

# Social Organics: Building on Herbert Witzmann and Rudolf Steiner

By Richard Cooper

What is shortness of breath? Have we not been confronted this year, as the year 2020 has extended into 2021 – with an almost eternal, 2020? As Bush would name the bombing of Iraq ‘Shock and Awe’ – shortness, *panic* comes from shock, terror. As we think of the *poor* air, the *black* air, after a bombing, do we walk distraught amongst the rubble, or do we perhaps hang discarnate above the scene? (We remind ourselves of the original spiritual greatness of that word ‘awe’, as reverence). All these significant anniversaries, 100 years before, in 1920: The Treaty of Versailles, the founding of the League of Nations and the opening of the First Goetheanum, all to which one heard all too little!<sup>i</sup> All these, as we walk ‘bare foot’ over the ruins of Europe, over which Rudolf Steiner said one must follow him, – *to find him*, to reconnect to his work at the end of the twentieth century.

On 27 February, 2021 a group initiative for Social Organics was founded. Inspired by an online seven-day international *Christmas Conference* over 2020-2021. Represented by a cross section of participants from the West to Eastern Europe and Russia, about 80 people gathered to discuss anthroposophy in light of present concerns. Lectures spanned the commemoration of the opening of the First Goetheanum 1920, to the history of anthroposophy in Russia, to the specific karmic impulses reaching back 100 years, like an ‘entombment’, like a ‘Sleeping Beauty’. It was an impulse for a third wave of anthroposophy, as some of the participants named it, a *Resurrection*.

The group was impressed by the spiritual urgency of the questions raised by Herbert Witzmann, brought by Robert Jan Kelder; about the original Christmas Conference statutes of 1923, of the Anthroposophical Society, and the pressing question of World Economy. The group was struck by the pertinence of one overarching subject: Social Organics (elsewhere described by Herbert Witzmann as ‘Social Aesthetics’: an important aside to the artistic relation), to which we shall turn.

From 1963 to 1973 Herbert Witzmann<sup>ii</sup> had been on the Executive Council of the General Anthroposophical Society. Due to disputes, he left to found the "Seminar for Free Youth Work Art and Social Organics" in Dornach. Witzmann’s work was focused on questions of knowledge: the link between perception and thinking, and further how they are related to World Economy and what he terms Social Organics or Social Aesthetics, terms developed by Herbert Witzmann out of Rudolf Steiner’s work on Social Renewal.

On Easter Monday 1984: Herbert Witzmann wrote the following in a letter to the Seminar of Epistemology and Social Aesthetics.

" ... If people, unsupported by instinctive goodness of mind, united out of fully conscious insight to the beloved task of a cooperation according to the main social law (i.e., without receiving the reward of one’s own developmental progress, but out of a devotion to the fellow human need renouncing self-sufficiency), then the most modern and promising thing at all possible would happen. In my opinion, the most important task of the seminar lies in the attempt to stimulate such a cooperation of its co-workers and participants. I see this as the most important task of the seminar. I am aware of how little I have contributed to its solution so far. However, any effort in the service of this task would make the gem shine. (This is the most important, the Christian) ... "<sup>iii</sup>

## Of Origins: Cain & Abel

There are two estrangements in the Bible of particular fundamental prominence in the Old Testament: Adam and Eve’s estrangement from Paradise and Cain’s estrangement from Abel and God. Almost

two Falls. Of the human being's social heritage as *brotherly and sisterly responsibility*; from man to woman, as *paradisial responsibility* and a third implied within them: the human being's relation to the spiritual world.

A short recap: "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground." (Genesis 4:1-2 KJV).



Cain offered grain and the fruits of his harvest, and Abel offered a sacrificial lamb from his flock. God showed favour to Abel, but not to Cain. Angered by God's rejection and filled with resentment, Cain killed his brother. God banished Cain and put a mark on him, the 'mark of Cain'. On the left, we have 'The First Mourning' by Bougeureau (1888). Adam and Eve have found the body of their beloved son Abel. Adam's left hand is held across his heart, as if to ease the grief. Eve is beyond consolation. Behind them, the world is an empty void, the murderer Cain is absent. While on the right: Bacchiacci, 'Adam and Eve with Cain and Abel', circa 1518. The two little brothers, Cain and Abel, are shown with their mother Eve. The family is no longer in the Garden of Eden. It does not figure in the Genesis story. Is this picture is meant to converse with all those paintings of Mary of Nazareth with the child Jesus and John the Baptist; These *usual* paintings of art history, that show mankind redeemed?

Cain and Abel carry the implications of separation of man from the spiritual world further, whereby Cain kills his brother and tries to hide his crime from God, to be forthwith hunted, marked and carrier of a curse to which mankind and all those who 'see' him shall be implicated. Cain asks perhaps the fundamental question of human social life '*am I my brother's keeper?*' and in God's eyes carries the mark of his sin further into collective human history. Yet to what extent in Cain's own eyes? When he was effectively lured into a trap by that very same God. A double-bind we shall return to. Through Cains' long path of exile, do his eyes become one with God's eyes, and how does this effect the human race as a whole? And further, before Cain slays Abel *in the field*, what had they spoken of? Abel in Hebrew means not only 'short breath' as in, 'short of time and life', but also has a deeper meaning of 'vanity'-

"The meaning of the name 'Abel' can suggest something about his destiny. This is because the initial meaning of the Hebrew word 'Hevel' {הבל} – that is how Abel's name appears in the original Hebrew – is 'passing.' Since 'passing' has a time related meaning, it is also the Hebrew word which is used to describe 'a very short period of time.' Over the years 'Hevel' also became another Hebrew word for 'breath' because it describes the very short duration of one single breath. (...) In the original Hebrew

the phrase ‘vanity of vanities’ (‘Vanitas vanitatum’ in Latin) appears as ‘Hevel Havalim’ {הבל הבלים} –the SAME as the original Hebrew name of Abel! What is the connection between the meaning of this biblical figure of speech and Abel’s name?”<sup>iv</sup>

### **Rudolf Steiner’s Last Address.**

From an anthroposophical perspective, when we ask the question, what is Social Organics, what is a *whole* Social Organism, we are driven back to core social questions. The Cain and Abel story reflects on the human being outcast from heavenly contact, but precisely through this, the path is prepared for how the *vanity* of Abel and the *crime* of Cain may be redeemed. Cain would again unite in harmony with his brother, he would do so in God’s eyes as much as in his own eyes, and in so doing prepare for the deeper resolution of Adam and Eve, a return to paradise, but on a level of an awakened consciousness. The shortness of breath, the vanity of life, of one breath, alone does not only refer to social interaction, but to reincarnation: *one* breath is not enough for this whole process of mankind’s redemption, it is not enough for the complexities of karma and the relationship man to spiritual, to unfold.

Rudolf Steiner shows that Cain and Abel are reference to two parts of the same *Being*. Lazarus-John as the ‘*Rich Young Man*’ described in the Bible goes through the process of death and resurrection and in so doing, joins with the spirit of John the Baptist to form *one being, at the Turning point of Time*. That being through further exposition is identified as the John-Individuality, referred to in the Bible as Lazarus and John the Evangelist. Hence Lazarus-John. In Rudolf Steiner’s Last Address<sup>v</sup> Steiner points to the specific reincarnations of Abel as Raphael and Novalis and of Cain in Christian Rosenkreuz and the Comte de Saint Germain. It is thanks to Rudolf Steiner’s explanation of this Cain and Abel story that we have deep insight not only into the occult, spiritual meaning of these stories<sup>vi</sup>, but also into their practical application to the spiritual laws of karma.



**Raising of Lazarus, Langres Cathedral, France**

Due to ill health, indeed his impending death, in 1925, Rudolf Steiner's further exposition was cut short. Perhaps the best exposition to date, and deepening of this theme, has been taken up by Judith von Halle in her book *The John Individuality*. For want of a more exhaustive explanation, these two individualities separate after Golgotha to in effect take on two tasks, reincarnating to fulfil their own task and equally that task of the other: as *complements* to each other, as they will again become one, in future. In this sense, the original fratricide would be redeemed. Through these dynamics, the priestly element of Abel would *in future*, but also *since* Golgotha join with the creative spirit of Cain. The priestly communion with the spiritual would then *no* longer be divorced from the creative scientific spirit.

### **The Royal Art: The 'call' and the 'question'**

Can we see Abel as the empty vessel awaiting its filling as much as its pouring out through the unification with Cain? It has to be further *recalled* that Abel's body, his blood 'calls' to God from the soil, after his death. A call therefore to fill the cup? An evocative meditation in itself on the Grail metaphor. As in regard of the John the Baptist, the Bible speaks of the voice that calls in the wilderness to 'make his paths straight': calling therefore Cain (Lazarus-John) forth as a Lazarus-Chalice, calling forth his destiny. Lazarus before raising from the dead, was The Rich Young Man in the Bible who responds to the Baptist's 'call' with the 'question' to Christ: 'How does one enter the Kingdom of Heaven', to which the answer is 'it is harder for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle', Cain, again *called* to resolve contradiction and impossibility, to which we shall return. All these dynamics of question, call and answer: the path to *Knowledge; Destiny; and the Spirit*, await our conscious appreciation.

From an anthroposophical perspective we describe how the *call* is heard from the spiritual world, first in the *astral body*, like a certain intuitive knowing. Once this call has been heard and the spiritual path has been embarked upon and some changes have been made to life and character, the *etheric body* may respond with what we shall call here *recognition of others*. Perception arises for *what* others have to contribute. What is new is that this perception goes beyond judgmental reflection about the work of others and sees it purely in terms of how may one's own work may *resonate* with that of others. Each member of such a social organism is valued, indeed promoted, with respect to his own personal contribution: tasks, roles, positions are taken up freely and in light of the spiritual.

### **2021 Social Organics: Three Core Principles of Collaborative Spiritual Research:**

Introduction: By following our thinking spiritually, observing it in relation firstly to nature, then to the human social realm, we may follow spiritual perception from the astral body to the etheric and on to the physical.

1. **Perceiving the Call:** The spiritual world speaks to us *through* our perceptions: So, we go out for a walk and the sounds, sights, smells play upon us. We engage in conversation, and the I, the words, the thoughts, the impression of the 'other' person, or being before us. We inwardly follow how the impressions play upon us; we *give* ourselves *to* these impressions. In inner work and meditation, beings, as intuitions, inspirations or imaginations may come and speak to us and we may converse and deepen our understanding of anthroposophy and life *with* and *through* them. Through this our life changes, we change, the beings we meet change: A 'call' is first heard in the *astral body*, like a certain intuitive knowing; Yet when we re-orient ourselves in life, our karma changes, and work can then begin on the *ether body*.

2. **Recognition of Others in Resonance:** We do not thereby lose our individuality, but we come to the second stage of perception, we *renounce* our own subjective perspective. We thereby receive a new perspective: in observation of the movement of thinking: we awaken to a spiritual surroundings. Through such interaction in patience and observation, a growing sense develops for what we may contribute to spiritual research. So from perceptive experience, to inner spiritual recognition of others: from '*Calling*' to '*Resonance*': what is new here, is that this perception of the 'call' goes beyond judgmental reflection to purely practical and free spiritual activity, in reciprocal exchange with others. Only through this can the physical body spiritually come into view.
  
3. **Spiritual Research as the Bestowing of 'Gift':** Going forward, the basis of such collaborative work is the activation of the will, understood here as the Gift. Out of the higher realisation of the bestowing of the gift to the other as a manifestation of myself, such a deed when conscious, is in fact a giving *of* myself: For consciousness of the I, has now expanded to identify itself *with* the other, as *myself, – as One*. We may take as example, the word '*dowry*', as in 'marriage dowry': A dowry is a transfer of parental property, gifts, property or money upon the marriage of a daughter (bride). It grants a power of life to an 'other'. To give out of supernatural, spiritual power in generosity is to move, from the *anxiety* of individual concerns and reflections to the value and joy of mutual (spiritual/ human as much as brotherly / sisterly) endeavors.

In the Bible, the Apocalypse, this endeavour of mutual enabling, through to deed, is referred to as the *Heavenly Jerusalem* ; In Freemasonry it is called '*The Great Work*' ; Rudolf Steiner tried to embody it in his ideas for social renewal and the *Threefold Social Order (1917-1922)*, and later the Christmas Conference Statutes (Opening address, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1923) looking to the form of the Christianity of the future: The Sixth Epoch (as emphasized by Robert Jan Kelder's and Herbert Witzenmann's work on these themes).

In 2020/21: In society and for anthroposophy, we hear again the call of the spirit. When Rudolf Steiner spoke in 1911 in Neuchâtel of *the call* of Christian Rosenkreuz, arising at turning points in people's lives, in times of crisis, he spoke also of the response to it, as a life 'newly devoted to spiritual science': the person hears the voice henceforth of the *Spirit*, and becomes a student of Christian Rosenkreuz.<sup>vii</sup> Such principles of recognition, resonance, and freedom, lie within the '*Endowment Call*' of Christian Rosenkreuz for a theosophical initiative of arts and crafts. The meeting of 27 November 1911, including Marie Steiner and Carl Unger among others, was for an initiative '*based purely on occult principles*', an initiative collaborative and as much artistic-creative. <sup>viii</sup>

These reflections on inner psychological experience of Social Organics are helpfully outlined and given a profound cosmic evolutionary perspective by Rudolf Steiner in *Cosmic Evolution*, Rudolf Steiner refers to *Earth* evolution; to the evolution of *Old Moon*, to *Old Sun* and to *Old Saturn*: these qualities are *Resignation; Renunciation; Bestowal; Sacrifice*. <sup>ix</sup>

### **The Original Christmas Conference Statutes**

The defense *against* thinking, against the spirit, has been a growing tendency among mankind over the last one hundred years, the more it senses *the drawing near* of the spirit. It is Christ who would strengthen our inner being to resist the passivity that would neglect spiritual development on the one hand or harden it toward materialism on the other. When we look to the senses spread around us Lucifer as 'the light bringer' is that being who should help us penetrate to the spiritual world through the 'carpet of the senses'. The *Luciferic influence* on its own, for groups and individuals to resist development without further thinking, is to create cult like conditions. The world outside the favored ideology becomes *alien* and one becomes unconsciously hostile to it: Ahriman puts to good use the illusive thinking and passivity of Luciferic *self-reflection* and *dogma*.

I refer here to the work of Robert Jan Kelder <sup>x</sup>, who has ably documented and commented on the Christmas Conference Statutes of 1923. Rudolf Steiner had sought to incorporate in the statutes of the Christmas Conference of the future form of Christianity from the future the Sixth Post Atlantean Epoch. Jan Kelder raises Interesting points from Herbert Witzgenmann's work in relation. Leading on from these reflections on the problem of *Dogma, and Politics*, I would like to highlight two sections from two of the original Anthroposophical Society statutes: <sup>xi</sup>

8. (...) 'No one is considered competent to judge the content, who has not acquired — through the School itself or in a manner recognized by the School as equivalent — the requisite preliminary knowledge. Other opinions will be disregarded, to the extent that the authors of such works will not enter into a discussion about them.'

9. 'The purpose of the Anthroposophical Society will be the furtherance of spiritual research; that of the School of Spiritual Science will be this research itself. A dogmatic stand in any field whatsoever is to be excluded from the Anthroposophical Society.'

When analysis of the opposing powers in evolution is termed '*Conspiracy*' on the one hand or '*Utopian*' on the other, practical alternatives for reform and development to the existing system are rendered mute. The person under the sway of Lucifer and Ahriman lives in a state of unconscious stress because he/she has to continually be on the watch for ideas which contradict their own. A *lack* of recognition of *dogma*, in fact reveals a deeper lack of requisite *spiritual qualification*.

### **Thinking Spiritual Qualification, Dissensus and Fraternity**

The 100 year centenary of The Christmas Conference will be 2023. In 2021, there are a number of urgent themes: wider reception of anthroposophical ideas in society; understanding 'fraternity' (brotherhood / sisterhood); And thirdly, 'spiritual qualification': of present anthroposophical work related to the future.

We look firstly 'outside' of anthroposophy, like Rudolf Steiner did in his time; by looking to developments in contemporary philosophy. As an example, the work of Jaques Derrida (1930-2004). Firstly, with regard to the term 'brotherhood'.

"This process of identification, this fraternisation, consists in two movements: making the other my brother, that is, identifying him (or her) as somehow like me, and excluding the false brothers, the others who are not really like me. By the way they function, fraternal communities exert a double violence on individuals: an internal and an external violence. (...) To escape this double violence, it is necessary, according to Derrida, to cut the bond that binds me to, or excludes me from, a group. Only then will there be an experience of the other, or a relation to the other, which will respect and do justice to its otherness, its difference." <sup>xii</sup>

In terms of the 'story' of anthroposophical work since Rudolf Steiner's passing in 1925: oft lamented, that story is discontinuous, open to interpretation, marked by exclusions, conflicts, struggle and rifts. But how could we see this situation esoterically: that is as the grounds for esoteric work, rebuilding on collaborative work and spiritual research?

"Because Derrida sees the political danger of our times in the gathering that threatens the respect for the singularity and alterity of the other, he will insist on separation and on the secret (Derrida & Ferraris, 2001: 58). Singularity is for him another name for the tout autre (the wholly other) and is associated with two values, namely the absolute and the secret, or the absolute secret. Both words serve to describe that which is separated, isolated, remote, inaccessible. (Derrida, 2001b: 296)"

How we uphold the spiritual activity of the individual as sacred, in a plurality of other singularities, changes how we relate to anthroposophical work as a group undertaking.

"There is no objective standard to which I could compare singularities so as to place them in order of importance. Each one of them is beyond standard, exceptional, incommensurable. But if every decision is an unjustifiable preferring, does it matter what I choose? Doesn't this thought of plurality lead to a relativist position of 'anything goes'? There is no absolute standpoint from which we can judge each other's choices, but this does not mean that one can be satisfied with one's preference and rest with a good conscience. I have to prefer, it is not possible not to sacrifice, but this does not mean that the sacrificed others become silent (just as Abraham's preference for his God does not mean that he stops loving Isaac). My decision remains an unbearable betrayal. One can therefore judge only those who do not realize that they sacrifice: those who do not make decisions in the night of non-knowledge (those who think they can objectively justify their preferences), as well as those who do not make decisions at all (those who remain on the level of generality and forget the irreplaceable singularity of every other)".

Brotherhood and sisterhood reconsidered: spiritual qualification as stated in the original Christmas Conference statutes is the responsibility to choose to know, *Discernment*. In this process of decisive and active choosing, spiritual research is how the anthroposophical impulse moves forward to us from the future.

### **The Consent / Dissent Relationship** <sup>xiii</sup>

There are different ways in which dissent can be silenced whether from an institution or a state. One is overt exclusion from a group or society. The other is to frame the field of debate so as to exclude the unwanted dissenting voice. This can be seen in broad positions taken, academically and politically, which in effect split anthroposophy into those advocating 'open' anthroposophy as opposed to those they deem as 'beyond the pale', labelled 'conspiracy theorists'. <sup>xiv</sup>

In psychology the Double Bind is used to describe how an individual experiences psychological reality when he is forced to hold two contradictory points of view. Should the individual fail to unravel the *confusing* contradiction with which they are thus presented, they will then deny the situation and so experience 'Cognitive Dissonance'. This is a particularly modern problem for we see how a whole network of lies can establish itself; each lie builds on the ignorance of the contradiction that precedes it as an interlinking network of false information.

Rather than to the double bind that restricts us, perhaps we should look to the great commentator on Aristotle, foremost philosopher in Islam, Averroes (Ibn Rushd). He described a thinking that can awaken to 'double meanings': to patiently hold onto contradiction until it becomes the ripened fruit of spiritual acumen - the ability to see things from *divine* perspectives;

'The double meaning has been given to suit people's diverse intelligence. The apparent contradictions are meant to stimulate the learned to deeper study.'<sup>xv</sup>

To work against the resistant powers in the world we must have a methodology. For Lucifer wants us to remain in self-referential distraction, in 'goodness' and blinding light, and Ahriman in the darkness of the unconscious. The experience of Christ in the Etheric is a means to see through deception and illusion.

Post-Golgotha Cain's own long path to redemption, and eventual reunification with Abel, crystalizing through these reflections: is a renewed concern with the *rediscovery* of spiritual research: *the call* and *the chalice*, of Cain and Abel.

As we pass from 2020 to 2021 and on into these important years leading up to the 100-year anniversary of 1923, we note that Herbert Wittenmann left the earth on 24 September 1988. This year 2021, is the 33<sup>rd</sup> year anniversary of his death. Like the similar 100-year Christ-Cycle resurrection of anthroposophy we strive to anticipate, so with Wittenmann's impulse for Social Organics, in faithfulness to Rudolf Steiner, we hope that this year his life's work Social Organics may experience its Easter time.

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Cooper, **Sleeping Beauty and the Year 2020**, Oct 2020.  
<https://www.anthroposophicum.com/articles-english/>

<sup>ii</sup> **Herbert Wittenmann (1905-1988)** coined the term 'Social Organics', leading on from Steiner's work on the Social Threefold Order, and social renewal.

<sup>iii</sup> **The Seminar | Basel, Epistemology and Social Aesthetics** (seit 1973) <https://www.das-seminar.ch>

<sup>iv</sup> **Life is Short: Abel's Destiny Hidden in the Hebrew Meaning of his Name**,  
<https://www.hebrewversity.com/life-short-abels-destiny-hidden-hebrew-meaning-name/>

<sup>v</sup> **The Individuality of Elias, John, Raphael, Novalis, The Last Address given by Rudolf Steiner**,  
Rudolf Steiner  
Dornach, Michaelmas Eve, 1924, GA 238.

<sup>vi</sup> <http://fvn-archiv.net/PDF/GA/GA145.pdf#page=139&view=Fit> 10 Vorträge, **Cain and Abel**, Den Haag 1913 ... Rudolf Steiner Gesamtausgabe ... GA 145.

<sup>vii</sup> **Rudolf Steiner** "Those whom Christian Rosenkruz wants to make his disciples are chosen by him in a peculiar way. (...) This new life, given by grace, gives the disciple light in all his subsequent life. He has this certain feeling that can be clothed in the words: Without this Rosicrucian experience of mine, I would have died. The life that now follows would not have the same value without this event." (Lit.: GA 130, p. 69f) **Rosicrucian Christianity**, Neuchâtel, First Lecture, September 27, 1911.

<sup>viii</sup> Virginia Sease, **Centenary Reflections on his Attempt for a Theosophical Art and Way of Life**, 15 December 1911, Temple Lodge, 2012.

<sup>ix</sup> (Rudolf Steiner, **Inner Experiences of Evolution**, 5 lectures in Berlin, October 31, 1911-December 5, 1911 (CW 132).

<sup>x</sup> Robert Jan Kelder, **On the Restoration and realization of the Statutes of the Anthroposophical Society** – Request by Robert Jan Kelder to the General Assembly of the General Anthroposophical Society on March 27, 2021 at the Goetheanum, Dornach. <https://willehalmminstitute.blogspot.com/2021/02/on-restoration-and-realization-of.html>.

<sup>xi</sup> **Rudolf Steiner's Opening Lecture and Reading of the Statutes**, The Christmas Conference, 24 December, 1923.

<sup>xii</sup> **Jacques Derrida** quotes from: <https://culturemachine.net/.../putting-community-under.../>

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<sup>xiii</sup> Jacques Rancière, **Dissensus, On Politics and Aesthetics**, “All these revamped versions of the all-powerfulness of the true have one thing in common. They reset the power of dissensus within an ontological principle of real difference: the abundance of Being, the pass of the Infinite, the strike of the Idea, the encounter with Horror and /or the Law.” **Continuum International Publishing Group**, 2010.

<sup>xiv</sup> Richard Cooper, **Anthroposophy in the Light of the Steiner Studies Academic Journal**, 2020.  
<https://www.anthroposophicum.com/articles-english/>

<sup>xv</sup> Ibn Rushd (Averroes) **The Decisive Treatise, Determining the Nature of the Connection between Religion and Philosophy**. Ibn Rushd (1126–98) Ibn Rushd insisted phenomena followed natural laws that God created. He has been described as the "founding father of secular thought in Western Europe" and was known as ‘the Commentator’ for his detailed emendations to Aristotle. Latin translations of Ibn Rushd's work led the way to the popularization of Aristotle. Wikipedia.