

Social Tripartity as Union of Three Principles

There can be various responses to Rudolf Steiner's idea of social tripartity. Those who acknowledge all alternative or nature-based concepts of life and/or social organisation may welcome it; for sure they will consider it. Technocrats may be upset by the socially-cultural constituent of the Steinerian system, because this is according to them definitely not needed for the sound life of the society and is only for their pleasure. Strict materialists and marxists approbate for no other but economic functions of the society, from who even the politically-administrative are derived. (How nicely has marxism prepared way for an unrestricted rule of supermarket economics!) But even a thinker of the previously remembered group may stop short, when he or she realises how much the steinerian system resembles something that had been here before. Why, Social tripartity is nothing else but slightly re-interpreted and actualised medieval social idea, according to which society was, or at least should be divided into three clearly distinguished classes: those who rule and fight; those who take care about its spiritual wealth; and finally those who work and generate its economic fundament. All the novelty consists in that that now by Steiner there is no talk about classes (to which one would belong for ever) but social functions in the exercise of which all can or even should participate, everyone by its deal and part.

Thus we must answer the question: "Why should work something, which was already abandoned at a time? Do these slight modifications really do that we might forge from this medieval social teaching an instrument for steering the modern society? What consequences would its widespread adoption have? Wouldn't it set us back somewhere to Middle Ages?"

Such questions show that the teaching of social tripartity must be rethought and newly interpreted. This can be one of the attempts at it. It is based upon a certain sociological model, which must be here scheduled first.

The idea of evolution coined itself in the revolutionary period on the verge between 18-th and 19-th Century. However surprising it may be to eyes of our contemporaries, but before this date when attempting to reform the society or the church, never an optimal function or process, no optimal trajectory or path for the society had been sought, but always only their optimal state. When such optimal state had been attained, history would reach its climax and end; nothing would hinder almighty God in setting his final account with the mankind, which would have thus fulfilled its mission; there might be dissension of opinions in the question, whether God would grant mankind some time before the utmost end of the World, before which they would be allowed to enjoy the fruits of such an perfect establishment (i.e. whether there would be any thousand-years' realm of bounty). This was more or less the way, how the reform of the society was viewed by the 17-the Century pansophists. The Age of Enlightenment didn't have alter these ideas very much, it just pushed God out of middle the scene to its very margin, setting the goal to the perfect society itself, which was viewed as kind of perfectly working machine. The idea of social evolution, whereby every state, however consummate and perfected might it be, would still be only a transitory stage – result of previous stages and issuing point for following ones, must have alarmed all those impeccable organisers of society and must have appeared to everyone a really revolutionary notion. But this very idea was it, which the German idealists – Schelling and Hegel -brought in the beginning of the 19-th Century. Evolution by Hegel is different from the later Marxist concept thereof and the difference is constituted by the fact, that it is NOT DRIVEN by anything, that there is no idea of any "propulsive

force”, be it economics or whatever else, but that it realises itself in every moment by means of double synthesis: the well known dialectic synthesis, which means improvement of the two previous mutually antagonist stages of development and a higher-level synthesis, synthesis of cause and purpose (to which the “dialectic synthesis” is only a vehicle); it is thus both driven (as by a spring – a spiral!) and hauled forward towards its merely anticipated aim. (If I, interpreting Hegel, added to its ideas something of Heidegger, let both great philosophers forgive me.)

If we now try to specify, how such a kind of development comes about and how it realises itself in the conditions of society and try to identify both the invisible spring and the invisible thread connecting it to future, we do not find a lot of eventualities. We can, following Marx, identify the propelling spring with the mechanism of production relations, but, to tell the truth, they have only very little of dialectic quality, which proves this attitude to be too narrow. It doesn't touch the point nor explain anything of the truly critical relations.

We land in even worse pitch if we try to see the thread of social evolution which connects present with the future. What are those tendencies or trends, which seal the social development with its mark?

If we make an overview of the past development of mankind and try to discern any unifying element, any lines or threads thereof, we may arrive to something, which sounds more or less like this: Mankind has departed on its way of evolution (no matter by what it was called into effect) very far from the natural state and this gap increasingly rises. Mankind is now making great progress even in *controlling* the nature. It also designs more and more complex forms of social coexistence and of distribution of workforce. The repertoire of technical means it governs increases too. Last, but not least, it must be mentioned that mankind at every stage of its development and in every state and/or social form, beside these its genuine functions, also creates something like a symbolic language with very specific rules, by which it expresses pleasure, satisfaction, pain, desire or hope –it is called *culture*.

Everything which does not belong to this language, i.e. all the previously mentioned things, all the manifestations and products of social development (state or administrative patterns and technological means) I will now summarise in another term, the term *civilisation*. The distinctiveness of both is obvious – although neither of these life environments can exist without the other (and only Marxists, positivists and behaviourists claim that the former can exist without the latter). They represent even a kind of contrary. Let's try to explain this.

Culture is built from the bottom. It is interesting, that the (Latin) stem of the word, which saw the light of the day somewhere in the bygone past and down the Centuries and millenniums nobody in any modern language has found any suitable substitution of it, which means that they all still use it, is the verbal stem *colo*, which has thousand of meanings: My Latin dictionary says e.g.: *cultivate, take care of, dwell, inhabit, honour, revere, worship, adorn, exercise, practice*. I can add one more to it – it is very close to *educate*. The object of *cultura* can thus be a field, a garden; it can mean being particularly fond of doing something or somebody – it can pertain itself to *friendship* as well. It may have even deity or God as its object. What is important, that it always arises due to personal initiative of an individual, or a (small) local community. The greatest cultural feats may extend to cover the whole nation, but they can seldom extend further. Just let's remember how troublesome it is to transfer fruits of culture of one nation or language community to another. Culture, which is in itself

creating of symbols, cannot escape the fundamental symbolic code used in the specific community, which is its language.¹

In principle, there is culture everywhere. We speak about the “culture of Cinerary Urn Fields”, “The Folk Culture of Highlands”... All, even the most primitive nations have their cultural codes, and they may be even pretty complicated. In principle it doesn’t depend on other components of human development, as may be demonstrated for example by the paintings of cavemen. Still, some relation exists here, but only quantitative. It is a well-known fact that communities would reach their utmost cultural expansion (but still only in quantitative sense – “quality” of art or anything similar can be never measured) in moments of material wealth which applies to the society at whole or at least encloses its substantial part and being simultaneously free from any extrinsic cultural pressure. (*inter arma silent musae* – of course.) But you cannot by any means say that nations and cultural communities under such pressure do not produce culture, not even that they do so only in limited extent or that they create only a second-rate one. As an example for the contrary it is enough to point at the Centuries long persecuted Jews or Armenians, who both have been bearers of remarkable astonishing culture.

The ways of *civilization* are different. The word itself (*civilis* is an adjective derivate from *civis*, which means a *city-dweller/burgher*) betrays that *civilization* arises only there, where too many people have gathered, lest they would be able to continue governing their affairs according to traditional family or clan practice, where it has come “so far” that a person you (regularly) meet is dispossessed, stripped of personal features and characteristics, you don’t know him or her by experience and so you *must* shape your mutual behaviour according to certain abstract pattern. First patterns of this type are based upon a class or even caste model, where everyone must be able to be easily classified at the first sight. But caste civilisation, or – in European conditions – professional/class society – doesn’t yet represent the true ideal of civilisation, for its functioning is a two-level one. The required uniformity has been reached on the inter-class or inter-caste level, but castes are still built up predominantly on a patriarchal or matriarchal family principle; in modern society are their relicts represented by *mafias*, *camorras* etc. But establishment of the guilds means that bells are tolling to the caste system. When democratic procedures have taken control *within* them, it remains only question of time, when also their outer margins will dissolve – or be removed; why should anybody maintain them, if the conditions are the same here and there?

Thus complicated is the step-by-step process of building fully developed civilisation. The ideal of any civilisation is lawful equity of all, the same access to social services and/or functions and quite often (but not necessarily) also democratic establishment of the entire society. However these principles can be realised already within the city-state of antiquity, really flourish can they only within the framework of adequately-sized empire. Because civilisation bears also a strong tendency to unification: the aim is that certain performance should be always practises in the same, standardized

1 Only with extreme caution one may talk about „culture“ with respect to larger unit. Still, there are some traces of what may be called “Central-European” or “Mediterranean” culture. These cultural complexes cannot comprise any language-based or culturally-historical symbols, since it is built up and shared by various nations, whose historical experience has been different and who use different languages. It does not remain much then, to which can such a “superstratum culture” extend: art and music, but even these are usually quite different among various nations. The last thing left is thus a stratum of “cultural habits”, which relate to e.g. life regime (*siesta* in the Mediterranean), consumption of certain liquors or beverages etc. Be it so, it might be more proper to talk about *Mediterranean, Nordic, Desert, Central-European, East-Asian* etc *lifestyle*.

way, because they may be performed by various people, and – as it is wont in a large empire - also culturally different! An officer's simple question what have happened during a soldier's guard might be answered by a poetical Frenchman by a catalogue of sounds and scents of the night, by a prosaic German by a list of people passing and of incoming calls and by a phlegmatic Swede by simple "nothing" or a f-word. If the officer should come from another cultural community, it might cause problems. That's why there has been a formula set down for such a routine question- answer form. The more is the society structure or the more structures and/or institutions has it created, the more of such "executive rules" are necessary. Every EU-citizen, no matter what type or level of education has he/she achieved, has to be capable of filling in or creating after the given pattern a vast range of documents from all spheres of public life reaching from taxes to criminal liability.

Following example shows the exigency of unification of civilisation structures: There are various ways of organising city transport. If we stay in Prague, people of my generation do remember: conductors in trams, later lever-operated ticket printing machines, turnstiles, and the present stamping machines; everything in combination with various styles of pre-paid fare. To manage the way of public transport travelling may be a difficult task for a visitor from another town or city. There has never been similar problem in trains, which operate in the same way throughout the country; everyone knows that you must buy ticket in advance, unless you are prepared to pay more on the spot. And after the conductor calls with non-specific words, no-one will be puzzled what that guy might want, but everyone automatically reaches for the ticket.

Far more advanced unification has been achieved for example in banking. Money machines operate in all places of the world (i.e. there, where there are some, but this is virtually everywhere) practically in the same way: we know how to use them even if we don't know the language in which the gadget addresses us. And we could go on to hotels, police, airports, army, courts... this all functions virtually in the same way all over the world.

It might seem, that civilisation brings us just pleasant things. But it contains some danger, too – in particular for *culture*. These arise there, where the spheres of operation of them both and their interests overlap, in the spheres which are shaped both by cultural interpretation and by civilisation patterns. The picturesque way of oriental bargaining, with sums and prices changing from one extreme to another and goods are being assessed due to their every possible aspect, will not hold out long there, where the first supermarket has already opened. Fashion styles represent here a truly specific field (meaning not only vogue i clothing, but lifestyle fashion in general). Styles follow private choice and taste, but still they always make up a kind of "general fashion style", in which something is voiced and materialised which might be defined as "the maximum acceptable individuality with a given uniform framework" Vogue thus belongs both to culture (it is an expression of a certain mindset –of an individual or of a group) and to civilisation. (There is always a certain dressing code required, if you want to appear a socially-adapted, "decent" person). But the cultural side thereof is seldom autochthonous: it is really quickly transferable to other environments (similarly as weapons and technologies).

We can argue with the marxists, whether these just described motions - the culturally-educative streaming, aiming et cultivation of an/the individual or small groups and the general civilisation streaming - are propelled by any kind of "mechanism", or there is none; but the essential thing is, that these movements exist and they represent general evolutionary tendencies and they do and will

guide us towards the future. But we've seen, too, that they are to certain extent contrapositive. How can they guide us then, if each of them leads somewhere else? Even if they weren't totally contrapositive, their ways will split, though, after having escorted us for the maximum viable common path, and their interests will have to conflict at last. The cord binding them together will get strained while the tendencies will bear to their parts; and after that no motion, forward or elsewhere, will be possible. Is there a way how to avoid this? Or – better – can we arrange the things somehow to be able to use two diverging, non-parallel forces (vectors) for the movement in chosen direction? Of course, we can. We need only a kind of “counterweight”, not very heavy, such, whose weight is lesser than the sum of applied forces; and at best controllable, so that we were able to regulate speed of the movement. If we have such “brake” or “anchor”, which must be applied in the *opposite* direction to that, in which we want to move, we can prevent the moment of collision, in which our two “propelling forces” would get to direct, 180 degrees opposition, causing a standstill, and we can use their force to move in the required direction!² I don't know if the metaphor is clear enough, but who doesn't see it through, let him sit down and draw the diagram. It is like hauling a riverboat by a pair of horses on each bank (where the counterweight is represented by the weight of the boat plus the force of the current. The ropes form an angle, but the boat moves forward more or less in direction of the bisector (because the forces on both banks may be roughly equal).

It remains to find what – according to this metaphor or allegory – the third, braking force of the social motion should be. My answer: it is the *regenerative tendency*, which in the metaphor corresponds to the force of the river current. So it is the sum of all (social) tendencies of a conservative, or – why not! – reactionary, backwards character! Tendencies to preserve things in their original (or natural) state. Motions that acknowledge well the natural state of world and its limits and limited potential to change. All of that is for people really necessary. Everyone understands well this human need, although it cannot be always well explained. Why, even the most initiative people have need of sleep.

We've thus created again a tripartite system and it is linked to the previously exposed by the fact that here, too, all its components must co-operate and harmonise, so that the society develops towards prosperity. I know it is not the same as the steinerian system, but there are points of interference, and may be thus used as one of ways of the interpretation of the former one. Let's go through them.

First, there is the creative, cultural tendency, which develops spontaneously, which depends only of the individual and its constitution, and only vaguely of external conditions. This is quite similar to the Steinerian spiritually-cultural impulse; and like it it also aims at the future.

Then, there is something that bounds humanity to the earth and interconnects with natural and material conditions, something that is “preservative” and often shows deep bondage to the past. But these are to large extent also the characteristics of the Steinerian materially-economical component of social life.

The greatest difficulty seems to appear by assignment of the remaining component, which in our model also “hauls forward”, even if in its strange and for humans disrespecting way. It can be glimpsed in processes of mounting bureaucracy in “self-organisation” of practically all social

² The *direction* of the movement is of course given predominantly by the resultant of the active forces and the (relatively small) counterweight can affect it only a little.

structures, which grow steadily and achieve quick the quality of blind intricacy and which we stumble upon at every corner. In the steinerian model its third component should be a balancing, more or less static one, such one which would safeguard order and stability of the community. Here, the congruence is not entire.

But I deem to be able to explain even this disharmony by the way of evolution which the global society has experienced since the 19-th century. If we look at the picture of bourgeois society of the 19-th century, we really may get the impression that the sense of the society, its "raison d'être" lies in the social order – in the system of laws and rules, which are the accidental point of all its efforts. Only hopeless romantics would have seen the purpose of the society in its spiritual productivity, and – on the other hand – few people would have considered economy to be anything more than a support for the sound organism of state.

In the 21-st century, the world looks different- The 20-th century swept away a lot of social orders; rules for the functioning of the society – including the most fundamental ones – kept changing, somewhere even once every ten years, so only very few enclaves like Switzerland could go on to cherish by "social order" characterised by stability and constancy. On the contrary, we have seen during this century, how much the social establishment is connected to civilisation progress: virtual election, regulated lobbying or even internet police may be introduced soon. "Social order" ceased to be guaranty of stability and in this function it was largely replaced by economy. And lately it has been truly pointed out that economics, which does not take into account the (limits of) natural resources moves on one leg. Economical considerations inspired prolifically by environmental thinking may create the desirable counterweight to both presently rather harum-scarum tendencies of social progress and this is just the way like about it and why I still consider it a re-interpretation of the Steiner's idea of social tripartity.

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