

Crossing the Rainbow Bridge: Exploring the Intersections Between Anthroposophy and
Contemporary Alt-Right Radicalization

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the naturalization of elements of fascism in seemingly progressive spaces, exploring how this phenomenon plays out in Waldorf schools, on biodynamic farms, and within holistic medicine. Anthroposophy, a philosophy and New Age Religion created by Rudolf Steiner in 1912, informs the pedagogy of seemingly hippy-ish and progressive institutions, such as Waldorf schools, and the farming and health practices of Anthroposophical medicine. By engaging in a close textual analysis of Steiner's lectures and writings, and contemporary interpretations of his work, I identify where Anthroposophy intersects with alt-right ideologies and how it can serve as a pipeline for right-wing radicalization. I explore Steiner's understanding of health, nutrition and diet, and race to reveal how these ideas have been reproduced and integrated into Anthroposophical institutions. The paper scrutinizes how Anthroposophical institutions, notably Waldorf schools, reproduce the work of Steiner while distancing themselves, or outright denying, the racism and ableism that was foundational to his philosophy. A closer analysis reveals that many of his writings echo elements of fascism, including the supremacy of the leader, the need for an integration of a purer community, and the right for the "chosen people" to dominate. This thesis does not argue that there is a causal relationship between Anthroposophy and alt-right radicalization; rather, I find that the characteristics of fascism shared between Anthroposophy and alt-right groups can prime students of Waldorf schools and members of Anthroposophical institutions for radicalization.

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Introduction

When my brother turned four, my parents, worried about his overstimulated response to movies and television shows, were faced with the seemingly impossible task of finding a school that limited its use of technology. The only school in my town that seemed to do so while still maintaining structure and classroom etiquette was a small private school called Waldorf. The school, set on twenty acres of land, overlooks the American river, and is breathtakingly beautiful. However, it had a reputation among the broader Sacramento community for being insular and mysterious, and was locally known as the “goat sacrificing cult on the river.” My mom, who grew up in Sacramento and was privy to the school’s reputation, was hesitant to tour the institution. However, faced with few options, she pushed aside her worries, and found that not only were no goats sacrificed (though there were a few on the property), the school promised an idyllic childhood. It seemed to protect children from growing up too quickly, and it helped foster imagination and creativity among its students. The sinister reputation the school had garnered in the community seemed to be nothing more than the product of a misunderstanding, as locals misconstrued the student run farm for some kind of ritualistic space. Many of the other parents were similar to mine; they, too, hoped for a school that allowed children to play, rather than forcing rote learning on five year olds. There were a few oddballs, and an uncomfortably large number of parents filling out the vaccine exemption forms distributed on the first day Kindergarten, but the watercolor paintings and finger knit strings (which would later become knitted lions and lambs) were more than enough to convince my parents that this was the school for me and my brother. Both of us attended from kindergarten through 12th grade, and I received a comprehensive education, covering both what is required by the state, and many additional art

forms, including basket weaving, book-binding, and pottery.¹ It was a protected childhood, and I have countless memories of climbing trees and leaving gifts for the gnomes that scattered the campus. The reputation the school had garnered in the greater Sacramento community was quickly forgotten by my parents, and I became an ardent defender of my hippy school. It was not until three years after I graduated high school that I googled the founder of the school, an Austrian man named Rudolf Steiner, and began to uncover the much darker roots of my seemingly progressive, if odd, education.

Steiner, I found, had created a convoluted philosophy he referred to as “Anthroposophy,”² which described various spirits, promoted a gnostic form of Christianity, and rooted itself in a vaguely veiled ethnonationalism and racial hierarchy. Reading his work began to shift how I understood the narrative that his work, and therefore my education, was progressive and “human-centered.” Though it was shocking to read – it certainly felt incongruent with my understanding of Waldorf – it helped contextualize some of the actions of some members of the community. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, a group of parents, including my best friend’s mom, attended anti-lockdown and anti-vax protests side by side with white supremacists. I remember hearing about it so casually, as though it was not a shocking or horrifying event, almost as though it were expected. It was appalling to watch my best friend's mom, who had always been a little hippy – resistant to processed food and red dye – threaten to move their family to Texas to avoid the vaccine requirements that the state mandated. How did the mom who talked to me and my friend about kindness in middle school and reprimanded the boys in my class for using inappropriate language on field trips, suddenly tolerate the violent language of

¹ This created very interesting sibling rivalries; I argue that my books were better, but his pottery and calligraphy were undeniably more craftily made.

² Though Anthroposophy describes itself as a philosophy, and therefore typically would not be capitalized, I capitalize the term throughout this thesis because I argue that the continued influence and impact of Anthroposophy makes it function as a new age religion.

the people she attended protests with? How had she come to own multiple guns, when she had driven me and my friend to protest about gun violence in schools just a few years before? My parents had chosen Waldorf to avoid technology (which is a decision that itself represents privilege and some anti-modern tendencies), but it struck me that other parents may have chosen the school for much different reasons. Had some of them known? Had Steiner's racist ideals bled into my classes? Was it even possible to separate the ethnonationalism that seemed to be a throughline in his philosophy from the "humanist" and "good" parts? And were the scandals involving Waldorf teachers' continued associations with alt-right groups merely anomalies in a mostly progressive community, or did they illustrate more pervasive and destructive norms?

I quickly found that Waldorf was not alone in its seemingly contradictory connection between hippy and alt-right spaces. In fact, this phenomenon has become so ubiquitous that it has secured its own name: "the crunchy-to-alt-right pipeline."³⁴ From breastfeeding facebook groups for new moms to essential-oil-anti-vaxxers, it seemed as though many hippy or crunchy spaces shared the same underlying characteristics that primed members for alt-right radicalization.

It was challenging for me to identify which of the beliefs I was taught were odd, but harmless, and which clearly connected the broader themes of hierarchy, control, and regimentation. Moreover, many Waldorf schools and other Anthroposophical institutions, including those relating to health, wellness, and biodynamic farming, had released statements claiming to work well within the "humanist" ideology of Steiner while rejecting his most

³ For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term "crunchy" as a descriptor for a way of living that is rooted in anti-modern tendencies, including low or no technological use, an organic and "toxin free" diet, a rejection of Western medicine, and often an environmentally conscience and sustainable lifestyle. It is used both as a self-identifier and as an externally applied label, and is an exaggeration of the term "granola" or "hippy" (Dictionary.com)

⁴ I utilize the term alt-right to describe a kind of political ideology that rejects establishment conservatism, and favors often abrasive rhetoric that promotes a return to the "old ways." It is steeped in racism, conspiracy theories, and essentialized gender roles (Southern Poverty Law Center).

explicitly racist writings. But the more Steiner lectures I read, the more they seemed to mirror the ideology of Nazi Party in Germany, though his death preceded their rule by nearly ten years. The two realities seemed incongruent, but it became increasingly clear through my research that while the work of Steiner did not devolve into fascism, it shares some of the primary components of the ideology.

Fascism is challenging to define, and the use (or misuse) of the term is the subject of debate amongst theorists. Many scholars, including Robert Paxton, author of the book *The Anatomy of Fascism*, are hesitant to provide a strict definition of the term. In his book, Paxton only defines the term fascism in the final chapter, after providing every possible piece of context and justification for his definition. This is in large part because fascists do not categorically define the ideology. Unlike the other “isms” of the 19th and 20th centuries (liberalism, communism, etc), fascism shifts its ideologies and goals based on what will be more appealing to the target populace.⁵ The definition Paxton provides holds that:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.⁶

This definition is helpful in identifying and categorizing fascism in its fully actualized form, however it does little to explain how this ideology develops. The fully expressed form of fascism found in Mussolini’s Italy or in Nazi Germany presents a much more significant challenge to undo, but Paxton warns that the early stages of fascism exist and are evident in every contemporary democratic country. Identifying and addressing areas where these ideas

⁵ Paxton, Robert O. 2005. *The Anatomy of Fascism*. New York, NY: Random House, pg. 219

⁶ Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 218

flourish, and more importantly, areas where radicalization is more likely to occur, is an urgent and critical task. Due to the shifting nature of fascism, this is often easier to recognize by investigating the component parts of fascism. These shared elements can also be used to make sense of the crunchy-to-alt-right pipeline. Paxton presents a list of elements, many of which I utilize. The most relevant of these characteristics are:

- A sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of traditional solutions;
- The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it;
- The belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external;
- Dread of a groups decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences;
- The need for a closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary;
- The need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's historical destiny;
- The superiority of the leaders instinct over abstract or universal reason;
- The right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.⁷

These elements form a more useful framework through which to analyze the work of Steiner. It is clear that at least one, if not more, of these elements underlie much of the spiritual work Steiner did. These shared characteristics serve as the connective tissue that bridges Anthroposophy and alt-right groups whether or not they are explicitly stated. In order to explore these connections and attempt understand how the members of my school community could become involved and radicalized into neo-fascist⁸ and white supremacist groups, I engage in a

⁷ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 219, 220

⁸ While I primarily utilize the aforementioned elements of fascism over its strict definition, I refer both to proto-fascism, which describes how these ideas appeared before the actualization of the term, and neo-fascism which describes how it is currently expressed

close textual analysis of some of Steiner's core lectures, and draw connections between his lectures, their contemporary expressions, and the elements of fascism they both express.

In order to better explore how the converge of these ideologies, I break down my thesis into the following sections: first, I explore Steiner as a figure, investigating his biography and the primary framework of Anthroposophy, which centers on reincarnation and karma. Next, I consider how Steiner's work is reproduced or altered in contemporary Anthroposophical institutions, paying particular attention to Waldorf schools and educational pedagogy. I investigate Steiner's claims about health, wellness, nature, and nutrition, and their impact on the function of Anthroposophical medicine and vaccine denial. I review some of Steiner's writings on race, and connect them with Anthroposophy's influence on Nazism and on contemporary institutions, including an overarching denial of Steiner's racism. Lastly, I explore how the work of Steiner and of his philosophy are mirrored in other crunchy and alt-right organizations.

I find that in each section, Steiner reinforces a dynamic whereby individuals are saddled with great responsibility, but have little to no agency to change their circumstances. Throughout Steiner's work, the themes and core components of his ideology share elements of fascism, and sometimes connect directly to the harmful philosophies and actions of contemporary Anthroposophical members. I do not argue, however, that there exists a causal relationship between Anthroposophy, fascism, and alt-right radicalization; that attending a Waldorf school, for instance, will turn one into a white supremacists. Rather, I argue that the characteristics of fascism that they share can serve as conduits for radicalization among people who seek these groups or philosophies as alternatives to what they view are the failures of contemporary society. Identifying where and when these convergences occur is critical in preventing further radicalization.

Chapter 1: The Philosophical Background

The philosophical makeup of Anthroposophy is at best odd, and at worst proto-fascist. The world Steiner created is convoluted and challenging to understand, and remains mostly unexplored, even by members of Anthroposophical institutions. Though his work initially appears to be somewhat irrelevant or fanatical, his philosophy is taken quite seriously by a small group of dedicated followers. Moreover, the ideas he introduces play a much larger (and much more subtle) role in the component institutions of Anthroposophy, whether or not his philosophy is explicitly expressed. The reach of this work – in Waldorf schools, in Anthroposophical medicine, and in biodynamically farmed products – is extensive, with numerous people knowingly or unknowingly engaging with ideas they may or may not agree with. As a result, the ways in which Steiner and Anthroposophy are reproduced in contemporary organizations, such as Waldorf schools, is driven and constructed by his most ardent followers. In this chapter, I explore who Rudolf Steiner was, the history of Theosophy and its impact on Steiner, and the creation and foundational elements of Anthroposophy, in order to better grasp both the meaning and continued impact of the movement he created.

Steiner's Biography

Rudolf Steiner was a prolific writer and was known for his charisma and “preacher-like” exposition skills.⁹ First hand accounts detail him holding “his listeners under the spell of his power,” and describe his lectures as “rhythmical cascades of eloquence, which sometimes

⁹ Paull, John. "Biodynamic agriculture: The journey from Koberwitz to the world, 1924-1938." *Journal of Organic Systems* 6, no. 1 (2011), pg. 28

reach[ed] the rapidity and force of a torrent.”¹⁰ This is evident even in reading the transcripts of his lectures; he constructs a logic that, while often quite flawed, is initially compelling. His personality, which still remains central contemporary in Anthroposophical circles, was crucial to the spread and appeal of Anthroposophy.

Steiner was born into a working class family in what is now Croatia in 1861¹¹ His father, a railroad operator, was moved around Austria through Steiner’s childhood. In his time in both small Austrian towns and in larger, more industrial cities, Steiner spent a significant amount of time wandering in the lower Alps and listening outside of churches. In this time, he developed a strong propensity for both nature and Christianity. He was a curious student, and insisted on the “reality” of the spiritual world, even as a child. Though he was quite bright, he attended a technical school that left him initially ineligible for university. When he left rural Austria for Vienna, he attended the only higher education institution he was eligible for, and studied philosophy independently. He was eventually able to pursue a PhD at the request of professors he had built relationships with, and due to the quality and novelty of his extensive writings. In his time in Vienna, he discovered the works of prominent 19th century thinkers, including Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Ernst Haeckel, both of whom would later play a significant role in the development of his own philosophy. Steiner was an avid reader, and when he left Vienna, it was to travel to Weimar where he worked organizing the Goethe Archives, cataloging his published and unpublished works.¹² This was considered a high honor, and also allowed Steiner to more deeply understand the philosophies of Goethe. Initially using Goethe as a scaffolding for his own ideas, Steiner began to develop a clearer idea of the spiritual world and the natural science he could use to justify it. In 1897, after spending seven years in the Goethe Archives, Steiner left for

¹⁰ Paull, “Biodynamic Agriculture,” 28

¹¹ Steiner, “The Story of My Life,” 2

¹² Steiner, “The Story of My Life,” 104

Berlin to work as a tutor and editor at the Free Literature Society.¹³ In Berlin, he discovered Theosophy, the spiritual practice that Anthroposophy is rooted in.

Theosophy

Derived from the Greek words “Theos” meaning God, and “Sophia” meaning wisdom, Theosophy is a faith system that incorporates the core beliefs of many religions into one. The movement was founded in 1875 and was largely led by Helena Blavatsky.¹⁴ The objective of Theosophy, as explained by Annie Besant, who joined the movement in 1889 and became one of its primary leaders, is to “obtain a direct knowledge of God” through an exploration of the “Mysteries,”¹⁵ which are the central focus of each religion.¹⁶ The Mysteries include the death and resurrection of Jesus; the secret teachings of Islam as derived from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed; Sangha in Buddhism, and many other prominent spiritual figures, to name a few. Theosophy looks beyond the dogma of exoteric religion (that which is meant to appeal and be understood by a large group of people), and focuses on the deeper, mystical, and esoteric (intended only to be understood by a very small number of people well versed in the topic) conceptions of God and spirituality. Religion, in the view of Theosophy, is not a set of instructions or teachings, but a state of consciousness.¹⁷ It separates the teachings of various religions from the traditions and rituals specific to them in order to compile an over-arching body of spiritual understanding and beliefs. It takes in not just “Mystical Truths”, but also forms “an eclectic system, which accepts truth wherever it is to be found, and cares little for its outer

¹³Steiner, “The Story of My Life,”274

¹⁴ Paull, John. “Rudolf Steiner: From Theosophy to Anthroposophy (1902-1913).” *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 2, no. 5 (September 26, 2022): 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2022.2.5.74>, 9

¹⁵ The capitalization of “Mysteries” follows the unusual capitalization in the text, which I believe is meant to emphasize the centrality and importance of them.

¹⁶ Besant, “Theosophy,” 1

¹⁷ Besant, “Theosophy,”3

trappings.”¹⁸ The methods through which individuals can receive information from higher powers are restricted by the physical limits of humans existing on the earthly plane. Receiving firsthand knowledge, therefore, requires an understanding of how consciousness can function on earth, which is found to be primarily through meditation and a discipline of life.¹⁹ Man is restricted by a body in this life, but he carries with him an eternal spirit. In order to understand man both in his earthly form and in his spirit form, consciousness must be studied as a science, a morality-art, and a philosophy of being.²⁰

The movement had a notable following, with reportedly 100,000 followers in 1902, though the numbers have dwindled significantly since.²¹ The combination of esotericism, mysticism, metaphysics, and other religions (primarily Buddhism and Hinduism), some argued, provided a revolutionary means to experience the world and promoted universal brotherhood. Others were less inclined towards the movement, including the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1911, which stated that Theosophy would be “hardly deserving of serious consideration; for the revelations appear to have been no more than a crude compilation of vague, contradictory and garbled extracts from various periodicals, books and translations.”²² The charisma of Blavatsky, and later Steiner, however, was clearly powerful enough to obscure harsh critiques.²³

Steiner, who was spiritually drawn to Theosophy, was appointed Secretary General of the German branch of the Theosophical Society where he worked closely with Annie Besant. He possessed similar charismatic qualities as the movement’s founder Blavatsky, and within his eleven year tenure as Secretary General, he increased membership tenfold from 377 members to

¹⁸ Besant, “Theosophy,” 4

¹⁹ Besant, “Theosophy,” 3

²⁰ Besant, “Theosophy,” 7

²¹ Paull, “Rudolf Steiner,” 9

²² Paull, “Rudolf Steiner,” 9

²³ Paull, “Rudolf Steiner,” 8

3,702. Already a prolific writer, Steiner used the scaffolding and worldwide audience that Theosophy provided in order to publish a few different periodicals, a book, various plays about “The Mysteries,” and create several of his own publishing presses (operated out of his home).²⁴ His own success dominated the German Theosophical Society, and the vast majority of his finances came from his lectures, books, and plays. He also worked closely with Marie Von Siviers, who was instrumental in shaping the Anthroposophical Society, and would later marry Steiner in 1914.

Steiner worked to further develop his own ideology within the Theosophical Society, much of which was based off of the foundational elements of Theosophy. Though the society promoted the concept of universal brotherhood and harmony between all peoples, it also posited a belief system that divided and categorized people within “root races.”²⁵ The definition of “all people” was significantly constrained, and seemed to primarily apply to white Europeans. The idea was based on an understanding of reincarnation and karma, which Steiner also adopted. However, unlike Theosophy’s reverence²⁶ for Eastern Asian religious practices, Steiner firmly rooted his own ideology in Germanic, European, and Christian traditions and mythologies.²⁷ This significantly contributed to his eventual split from Theosophy, which came about in large part because leaders in the Theosophical Society believed they found the second coming of Jesus in Jiddu Krishnamurti, a young Indian boy, and Steiner rejected the idea that a spiritual leader could be non-white in the contemporary epoch.²⁸ While most of his writings on race were derived from the Theosophical understanding of reincarnation, they were clearly influenced by the German

²⁴ Paull, “Rudolf Steiner,” 13

²⁵ Strube, Julian. “Esoterik und Rechtsextremismus.” In *Handbuch der Religionen*, pp. 1-20. Westarp Science Fachverlag, 2023, pg. 2

²⁶ I use the term reverence lightly, as it appeared to be more of an appropriation of a variety of East Asian religions than a genuine respect or admiration.

²⁷ Paull, “Rudolf Steiner,” 15

²⁸ Paull, “Rudolf Steiner,” 15

nationalism Steiner was surrounded by. This discovery served as a final breaking point for Steiner, but he had already considered leaving to pursue his own interests. His plays about the Mysteries were becoming increasingly popular (and lucrative), and a Swiss dentist, Dr. Emil Grosheintz, gifted Steiner a piece of land in Dornach, Switzerland where he was able to build the center for Anthroposophy (which still stands today).

Founding Anthroposophy

In December of 1912, Steiner officially founded Anthroposophy, bringing with him the vast majority of the German Theosophical Society's members. He was expelled from the Theosophical Society a few months later, in March of 2013.²⁹ There is no evidence for any further contact between Steiner and the Theosophical Society, however, he closely followed Theosophical publications for the remainder of his life. The majority of the English texts found in his library upon his death were Theosophical publications.³⁰ Some passages in his later writings, especially those on the Christian impulse of Anthroposophy, seem to angrily reference the failings of the Theosophical Society, implying a certain level of disdain between Steiner and his former community. Regardless, Steiner is inextricably linked to the Theosophical Society, as many of his most foundational works either directly reference the ideas of Theosophy, or were written during his time as General Secretary of the German branch. Unlike Theosophy, Anthroposophy has grown significantly since its creation. Though Steiner died only fifteen years after creating Anthroposophy, his ideas, codified into self-sustaining organizations, continue to impact and influence communities around the world.

²⁹ Paull, "Rudolf Steiner," 15

³⁰ Paull, "Rudolf Steiner," 16

Reincarnation in Anthroposophy

The core of Anthroposophy's philosophical framework is an understanding of reincarnation and karma that shapes both the material reality that one is born into (as a result of past karma), and shapes the central purpose of their current life: to fully incarnate in this body and spiritually develop in order to better prepare for the next life. Cycles of reincarnation, karma, and destiny inform much of the work of Anthroposophy, including its educational pedagogy and healing practices. Moreover, the racism and ableism Steiner expressed, is intimately tied to and justified by his understanding of life cycles. He used pseudo-scientific logic to explain how reincarnation occurs and how destiny is created and acquired throughout the many lives of a soul. In one of his core writings on reincarnation, he compared himself to the Renaissance natural scientist Francesco Redi, who suggested that all creatures have descended from other living creatures. Anthroposophists, Steiner suggested, postulate a similar argument as Redi: a soul does not appear out of nothing, rather it must spring from another soul.³¹

The spiritual qualities of a soul, more specifically, must have originated from somewhere and developed through some means, just as physical characteristics are passed down hereditarily. Spiritual science must work in accordance with natural science; according to Steiner, everything that spiritual science suggested corresponded with the ways in which natural science explains physical phenomena. For instance, Steiner invoked the work of Darwin, focusing specifically on a quotation from *The Origin of Species* where Darwin suggests that: "I hold that all organic beings that have ever lived on this earth have descended from one primordial form into which the creator breathes the breath of life."³² While Anthroposophy placed more weight on this idea than

³¹Steiner, Rudolf. "Reincarnation and Karma: Concepts Compelled by the Modern Scientific Point of View - GA 34. Reincarnation and Karma - Rudolf Steiner Archive." Accessed October 26, 2023. https://rsarchive.org/Articles/GA034/English/AP1962/ReKarm_questions.html.

³² Steiner, "Reincarnation and Karma"

Darwin did, the two ideas, Steiner suggested, are in accordance with each other. Natural science was not a complete field. Rather, it was merely an aspect of spiritual science. Though many of Steiner's claims were not proven, he argued that uncertainty in the arguments of spiritual science would still provide clarity to many issues concerning morality and the spiritual nature and history of soul.³³

The "science" of reincarnation is not studied in the same manner or with the same attention as the science of physical evolution, but Steiner argues that there are numerous examples that prove the unique spiritual quality of souls. Children all raised in the same town and taught by the same teachers, will still vary in what they learn and how they experience the world. Twins, too, though genetically identical, have separate personalities.³⁴ The souls of people, therefore, must evolve in a way that reflects a certain level of individuality, and this individuality must be reflective of the spiritual character of the soul and their past incarnations.

The positioning of natural science as merely a section of spiritual science functions as a means to legitimize the work of Steiner. In claiming that his work is a necessary addition to that of Darwin, for instance, he is able to avoid constructing his own justification for reincarnation. It also necessarily ties natural science to spirituality, which is one of the primary goals of Steiner's philosophy. To further avoid justifying his work, Steiner claims that a higher spirituality allows some of his work to go unexplained, suggesting it is too complicated or too evolved for many readers, sometimes even for Steiner himself, to fully comprehend. Steiner also explicitly states that the materialistic minded men of his time were too consumed by the judgments of the physical plane to conceptualize the depth of Anthroposophy's ideas.³⁵ This move secures his

³³ Steiner, "Reincarnation and Karma"

³⁴ Steiner, "Reincarnation and Karma"

³⁵ Steiner, "Christ and the Human Soul"

argument from critique, as he equates disputing his claims about reincarnation as equal to questioning evolution.

Steiner uses this as a basis to construct a hierarchical system of organizing people under the guise of soul evolution. Although the explicit nature of this hierarchy is obscured or entirely ignored by most modern Anthroposophical institutions, the foundational nature of this hierarchy to his philosophy cannot be understated. This hierarchy is reproduced in the contemporary work of Anthroposophists, regardless of whether they explicitly express it or not.

Steiner justifies this hierarchy by arguing that in the same way that not all souls are the same, so must it be true that not all souls are equally evolved. He utilizes the zoologist and naturalist, Ernst Haeckel,³⁶ who stated that “the final result of a comparison of animals and man shows that between the most highly developed animal souls and the lowest human souls there exists only a small quantitative, but no qualitative difference; *this difference is much smaller than the difference between the lowest and the highest human souls*, or the difference between the highest and the lowest animal souls.”³⁷ Steiner suggests that there must be something occurring that allows the most highly developed animal souls to evolve into human souls, and for the lowest human souls to evolve into a higher soul. Moreover, this occurrence cannot and should not be written off as an inexplicable miracle. Rather, “honest thinking” and “strict science” must be applied to the evolution of the soul in the same way it is applied to the evolution of the physical being.³⁸ In examining physical evolution, the researcher can trace a hereditary line from one species to another using similar physical characteristics. Steiner argues this same method should be used to track soul evolution, with a focus on biography instead of physical

³⁶ Haeckel, who coined the term ecology, has also been considered a significant philosophical influence on the Nazi party, especially in his justifications for nationalism and racial hierarchies (Staudenmaier, “Ecofascism,” 6)

³⁷ Steiner, “Reincarnation and Karma”

³⁸ Steiner, “How Karma Works”

appearance.³⁹ In the same way that one can suggest that the size and shape of the skull of one animal is the evolved result of the size and shape of its ancestor, so can one suggest that the characteristics of the soul are the evolved result of its previous biographies. In this way, the soul adheres to the laws of karma.⁴⁰ The more one understands karma, and more importantly, accepts the responsibility of karma, the more one emerges from the fog of ignorance.

Karma in Anthroposophy

The focus on the individual is emphasized in his writings on karma. An individual accumulates experiences throughout their lives which influence the way they interact with the world. A child, for instance, who is bitten by a spider may develop a fear of the bug for the rest of their life. The events of merely a day before can allow individuals to expand their thinking and conception of the world. This concept, Steiner argues, can not only be applied in one lifetime, but rather a through line can be drawn between all the lives an individual has lived. The conditions within which every body is born will, therefore, be in some way familiar to the soul; the human soul can only live in conditions “he has created for himself and [that] are suited to him.”⁴¹ The experiences one had, and the choice they did or did not make will make up the fabric of their next life. This idea is reflected in the natural science canon of Steiner’s time, specifically in the work of Ewald Hering and Ernst Haeckel. However, neither scientist refers to this as karma and past life memories, rather they explore the concept by referring to it as a form of unconscious memory. Steiner does little to elaborate on this, as the details of their work is not

³⁹ Steiner, “Reincarnation and Karma”

⁴⁰ Steiner, “Reincarnation and Karma”

⁴¹ Steiner, Rudolf. “Answers to Some Questions Concerning Karma - GA 34. Reincarnation and Karma - Rudolf Steiner Archive.” Accessed October 26, 2023.
https://rsarchive.org/Articles/GA034/English/AP1962/ReKarm_questions.html.

important to Steiner. The simple idea that natural scientists were researching an entity that could not be explained by the laws of physical nature in a way that vaguely mirrored his ideas, was sufficient to support his belief in reincarnation and karma.

Developing an understanding of karma constitutes a broadened view of life conditions. Only through karma can one answer the question of why good men suffer and evil men experience joy. The labels “good” and “evil” may only be applicable to this life, though their conditions are created as a result of past lives. Nothing, Steiner suggests, “can happen to the human being in life for which he has not himself created the conditions.”⁴² With each new life, the soul is able to expand its breadth of understanding. The “primitive soul,” as Steiner describes it, acts in accordance with desires. This soul has not yet developed a greater sense outside of itself. In subsequent incarnations, the soul is influenced by past events, not just desire. With every new incarnation, the guidance of desire falls away and experience, which brings with it higher faculties, replaces it.⁴³ The pilgrimage through incarnations is one of upward development. The world grows brighter and the spirit becomes increasingly self-determinative. The question of free will is thus answered: humans are both free and unfree; caught in a perpetual state of growing consciousness. Understanding this truth, though it is often met with derision, should be the primary goal of an enlightened (and therefore more free) soul.

Steiner continues to touch on the concept of karma in his explanations of race and of health. In fact, karma (and its ties to reincarnation) are one of the primary justifications for much of Steiner's philosophy. Steiner was not alone in his fascination with Eastern Asian religions, and his work on karma begins in the context of Theosophy and extends through his death. What is perhaps more important, however, is the thinly disguised hierarchy Steiner establishes in his

⁴² Steiner, “How Karma Works”

⁴³ Steiner, “How Karma Works”

descriptions of karma. Everyone can be divided into levels of consciousness, with younger souls lacking crucial skills that enable them to move through the world. The most advanced souls, conversely, are the only humans who have achieved anything close to free will. It is among this group, and among this group only, that true knowledge can be produced and disseminated. This positions Steiner as an all-knowing figure, or, at the very least, well on his way to accessing all knowledge. It immunizes virtually all of his arguments from criticism by very simply stating that his ideas are too enlightened to be understood by the masses. Karma both informs every single iteration of life a soul experiences, placing responsibility for life conditions fully on the individual, and suggests that each individual has achieved a different level of life, with someone experiencing only a primitive “in the dark” version, while others have achieved a more enlightened understanding of the world. While every soul is responsible, only some have the agency to truly impact the conditions of their next lives.

The life of Steiner is rarely discussed by Anthroposophists or in Anthroposophical institutions, but understanding his charisma helps to contextualize the appeal of his philosophy. Moreover, the core framework that reincarnation establishes in the rest of philosophy begins to reveal how his ideas correspond with fascist elements that promotes the primacy of the individual, and how he reinforces the idea that responsibility is saddled upon every soul, though the individual is rewarded minimal agency in changing their life conditions. His writings on reincarnation and karma clearly reflect the components of fascism that create an overwhelming sense of crisis (in this case the crisis of unknown but necessary karmic punishment) and the superiority of the leaders instincts over abstract or universal reason.

Both of these factors are expanded upon in his most explicitly proto-fascist writings, and his philosophy plays an ever present role in the functionings of Anthroposophy’s institutions,

most prominently in Waldorf schools. The degree to which his philosophy influences the pedagogy ranges between schools, and the extent to which it is shared with the parents also varies by community, but fundamental aspects of it, specifically of reincarnation and karma, essentially shape the way children learn about the world in Waldorf schools. It is crucial to uncover how Steiner's lectures continue to influence and perpetuate hyper individualist, anti-modern, and fundamentally hierarchical ideals in contemporary institutions in order to make sense of the alt-right radicalization of some of its members. The pipeline from crunchy to far-right is established and reinforced often not by Steiner's most explicitly problematic ideas (though they too play a role in radicalization), but by the subtle ways in which hierarchy and superiority shape the educational, farming and medicinal practices Steiner created.

Chapter 2: Modern Anthroposophical Institutions

Examining how Anthroposophy has manifested in contemporary societies around the world is crucial in identifying sites of right-wing radicalisation. It also helps to reveal how the fascist elements of Steiner's work are tangibly reproduced, and further reveals the continued centrality of Steiner as a figure. For the purpose of this thesis, the work of Steiner is only important insofar as it is being recreated and disseminated in contemporary settings. Many of the modern Anthroposophical communities, most prominently Waldorf schools, are struggling to balance the contradictions of presenting as progressive and humanists while still working closely with the philosophy of Steiner. In doing so, they are reinforcing the much darker nature of Steiner's philosophy. This is only sustainable as long as members do not critically engage with Steiner's written work, which most do not due to the convoluted (and odd) nature of it. In this chapter, I explore how modern Anthroposophical institutions function, the membership and reach of each component institution, and the aspects of Steiner's philosophy they intentionally and unintentionally reproduce.

Waldorf Schools

The first Waldorf School was created in 1919 at the Waldorf-Astoria factory in Stuttgart. The story I was told as a student was that after the destruction of the first World War, there was an apparent need to reform schooling, and, by extension, society in a humanist and universalist manner. I cannot pinpoint when this story was told to me, but it is echoed in the writings of other Waldorf Schools, including on the website of New York City's Waldorf school, which states this

form of education was “born out of [this] activism in the aftermath of WW1.”⁴⁴ This telling of the history of my schooling positioned Steiner as a savior, coming in to shape the minds of children to promote equality, deep understanding, and, of course, peace.⁴⁵ This idea is certainly maintained within Waldorf Schools, and while Steiner himself is rarely discussed, he is held with a quiet reverence by Waldorf communities. This is exemplified by the central placement of his portrait, which hangs in every Waldorf School.

A less fanciful understanding of the creation of Waldorf school, explains that factory owner Emil Moolt, who was intrigued by Steiner’s philosophy, invited Steiner to create a school for the children of his employees at the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory. It was an opportunity for Steiner to expand and implement his ideology in a tangible manner, and created a means of disseminating his philosophy to future generations. It was his most successful project, spreading his philosophy to every continent in the world.

Though the story told by contemporary Waldorf schools is misleading, the education did emerge into a culture that was desperate for it. There was an increasing interest in the Lebensreform (life reform) movement in Germany at the time, which rejected modernity, especially industrialization, and favored a more natural way of approaching life.⁴⁶ It included a subsection on Reformpädagogik (educational reform), which discouraged the authoritarian nature of education, and emphasized connection with nature and child-centered teaching methods.⁴⁷ This is especially clear in the creation of “Eurythmy,” a primary hallmark of Waldorf schools. Eurythmy, which is exclusively associated with Steiner, was inspired by the

⁴⁴ Rudolf Steiner School New York City, “Our History” <https://www.steiner.edu/history/>.

⁴⁵ There is some irony to this story, as some theorists, including Peter Staundemaier, argue that Steiner’s philosophy played a role in the philosophy of the Nazis in WWII (Staundenmaier, “Ecofascim”, 1).

⁴⁶ Berner, “Rudolf Steiner’s “Eurythmy”: Between Originality and Zeitgeist,” *Paedagogica Historica* 59, no. 6 (2023): 1197-1215. Besant, Annie, and Alexander Fullerton. *Theosophy*. London: TC & EC Jack, 1912, pg. 1

⁴⁷ Berner, “Eurythmy: Between Originality and Zeitgeist,” 2

Körperkultur (meaning “body culture”) subsection of the Lebensreform movement. Eurythmy is meant to facilitate the growth of the child, encouraging the soul to more deeply incarnate in the physical body. It includes an alphabet and various dance movements performed to classical music or poems. The practice is used both in Waldorf Schools as a part of the curriculum and extracurricularly as a tool for physical and mental healing. It emphasizes rhythm and can be used to “train the will,”⁴⁸ which denotes a certain level of regimentation and control present throughout Waldorf education. However, Steiner himself never engaged in the practice, though at public performances he would often give an introductory lecture. Rather, the daughter of one of Steiner’s close friends, Lory Smits, and Steiner’s wife, Marie von Sivers, were responsible for the performance and training for the practice.⁴⁹

In addition to healing dances, Waldorf education is advertised as providing children with a child-centered education that discourages homework and grades in the lower classes, and emphasizes arts and the outdoors. The education centers around Steiner’s idea of seven year growth cycles, and is meant to nurture the soul as it incarnates in the body. The first cycle from the ages of zero to seven is meant to help the child land in their body. From seven to fourteen, their ethereal body is being shaped, and from fourteen to twenty-one, the astral body is being tended to.⁵⁰ This is fundamental to the education, which, for instance, does not teach students how to read or write until they have entered the second seven year cycle.

Steiner’s philosophy is rarely explicitly stated or explained to students even though it shapes the curriculum. There are only a handful of instances I can identify where Steiner’s understandings of the world were evident. One of my only memories from Kindergarten is sitting

⁴⁸ Berner, “Eurythmy: Between Originality and Zeitgeist,” 4

⁴⁹ Berner, “Eurythmy: Between Originality and Zeitgeist,” 4

⁵⁰ Staudenmaier, Peter. “Anthroposophy and Ecofascism,” n.d.
<https://social-ecology.org/wp/2009/01/anthroposophy-and-ecofascism-2/>, pg. 9

on the carpet in the classroom with my parents on my birthday while my Kindergarten teacher told the class how my soul had crossed the rainbow bridge to enter my body. The rainbow bridge, she explained, served as the connection between the soul world and the physical world. I had crossed over into the arms of my parents who I had chosen to fulfill a karmic connection with. This was a sweet story for my family, however, if there were other children in the room who had a family that looked or acted differently than mine, imposing blame on the child for “choosing” their parents seems incredibly harmful. It reinforces the theme in Steiner’s work that places immense responsibility on the individual (in this case a five or six year old child), yet provides little agency for them to change their present or future conditions. It creates a dependency on Steiner’s philosophy: if one cannot change the conditions for this life, it is essential that they act in a manner that will guarantee better circumstances in the next.

The laws of karma inform many of the pedagogical choices of Waldorf schools. Every class is assigned a teacher who works with the students from the first through the eighth grade (at least in theory; they do not always stay for all eight years). This teacher is destined to be in the lives of each of their students and vice versa. There is nothing inherently wrong with this idea. In fact, there is an element to it that is sweet and suggests a deeper investment of the teacher in their students; it is destiny that they have met, after all. However, there is abundant opportunity for this idea to be exploited. This is clear in the writings of Valentin Wember, a Waldorf teacher who wrote a piece in 2004 exploring the elements of reincarnation and karma as they relate to Waldorf pedagogy. Wember first suggests that soul’s that have lied in previous lives will be reincarnated with mental and/or learning disabilities. He uses the case of lying specifically, because he argues that mental disabilities prevent individuals from being able to differentiate between what is real and true, and what is a lie.⁵¹ Disabled children in a classroom setting,

⁵¹ Bierl, “Wurzeln, Erzeugel und Volksgeister”⁷

Wember suggests, likely lied specifically to the teacher in a past life. This creates a dual karmic lesson: the child is serving time for lying, and the teacher has the karmic responsibility to teach the child despite being deceived by them in a past life. Not only is this a narrow, ableist, and not remotely accurate understanding of disability, it also creates an exacerbated power dynamic between teacher and child. It asks the child to repent for a wrong they did in another life, and implicitly gives the teacher the power to act outside of the bounds of professional responsibility in order to rectify the wrong they incurred in another lifetime. It is well in line with the element of fascism that urges subjects to accept the unquestioned primacy of the leader and their authority over abstract or universal reason.⁵² It also illustrates the authoritarian nature of the child and teacher relationships in Waldorf schools.

Despite being advertised as an alternative to the woes of modern education, for the most part, Waldorf schools reinscribe an authoritarian relationship between adult and child, and center a white, middle-class, and Western ideal of childhood. The education is sold as a way to protect childhood from the perceived dangers of adult life and the risk of growing up too quickly, which manifests itself in strict regulations of what can and cannot be said and done.⁵³ There is some truth to the idea that childhood has become highly regulated, and children are often exposed to inappropriate ideas or images far too young. This is important to note, as it is one of the primary attractions for Waldorf schools, which are often populated by the children of non-Anthroposophists. It is certainly what interested my parents in the pedagogy. Moreover, the education is typically somewhat successful in “protecting” the child from the world outside of Waldorf, but, in doing so, it reinforces some of Steiner’s more nefarious ideas. The ideas become insular, unchecked by anyone outside of Waldorf. Though they are presented as progressive, the

⁵² Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 219

⁵³ Wilson, Marguerite Anne Fillion. "Problematising child-centeredness: Discourses of control in Waldorf education." *Global Studies of Childhood* 12, no. 2 (2022): 118-133, pg. 119

education, to some extent, uncritically perpetuates early 20th century anti-modern and illiberal conceptions of society, through learning “traditional” skills (knitting, gardening, etc), and through the more subtle influence of Steiner’s ethnonational philosophy.⁵⁴

The “threat” of adulthood is primarily described in terms of technology and media, therefore, in the lower grades any talk of movies or of their characters is strictly forbidden.⁵⁵ Rather, play should focus on building a reverence for nature and expanding the imagination of the child. Play is only allowed if it falls under an adult-sanctioned and protected umbrella, which is done at the discretion of the teacher. Art is emphasized, but for children who fall within the “waking-up” cycle (zero to seven years), the use of more than one color is deemed overstimulating, and is forbidden.⁵⁶ Academics are delayed compared to mainstream education models, and children who are able to read before reaching the second cycle, for instance, are considered “too in their heads” and not enough in their hearts. These skills must be developed in sequential order. This by no means signals a lack of emphasis on academic learning, rather it is meant to prepare children to be able to sit down and learn when it is deemed time (according to the ideas of Steiner, not contemporary neurodevelopment research). Freedom to be a child in this model is only achieved through strict regulation and a “surrender to authority.”⁵⁷ This normalizes a level of control and regimentation that is also reflected in contemporary alt-right and fascist groups. It re-emphasizes the element of fascism that insists on the primacy of the group over the individual,⁵⁸ homogenizing child development and insisting on an absolute faith in the authority of the teacher and of the pedagogy.

⁵⁴ Every Waldorf School enforces Steiner’s ideology to a different degree, making it challenging to evaluate them as a whole. In my experience, Steiner and Anthroposophy are followed more closely in Germany and Austria, and far less intensely in the United States.

⁵⁵ Wilson, “Discourses of control in Waldorf Education,” 126

⁵⁶ Wilson, “Discourses of control in Waldorf Education,” 127

⁵⁷ Wilson, “Discourses of control in Waldorf Education,” 128

⁵⁸ Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 219

The role of the teacher as the primary (if not exclusive) authority figure is reinforced throughout the education, providing them the power and responsibility not just to fulfill basic educational requirements, but also, for instance, to separate children into personality types and educate them accordingly. Steiner believed that each individual is dominated by one of four personality types: choleric (fiery and stubborn), sanguine (lively and restless), melancholic (shy but a bit egotistical), and phlegmatic (sedated and dreamy).⁵⁹ Each temperament faces certain challenges in their lives, and each child must learn to control and subdue the nature of their temperament. The temperament assigned to each child will shape their education accordingly; the phlegmatic child must sit next to a melancholic soul, who in turn must sit next to the sanguine, and so on. This serves to balance the energy of the classroom and of each temperament. It serves as a tool to reinforce the lack of individuality and agency that is evident in much of Steiner's work.

The assignment of personality type is not explained to the children, but it often is explicitly expressed at some point in the education. In fifth grade, for instance, my school participated in an Ancient Greek style day of games. For the event we were separated into Ancient Greek cities, and given colored shirts to wear. The choleric children were put in Sparta and wore red shirts, the sanguine, wearing yellow, into Athens, and so on. Debates about which house was best lasted through the end of middle school. The separation of children into personality types is, in itself, quite problematic, but it is made worse by the fact that the teacher that assigns the personality types when children are seven, will remain with them until they are fourteen. It reinforces the very rigidity that Waldorf advertises itself as separate from.

⁵⁹ Bierl, "Wurzeln, Erzeugel und Volksgeister: die Anthroposophie Rudolf Steiners und die Waldorfpädagogik." Konkret Literatur, 1999, pg, 8

Moreover, it reproduces a structure that separates people by how they present. More specifically, how they are perceived within a framework of reincarnation which assumes a long forgotten history of each soul, and a predetermined set of life challenges. Though the content of the categorization is different, it is eerily similar to Steiner's separation and subsequent ranking of the "root races." Especially given the attention towards each student that is emphasized in Waldorf schools, forcing a classification of personality type serves to reduce a child to a few essentialized characteristics. This structure reproduces the element of fascism that suggests that there is a superiority of the leader's (in this case both the Waldorf teachers themselves and Steiner as an intellectual leader) instinct over reason.⁶⁰ In positioning the teacher in a role that requires them to determine and separate children based solely on their experience of the child, both the parents and the children in the class are primed to listen to the unquestioned choices of the authority.

It is important to note that the extent to which Steiner's ideology is enforced is determined by the school itself. Waldorf Schools must be approved by the local or national Anthroposophical Society and are regulated by the state to the extent that any private schools are, however, there is significant room for specific schools to interpret and implement Steiner's pedagogy. Moreover, many Waldorf teachers are not themselves Anthroposophists, and are drawn to the school out of necessity or the appeal of a less state regulated education. In my experience, there was much more of an emphasis on Steiner's philosophy in the lower grades, and by high school it functioned more as a preparatory school than an Anthroposophical school. However, this is not consistent across all Waldorf Schools, and there is an abundance of opportunity for the authoritarian structure of the education to be exploited by alt-right groups.

⁶⁰ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 219

Biodynamic Farming and Holistic Medicine

Steiner's legacy extends beyond Waldorf schools, and includes biodynamic farming and Anthroposophical medicine. Biodynamic farming practices are likely the most accessible to the widest range of customers; biodynamic wines are trendy, and products such as Weleda, Dr Hauschka, or Demeter all utilized both the biodynamic and medicinal standards set by Steiner. These products are not only easily accessible in a local Whole Foods or health food stores, but also promoted by celebrities such as Gwyneth Paltrow.⁶¹ Both the farming and medicinal practices are centered around the core tenets of Anthroposophy, and reinforce the hierarchy that Steiner embedded within his philosophy. Biodynamic farming is a practice that emphasizes soil fertility over crop production, and produces exclusively organic foods. The practice is regenerative and sustainable. The esoteric nature of it includes burying a steer's horn stuffed with manure for a year in order to harness the ethereal and astral radiations in the surrounding earth in order to produce food that is nutritious enough to promote the spiritual awakenings necessary of all people and communities.⁶² The accessibility of these products is important only insofar as it introduces people to Steiner. The philosophy behind biodynamics is not well known, nor is it explicitly expressed on wine labels or face wash tubes. However, the ubiquity of the practice denotes a continued level of influence.

As is explored in the following chapter, electing to be treated by an Anthroposophical doctor certainly requires more knowledge of (and belief in) Anthroposophy. It takes a holistic approach to medical care, considering not just the location of sickness, but the source. This includes evaluating which part of the body is experiencing illness (ethereal, astral, physical, ego),

⁶¹ Nast, Condé. "Gwyneth Paltrow's Guide to Everyday Skin Care and Wellness." Vogue, March 30, 2021. <https://www.vogue.com/article/gwyneth-paltrow-beauty-secrets>.

⁶² Staudenmaier, "Ecofascism," 10

and treating patients accordingly.⁶³ They advertise cancer treatments that do not include either chemotherapy or radiation (though patients are welcome to use both outside of the practice), and promote an understanding of health and sickness that is intimately tied to personal responsibility and karma. These concepts exist outside of medical practices but firmly within the hierarchy Steiner embedded in his philosophy. The idea that every experience is tied to karma is often used to suggest that sickness must be lived through, not prevented. This has produced a disproportionately large anti-vaccine or vaccine hesitant communities, especially in Waldorf schools. This can serve both to influence parents who bring their children to Waldorf schools but may not understand Steiner's philosophy, and can draw in people who are anti-vaccine to the Waldorf community. It plays a crucial role in constructing and maintaining the crunchy-to-alt right pipeline.

Modern Anthroposophical institutions vary greatly depending on where they are located and the extent to which they follow the dogma of Anthroposophy. However, it is clear that each institution carries some elements of the philosophy, and even if they are never explicitly addressed, Anthroposophy and all of the elements it contains are continuously reproduced in these organizations. The hierarchy Steiner developed, and the theme he reinforced that plays great responsibility on the individual but awards them no agency, is reinforced by the fascist characteristics that emphasize the superiority of the group and of the leader over reason. These components are reproduced by contemporary organizations, both because many refuse to engage with the problematic elements of his work, and because, I argue, it is impossible to separate the "bad parts" from the good. Without a critical evaluation of the specifics of Steiner's philosophy, his ideas and the members engaging with them, are primed for and subject to radicalization.

⁶³ Steiner, Rudolf. "Lecture II - Vol. 318. Pastoral Medicine (1987) - Rudolf Steiner Archive." Accessed December 6, 2023. <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA318/English/AP1987/19240909a01.html>.

Chapter 3: Health and Wellness

Health and wellness, especially complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), has become increasingly popular, in large part due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the influence of social media algorithms. Juice cleanses that promise a clean slate for their consumers and supplements that promote the ingestion of sometimes harmful levels of vitamins or minerals are abundant. Alternative medicine providers may both supply care and discourage the use of Western medicine, especially vaccines. Anthroposophists have long played a central role in the world of homeopathy and CAM, and Waldorf schools routinely have large unvaccinated student and parent populations.⁶⁴ It is not the medicinal practices that are inherently harmful; in fact, many (in tandem with Western medicine) may help to relieve symptoms. However, the accompanying philosophy and implications drawn from Anthroposophical medicine reinforce the structures of domination and responsibility-without-agency that is present throughout Steiner's philosophy. This may also serve to bring together Anthroposophists and far-right anti-government anti-vaxxers, especially with the rise of anti-vaccine activism during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The philosophy behind Anthroposophical medicine informs both the practices of trained doctors and amateur readers, which poses a serious risk for people without a medical background who may seek to derive medical advice from Steiner. In order to explore implications and impacts of Anthroposophical medicine, I analyze some of Steiner's lectures pertaining to health, karma, sin, and nutrition, and their tangible and continued impacts on medical care and vaccination rates within Anthroposophical communities.

⁶⁴Freytas-Tamura, Kimiko de. "Bastion of Anti-Vaccine Fervor: Progressive Waldorf Schools." *The New York Times*, June 13, 2019, sec. New York.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/13/nyregion/measles-outbreak-new-york.html>

The Philosophy of Anthroposophical Medicine

Anthroposophical medicine, derived from the work of Rudolf Steiner and Ita Wegmen, is an integrated and holistic form of complementary alternative medicine. It explores both the physical and spiritual aspects of health, and (in theory) combines homeopathic, plant, and natural remedies with allopathic (meaning conventional Western) medicinal practices.⁶⁵ Healing practices include curative Eurythmy, herbal remedies, medicinal baths, and rhythmical massages. Medicine is often administered with special care to timing, and to the biological rhythms of the patient,⁶⁶ all of which mirrors Steiner's philosophy of farming and educational practices, which center the concept of rhythm as a primary or essential aspect of successful care or education. While many of the practices used by Anthroposophical medicine do not appear especially harmful – taking mistletoe tablets, for instance – the advice given by Anthroposophical doctors, especially related to discouraging vaccine use (which importantly is not a doctrine of Anthroposophical medicine, but is quite common) represents a much larger issue. A study done in Switzerland found that a quarter of cancer patients seeking Anthroposophical care had entirely abandoned the tandem use of conventional health care. I can understand the appeal of alternative medicinal care, especially when considered against the failings of Western medicine, but abandoning scientifically backed practices and replacing them with interpretations of Steiner's work can be quite dangerous.

Steiner takes a spiritual science approach to the body, suggesting that it cannot be examined in any way that does not acknowledge the ever present influence of the soul.⁶⁷ An idea

⁶⁵ Steiner Health. "What is Anthroposophical Medicine?" *Steiner Health*, <https://steinerhealth.org/anthroposophic-medicine/>

⁶⁶ University of Michigan, "Anthroposophic Medicine." *University of Michigan Integrative Medicine*. (2016). https://web.archive.org/web/20160310070249/http://www.med.umich.edu/umim/resources/anthroposophic_medicine.html

⁶⁷ Steiner, "Fundamentals of Anthroposophical Medicine"

one has can be connected to preceding ideas or experiences in a web-like fashion, one that Steiner believes mirrors the structure of the brain. If biography can be mapped onto the brain, a concept Steiner introduces when exploring how reincarnation can be proven, then breathing reflects the supersensible world. “The brain,” Steiner writes, “is an Imagination⁶⁸ made concrete; everything connected with breathing is an Inspiration made real, an Inspiration brought down into the world of the senses.”⁶⁹ Steiner applies this same mode of analysis – comparing parts and functions of the body to aspects of the spiritual and cognitive world – to explain the purpose of each part of the body. This informs both the diagnosis and the treatment of illness. The spiritual scientific underpinnings of Anthroposophical medicine are, therefore, reproducing the same philosophical understandings of the physical and spiritual worlds that Steiner posits in his writings on reincarnation and karma. This informs not just where one experiences sickness, but also why. In his extensive writings on karma, Steiner contends that every act committed by an individual, especially one that harms another, must be atoned for.⁷⁰ Illness, therefore, in any form, is the result of the actions of the soul’s past lives; it is a kind of necessary compensation. In rare cases where it is not, the result of the illness or disability will significantly impact the future life of the soul.

Illness, according to Steiner, can never be conceptualized in isolation. Rather, a doctor must evaluate the physical, astral, ethereal, and self-actualized “ich” aspect of each patient’s life in order to make a proper judgment about their health. These four bodies shape Steiner’s philosophy; regardless of the topic he discusses, the impact of the four bodies are the lens through which a concept must be explored. In this conceptualization, chronic illness, for

⁶⁸ Steiner routinely uses capitalization to emphasize words, however it is unclear whether or not that was his intention or a translator’s choice, as all nouns are capitalized in the German language.

⁶⁹ Steiner, “Fundamentals of Anthroposophical Medicine”

⁷⁰ Steiner, “Christ and the Human Soul III”

example, is more likely to be associated with the frivolous and weak character and ego of the individual, rather than a material cause. The first step in evaluating sickness, according to Steiner, requires that “you [have to] ask yourself when somebody comes and says he has been suffering from this or that for years, is what kind of person is he fundamentally? You have to know what basic character type his ego is, otherwise you are bound to go wrong with ordinary medicine, unless you are lucky.”⁷¹ Sometimes this holistic evaluation can result in a simple prescription for change – a change of job for instance – but other times it is impossible to effect change, and the individual is saddled with chronic illness with no hope for relief, due to their wrongdoings in a past incarnation. This reinforces the theme throughout Steiner’s work that places the responsibility for health on the individual, while providing them no tangible agency to achieve or maintain health. This, in turn, requires individuals to turn to a higher authority (in this case, both Steiner and the spiritual world more broadly) in order to find wholeness. It reinforces reliance on a leader and on the community, reflecting both the fascist characteristics that promote the supremacy of the leader and of the group above individual wants or needs.⁷²

Illness is not just associated with failings of the ego or ethereal body; it can also be specific to race and nationalities. According to Steiner, illnesses originating in the ethereal body and presenting in the glands are directly tied to the ethnicity of the individual, and must be treated as such. Grouping together like complaints, such as back pain, from different ethnicities of people is a primary failing of Western medicine according to Steiner.⁷³ This is clearly connected with Steiner’s conceptions of race, especially in how he conceptualizes the influence of higher beings on specific parts of the body. Drawing from his other writings, I believe this

⁷¹ Steiner, Rudolf. “II. Different Types of Illness - 107. The Being of Man and His Future Evolutions - Rudolf Steiner Archive.” <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA107/English/RSP1981/19081110p01.html>.

⁷² Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 219

⁷³ Steiner, “Different Types of Illness”

distinction is important to Steiner because his understanding about the material and spiritual composition of bodies is determined by the planet ruling each of the five root races (an idea explored in the following section). The etheric body, for instance, is expressed through the glandular system. The planet Saturn, which rules the glands, also rules over people native to the Americas. Certainly every human has a glandular system, but in Steiner's philosophy, it may be more emphasized within the bodies of those who are ruled by Saturn. This becomes a salient worry when it is considered within the framework of racial decadence and decline: Steiner positions each race on a hierarchy, and those at the bottom of the hierarchy are set to die out, while those on top will advance to the next evolutionary epoch. Without further explanation from Steiner on how this is applied to health and wellness, I can only draw potential connections between his racial theories and his theories of illness, but it seems to reinforce the unforgiving hierarchy of beings Steiner established. Moreover, claiming a spirituality-determined health advantage reflects the element of fascism that suggests that a given group (in this case those at the top of the hierarchy, the Europeans), has a right to dominate others due to a superiority established in a Darwinian struggle.⁷⁴ This framework is, at minimum, discursively harmful, but certainly could have tangible impacts on the quality of care provided to non-white or non-European patients.

Conceptions of health and wellness are also present in Steiner's more explicitly Christian writings. In one of his foundational texts on the Ten Commandments, Steiner states that the imagination of God must be correct and held true by the individual in order to maintain health for generations, as health, which can only be achieved in a pure and sinless body, is transmitted through blood. This was translated from God to the people via Moses. While many conceptualizations of Moses view his testimony abstractly or metaphorically, Anthroposophy

⁷⁴ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 220

views it as an occult truth, a dictation from God that must be strictly followed. Steiner suggests that “you produce children, parents, grandparents capable of surviving, when you take up the correct imagination of the Divine, otherwise that which depends on the blood will die out.”⁷⁵ This idea places the onus not just on the parents or ancestors of a sick individual, but also on their past incarnations and previous families. It places the great responsibility of maintaining the health of oneself and family (both physical and spiritual), without providing any tangible means or the agency necessary to do so. It also suggests that families that have survived, have done so due to a dominance over weaker individuals and communities. This idea is well in line with the fascist concept that promotes the domination of the superior race.

Only those who understand the correct image of the divine are able to bear children. This belief is set within Steiner’s framework of racial decline, which, among other things, argues that non-white people cannot spiritually develop on their own, and can only hope to live a life free of significant karmic wrongdoings so that they are reincarnated in a white body.⁷⁶ This would suggest that only white (Christian) people should have children. Though this idea is not as explicitly eugenic as mandating that non-white people cannot have children, it does more subtly reinforce the idea that white babies are born with inherent value and the birth of more should be encouraged, while birth rates for non-white babies should decline. The use of Christianity⁷⁷ also allows Steiner to utilize a framework that already places an all-knowing being at the top of hierarchy. In this case, God translates wisdom down the hierarchy, reproducing a structure that does not question the authority or wisdom of God. Steiner capitalizes on this dynamic, and while he does not replace God with himself, he does position himself as a healer, and enforces an

⁷⁵ Steiner, Rudolf. “GA 108. The Ten Commandments - Rudolf Steiner Archive.” Accessed September 21, 2023. <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA108/English/Singles/19081214p01.html>.

⁷⁶ Staudenmaier, “Ecofascism”, 5

⁷⁷ I use Christianity as an example because it is how Steiner frames his work, but this dynamic is present throughout monotheistic religions.

acceptance of (his) authoritarian leadership. Steiner can then explicitly fulfill the role of translator, imparting important wisdom on those who will listen, without having to claim or justify the “rules” he explains. This is characteristic of the fascist dictate to follow a (male) leader.

Contemporary Expressions of Anthroposophical Medicine

Health and wellness took on a particularly strong focus for Anthroposophists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because illness is considered a symptom of karma, and therefore is both predetermined and necessary for a soul’s karmic development, intervening in any way may disrupt the soul’s ability to grow and further incarnate in the body. A study done in Germany tracking the demographics of those participating in anti-lockdown protests found that “Prominent supporters of Anthroposophy took part in and publicly spoke at anti lockdown protests, and Anthroposophical beliefs about natural self-healing powers or alternative medicine were strongly endorsed among protest participants.”⁷⁸ This is consistent with Steiner’s beliefs on illness and healing, and is reflected in my personal experience in Anthroposophical communities. Interestingly, the study also found a strong positive correlation between those who subscribed to Anthroposophy and beliefs in antisemitism and racism.⁷⁹ This suggests first that these anti lockdown protests were not based upon a single grievance (COVID-19 restrictions), rather they represented a much larger fear of decline (a core characteristic of fascism). And secondly, that the lines in Anthroposophy between health and wellness and race and racism are, at best, blurred. This reveals a further, though more subtle, parallel with fascism. Fascism as an ideology is challenging to capture, as it has an unspoken (or more importantly, unwritten) doctrine that shifts

⁷⁸ Liekefett, Luisa, Ann-Kathrin Bärner, and Julia C. Becker. "Hippies Next to Right-Wing Extremists?." *Social Psychology* (2023).<https://econtent.hogrefe.com/doi/full/10.1027/1864-9335/a000509>, pg. 124

⁷⁹ Liekefett et al, “Hippies Next to Right-Wing Extremists?”, 131

to fit the context in which it is used. This makes it challenging to define, but it also reveals the transient nature of the ideology.⁸⁰ Conceptions of health in Anthroposophy, just like race, are not inherent, rather they are used metaphorically to scare and control groups. Because Anthroposophy and fascism share common characteristics, it is unsurprising that race and health would be intimately tied together, as they serve the same purpose. This is especially evident in their reliance on the two elements of fascism that utilize fear of a group's decline and the need for the integration of a purer community. The use of these elements in both race and health and wellness discourses can help reveal why each of the branches of Anthroposophy, though all somewhat unrelated, are so broadly appealing to seemingly disparate groups (parents, hippies, alt-right groups, etc).

Another article published in the *New York Times* found that high levels of vaccine hesitancy or denial were prevalent across Waldorf communities. One parent interviewed for the article explained her reasoning behind not vaccinating her child as a protective measure, suggesting that “As a parent, for me, a lot of my job is to just not put extra obstacles in that soul’s way.”⁸¹ This line of thinking is derived from Steiner’s idea that health and illness are directly tied to soul development and karma. It is prevalent throughout Waldorf communities, including my own. Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, chicken pox went around my second grade class. I begged my mom to let me go to a chicken pox party – a playdate of infected and non-infected children who would share food (a lollipop, a popsicle, etc) in order to infect the healthy children and build “natural immunity.” I was (to my great dismay) already vaccinated against the chicken pox and my mom was horrified by the parties. Nonetheless, the impulse to get your child sick rather than to vaccinate them is present throughout Waldorf communities.

⁸⁰ Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 219

⁸¹ Freytas-Tamura, “Bastion of Anti-Vaccine Fever: Progressive Waldorf Schools”

A mother and author of the blog “The Waldorf Mom,” similarly suggests that illness plays an important role in the social, emotional, and technical development of children. “As long as the illness is properly supported, rather than suppressed, the child emerges somehow more in himself, sometimes with newfound skills and abilities.”⁸² Vaccines, according to her post, pose not only immediate health risks as they carry “toxins,” but also spiritual and developmental risks. She suggests that through rhythm (highly regimented days) healthy meals (no refined sugars etc), limited to no technological use, and the stress-free enlivening education provided by Waldorf can strengthen the child beyond the need for vaccines. She concludes her post by sharing an anecdote: her children both contracted whooping cough, and her older child who had received two rounds of the DPT vaccine fared much better than her younger child who had only received the polio vaccine. Both children were ultimately okay, but it seemed to be an event that caused a fair amount of internal turmoil for her. “Would I have vaccinated against it if I had known what it would be like?” she wonders, “Perhaps. But now that it’s behind me, I feel more confident that my sons have the best protection from this illness.” She concludes the post by emphasizing the significance and the challenges associated with choosing whether or not to vaccinate one’s children. While her thinking represents a hesitancy, rather than a denial towards vaccines, it utilizes and familiarizes readers with the terms of alt-right vaccine denial.

Steiner’s work on health and wellness broadly shares the element of fascism that dictates a need to purify the community. This element of fascism was derived from the discovery of bacteria in the 1880s, and the resulting fear of disease (which conveniently was directed at immigrants, Jews, and other non-white individuals). This manifested as eugenics programs in the

⁸² Tapalas, Panjee. “Vaccines: My Journey.” *The Waldorf Mom: Musings on the Journey through Conscious Parenting*, (2013). <https://waldorfmom.net/natural-health/vaccinations/>

late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁸³ Importantly, Anthroposophists have not taken purification of the community to this extent (or anywhere near it). However, the underlying fear of contamination – especially expressed in relation to the toxins in vaccines and other Western medical interventions – is clearly present in both ideologies. Steiner’s karmic justification for non-intervention in illness, and the implication that illness is, in of itself, a purifying process, both rewards the sick and suggests that the responsibility for health rests solely on the individual (unless of course it can be tied to the genetic continuation of one’s family). The convergence of these ideologies lays the groundwork for the potential radicalization of individuals who travel from crunchy to alt-right.

These ideas are not new. In fact, an article examining the interconnection of anti-vax and political ideologies noted the historical convergence of occultism and proto-fascism in the 19th and 20th centuries, and argued that “it’s not just that right-wing anti-vaxxers exist, but that ‘the anti-vaccine movement is a highly effective channel for the penetration of far-right ideas into left-wing countercultures.’”⁸⁴ Homogenizing the anti-vax movement to suggest that all participants in anti-vaccine protests, for instance, are far-right, fails to acknowledge individuals or groups who fear vaccines because they doubt the safety or efficacy of them. This is a misinformed view, but it reveals a dangerous assumption that often accompanies discourse around anti-vaccine thinking, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Protests, rallies, facebook groups, etc are all sites where radicalization occurs among anti-vax Anthroposophists (who oppose vaccines for spiritual and pseudo-health reasons), and anti-government alt-right groups, though both communities likely approach the issue differently. Many elements of Steiner’s philosophy on health and wellness are underlined with proto-fascist elements which

⁸³ Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism”, 36

⁸⁴ Russell, Francis. "Pox populi: Anti-vaxx, anti-politics." *Journal of Sociology* 59, no. 3 (2023): 699-715, pgs. 70-71

prime individuals for much more explicit alt-right radicalization, especially when alt-right groups and Anthroposophists share the same physical spaces. Equating all anti-vax sentiment with alt-right ideas prevents intervention before radicalization occurs.

Biodynamic Farming and Nutrition

Both in Steiner's writings and in the interpretations derived from them, there is an emphasis both on care for one who is already sick and on preventive care. This is evident in Steiner's approach to diet. While there is no strict Anthroposophical diet, Steiner was concerned with food. In order to activate the spirits that exist within the universe, Steiner argued, food must be transformed via the digestive system. Where there is a lack of spirituality, there is also a lack of proper digestion, leading to illnesses such as diabetes.⁸⁵ When animals ingest plants, Steiner believed that they utilized astral forces to digest it. When humans then consume animals, they have let the animals complete some of the spiritual digestion which then "binds the human being directly to the earth" and deprives people "of the forces that could free them from the earth."⁸⁶ While vegetarianism is a more spiritually clean diet, it also must be accompanied by a conscious incorporation of other spiritual elements. Without spirituality, a vegetarian is no better than a spiritually focused meat eater. These dictations are seemingly contradictory, combining both a laissez-faire individualist approach, and suggesting a high level of regimentation. It is a contradiction that Steiner sits comfortably within, and is reproduced throughout his work. His emphasis on individualism is often overshadowed by the control he exerts in his lectures, as is evidenced by this approach to nutrition. It is both clearly connected to the element of fascism that suggests the superiority of the leader's instinct over abstract reason, and represents an

⁸⁵ McKanan, "Food and Freedom in the Anthroposophical Movement," 17

⁸⁶ Mckanana, "Food and Freedom in the Anthroposophical Movement," 21

entirely separate form of individualism that is often reproduced by contemporary alt-right groups, which similarly exert control while proclaiming to protect individual freedoms.⁸⁷ These conceptual similarities pave the pipeline from hippy to alt-right.

The emphasis on nutrition returned in Steiner's work towards the end of his life. In 1924, just a year before his death, Steiner was approached by local farmers in Switzerland who were struggling to support the crops they had routinely grown in the region.⁸⁸ Crops that could once be grown on the same field for thirty years were now unable to produce a sufficient yield for more than three or four years. Steiner suggested that it was a failing not only of the material-driven contemporary farming practices, but also of the lack of spiritual awareness. This was evident not just in the failing crops, but also in the lackluster nutrition that was produced in surviving crops. The nutrition derived from food, Steiner suggested, was not sufficient for the spiritual development required from individuals. "Nutrition as it is to-day," Steiner suggested, "does not supply the strength necessary for manifesting the spirit in physical life. A bridge can no longer be built from thinking to will and action. Food plants no longer contain the forces people need for this."⁸⁹ Stemming from this worry, Steiner developed the final leg of Anthroposophy: biodynamic farming.

For Steiner, just as spirits stream down onto the earth and influence racial developments and health, so do spirits live within the earth and control the plant world. Divorcing farming from spirituality causes crops to begin to decay or produce fewer yields. In order to sustainably grow foods, the spirits existing within the soil and those that influence it externally must be carefully tended to.⁹⁰ The practices of biodynamic farming range from crop rotation (which is an

⁸⁷ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 219

⁸⁸ Pfeiffer, Ehrenfried. "Preface - Vol. 327. Agriculture" *Rudolf Steiner Archive*, 1958.
https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA327/English/BDA1958/Ag1958_preface.html

⁸⁹ Pfeiffer, "Preface"

⁹⁰ Pfeiffer, "Preface"

incredibly important practice in any kind of sustainable farming) to burying a cow's horn filled with manure for a year to channel the earth spirits. After a year, the horn is dug up and the manure is poured into water and stirred at consistent intervals until it is properly dispersed.⁹¹ It is then spread on the field to prepare for planting. Planting must occur in alignment with the moon cycle, and depends on the type of crop. Steiner also suggests spreading the ashes of burnt mice skin to prevent unwanted plants from growing and to discourage pests from interfering with the fields.⁹² While these practices may strike one as strange, many of the material practices – the bio in biodynamic farming – are well established sustainable farming practices. There exists a legitimacy within the work which often dominates or obscures the spiritual aspect of the philosophy. These practices are undeniably odd, but their connection to the more nefarious nature of Steiner's work is less clear.

It comes, in part, through the level of regimentation evident in these farming practices (down to the number of stirs necessary for the water-manure mixture). They can serve to explain the high level of control Steiner both held and demanded. It reinforces the centrality of Steiner as a leader. It could also reflect the fascist element that privileges the instincts of the (male) leader over reason.⁹³

Steiner also utilized a sense of urgency, suggesting that these practices were essential, and if they were not widely taken up by the middle of the 20th century, then untold damage to humanity would be done.⁹⁴ This, too, is characteristic of the element of fascism that promotes a sense of overwhelming crisis.⁹⁵ He contended that these practices were essential to reviving spiritual life around the world. This suggests that Steiner's positive contribution to sustainable

⁹¹ Staudenmaier, "Ecofascism," 10

⁹² Steiner, "Agriculture,"

⁹³ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 219

⁹⁴ Pfeiffer, "Preface"

⁹⁵ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 219

farming practices was not rooted in a bettering of the environment for the environment's sake, as much as it was a tool utilized to further the fealty to his philosophy. The use of diet is especially interesting as a tool for control, and is often backed by a manipulation of people's fears. It utilizes a fear of overwhelming crisis, which is one of the primary elements of fascism. This fear manipulates followers into submission, as they are forced to decide between a future of untold damage and lackluster food, or one of spiritual enlightenment.

Nutrition is emphasized in both the health world of Anthroposophy and among biodynamic farmers. The combination of the factors Steiner considers in his work on biodynamics— the failings of contemporary life and the resulting failings of food – is artfully consolidated into “ancestral” diets. Though there are specific ways of eating that are common among Anthroposophists, Steiner did not conceptualize an Anthroposophical diet. Followers, instead, have turned to other alternative forms of health to find diets. These diets justified their doctrines by suggesting they model an old and forgotten way of being. They often insist that a return to this imagined past is achievable through a clean diet, especially if it is placed in opposition with the “toxins” that characterized contemporary diets (processed foods, corn syrup, etc). This includes the popular Paleo diet, and Sally Fallon's “Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and Diet Dictocrats.”⁹⁶ Both ways of eating are rooted in an imagined past, especially one rooted in Nordic or Germanic mythologies, where strength and health (and whiteness) dominated. The Paleo diet, for instance, was introduced by white supremacist and eugenicist Walter Voegtlin. Though he was shunned from mainstream Paleo communities, his influence remains and is present even in the much less offensive terms used by Loren Cordain, who popularized the diet. She suggests that humans are

⁹⁶ McKanan, Dan. "Salad, lard, and everything between: food and freedom in the anthroposophical movement." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 23, no. 1 (2019): 14-37, pg. 16

not suited for the modernized world, and must return to the ancestral diet of our forefathers.⁹⁷

These claims are not rooted in research (in fact, research surrounding these diets has produced varied results⁹⁸), however, they are not inherently alt-right or white supremacist. Rather, they utilize the register of terms that may signal an affiliation or susceptibility to alt-right and white supremacist spaces.

Steiner's understanding of health and wellness reinforces the hierarchy he established throughout his lectures, and though the care derived from it can be helpful as a complement to conventional health care, it is also associated with low rates of vaccinations and often an abandonment of Western medicine entirely. His works reveals significant proto-fascist underpinnings, especially related to the fascist characteristics of needing to purify the community, the primacy of the individual, the unquestioned role of the leader (Steiner), and the superiority of a given group over others as determined by a dominance within a Darwinian struggle. Anti-vaxx sentiment paired with activism has also allowed Anthroposophists and alt-right groups to share the same spaces, accelerating the process of radicalization, a phenomenon I witnessed first hand. Unveiling the philosophies behind health, farming, and nutritional practices, is crucial in identifying and intervening in sites where characteristics of fascism are normalized.

⁹⁷ Gershon, Livia. "Why Eat Like a Caveman?" *Jstor Daily*, 2023. <https://daily.jstor.org/why-eat-like-a-caveman/>

⁹⁸ Mayo Clinic, "Paleo Diet: What is it and why is it so important?" *Mayo Clinic*, 2022. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/paleo-diet/art-2011182>

Chapter 4: Race

Steiner's writings on race are perhaps most reflective of the proto-fascist character of Anthroposophy. They are simultaneously the most explicitly racist and fascistic and the most heavily censored of his extensive lectures. Outside critiques of Anthroposophy or its component institutions are typically focused on the racism Steiner espoused. This has produced a significant denial and erasure of his most racist work. Some particularly racist passages have been removed from new versions of his writings, or have never been translated from their original German.⁹⁹ In recent years, especially since the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020, Waldorf schools and other Anthroposophical affiliates have released anti-racist statements. I compare Steiner's understanding of race and the resulting racism that exists in contemporary institutions to the statements published by Waldorf schools in order to explore the continued role race and racism play. The fascist elements of Steiner's work – including the right to dominate over other groups, the dread of decline, and the need for a closer integration of a purer community, among others – are intimately connected to his writings not just on race, but on reincarnation more broadly. I argue that the kind of hierarchical ethnonationalism and racism Steiner posits is impossible to separate from the rest of his philosophy and from Waldorf pedagogies, whether or not it is explicitly expressed within contemporary organizations.

Steiner's Philosophy of Race

Steiner's lectures on race stretch from some of his earliest work in Theosophy to his death, and each text suggests an increasingly convoluted understanding of evolution and various higher beings. In a series of lectures he gave in 1910, titled "the Five Root Races of Mankind,"

⁹⁹ Staudenmaier, "Race and Redemption," 31

Steiner explains the hierarchy of spirits and the geographical area each spirit controls. He begins the lecture by reinforcing the esoteric nature of his ideas, suggesting that they can only be understood in the context of every other lecture he has given.¹⁰⁰ This idea is consistent throughout his lectures and writings, suggesting that his ideas can only be properly understood in their totality, even though his works amount to over 6,000 texts.¹⁰¹ It is important to note that the complexity of the ideas Steiner expresses is challenging to capture, and summarizing his mythological racial ideology inevitably leads to greater confusion. What is consistent across his texts on race is the motif of one group (the Aryans) ascending far beyond what the other groups are capable of achieving. Throughout his writings on race, Steiner connects with the component of fascism that suggests that a chosen people have the right to dominate other groups due their unimpeachable superiority.¹⁰² He establishes and reinforces an impenetrable and internal hierarchical logic, using both his previous work and that of social Darwinists to reinforce his ideas.

It is important to situate his racial ideology within his conception of evolution. According to Steiner, humanity has advanced through various ages, which have been broken down into epochs that seem to reinforce his racial hierarchy by suggesting a pseudo-evolutionary development of the hierarchy. The ages are determined by the relationships between people and the spirits; in earlier ages, for instance, including the Atlantean age which preceded our contemporary age, the spirits were visible to humans through a mist. Moreover, races were not separated around the globe, but lived together as one.¹⁰³ In our current age, the fifth age, there

¹⁰⁰ Steiner, Rudolf. "6. The Five Root Races of Mankind - Vol. 121. The Mission of the Individual Folk Souls (1970) - Rudolf Steiner Archive." Accessed October 21, 2023. <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA121/English/RSP1970/19100612a02.html>.

¹⁰¹ Moore, Hilmar. "Rudolf Steiner: A Biographical Introduction for Farmers | Biodynamic Association." Accessed December 6, 2023. <https://www.biodynamics.com/rudolf-steiner-biographical-introduction>.

¹⁰² Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism", 220

¹⁰³ Steiner, "Five Root Races of Mankind"

have been consecutive epochs where one race or culture dominates. For instance, there was the ancient Indian period of civilization that began at the beginning of the fifth age. Europeans currently dominate, as humanity marches closer and closer to the next age, the sixth epoch. The sixth epoch will be dedicated to spiritual development, and all humanity will embrace each other as brothers and sisters.¹⁰⁴ However, there is a distinct difference between soul development and race development; all souls incarnate in different bodies, however the type of body they reincarnate into depends on how spiritually developed the soul is. Bodies higher on the hierarchy (white and able bodies) will host the most spiritually developed souls, while bodies lower on the hierarchy will eventually degenerate and die out as souls continue to incarnate upwards.¹⁰⁵ As this occurs, races lower on the hierarchy will disappear, presumably leaving only white bodies to advance to the universal humanity of the sixth epoch.

Interestingly, this concept (without the degeneration part), is shared somewhat openly in Anthroposophical spaces. What is emphasized, however, is that every soul will incarnate in every body at some point (as long as we remain in this epoch). This is viewed by Anthroposophists as a humanist or universalist perspective; though there may be systems of inequality, we have all existed in every position, whether dominant or oppressed, at some point. This serves not just to promote the “goodness” of Steiner, but also removes the responsibility of all people to identify and address instances of inequality. If we all have lived in the position of an oppressed group, and have presumably derived spiritual development from the experience, then why would it be necessary to change the material injustices in the world? The argument that Steiner was in fact a champion of equality, is pervasive in Anthroposophical spaces.

¹⁰⁴ Steiner, “Preparing for the Sixth Epoch”

¹⁰⁵ Staudenmaier, “Race and Redemption,” 12

In order to explore the concept of racial and spiritual development, Steiner uses both pseudo intellectual and spiritual justifications for placing each race into a hierarchy. According to Steiner, there are a select few spirits, Spirits of Form, who stream down onto Earth in the same way that sunlight does. These spirits are influenced by Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. The place in which someone develops the “I” (which essentially describes the ego and is a marker of full soul incarnation), is influenced by the Spirit of Form that streams down onto that piece of land, and by extension, the planet that rules the Spirit.¹⁰⁶ The spirit ruling over a particular race can reveal important characteristics about them. The N— race,¹⁰⁷ for instance, situated in the interior of Africa, is ruled by the planet Mercury. The Malayan race in Asia is ruled by Mars; the Europeans by Jupiter; the indigenous people of America by Saturn.¹⁰⁸ This distribution of races is essential to maintaining the equilibrium of the Earth. His insistence on the equilibrium of Earth may suggest some xenophobic tendencies, as he later suggests that “the N— race does not belong to Europe, in the fact that this race is now playing such a large role in Europe is of course nothing but a nuisance.”¹⁰⁹ Though this is not the primary focus of my critique, it is nevertheless a problematic aspect of his work.

Every spirit acts on a particular aspect of the “four fundamental members of man.” The “I” is found in the blood, the astral body in the nervous system, the etheric or life-body in the glandular system, and finally the self-sufficient physical body. This description of the bodies of man is used in his conceptions of health and wellness as well, and reflects both his fascination and knowledge of popular natural science in the early 20th century. The Mercury race, for instance, embodies the quintessence of humanity, with its Spirit Form acting on the glandular or

¹⁰⁶ Steiner, “Five Root Races of Mankind”

¹⁰⁷ Steiner uses an outdated term to refer to Black people in the text

¹⁰⁸ Steiner, “Five Root Races of Mankind”

¹⁰⁹ Staundenmeier, “Race and Redemption,” 18

lymphatic system. More specifically, the Mercury race is led by physicality and desire. The Mercury race is meant to depict Black people, and Steiner suggests that “what transforms the undifferentiated universal human from the distinctive Ethiopian type with his black pigmentation and wooly or frizzy hair is the consequence of their activity.”¹¹⁰ This crude description of Black bodies places an odd responsibility on the individual, both suggesting that their spirit choose the body they inhabit, and removing the possibility of agency from the individual by suggesting they are controlled by the anterior brain and will never have the faculties to develop free will. Moreover, describing Black people as being guided by “physicality and desire” reinforces a frankly lazy racist trope.

In Asia, the Venus forces work on the nervous system of the “y— brown races”¹¹¹ found in Southern Asia. However, Venus works on the nervous system indirectly by influencing the respiratory system. Though this is part of the nervous system, it is not associated with higher mental activity, rather “the unconscious organism is deeply stirred by these Venus forces which work in these racial types.” This is an interesting distinction Steiner makes: it awards the Venus race some autonomy, certainly more than the Mercury race, but it prevents the possibility for self-actualization by suggesting that there cannot be significant access to the higher functions of the nervous system. In reinforcing this tension between responsibility and lack of total or complete autonomy, Steiner justifies the separation and oppression of people he views to be low on the moral and spirituality hierarchy. Without the possibility for spiritual, intellectual, or moral advancement there is no need to strive for the creation of equal conditions.

In America, Saturn reigns over the indigenous people and works through the glandular system. In the Saturn race, forces coalesce to lead to the decline of man. The glandular system,

¹¹⁰ Steiner, “Five Root Races of Mankind”

¹¹¹ Steiner uses the full color, which is both outdated and offensive

which according to Steiner does some of the body's hardest work, appears in the Saturn race through a slow process of ossification.¹¹² Steiner cites pictures of Indigenous people as evidence for this, suggesting their faces look hardened and represent a degeneration of their race.

The Saturn race, unlike the other races, did not advance beyond the Atlantean period (the period in which all humans lived together and could still perceive the spirits acting upon them). When the Europeans met the indigenous people in America, Steiner describes a kind of deep contradictory set of emotions: one representing the last breath of the past of men, and the other representing the future.¹¹³ He presents a romantic mythology of a past of unity and a present of degeneration. It suggests an inevitability of racial conflict and decline; races must die out for others to advance towards the next epoch.¹¹⁴ This, once again, reinforces the overarching proto-fascist theme throughout his writings on race that suggest that there is a "chosen people" who are meant to dominate all other peoples, which is determined by a superior prowess in a Darwinian struggle.¹¹⁵

Next is the Mongolian race controlled by Mars via the blood. Unlike the other races, however, there is another spirit, Jahve, who works in accordance with Mars to separate the Mongolian race into two: the Mongols and the Semites. The influence of Mars explains why there is an emphasis on blood-stream among the Semitic-Hebrew people. This, he argues, is one of the mysteries that gives us insight into the guidance of all mankind. The twofold influence in the blood, Steiner suggests, also points to an important polarity in mankind which must be emphasized in order to understand the Folk Souls. Steiner does not elaborate further on this idea, nor how this mystery points to the guidance of mankind, however, his insistence on separating

¹¹² Steiner, "Five Root Races of Mankind"

¹¹³ Steiner, "The Five Root Races of Mankind"

¹¹⁴ Staudenmaier, Peter. "Race and redemption: Racial and ethnic evolution in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy." *Nova Religio* 11, no. 3 (2008): 4-36, pg. 17

¹¹⁵ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 220

Jewish people, not necessarily as their own race but as a subsection of the “Mongolian” race intentionally places Jews as a distinct group within his hierarchy of race. This is characteristic of the ethnonationalism of Steiner’s time, and paired with his insistence on the balance of races, may also point to a discomfort, if not outright antisemitism, toward the growing Jewish diaspora in Europe in the early 20th century.

Steiner’s insistence on the primacy of Christianity in his work would seemingly be challenged by his rejection of Judaism, as it precedes and is fundamental to Christianity. Steiner is able to avoid addressing this inconsistency by disconnecting Christianity from its Abrahamic roots. Though Steiner does reference some of the mythology developed in the Old Testament, he uses it to demonstrate how humanity became divorced from the intimate relationships once held with the spirits above. Steiner insists that what preceded the resurrection of Jesus (or what he refers to as the “Miracle of Golgotha”), was simply a more disconnected population from the spirits that ruled them. Jesus reconnected the people with the ruling spirits, bringing life and meaning back into the world.¹¹⁶

Lastly, Jupiter acts on the people of Europe. The influence of Jupiter is manifested uniquely across Europe depending upon which sense dominates (the eye, the ear, etc). Steiner argues that this created a particular nationalistic tendency in the region. For the Caucasian race, occult enrichment in its initial stages takes the form of awakening into higher intuition, imagination, and inspiration. Asian populations, on the other hand, can only become enriched through a uniquely respiratory process, one he does not further elaborate on. The suggestion that for both groups the nervous system is being influenced, but only the Aryans have access to higher facilities, reveals a lack of logic within Steiner’s thinking. This is common with racist

¹¹⁶ Steiner, “The Mystery of Golgotha”

ideas, which often cannot be explained, as they tend to function outside of logic, and instead focus on the classification of groups within a hierarchical system of control.

In addition to the need to purify the community through karma, reincarnation, and a spiritual hierarchy that promotes a pagan-esque Christianity, Steiner also seems to express a fear of decline in many of his writings. He insists first that there are particular geographical places where races are meant to live, and second that there are inherent conditions present within each race that either allow them to grow spiritually (as is the case of white people) or prevent their spiritual development unless it is taught by a white person. His work reinforces a seemingly necessary separation of peoples, and any challenge to this does nothing more than dilute the racial purity and sanctity of his spirituality and philosophy. This is especially evident in a lecture he gave in Dornach, Switzerland in 1922 where he states that:

Recently I went into a bookstore in Basel and found an example of the latest publishing agenda: a N— novel, just as the N— in general are entering into European civilization step by step! Everywhere N— dances are being performed, N— dances are being hopped. But we even have this N— novel already. It is utterly boring, dreadfully boring, but people devour it. I am personally convinced that if we get more N— novels, and give these N— novels to pregnant women to read during the first phase of pregnancy, when as you know they can sometimes develop such cravings, if we give these N— novels to pregnant women to read, then it won't even be necessary for N— to come to Europe in order for mulattoes to appear. Simply through the spiritual effects of reading N— novels, a multitude of children will be born in Europe that are completely gray, that have m—¹¹⁷ hair, that looks like m—¹¹⁸!

This fear was not unique to Steiner. In fact, much of Steiner's work is in conversation with other thinkers of his time, and the ideas he posits are reminiscent of the widespread "race science" of the early 20th Century. For Steiner, even the writings of Black individuals threatened the white woman's ability to bear children who reflect both a physical and spiritual whiteness.

¹¹⁷ Steiner used a derogatory term used against Black people.

¹¹⁸ Staundenmaier, "Race and Redemption", 15

Appealing to the purity and innocence of the future generations is common among white supremacists groups and thinkers. The emphasis on fertility as intimately tied with femininity reinforces the “natural order,” an idea that Steiner pushes in his writing. The mass interest in books written by Black authors that Steiner addresses, challenges his core idea that Europeans are the most spiritually and intellectually advanced peoples, chosen by the spirits to rise to the top of the moral order. It also suggests that keeping races separate is not enough to maintain the purity of whiteness; all objects or artifacts from races, too, must be kept separate. These ideas reflect much of the “racial purity” philosophies of the Nazis. This is well in line with the fascist characteristics that suggest a need for a closer integration of a “purer” community.¹¹⁹

Steiner and the Nazi Party

Elements of Steiner’s racial philosophy read very similar to the Nazi’s racial doctrine. In fact, the use and subsequent banning of Anthroposophy in the Nazi party is subject to significant scrutiny, both within Anthroposophical circles, and among outside scholars. Steiner’s work had a prominent and tangible influence on high ranking members of Nazi party. When the Nazi’s gained control of Germany in 1933, there was fear among Anthroposophists about the future of the movement. However, it was derived not from a moral disagreement with the Nazis, but from a similarity between Steiner’s work and Hitler’s writings. An Anthroposophist named Günther Schubarts said “Precisely because Hitler took over some things from Rudolf Steiner, I see a danger in his rise because there is a lack of real spirituality.”¹²⁰¹²¹ There is certainly a concern that his work would be misused, and I am not suggesting that Steiner would have been Nazi had he

¹¹⁹ Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 219

¹²⁰ Staudenmaier, Peter. “Der Deutsche Geist am Scheideweg: Anthroposophen in Auseinandersetzung mit Völkischer Bewegung und Nationalsozialismus.” *Marquette University*. 2012, pg. 478

¹²¹ The quote is translated from its original German: “Gerade deswegen, weil Hitler manches von Rudolf Steiner übernommen hat, sehe ich eine Gefahr in seinem Aufstiege, weil die wirkliche Durchgeistung fehlt.”

lived during their rule, but the explicit acknowledgement of Steiner's influence on the party is important.

Facing the imminent threat of Waldorf schools being closed, a prominent Anthroposophist appealed to the educational minister, arguing that Waldorf schools could easily alter their practices to fit the demands of National Socialism, because "the basic ideas of the Waldorf schools are much closer to the idea of National Socialism than might appear from a superficial overview."¹²² ¹²³ Whether or not Anthroposophists believed this, and were just arguing for the sake of keeping Waldorf schools open, it is a reprehensible and oft forgotten part of Anthroposophic history. Despite their plea, Waldorf schools were shut down in 1941.

Steiner also had an impact on the "green wing" of the Nazi party.¹²⁴ Many prominent figures in the Nazi party were themselves Anthroposophists, and the eventual ban of Anthroposophy came about after years of contention and disagreement between the infamous Heinrich Himmler and Rudolf Hess. Himmler considered the philosophy a threat to his own fascist pagan spirituality, while Rudolf Hess, Hitler's personal representative, was a practicing Anthroposophist.¹²⁵ This convergence was most prominent in the green wing of the Nazi party, which emphasized sustainable practices due to the connection between Germans and the land they occupied. This idea, echoed by Steiner and other prominent philosophers, including the proto-Nazi and good friend of Steiner, Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel, who coined the term ecology, craftily combined environmentalism and racial hierarchy (placing Germans at the top, of course), and was often quoted by the Nazis.¹²⁶ Both philosophers contributed to the creation of

¹²² Staudenmaier, "Der Deutsche Geist am Scheideweg," 482

¹²³ In its original German, the quote states "weil die Grundgedanken der Waldorf-Schulen der Idee des Nationalsozialismus viel näher stehen, als es bei einem oberflächlichen Überblick erscheinen mag."

¹²⁴ Staudenmaier, "Ecofascism," 1

¹²⁵ Staudenmaier, "Ecofascism," 12

¹²⁶ Staudenmaier, Staudenmaier, Peter. "Fascist Ecology: The "Green Wing" of the Nazi Party and its Historical Antecedents." *Marquette University*, 2011.

https://epublications.marquette.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1155&context=hist_fac, pg. 18

ecofascism, which combines eco-mysticism, nationalism, and racism.¹²⁷ At its worst, it promotes genocide as a solution to environmental degradation. Steiner provided a mystical and esoteric framework that already contained a prophecy of racial decline which was well in line either with what some Nazis already believed or what they grew to believe. His work tapped into the core fascist sense of an overwhelming crisis that must be immediately dealt with. Steiner's work provided an answer (though undeniably a horrible one) to the fears of the corrosive effect of industrialization and the separation of the people and their land; the Nazis took these ideas further than Steiner, though they made use of some of the same terms and concepts.

Contemporary Responses to Steiner's Racism

In part, what distinguished Steiner's ideas from other philosophers of his time was his esoteric approach to race. He positioned himself as a messenger for higher beings, instead of directly tying his ideas to himself. The esoteric nature of his ideas also can obscure the blatant racism they express,¹²⁸ which I believe has helped keep Steiner relevant in contemporary Anthroposophical circles. Moreover, it remains virtually untouched, acting almost as a time capsule of early 20th century ethnonationalism. He obscures his racism enough that much of his writing is palatable, and many of the fundamental ideas he proposes exist mostly intact in contemporary Anthroposophical institutions. His most explicitly racist ideas were, and mostly continue to be, ignored by the Anthroposophical society and its branches, with members instead emphasizing a more humanist or universal perspective on race.¹²⁹ In some cases, specific passages have been omitted from English translations without an indication that they ever

¹²⁷ Staudenmaier, "Ecofascism," 13

¹²⁸ Strube, "Esoterik und Rechtsextremismus," 3

¹²⁹ Staudenmaier, "Race and Redemption," 5

existed.¹³⁰ Anecdotally, I have heard the argument that Steiner simply cannot have been racist because there are Waldorf schools and other Anthroposophical institutions all over the world, including in majority Black or brown countries.¹³¹ Though this argument lacks real substance and fails to engage with the written work of Steiner, it does represent a theme of denial and justification present in many of the arguments of Steiner apologists.

In response to the protests in 2020, individual Waldorf schools and the organizations who monitor them have released Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statements. The Association of Waldorf Schools in North America (AWSNA) released a one page statement stating that:

We acknowledge that Rudolf Steiner, founder of Waldorf education (1919), offered many profound insights that support the value and dignity of each human being and form the foundation of our organization's histories and worldview. Yet, he also made statements that reflect harmful assertions regarding race and ethnicity. Racism, explicit or implicit, stands in direct conflict to the fundamental principles of Waldorf education. We commit to working to address any dehumanizing or disparaging aspects of our history and practices.¹³²

Not only does this statement not identify any specific writings or lectures from Steiner, it also fails to distinguish how Steiner's racism may impact the structures of Waldorf education. Certainly, this would be challenging to do; in order to critique the racism Steiner espouses, one would have to critique the systems of hierarchy established in his writings on reincarnation and karma. It would be more feasible to identify quotes that are not as explicitly tied to reincarnation or karma, such as the text from above suggesting that books written by Black authors should be banned from Europe, but this requires that Anthroposophical institutions acknowledge Steiner's

¹³⁰ Staundenmaier, "Race and Redemption," 31

¹³¹ Ironically, the country that is often mentioned by people using this argument is South Africa, which may also point to a failure to understand the history and racial dynamics of the country.

¹³² AWSNA, "Statement of Equity and Racial Justice" *Association of Waldorf Schools of North America*. <https://www.waldorfeducation.org/awsna/statement-of-inclusion-and-equity>

explicit racism. Moreover, there is a clear link between the ethnonationalism he expressed in the early 1920s and the ethnonationalism espoused by Nazis just a decade later. This would contradict the overarching argument that Steiner was far ahead of his time, and those who may reject his philosophy are simply too unaware of the realities of the universe.

The Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen (BdFW), which is the mother organization of Waldorf schools, also released statements addressing the racism expressed by Steiner, both in 2007 and in 2020. In 2007, compelled to comment on Steiner's racism after a Dutch book was published examining his work, two scholars Ramon Brüll and Dr. Jens Heisterkamp published a 20 page referendum at the behest of the BdFW, the Frankfurt Memorandum, claiming that the vast majority of Steiner's work is not racist. The authors claim to be objective authors, though they also state they have a "committed connection to the work of Rudolf Steiner."¹³³ They begin by disputing the idea that the root-races Steiner writes about have anything to do with ethnicity. Rather, they are meant to represent amorphous groups of people or describe humanity at large.¹³⁴ The authors claim that Steiner distanced himself from this language in the work he did later in his life, however he wrote explicitly about race in 1923, just two years before his death, in the text titled "Color and the Human Races."¹³⁵ ¹³⁶ In this text, Steiner explains that the outward expression of race has to do with the ability of each race to absorb and reflect sunlight. Black people, for instance, absorb all of the warmth of the sun, resulting in dark skin. White people, on the other hand, create their own warmth, and therefore do not need to absorb the light of the sun.

¹³³ Brüll, Ramon and Heisterkamp, Jens Dr. "Frankfurt Memorandum: Rudolf Steiner and the subject of racism." 2013. https://info3-verlag.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Frankfurt_Memorandum_English.pdf, pg. 2

¹³⁴ Brüll and Heisterkamp, "Frankfurt Memorandum" 3

¹³⁵ Steiner, Rudolf. "II. Color and the Human Races - GA 349. Colour and the Human Races (1969) - Rudolf Steiner Archive." Accessed December 6, 2023. <https://rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA349/English/UNK1969/19230303v01.html>.

¹³⁶ I found this text in both English and German because I was so surprised by the blatant disregard for Steiner's later writings that I assumed it was a poor translation. It is not.

The ability to reflect it back, like snow, indicates a higher intellectual, spiritual, and moral function. Citing this, Steiner suggests that "Europe has therefore always been the starting point for all the development of the human element in connection with the outside world." Without a reliance on the external world to maintain the functions of the internal body development from humans for the world is possible. This fits well within the register of contemporary alt right groups who emphasize a reimagined history where all moral, intellectual, and spiritual advancement emerged from Europe, but it also aligns with the themes reproduced by fascists. Specifically, it is well in line with the element of fascism Paxton identifies, that justifies the domination of one group over all others.¹³⁷

Brüll and Heisterkamp's critique is not one of substance, rather it rejects the idea of racism entirely from Steiner's work without proper justification. They do recognize the racism in some of Steiner's most explicitly racist texts, but maintain that the majority of his work posits a universalist perspective and the racism is more a symptom of his time than descriptive of his ideology at large.¹³⁸ Even so, it is certainly more detailed than the statement released by AWSNA.

The BdFW updated the original Frankfurt Memorandum in 2020 to include the Black Lives Matter Movement, and has released a new statement this year, though it is supplementary to the Frankfurt Memorandum. It states that: "as schools without selection, segregation and discrimination of their students, [we] see all people as free and equal in dignity and rights, regardless of ethnicity, national or social origin, gender, language, worldview or religion."¹³⁹ Similarly, this statement is more targeted and robust than that of AWSNA, but it certainly does not identify where or how Waldorf schools are meant to address the impacts of Steiner's racist

¹³⁷ Paxton, "The Anatomy of Fascism," 219

¹³⁸ Brüll and Heisterkamp, "Frankfort Memorandum" 13

¹³⁹ Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen, "Waldorfschulen für eine Inklusive Gesellschaft"

work on their institutions. In fact, all of the relevant critiques I could locate failed to recognize that the racism expressed by Steiner reaches far beyond him. It is embedded at every level of Anthroposophy, in all Anthroposophical institutions. Not only do these critiques fail to provide a framework for reform, they fail to even suggest that one is needed.

Denial of Steiner's racism, whether or not it is representative of the rest of his philosophy, has not been effective in preventing racist incidents in Anthroposophical communities. In 2015, a Waldorf teacher in Northern Germany was found to have a personal and previously professional relationship with former SS member Erich Priebke, the man responsible for the massacre of 335 people.¹⁴⁰ A student at the Waldorf school discovered the connection, and despite photos of the two of them working together at a school in Argentina, it took nearly four months for Schröppe to be fired. This is, in part, due to his colleagues who spoke out in favor of his character and abilities as a teacher.¹⁴¹ As recently as May of 2023, Waldorf teachers have been fired for having connections with alt-right groups, including the German "Reichsbürgerbewegung." Similar to the US Sovereign Citizens Movement, the Reichsbürger believe that the German government is a business, not a governing body, and that Germany must restore its territory to that of the second Reich (the end of WWI), or the third Reich (Nazi Germany).

It is evidently impossible to meaningfully critique the racism Steiner expressed and constructed without fundamentally changing the ways in which contemporary Anthroposophical institutions function. It is structurally bound within Waldorf schools. Moreover, it is impossible to separate the racism in Steiner's writings and maintain accreditation through AWSNA. The 38 page document that details how schools achieve Waldorf accreditation, opens by expressing that

¹⁴⁰ Bowry, "German Far Right Conspiracy Theorists Step Up Attempts to Undermine Schools." *Fair Observer*, 2020. <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/kiran-bowry-germany-far-right-conspiracy-movement-waldorf-steiner-schools-covid-19-education-news-13661/>

¹⁴¹ WDR Doku. "Wie Rechtsextremisten unsere Schulen unterwandern." 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQrxlpPEa9>, 7:09

Waldorf schools “work actively with insights from Rudolf Steiner about the incarnating human being.”¹⁴² This intimately ties the work of Waldorf schools to Steiner’s understanding of reincarnation. They further state that Waldorf schools must function around the three seven-year life cycles Steiner explains, emphasizing the “use [of] rhythm and repetition,” and the “student-teacher relationship.”¹⁴³ This simultaneously gives individual schools and teachers quite a bit of room to interpret the work of Steiner as they so choose, and enforces a kind of structural regimentation that is reflected in many elements of fascism and the expression of racism found in Steiner’s writings. If reincarnation must be central to the functionings of Waldorf schools, then how can they separate out the racial hierarchy, the ableism, and the control that Steiner embedded out of the “good” or desirable aspects of Steiner’s philosophy?

There is significant evidence for the pervasive racism in Steiner's work and in contemporary Anthroposophical institutions. These underlying and explicit themes of racism reflect the elements of fascism that insist on the integration of a purer community; the primacy of the group; the dominance of leader; and the right of the group to dominate others based on a superiority established in a Darwinian struggle.¹⁴⁴ These shared characteristics have helped facilitate an interconnection between alt-right groups and Anthroposophists, but it has not established a causal relationship between Anthroposophy and alt-right radicalization. Rather, the similarities can provide a level of familiarity and comfort with these ideas which can lead to the radicalization of some members, or reinforce the ideas already expressed by contemporary alt-right groups. It exists, in part, as a site of knowledge where 20th century ethnonationalism converges with contemporary alt-right rhetoric. The lectures Steiner delivered on race are

¹⁴² AWSNA, “2023 Accreditation Guide,” *Association of Waldorf Schools of North America*, 2023. <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1701198619/waldorfeducationorg/zromektj3jaqawmkwj0s/2023AccreditationGuide.pdf>, pg. 4

¹⁴³ AWSNA, “2023 Accreditation Guide,” 5

¹⁴⁴ Paxton, “The Anatomy of Fascism,” 219

undeniably horrifying to read, but they must be addressed in order to better understand how they are being reproduced in contemporary institutions, and their role and making a new generation more susceptible to alt-right radicalization.

Conclusion / Connections

Anthroposophy, which initially seems to provide a progressive, holistic, and humanist solution to some of the primary issues of our time – health, education, systems of oppressions – actually masks an underlying proto-fascist ideology which emphasizes control and regimination, and constructs mythologies that play on the fears of its members. Reading any of Steiner’s work, even the seemingly harmless lectures, reveals a very odd and convoluted understanding of the world and of spirituality. My parents would often say that they did not understand why my school was doing what it was doing, but they liked the outcomes. Explaining that we had farming class because it was important that we learn to channel the spirits of the Earth is, frankly, ridiculous, but my parents liked that my brother and I were spending so much time outside. Similarly, limiting technology because bad spirits lived within computers (and fluorescent lights) did not resonate with my parents (who shamefully both have phones and computers), but they appreciated that we had painting class instead of computer class. It seemed harmless enough, and the fact that almost every student in my class was white seemed to be more of a symptom of private education, than one of underlying racism.¹⁴⁵ This lack of understanding and inability to identify the harm behind what appeared to be just an odd philosophy is exactly what creates and sustains the crunchy to alt-right pipeline.

Waldorf and other Anthroposophical institutions are not alone in this phenomenon. Elements of fascism exist in many spaces today, especially online. This is commonly associated with young boys being exposed to harmful rhetoric, but exists within seemingly progressive and hippy spaces as well. One scholar, Catherine Tebaldi, has identified groups that utilize this form

¹⁴⁵ Although it is impossible to separate the classism expressed in private education from the racism.

of neo-fascist expression as “granola Nazis.” Granola Nazis describe the set of semiotic elements, including images, practices, and terms used to signify a fealty to a “traditional” moral order. Tebaldi explores how granola Nazis, primarily through the use of social media, utilize and give meaning to a register of terms that pose nature as a representation for traditional gender roles, and promote wellness as a representation for the white supremacy.¹⁴⁶ It facilitates a convergence between seemingly disparate groups by manipulating terms or imagery commonly used by hippy communities (mothers baking sourdough, weaving flower crowns, etc), and attaches them to both male and white supremacists ideas. There is an emphasis on environmental sustainability and health and wellness, which are both intimately tied back to whiteness. It is presented as a form of resistance against the failings of contemporary society and provides a shared (often pagan) spirituality.¹⁴⁷

The register used by Granola Nazis is eerily familiar to the work of Steiner, and to some of the ideas posited by the people I know who practice Anthroposophy. The connections are innumerable, reflecting both the language and terms used by Anthroposophists, and the common elements of fascism that both groups share. In many ways, the groups that Tebaldi identifies as granola Nazis, which utilize the work of people such as infamous white supremacist and felon David Lane, are expressions of fascism and violent discourse that are more severe than those found in Anthroposophy. In other cases, though there is significant variance in Anthroposophical communities, it seems as though the elements of fascism are just better obscured by Anthroposophists than they are by granola Nazis or by other alt-right groups. Regardless, fascism does not appear in its fully actualized form immediately. The work of Anthroposophists

¹⁴⁶Tebaldi, Catherine. "Granola Nazis and the great reset: Enregistering, circulating and regimenting nature on the far right." *Language, Culture and Society* 5, no. 1 (2023): 9-42,pg. 2

¹⁴⁷ Tebaldi, “Granola Nazis,”13

does not have a causal relationship with alt-right radicalization, but in familiarizing members with proto-fascist ideas (including a sense of overwhelming crisis, dread of the groups decline, and the need for a purer community), it becomes more likely that one will become radicalized. There is no complete answer for why my friend's mom ended up attending an anti-lockdown protest with white supremacists, or why she now owns guns, but her progression from somewhat alternative to alt-right is clearly linear. The elements of fascism that exist in Anthroposophical circles are mirrored in the alt-right ideology she now consumes. The jump was not as large as I had presumed; the philosophy behind these communities was not as incongruent as I had hoped. As alt-right groups grow and neo-fascism exists in more spaces, identifying how elements of fascism are being expressed is crucial in intervening and preventing the growth of these nefarious ideas. I can look back at my twelve years in a Waldorf school with much more critical eyes, and begin to unravel how the hierarchy inherent to Steiner's philosophy has shaped my worldview. It is in the process of consciously unraveling harmful beliefs, that alt-right radicalization is prevented.

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