world after the devastation and shock of World War One. But the question arises as to whether in a neoliberal system, the storms, the crises of society, history and humanity – one hesitates to say simply – accentuate, extend and consolidate market economics?

### **Observing thinking in meditation**

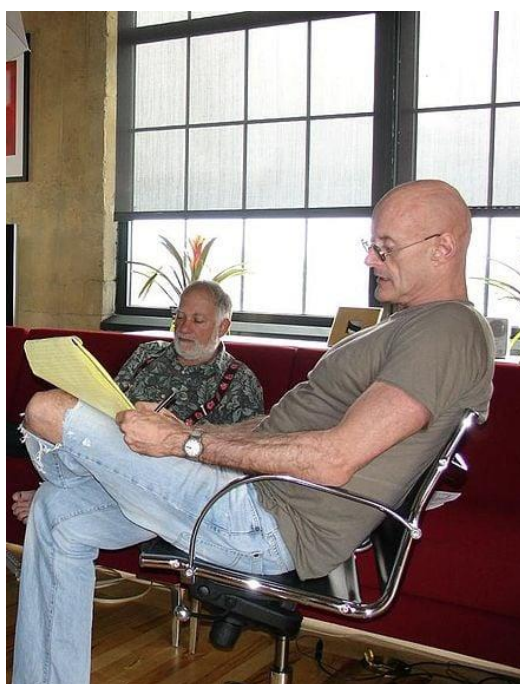
When we contemplate something intently, be it life, perception, history, a book, or a person, we may then come to a point where it is important to drive all these impressions with an act of will from the mind, to hold them in a sense, in a pralaya. For when we do this, we may then behold the powers lying behind the thinking processes. For example, when describing the Rose Cross Meditation Rudolf Steiner suggests the images built up in the mind are driven out of consciousness, or the karma exercises where we behold an event and then concentrate our mind upon it, dwelling on it, as if tasting and digesting it. More profoundly, the transition from Atlantis (the world in time before the flood), is the perhaps best archetype we have for how we “weather a storm”, as we put ourselves in Noah’s shoes, looking at how the rainbow silently dawns over a new world after the flood.

There are four processes. Firstly, we understand the position of observing, as an observant independent I, what it is we want to investigate, which in the preceding explorations has been broadly the stage of transition from one time to another within the unfolding of time. Secondly, we recognize that this I, lives in its spiritual environment of thinking, of the diverse ideas and reflections one may make in observing the weaving of thinking and feeling in our reflections and contemplations of ourselves and of life. In a deeper process, we may identify structure, hierarchies, groupings and forms of how ideas are linked to each other. When we follow this as a desire to investigate the truth of something, this is where we may see where life manifests from the astral world down into the etheric, which may be insight and recognition into karma, the destiny of humanity, society and culture or of the individual. The fourth aspect of investigation is to consciously direct our *intention* strategically, to hold our attention, much like the descriptions of the pralaya above, to then see what emerges as a heightened knowledge of the object in knowledge, of what we have been observing.

By holding questions up to the spiritual world through this process we are able to gradually descend deeper into our bodies to explore what lives within us. In *How to Know Higher Worlds* Rudolf Steiner spoke of “For every step we endeavor to make spiritually, we should make 3 steps forward morally”, which refers to this movement from principles of spiritual development to actual moral development as an activation of our will to knowledge. In this inner process we slowly move away from principles to morality.

In reflecting on the world and world history, what arises is perhaps a fifth challenge to the four steps of the process outlined previously, and that is to resist falling into a polemical position, against the hindrances and resistances we see unfolding in the world. For these are struggles and processes of history that are calling in imagination for a deeper sense and understanding of embodied morality, rather than mere abstract principle.

### **Application of Principle**



In *Integral Politics: A Summary of Its Essential Ingredients*, Ken Wilber identifies how we may navigate this danger of falling into polemical positions when we come to engage with political topics in the world,

“An integral politics is not an “Us against Them” politics. It’s a politics in which every unique perspective, both of every person who is a voter who expresses their unique perspective through voting, and through whatever sort of civic or political activism that they’re moved to do, that you can do in a democracy. That’s an incredibly dramatic idea that never existed previously in history, and every organized group is allowed to and encouraged to express its perspective. But what’s happened is that politics until now has become a zero-sum game. It’s Us against Them, we’re right and they’re wrong, and the notion of listening deeply to another person’s perspective and saying wow ... I see that, you are really pointing towards something I hadn’t thought of before. I disagree with three things you said, but one dimension of what you said has really moved me and I really want to incorporate it. You don’t see that a lot on your classical James Carville, Rush Limbaugh talk shows. Because it’s a zero sum, either/or game.”<sup>iv</sup>

The question not only arises as to how our society is changing and how this process of morality versus principle is embodied in debates around spiritual activity in the world, but also the moral technique with which we engage it with? These are questions that every spiritual stream has to answer in terms of their relation, indeed relationship to society, indeed humanity as a whole. Albeit perhaps easier for one man to voice an opinion, perhaps less for an institution of a group of thinkers and writers, here is one of the

Goetheanum's recent statements on wider social concerns of the reception of the Anthroposophical Society in the world:

“The Anthroposophical Society continues to direct itself towards worldwide goals that have been inherent since its founding. The history of the Anthroposophical Society and the Goetheanum is not a pure success story and offers no cause for self-aggrandizement and idealization. The aspirations with which this Society and its School of Spiritual Science began were high and the discrepancy between the ideal and the reality is clear. However, it can be both a task and a motivation to live up to these aspirations ever more and more. Rudolf Steiner emphasized that the Anthroposophical Society has to try and ‘uphold’ what it promises for its entire membership and thus for the world. From our point of view, in addition to critical analyses of its own social history – as part of contemporary history – and as a commitment to the present time, this also includes making intensive efforts toward anthroposophical spiritual science itself, its inner spiritual substance. Rudolf Steiner quotations can be used and abused for all kinds of purposes – to discredit Anthroposophy and anthroposophical institutions, but also to back up and supposedly legitimize one’s own opinions. The exploitation of singular statements or passages from Steiner’s texts by critics and by followers of Anthroposophy – with diffuse political and a variety of other convictions – has a long tradition. One of the tasks of the School of Spiritual Science is to present work for differentiated reception of the work and to take care of the hermeneutic layers of approach to anthroposophical spiritual science.”<sup>v</sup>

The above is a pertinent example. Firstly, one may consider the context of the polemical nature of the debate between anthroposophy and the world with regard to racism. The debate has been going on for decades and rears its head from time to time. Protagonists will situate themselves on one side of the debate or the other: the one outside of anthroposophy criticising Rudolf Steiner’s comments on race, while those anthroposophists defend their position in light of course of Rudolf Steiner’s position. One senses well in the above text the eagerness on the part of the leadership, for the anthroposophical worldview to be accepted in the academic world, but also the wish for the membership not to be polarised, indeed alienated on this topic. Firstly, there is the apologetic tone, and the attempt to represent those critical in academia of anthroposophy and equally those critical of the anthroposophical societies wish to be accepted by the academic world. So, the text treads a fine line between wanting to represent those in favour of esoteric research and the pursuit of inner truth as opposed to those who see this process necessarily in collaboration with outside institutions.

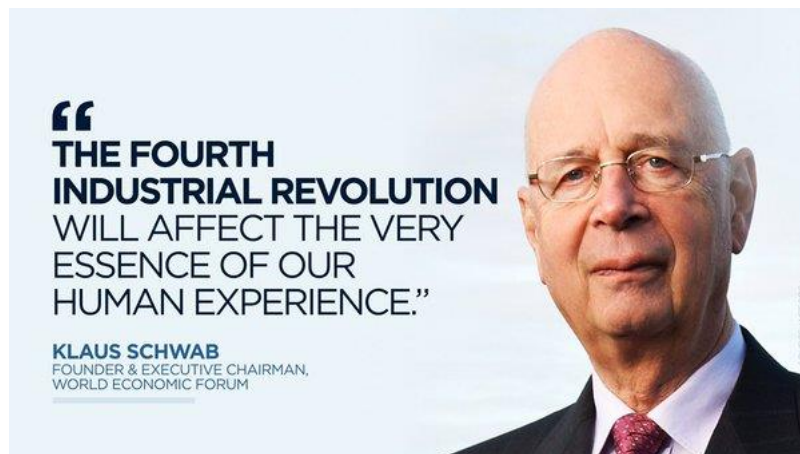
Debates on racism that have accompanied the past years are indeed a hot topic in contemporary media debates. With the influx into western countries of millions of immigrants over the years such topics are indeed a pressing concern, and the fight for equality along racial lines, as much as gender lines has been an ongoing debate in western societies. Such debates are essential for the smooth running of our society. Their contemplation calls indeed for a move from principle to morality, for those affected by it: the immigrants themselves; the local people who meet them, as much as the academics who write about them, but what of the debate itself on how that society that they integrate *into* look? What stands out in the choice of such a topic, is that by the very decision to focus upon it, other topics of current historical and social concern, are passed over.

### **Concerns of and about the system**

Out of concern for all our children, indeed children and adults, of people of all races and religions, one has consider the overarching system of which they are a part, through which a crises has arisen, which raises again the question of the Neoliberalism. Perhaps the best example has been since 2020 the Great Reset, a proposal for social renewal, outlined by Klaus Schwab (head of the World Economic Forum) in his book of the same name.

It is as if for the last decades, the movement of society and the economy globally and locally had been steadily orienting itself for this 2020 moment of crisis. From disasters in the Middle East, to the Financial

crisis of 2008, to the rise of China and the changing relationship of the US, UK and Russia to Europe, The United Nations has played an overseeing role, shaping what was earlier called Agenda 21, "the agenda of the twenty first century". Later updated to the name " Sustainable Development 2030 ".



The World Health Organization (WHO) runs a global health policy. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) control money and trade. The World Economic Forum (WEF) is headed by Klaus Martin Schwab who wrote his timely book on coming changes and present crises 'The Great Reset' 2020. In line with this Great Reset, world leaders, heads of state, banks around the globe, NGOs (non-government organisations) philanthropic foundations, multinational corporations, even global hedge funds, are all broadly in agreement.

52. "We the peoples" are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is "we the peoples" who are embarking today on the road to 2030. (...) Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people – and this, we believe, will ensure its success.<sup>vi</sup>

The Great Reset outlines a world of social and financial global interdependence, both an economic and a societal reset. However, it is also a political, a geopolitical reset – designed to change systems of government, perhaps beyond what we might normally understand under that term. Many of these proposed changes have already been implemented and can be found locally, in local government goals and plans. Their neoliberal character lies in the orientation toward conditioning facts for the market economy; building on neoliberal thinking since at least the 1950s<sup>vii</sup> they have focussed on climate change among other legal, technological and social goals, since the 1980s<sup>viii</sup> and now respond to pandemics, and incorporate them into longer term planning.

The plans come complete with the outer public rhetoric of ' build back better ' and ' sustainable development ' already the repeated standard speeches given by leaders of nation states, in line with the United Nations. At the same time, these programs for social change show an awareness of the challenges to people's mental health and well-being as people the world over have to adapt to the shock of a change of reality many were previously unaware of under the ' old normal '.

In a world where we perhaps have to reimagine our understanding of politics, culture and economy. For example, it is said in 2030, about 80% of the jobs now done by people will be fully automated by robotics. the question is, how we engage with this new world coming into being, not passively as in feeling overwhelmed and angry, passively polemic, but actively as in getting more informed about the coming changes, about how they might possibly gestate something new, to better orient to the world we are moving into? In such a process we do not have to resort to polemics but rather engagement and interest historically in what is taking place on the world stage.

Otto Lerchenfeld (1868-1938) asked Rudolf Steiner the question that led to his formulating the Threefold idea. In his memoir, Lerchenfeld records this thought: “[The Threefold Social Organism] did not provide what was intended to become a definitive solution of the social question, and could naturally not do this by reason of the very nature of a living organism. Nevertheless, there did result out of this idea the way, the only straightforward way upon which the social conditions, the social difficulties with their eternally varying problems, might be guided again and again towards a solution appropriate to the period, towards their curing.”<sup>ix</sup>

What kind of world arises after the storm, in reflection on Neoliberalism and how it is embodied in changing ideas of global and indeed local governance? The answer may lie with the persistence to think about the relevance of moral development beyond and through analysis of the phenomena before us. This process undoubtedly asks where each of us individually focusses their attention: initially on the principled life – in research which is itself a form of engagement – but then secondly, in the search for the moral commitment to pursue the *application* of ideals, in terms of how our insights can actively engage with life.

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<sup>i</sup> Rudolf Steiner, **Occult Science**, GA 13, 1909

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/n/neoliberalism.asp> **What is Neoliberalism?**

<sup>iii</sup> See Eugen **Grundsätze**, p.378. Referenced In Michael Foucault, **The Birth of Biopolitics**, Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979, p.140.

<sup>iv</sup> Ken Wilber **A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality**, 2000

<sup>v</sup> **Anthroposophy and Racism**, Peter Selg, Constanza Kaliks, Justus Wittich, Gerald Häfner. A Contribution from the Goetheanum Leadership. <https://goetheanum.co/en/news/working-paper-on-racism>

<sup>vi</sup> **Seventieth session. Agenda items 15 and 116**. Distr.: General 21 October 2015. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015  
[https://www.un.org/.../docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_70\\_1\\_E.pdf](https://www.un.org/.../docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> **Our Common Future**, (Brundtland Report) 1987. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future.

<sup>ix</sup> **Rudolf Steiner, Social and Political Science**, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2003, p. 7.