

Own Lights and Folk Souls / The Anthroposophical Society as part of current history

18 November 2023

These are the script notes for an online talk given on 18 November 2023.

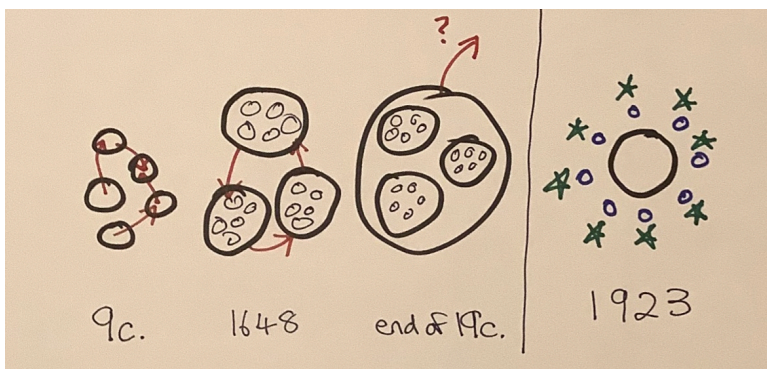
This has been my theme of the year, now shared in many places: Chicago, Portland, Sacramento, Ann Arbor and Harlemville in the USA, as well as Quito and Sao Paulo and soon Ireland. That is to say, mainly in the North, South and Central Americas. Much of the background to this work and its more recent tracking can be found at www.hopespringseternal.world.

The theme has a varied genesis. In part, it derives from my life-long destiny with the Americas, some 60 years so far. Another part results from my twin activities as a treasurer of the Anthroposophical Society (currently in Quito, Ecuador) and as convenor of the Economics Conference of the Goetheanum (part of the Social Sciences Section).¹ In these capacities, I regularly visit colleagues and projects in the Americas in order to see what is happening and what is possible in those places, both in the anthroposophical movement and in regard to their general, often challenging, existence. The theme also arises from my sense of both general economic history alongside the specific history of the Anthroposophical Society.

Very importantly, the sketches and much of the material I would like to share are not mine alone, but have evolved on a two-way basis: in-field testing of a priori ideas that are then affirmed or adjusted in the light of my audiences' responses and engagement. Both the images and the material are in that sense synthetic. They also reflect a welcome and seemingly readily renewed engagement and interest in the Anthroposophical Society itself on the part of participants.

My talk is organised under 6 topics:

- 1: The Evolution of Economic Life
- 2: A Second Chance for Humanity
- 3: The Story of Country Groups
- 4: Old Story; New Telling (Revisiting Branches)
- 5: We become what we think
- 6: 'Owning' the Goetheanum



1: The Evolution of Economic Life

In 1923, humanity had its first chance to embark on a new social life characterised by a single world economy, nested in the peoples of the world, each one of which required to be recognised in its own right. This was also our first opportunity to design and build a society of our own making. That we have so far made a fist of things does not prove we cannot do better.

Here is a sketch derived from my understanding of Rudolf Steiner's socio-economic ideas, filtered and corroborated in my professional capacity as an economic and monetary historian. It shows the essence of economic evolution. Perforce of being spiritual beings on earth with innate, if often under-resourced generosity, we create surpluses which, through trading with one another, leads every individual part of the economy, starting with the single individual human being, to seek out its neighbour. Thus, the world's economy is forever 'agglomerating'. In the 9th century in Europe this meant that the many, many separate 'private' manorial economies nevertheless came together. By the 17th century, these had become 'agglomerated' in what by then had become nation-states. Despite their rivalries, they too traded

¹ See under Projects [<https://social.goetheanum.ch/en/fields-of-work#projects>] or directly [<https://economics.goetheanum.org/home>]

their surpluses with one another, balancing out any trade imbalances with specie flow (of gold and silver). The last place to do this, under Bismarck, was Germany in the 19th century. But all these nation-states styled themselves as empires – variously at war and trading with (or against) one another through the ‘concerts of powers’, until they, too, ‘agglomerated’ at the world level. At this point, with no other planet to trade with, the outward flow of surpluses implodes, as it were, requiring (but not yet achieving) the balance of payments and gold standard to become three kinds of money.

It is at this point, that the nation-states need to find an identity other than economic prowess, allowing surpluses to be shared and not used as finance-based instruments of power. Here, in my view, is where a worldwide commonwealth should have come about, not the League of Nations and its derivative, the United Nations.

And yet, in what would national identity inhere? What would become the stars or lights of the nations? The question of the ‘true’ role of nations has been there ever since they became (wrongly) wedded to economic evolution in the 17th/18th centuries.

2: A Second Chance for Humanity

Now, one hundred years later, as explored with colleagues in the Economics Conference of the Goetheanum these past 21 years, we have a second chance to take hold of this opportunity.²

But will we take it? For there will not be a third. It’s now or never. So, the question becomes: How long is ‘now’?

In the world at large, this second chance appears as the still present possibility of a shared global economy based on each country having its ‘own light’, a light to be respected by all others. At the start of the 20th century, in 1908, British economist Roger Hawtrey wrote: ‘...if all countries maintained internal price stability, both economies and exchange rates would be stable without the need for ‘contractual’ transfers’.³

In 1953, Milton Friedman repeated that, ‘...flexible exchange rates are a means of combining interdependence among countries through trade with a maximum of internal monetary independence; they are a means of permitting each country to seek for monetary stability according to its own lights, without either imposing its mistakes on its neighbours or having their mistakes imposed on it. If all countries succeeded, the result would be a system of reasonably stable exchange rates; the substance of effective harmonisation would be attained without the risks of formal but ineffective harmonisation.’⁴

These thoughts also lived in the English economist John Maynard Keynes. His *A Tract on Monetary Reform*⁵ turned on the image that is everywhere the clue to denationalised but cooperative economic endeavour – an image of internal currency values matching external ones, with interest rates as low as possible and the avoidance of importing or exporting inflation or deflation.

This is an image of stability designed to contend with footloose global capital flows. As Keynes’s biographer, Robert Skidelsky, wrote in 2000: ‘[It belongs to the search for] a system which would maintain balance of payments equilibrium between all countries without trade discrimination but also without forcing deflation, unemployment or debt-bondage on deficit countries...’⁶

Though dry and technical, these words illustrate today’s macro-economic version of how things should be, and beneath history are. It does not help, however, to say they will never obtain unless Rudolf Steiner’s

² *A Second Chance for the World – A Deed in Becoming*. Documentation of meetings held during 2019 in Vancouver, Canada and Folkestone, England. [<https://aebookstore.com/publications/associative-economics-worldwide/authors/christopher-houghton-budd/a-second-chance-for-the-world/>]

³ *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain, 1937-1946*, Robert Skidelsky. Macmillan, London 2000. p. 215.

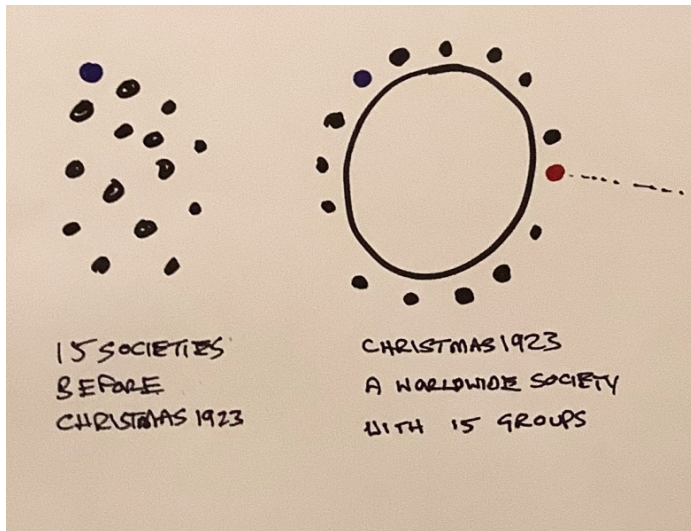
⁴ *Essays in Positive Economics*. Friedman, M. Chicago: Phoenix (1966 [1953]), p. 200.

⁵ *A Tract on Monetary Reform*, J M Keynes, Macmillan 1923.

⁶ *John Maynard Keynes: Fighting for Britain, 1937-1946*, op. cit., p. 182.

ideas are adopted. The challenge is to build a bridge between these ideas and current realities through concrete behaviour.

The most raw example of this is to ask how would what Rudolf Steiner called a *free* spiritual life (not just spiritual life) be conceived and funded, and then to approach the post Christmas 1923 Anthroposophical Society as if it were an, if not *the*, exemplar of this.



3: The Story of Country Groups

This brings me to the story of Country Groups of the Anthroposophical Society. In the Anthroposophical Movement, the 'own lights' theorem seems to appear in the development of Country Societies, which, their autonomy notwithstanding, are also groups of the worldwide Society, each with a General Secretary.

Here is a sketch of their evolution. It shows some fifteen Anthroposophical Societies prior to their forming the worldwide Society at Christmas 1923.⁷ After which they became groups of the greater whole.

What is this story about if not a conversation between humanity's folk souls? What are Country Groups if not vehicles for the folk souls to express themselves through?

Humanity as a whole may be asleep to the 'own lights' concept, yet some of us, surely, are awake and can see that, however unwittingly, the idea points to a single world economy, predicated on each people identifying its unique contribution in the entirety of humanity's development, and in a context of national sovereignty without national combination, meaning rights life should be country-based and not international or internationalised (i.e. no European Union and no United Nations!).

As John Keats, aged 21, wrote:

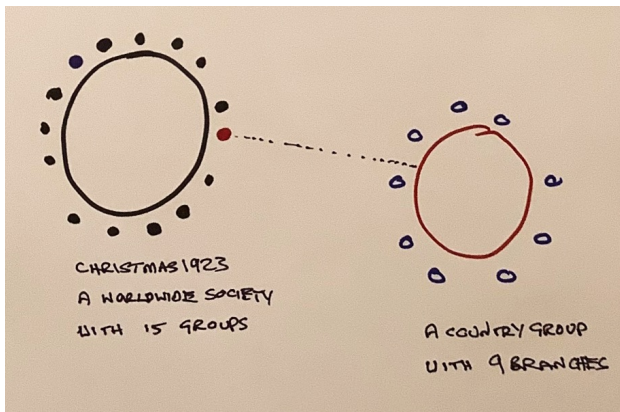
Great spirits now on earth are sojourning;
 He of the cloud, the cataract, the lake,
 Who on Helvellyn's summit, wife awake,
 Catches his freshness from Archangel's wing:
 He of the rose, the violet, the spring,
 The social smile, the chain for Freedom's sake:
 And lo! whose steadfastness would never take
 A meaner sound than Raphael's whispering.
 And other spirits there are standing apart
 Upon the forehead of the age to come;
 These, these will give the world another heart,
 And other pulses. Hear ye not the hum
 Of mighty workings?
 Listen awhile ye nations, and be dumb.

That was written in 1816, the very time Rudolf Steiner points to as marking the moment when the financial economy began to emancipate itself from the real economy, a process that culminated in 2008. A culmination that haunts us still.

⁷ There were 15 mentioned at the opening of the Christmas Conference (see Appendix 1), but not all of them were formed country societies. 10 were actual, 5 were 'incipient'.

So, this is a problem that has long been with us. Even so, is it too late to consider the possibility of a second chance and in so doing remind ourselves of today's historical moment? Further, to then step into it?

That is to say, can we comprehend that clarifying the nature of the worldwide Anthroposophical Society post 1923, especially as regards its financing, is both a 'private' and an historical task... and that if we can meet this challenge in our own case, we can meet it as such and for humanity as a whole?



4: Old Story; New Telling (Revisiting Branches)

Look at the second sketch again, this time as if a Country Society itself is surrounded and carried by its Branches,⁸ just as the worldwide Society sits (or should sit) in the lap of the Country Groups.

Surely, it is this more confederal image, rather than 'centre and periphery' thinking, that belongs to the two-way relationship Rudolf Steiner envisaged between the worldwide Society and its Groups? Why not, then, replicate this between the Country Groups and their Branches?

5: We become what we think

I have arrived at this point in my journey not only through life-long engagement in the Society and the School, but because I have been mindful of the fact that the way we think about things often conditions how they then become. This has led me to pay attention to two key points of method and epistemology:

- i) when thinking of one's relationship to the Goetheanum and to the worldwide Society based there, beware the imagery of 'centre and periphery'. I find it more useful to think in terms of the whole and its parts and of each part being a microcosm of the whole.
- ii) when thinking of the Anthroposophical Society, have careful regard for its role as an exemplar of funding free spiritual life and how Rudolf Steiner himself envisaged that funding. In today's world, one needs to be wary of spiritual goals and ideals not tempered by a grounding in finance, both as conventionally understood and in terms of spiritual science.

It is not for illustration now, but this long quest has led to research into a chart of accounts specific to the Anthroposophical Society, but intended to be replicable by any earthly entity that is the vehicle of such an 'unearthly' thing as the School of Spiritual Science. Such a chart of accounts, and the habits, policies and conducts it entails, is essential if one is to learn how to resource one's chosen ethos without thereby compromising or contradicting it.⁹

6: 'Owning' the Goetheanum

I close with an idea that becomes increasingly clear as one delves into both the history and financing of the Anthroposophical Society: an idea born of the re-engagement that often resulted in my seminars, and the experience of being a part of, not apart from, the Goetheanum in its wider, non-geographic, sense. This can be the start of overcoming any disconnect that may exist or have arisen, namely, renaming one's branch as

'The Anthroposophical Society in [country] in [city]'

⁸ I write this mindful that many Country Societies are not organised with branches, often being based on a nationally central organisation with groups of various kinds scattered throughout their country.

⁹ See Appendix 2 for a working illustration.

Subsequent to my presentation, three themes arose that merit mention here:

- the nature and meaning of ‘nations’ and their ‘lights’.
- the place of the individual, to which some thought my stars referred.
- the process of surpluses.

Basis of Nation-states post WW1

People, nation, place, land, country, language...?

I linked folk souls to countries,¹⁰ but by way of a question. In my sketches, the stars were not meant to be individuals, but to represent the question: In what does a nation or nation-state find its identity if not in economic prowess over others or catching the souls of its citizens on nationalism – seeing their allegiance not, indeed, to their own individual star, but to some national purpose or flag? Is this identity, which may be singular, several or plural, linked to folk souls? Or something else? What are folk souls? In the background is *The Mission of Folk Souls*,¹¹ lectures given by Rudolf Steiner as a riposte to Roosevelt in 1910. My hope is to encourage an active, open conversation where I think this is missing, both inside our movement and in the world at large.

To repeat, the stars are about the future of nations. I am aware that, for example, in Austro-Hungary, before ‘the West’ destroyed it, there were many cultural groupings living side by side, and following many religious persuasions including Judaism, Western and Eastern Christianity and Islam. But countries like Switzerland and the UK also comprise various groupings, in both there are four language groups, for example. Then there are principalities such as Lichtenstein, Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, not forgetting the Vatican City State! And then there are places like the Basque region. My question was more about how such groupings are to understand themselves. In my mind, not as the United Nations, or as the European Union, which is a conglomeration of nations, a kind of supnation. The same problem exists in the United States: what really unites them?

A further nuance occurs to me. The background to my theme concerns the recent shift from ‘national’ to ‘country’ society. What, though, does ‘country’ mean? In German it is *Landesgesellschaft*; ‘land’ society. Although it does not ‘sing’ to say that in English, we do have the concept and the word, as in England, Switzerland, ‘the land of the free’, ‘homeland’. One can also say ‘place’. In English history we very clearly see that, whoever comes to stay here becomes English – as if there is some prior being here that one becomes part of, adopting its language, conventions, and so on. In my case, as well as being an individual in my own right, I am also an Englishman – generically a citizen in a republic, a subject in a monarchy.

Surpluses in a One-world Economy

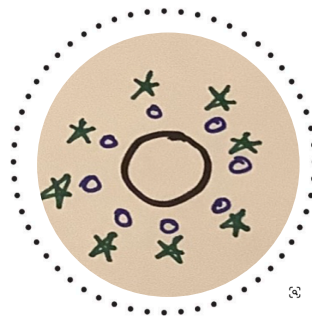
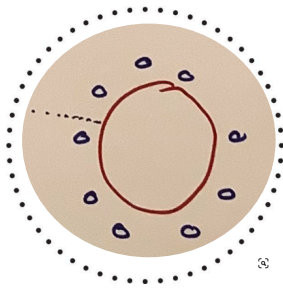
For me, as demonstrated in conventional accounting, surpluses pass from their first appearance as ‘profit’ or internally generated capital, to the ‘own capital’ account of an initiative (which is what taking my cue from Rudolf Steiner,¹² I think the free spiritual life comprises; i.e. not culture in a wide sense and not just education or the arts). Then it becomes ‘freed capital’, not needed by the activity in which it arises, and so available for those taking initiative in fulfilment of their destinies in whatever way that means economically for them. This can be running a restaurant, for example, or making a loan.

¹⁰ A topic explored under ‘Choir of Cultures’, in *Finance at the Threshold – Rethinking the real and financial economies*, Christopher Houghton Budd. Gower 2011.

¹¹ *The Mission of the Individual Folk Souls in Relation to Teutonic Mythology*, 7-17 June 1910, Oslo. Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1970. CW 121.

¹² ‘The third division, alongside of the other two and equally independent, includes all those things in the social organism that are connected with the mental and spiritual life. The term, “spiritual culture,” or, “everything that is connected with mental and spiritual life,” hardly describes it accurately. Perhaps one might express it better as, “everything that rests on the natural endowments, both spiritual and physical, of each single human being.” *The Threefold Nature of Social Life*, Ch. 2.

The key thing is that this 'freed capital' then becomes available as loans or shares or donations, which need to be matched to the type of initiative. Why lend to students? Why give to a business? Etc.



The Place of the Individual

Perhaps I should have done, but I did not address or include the individuals in my sketches (for which an equivalent might be the members of the Society). I have produced a third pair of sketches to illustrate this. In my understanding, the spiritual life is grounded specifically on individuals, not nations or groupings of any kind.

Appendix 1: The General Secretaries 'who spoke on behalf of the country Societies.'¹³

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Austria: | Count Polzer |
| Belgium: | Madame Muntz. |
| Czechoslovakia: | Dr. Eiselt, Dr. Krkavec. |
| Denmark: | Herr Hohlenberg. |
| England: | Mr. Collison. |
| Finland: | Herr Donner. |
| France: | Mademoiselle Sauerwein. |
| Germany: | on behalf of the Council – Dr. Unger; on behalf of the Free Anthroposophical Society – Dr. Büchenbacher. |
| Honolulu: | Madame Ferreri. |
| Italy: | on behalf of the Council – Baronin de Renzis, Rome / Herzog von Cesaro, Fräulein Schwarz, Milan. |
| Netherlands: | Dr. Zeylmans van Emmichoven. |
| Norway: | Herr Ingerö. |
| Sweden: | Fräulein Henström. |
| Switzerland: | Herr Steffen. |
| USA: | Mr. Monges. |

¹³ *The Proceedings of the Christmas Conference 1923/4*, Anthroposophic Press, New York, 1990. CW 260, p. 78-9.

Appendix 2: Sample Chart of Accounts

A simple first step to create a chart of accounts that distinguishes the finances of the Anthroposophical Society qua earthly entity and the 'unearthly' School of Spiritual Science within it...

| INCOME | | EXPENSES | |
|--|--|---------------------------------|--|
| SOCIETY | | SOCIETY | |
| Dues / Contributions | | General | |
| from direct members | | Events, Lectures and Workshops | |
| from branches | | Internal Travel | |
| - transferred to GAS | | Foreign Travel | |
| Sub-total | | TE Fund | |
| | | Office costs | |
| AGM | | Rents and Premises costs | |
| AGM | | Social costs | |
| - AGM costs | | Council Costs | |
| Sub-total | | Honoraria & Remuneration | |
| | | Depreciation | |
| Journal, Website, Library | | Taxes | |
| Subscriptions Journal | | Website | |
| Subscriptions Website | | Journal, Library | |
| Subscriptions Library | | Telephone and Utilities | |
| Sub-total | | Publicity | |
| | | Bank charges, interest, etc. | |
| General | | Professional Fees | |
| Events, Lectures and Workshops | | Insurance | |
| Book sales | | Book Purchases | |
| Rent received | | Postage | |
| Interest, Dividends, etc. received | | Accounting | |
| Other | | Other | |
| Sub-total | | | |
| | | | |
| Total Society Income | | Total Society Expenses | |
| | | | |
| SCHOOL | | SCHOOL | |
| Events, Lectures and Workshops | | General Secretaries | |
| From non-Anthroposophical sources | | Class Holding | |
| From anthroposophical institutions* | | School & Section meetings | |
| Free gifts* | | <i>Projects and Initiatives</i> | |
| Legacies* | | Other | |
| School & Section meetings | | | |
| <i>Projects, Initiatives and Research</i> | | | |
| Other | | | |
| Total School Income | | Total School Expenses | |
| * Not used for insufficient membership income. | | | |
| Total Income | | Total Expenses | |