The Higher Worlds meet the Lower Criticism
New Scholarship on Rudolf Steiner

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When Rudolf Steiner died in 1925, he was a prominent public figure in Germany. Whether celebrated or castigated – or, more often, puzzled over – Steiner was somebody who called for comment. Obituaries and memorials appeared across the spectrum of the German press, from the Börsenzeitung, the Wall Street Journal of the Weimar Republic, to the Socialist newspaper Vorwärts, from the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung to the Frankfurter Zeitung to the Münchener Neueste Nachrichten. Even the *New York Times* saw fit to mark the passing of “Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Theosophist.”¹

¹ “Dr. Rudolf Steiner, Theosophist, Dies – Leader of Anthroposophical Movement Succumbs in Berne at 65 Years,” *New York Times* (March 31, 1925). Copies of obituaries from the German press can be found in the files of the German Federal Archives: Bundesarchiv Berlin NS5/VI/40345. I would like to thank Christian Clement, Helmut Zander, Egil Asprem,

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This degree of public attention at the time of Steiner’s death stands in conspicuous contrast to his somewhat obscure origins. Born in 1861 on the periphery of the Habsburg Empire, even his exact date of birth is a point of some contention. By the time he became well-known to a larger audience, Steiner was viewed above all as an esoteric teacher and the founder of the Anthroposophist movement, an attempt to renew and expand the Theosophical tradition in Germany and abroad. The *London Daily Express* captured the typical image of the time, referring to him as “Dr. Rudolf Steiner, the mystic occultist.”

But Steiner’s early career followed a different path. After studying at the Technical College in Vienna, he established himself in the 1880s and 1890s not as an occult thinker but as a journalist and editor with literary, scientific, and philosophical interests. The “Dr.” in his name referred to a doctorate in philosophy received in 1891. Steiner worked for years at the Goethe archive in Weimar, editing Goethe’s texts on the natural sciences. In 1897 he moved to Berlin to edit the *Magazin für Litteratur*. He made several unsuccessful attempts to find an academic position. Shortly after the turn of the century, Steiner found his way to well-heeled Theosophical circles in Berlin, joining the Theosophical Society at the beginning of 1902. Within a few months he was named General Secretary of the German branch of the Theosophical Society, an office he held until breaking away ten years later to found the Anthroposophical Society.

Steiner’s swift transition from independent free-thinker to esoteric leader has never been easy to explain, one of many details about his intellectual development that have proved challenging for scholars studying Theosophy and Anthroposophy. That is one reason why the new critical edition of selected Steiner texts, arranged and edited by Christian Clement, carries so much promise. By offering careful textual comparisons between the various editions examined here.

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Alicia Hamberg, Michael Eggert, and Angsar Martins for critical discussion of the issues examined here.

2 *London Daily Express*, April 11, 1921. The brief article, filed from Berlin by an unnamed “Daily Express correspondent,” claims that “Steiner’s followers for the most part belong to the richest and most important families” in Germany. Other contemporary sources observed that Anthroposophy “seems to have attracted its following largely from the cultured middle-classes, young intelligentsia, physicians, students, artists, and officials, those classes most directly affected by the cultural crisis of post-war Europe.” Paul Means, *Things that are Caesar’s: The Genesis of the German Church Conflict* (New York: Round Table Press, 1935), 112.

of Steiner’s major published works, Clement’s project marks a significant step forward in scholarly engagement with Anthroposophy and its ideological origins. It also highlights the ongoing difficulties inherent in any attempt to bridge the gap between esoteric and academic standpoints.

Clement is a former Waldorf school teacher who left his native Germany for an academic career in the United States. After earning his PhD in German Literature at the University of Utah, he is currently associate professor of German Studies at Brigham Young University. The new Steiner edition arose out of Clement’s work creating and maintaining the Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, a German-language website designed to make Steiner’s texts accessible to a broader readership. In interviews with Anthroposophist media, Clement – who is not an Anthroposophist himself – has forthrightly discussed his sympathetic approach to Steiner. This places him in a productive but conflicted position on the boundary between esoteric and scholarly discourses, an ambivalence reflected in the editorial project itself.

The series of Steiner texts in the projected eight volumes of the *Rudolf Steiner Kritische Ausgabe* include works from Steiner’s pre-1900 philosophical period as well as central titles from his mature Theosophical and Anthroposophical teachings. The two volumes under review here are the first to appear; eventually they will form volumes 5 and 7 of the overall set. Each features a distinct pair of works: volume 5 consists of Steiner’s 1901 book *Mysticism at the Dawn of the Modern Age* and its 1902 successor *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, while volume 7 centers on Steiner’s seminal esoteric text *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds*, originally published in 1904, as well as its lesser-known sequel *The Stages of Higher Knowledge* from 1905. The edition as a whole is being published in cooperation between the Rudolf Steiner Verlag, the official Anthroposophist custodian of Steiner’s collected works, and the distinguished Frommann-Holzboog publishing house, whose origins date to the early eighteenth century. This fact alone is a sign of the new edition’s pioneering character; it indicates both a novel openness in parts of the Anthroposophist leadership, and a willingness within established German philosophical circles to engage with Steiner’s works. Clement’s ability to bring these two worlds together is no small achievement.

Reactions from within the Anthroposophical milieu have been decidedly mixed. Some Anthroposophists have denounced Clement as the agent of an anti-Steiner conspiracy, while others have praised the project for bringing Steiner’s writings to a new generation of readers in a textually reliable format. Scholarly responses, though sparse so far, have been equally equivocal, commending Clement’s impressive editorial labors while questioning some of
his interpretive assumptions. In his role as initiator and coordinator of the project, Clement has been admirably straightforward in dialogues with critics and supporters alike, depicting his efforts as an attempt to respect Steiner’s self-conception while making his work more palatable to modern philosophical readers. At times, this involves a desire to vindicate Steiner philosophically.

How well does this approach work? From a historical as well as a philosophical perspective, the results are uneven. The edition itself is handsomely produced and eminently practical. For each selected text, Clement has gone to the trouble of assembling every version published during Steiner’s lifetime, clearly marking all textual variations in the manner of a standard critical edition. This makes the volumes extremely useful for any philosophically informed and historically attentive engagement with Steiner’s ideas and their development over time. Moreover, Clement has attempted to track down the original source for every passage Steiner quotes from other authors – a formidable task in light of Steiner’s frequent failure to identify his sources – as well as passages where Steiner appears to paraphrase earlier publications. This procedure reveals just how much Steiner borrowed from previous authors, often without attribution. It also underscores a contentious question raised in prior research by other scholars: did Steiner plagiarize from existing texts? Was he trying to pass off others’ work as his own, or was he careless and hurried, or was he stitching together disparate elements in ways that weren’t meant to be deliberately deceptive?

Though it is true that Steiner’s practice was not compatible with the scholarly norms of the time, Clement points out that this was not really his aim in the texts in question. The post-1900 Steiner, in transition to full-fledged occultist, had little incentive to follow academic conventions. His books on mysticism from 1901 and 1902 grew out of invited presentations to Theosophical groups. He did not present those works as scholarly treatises, but saw his role basically as a synthesizer, drawing together a range of sources in order to provide an accessible narrative to his new-found Theosophical audience. Clement shows that the sources Steiner borrowed from were often secondary works offering broad overviews of large philosophical and historical fields. Steiner’s method does not expose him as an inveterate plagiarist; it reveals him as an eager speaker and writer looking to put his stamp on the fin de siècle interest in mysticism.

4 Clement has collected more than two dozen reviews of the first two volumes at the website he has created to accompany the project: www.steinerkritischeausgabe.com. The next volume is scheduled to appear in late 2015.

5 Schriften über Mystik, xxx–xxxii.

6 See Schriften über Mystik, xxxi, as well as Clement’s thorough Stellenkommentare, 234–339.
In addition to providing a rich textual basis and thoroughly researched annotations, the new edition includes extensive introductory and contextual material framing Steiner’s works. These sections constitute a substantial portion of the edition; Clement’s introduction to volume 7, for example, is nearly as long as the entire text of *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds* itself. It is here that Clement’s own perspective plays a crucial role. His combination of sympathy and critical acumen works relatively well with Steiner’s texts from the transitional period just after 1900, when the future esoteric leader was moving toward Theosophy; the two books collected in volume 5 document this shift. But the same volume also includes a number of notable missteps. Perhaps the most striking is Clement’s reliance on a set of ostensible transcripts of Steiner’s original 1901–02 lectures to Theosophists that formed the basis for *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. The documents Clement cites are not in fact transcripts of Steiner’s original lectures, but ex post facto constructs assembled out of fragmentary notes taken by a Theosophist who was present at the lectures. Though Clement does not mention it, the documents in question were evidently composed several decades after Steiner’s death.

The issue at stake here is not merely one of textual integrity – Clement invokes the dubious source in his introduction and commentary, not in the apparatus accompanying Steiner’s published text – but one of conceptual and historical accuracy. In the published version of *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, Steiner makes no mention of central Theosophical concepts such as karma and reincarnation. This is not surprising, since Steiner at this stage was still in the process of familiarizing himself with Theosophy’s teachings. According to Clement, however, the supposed ‘transcripts’ refer continually to reincarnation and thus show that Steiner was thoroughly immersed in Theosophical concepts at the time. This claim is unfounded. What the ‘transcripts’ reveal are the esoteric preoccupations of the Theosophist who compiled the notes; they are not a reliable indication of Steiner’s own views in late 1901 and early 1902, which are instead spelled out in book form in *Christianity as Mystical Fact*.

Why does this matter? Clement’s ill-considered references to the purported ‘transcripts’ form part of a larger argument: Like many Anthroposophists, Clement posits a fundamental continuity between Steiner’s pre-1900 philosophical works and his post-1900 esoteric teachings. Clement’s underlying argument represents a more sophisticated version of a longstanding trope in Anthroposophical discourse, one that presents Steiner as the inheritor and

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fulfillment of the legacy of German Idealism. This notion, though often overblown, is not inherently implausible; Steiner’s early philosophical works were indeed steeped in the traditions of German Idealism, and a number of classical Idealist thinkers gave serious attention to esoteric themes. Hartmut Traub’s monumental 2011 study *Philosophie und Anthroposophie* examines these connections in great detail and offers illuminating insight into the development of Steiner’s early thought. Other scholars, such as historian Helmut Zander, have emphasized the discontinuities in Steiner’s work before and after the turn of the century. The continuity thesis faces several significant obstacles. Aside from the strikingly divergent character of Steiner’s works from different points in his life, his published comments on Theosophy during the 1890s – the decade immediately before his embrace of Theosophical precepts – were unremittingly negative.

Nonetheless, the ongoing scholarly debates over Steiner’s intellectual development address a challenging question that does not accommodate easy answers but calls for sustained and careful interdisciplinary analysis. Proponents of the continuity thesis will eventually have to confront the pronounced discrepancies between Steiner’s early philosophical writings and his later esoteric teachings. Those discrepancies are essential to understanding the formation of Steiner’s ideas and the changes in his worldview over time. Attempts to discount or downplay the differences between the earlier and later Steiner, in the hope of harmonizing those differences into one putatively integrated whole, fail to reflect the complexity of his thought. They do not do justice either to Steiner’s early philosophical project or to his later esoteric cosmology, and consequently misjudge the relationship between the two. Clement’s edition makes it possible for readers to put together a detailed chronological account of these shifts and changes across Steiner’s works, even if some of Clement’s own conclusions are open to question.

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The two books that make up volume 5 show Steiner’s initial foray into mysticism, but they are not mystical texts themselves. They hint at an author working his way from Haeckel toward Blavatsky, and exhibit Steiner’s customary combination of the occult and the scientific. The centerpiece of volume 7, on the other hand, is Steiner’s foundational esoteric tract *Knowledge of Higher Worlds*, a manual for students of the occult seeking access to the Higher Worlds promised by esoteric doctrine. According to Steiner, the path he outlined offered verifiable knowledge of these Higher Worlds, available to anyone willing to follow his stages of initiation. The book’s opening lines declare:

There slumber in every human being faculties by means of which he can acquire for himself a knowledge of higher worlds. Mystics, Gnostics, Theosophists – all speak of a world of soul and spirit which for them is just as real as the world we see with our physical eyes and touch with our physical hands. At every moment the listener may say to himself: that, of which they speak, I too can learn, if I develop within myself certain powers which today still slumber within me.10

While Steiner’s transitional texts from 1901 and 1902 are often well suited to Clement’s sympathetic approach, his reading of *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* is much less persuasive. The latter book represents the first full-fledged presentation of Steiner’s mature esoteric epistemology and is one of the canonical works of Anthroposophy. In later editions of the book, Steiner went to considerable lengths to distance his message from his Theosophical predecessors. Much of Clement’s interpretation follows this line, even though the material collected in volume 7 abundantly demonstrates the extent to which Steiner drew on previous Theosophical works. In his introduction and commentary, Clement is particularly concerned to dissociate Steiner from Blavatsky. Thus, large stretches of the volume read like an attempt to rescue Steiner from himself, to salvage a philosophically respectable variant of German Idealism from his bold explorations of the Higher Worlds.

Part of this strategy appears to be anchored in a basic misconception about the nature of Western esotericism and the origins of Theosophy. Clement strongly underscores the modern and Western character of Steiner’s esoteric form of meditative self-knowledge, something that is unremarkable from a historical point of view. But Clement’s assessment in several places suggests a naïve understanding of allegedly Eastern models and their Western

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proponents. This is a point that has bedeviled other commentators keen to distinguish Steiner from his Theosophical precursors and contemporaries; the argument often depends on the notion that there was something genuinely ‘Eastern’ about Blavatsky’s syncretic project in the first place. It overlooks the fact that Theosophy itself was already thoroughly modern and Western before Steiner came along.

This point indicates the most remarkable omission in a volume of more than 600 pages: the lack of any sustained engagement with the ample scholarship on Western esotericism. Aside from Zander’s historical research, which largely serves as a foil for Clement’s own arguments, and the excellent studies by Traub and Baier, Clement does not discuss any of the extensive literature on these topics. There is no mention of the highly relevant research from Wouter Hanegraaff or Olav Hammer, to choose two of the more significant examples, or even the specific studies of Steiner’s esoteric epistemology by Wolfgang Schneider, Heiner Barz, Alfred Treml, Julia Iwersen, or Heiner Ullrich.


This is an unfortunate missed opportunity to relate discussion of Steiner’s work to the growing body of scholarship on esoteric and occult currents more generally, and it has important consequences for Clement’s reading of Steiner. Paradoxically, many of Clement’s annotations to Steiner’s text seem fundamentally at odds with Clement’s stated conclusions.13 Similar dynamics arise at other points in volume 7, sometimes in reaction against standard textual procedures. An otherwise minor example illustrates the problem. Discussing Steiner’s appropriation of the fictional figure of the “Guardian of the Threshold,” introduced in an 1842 novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Clement writes that “critics” of Anthroposophy have raised the “accusation” that Steiner adopted this figure from Bulwer-Lytton’s literary work.14 But this has nothing to do with criticism, much less with accusations; it is a simple statement of Steiner’s source. Bulwer-Lytton used a variety of names for the figure – “Dweller of the Threshold,” “Haunter of the Threshold,” and so forth – and in German translations the phrase “Hüter der Schwelle” soon established itself, sometimes in feminine grammatical form.15 The phrase appeared in references to Bulwer-Lytton in German occult periodicals in the 1880s, and Steiner himself explicitly cited Bulwer-Lytton’s novel in Knowledge of Higher Worlds,16 where the phrase is used to describe two important beings encountered in the course of the occult pupil’s path of initiation.17


13 See, for example, Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung, xxix, xxxiii, cxi, cxiv–cxv, 241, etc.
14 Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung, 319.
15 Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Zanoni (London: Saunders & Otley, 1842); Zanoni: Ein Roman (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1842); the current Anthroposophist edition is Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale (SteinerBooks, 1989).
16 See Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung, 145
17 German Theosophist Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden referred to Bulwer-Lytton’s “Hüter der Schwelle,” in Hübbe-Schleiden’s journal Sphinx, an important early esoteric periodical, in 1887: Hübbe-Schleiden, “Zöllners Zurechnungsfähigkeit und die Seybert-Kommission,” Sphinx: Monatschrift für die geschichtliche und experimentelle Begründung der übersinnlichen Weltanschauung auf monistischer Grundlage (November 1887): 321–28. Steiner readily acknowledged the link between his own references to the Guardian of the Threshold and its earlier literary instantiation,
Contrary to Clement’s claim that Bulwer-Lytton’s fictional creation and Steiner’s esoteric figure have “virtually nothing in common,” the parallels are unmistakable. Joscelyn Godwin describes Bulwer-Lytton’s “Dweller of the Threshold” as “a hideous personification of one’s past thoughts and evil tendencies, which even if not perceived lures the aspirant towards disaster.” These parallels are unsurprising in light of Bulwer-Lytton’s involvement in proto-Theosophical milieus and the novel’s overt Rosicrucian references. Godwin characterizes Bulwer-Lytton as a “pivotal figure of nineteenth-century occultism.” Steiner borrowed other elements from the Victorian novelist, such as the notion of “Vril” as an occult force. As Julian Strube has shown in his thorough study of the Vril myth, Steiner played a key role in promoting this idea in Germany.

Clement’s discussion overlooks this crucial context. Detailed research by Theodore Ziolkowski and others has established the importance of such literary borrowings for modern esoteric thought. The re-purposing of literary sources for devotional and meditative functions, as well as their refashioning as forms of scripture, testament, and doctrine, has been a prominent feature of writing that “Bulwer Lytton’s Zanoni contains in novel form a description of the Guardian of the Threshold.” (Knowledge of Higher Worlds, 159)

18 Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung, 320
emergent spiritual approaches for a long time. It was an especially important element in the modern occult revival out of which Anthroposophy emerged. By ignoring this background, Clement misses another significant way in which Steiner helped shape the contours of Western esotericism in the modern era.

These lapses notwithstanding, volume 7 does provide important material on the Theosophical origins of Steiner’s esoteric work, against the grain of Clement’s own interpretation. He acknowledges Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater as sources for *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* and devotes pages to tracing Steiner’s gradual appropriation of Theosophist concepts.23 He also offers insight into the shift in tone from Steiner’s turn-of-the-century works to his mature esoteric pronouncements.24 What is missing is a broader sense of the fin de siècle intellectual atmosphere, in Germany as elsewhere, which left such a deep impression on Steiner’s subsequent writings.25

Steiner was hardly a unique figure around the turn of the twentieth century; there were many others searching for ‘higher worlds’ in various ways, whether through science or through initiation or through contemplative practice. Understanding Steiner’s specific contributions to this search means

23 *Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, xxxvi–xxxvii and xlvi–xlvii.

24 Contrasting *Knowledge of Higher Worlds* to the 1901/02 texts from volume 5, Clement writes: “Hier spricht nicht mehr eine Stimme, die ein kritisches Publikum durch Argumentation von der eigenen Position zu überzeugen versucht, sondern eine solche, welche die Autorität eines Wissenden für sich in Anspruch nimmt und als Lehrer zu Schülern spricht, d.h. zu Menschen, die den ‘Pfad der Erkenntnis’ schon beschreiten und insofern bereits für sich eine Vorentscheidung über die Validität des Vorgebrachten getroffen haben” (*Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung*, xxvii). Steiner’s contemporary Hans Freimark was more blunt, offering a vivid first-hand description of his speaking style: “Steiner liebt die hohenpriesterliche Gebäude, in seinen Vorträgen und in seinen Schriften. Es ist nicht ohne Eindruck, wenn auf der Rednerbühne der hagere Mann die dunkelglühenden Augen zur Decke richtet, das strähnige schwarze, in die Stirn fallende Haar mit einer ruckenden Kopfbewegung zurückschleudert und die gelblichen schlanken Hände wie segnend hebt. Diese Pose hat Stil. Und ihr entspricht seine Stimme, die von suggestiver Eindringlichkeit ist und die die wunderbaren Tatsachen, die er erwähnt, seinen Zuhörrern in einer Weise nahebringt, die man nicht überzeugend nennen kann, wohl aber als überredend bezeichnen muß.” Hans Freimark, *Moderne Theosophen und ihre Theosophie* (Leipzig: Heims, 1912), 40.

assessing his work not just in relation to earlier generations of German Idealist philosophy but also in the context of comparable esoteric endeavors in the years immediately prior to Steiner’s Theosophical turn – figures such as Franz Hartmann or Carl Du Prel, who anticipated central components of Steiner’s mature esoteric outlook. Without taking this context into account, sympathetic readings of Steiner run the risk of wishful thinking, in a fruitless effort to re-cast Steiner’s later esoteric teachings as an extension of his early philosophical works. That sort of reading will only appeal to those already committed to Steiner’s principles.

In an odd way, Clement’s comments sometimes seem to sense this restricted audience, even as his project strives to transcend it. Though he does not make use of the rich scholarship on modern occultism, he regularly draws on Anthroposophical secondary literature. He is particularly indulgent toward the work of Lorenzo Ravagli, a prominent Anthroposophist and editor of Erziehungskunst, the chief journal of the Waldorf movement. Ravagli’s writings are typical of the effort by Steiner’s followers to defend their esoteric worldview against external scrutiny. His publications are Anthroposophical apologias marked by an aggravated tone toward scholars who study Steiner, above all Zander. Astonishingly, Clement at times places Ravagli’s polemics against Zander on the same level as Zander’s scholarship. Indeed Clement himself often has a notably difficult time taking Zander’s research seriously, and frequently portrays Zander as a critic of Steiner rather than a historian of Anthroposophy. This fundamental misconstrual runs throughout both volumes, and significantly vitiates Clement’s analysis.

Despite the insights that Clement brings to Steiner’s Knowledge of Higher Worlds, his overall interpretation remains unconvincing. His approach is too imbued with Anthroposophical assumptions and his conclusions fit too

26 See e.g. Franz Hartmann, Ein Abenteuer unter den Rosenkreuzern (Leipzig: Theosophisches Verlagshaus, 1899); Hartmann, Unter den Adepten. Vertrauliche Mittheilungen aus den Kreisen der indischen Adepten und Christlichen Mystiker (Leipzig: Lotus Verlag, 1901); Carl du Prel, Die Philosophie der Mystik (Leipzig: Günther, 1885); du Prel, Die monistische Seelenlehre: Ein Beitrag zur Lösung des Menschennächts (Leipzig: Günther, 1888).


28 E.g. Schriften über Mystik, xxxiv, or Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung, lxxii

29 Examples include Schriften über Mystik, lxv, and Schriften zur Erkenntnisschulung, lxxiii, lxxx, and 319.
neatly with Anthroposophical expectations. But it has also exposed a rift within the Anthroposophist movement, with Steiner’s more conspiratorially inclined followers convinced that Clement’s project forms part of a nefarious plot to sacrifice Anthroposophy’s esoteric truths at the altar of academic respectability. Less myopic admirers of Steiner, meanwhile, have greeted the edition with enthusiasm, appreciating its potential for widening the appeal of Anthroposophist ideas. If the former fear that Steiner will be neutralized by scholarly niceties, the latter understand the promise of a refurbished and reinvigorated Steiner clad in the prosaic garb of philosophical Idealism.\footnote{Recent signs from mainstream Anthroposophist publishers indicate that the anti-Clement faction enjoys considerable support among Steiner’s English-speaking followers; see e.g. the new translation of one of the more scurrilous attacks on Clement by Pietro Archiati, a prominent Anthroposophist in German-speaking Europe: Archiati, \textit{Spiritual Science in the Third Millennium: Intellectuality versus Anthroposophy} (Forest Row: Temple Lodge Press, 2015), distributed by SteinerBooks.}

A historical approach yields a different story. The search for greater forms of knowledge and spiritual experience beyond the confines of established religion and academic science was a fundamental element of the modern German occult revival. Many of the people drawn to this milieu were highly educated and steeped in German cultural traditions, including the classics of Idealist thought. A large proportion of them came from the ranks of the \textit{Bildungsbürgertum}, the educated bourgeoisie. Steiner’s background in Idealist philosophy facilitated his remarkably rapid transition to a leading role within the German Theosophist movement. He offered, in effect, exactly what his audience wanted to hear: familiar Theosophical themes presented in the idiom of German high culture, with ample invocation of figures like Fichte and Schelling and Goethe. What Theosophy promised was a “synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy,” in Blavatsky’s famous phrase, and Steiner was well positioned to provide just that, packaged in ways that appealed to German Theosophists in particular.\footnote{H. P. Blavatsky, \textit{The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy} (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888).}

After his post-1900 esoteric turn, Steiner emphasized the traditions of German Idealism in a wide range of contexts, such as enlisting them for patriotic purposes in the early years of World War I. Facing this historical situation need not detract from what was innovative in Steiner’s thinking. But it is a useful reminder that grand narratives about the unfolding of Spirit in the mode of German Idealism were by no means unique to Steiner, whether before or after his Theosophical turn. This is another reason to pay attention to the
specific features of Steiner’s individual texts and heed the particular arguments they make. Thus, for all its flaws, it is essential to recognize the enormous service that Clement has done for all scholars studying Steiner, whatever their interpretive orientation.

The critical edition provides a new basis for future research on Theosophy and Anthroposophy. At its best moments, Clement’s familiarity with the philosophical context raises the quality of his analysis far above the level typically found among Steiner’s followers themselves. For that very reason, it merits critical attention and debate. And its most debatable aspects go to the heart of Clement’s project as a whole. The approach he adopts in the first two volumes all too often reduces the later Steiner to an extension of the earlier Steiner. It cannot account for the fantastic profusion of new ideas that defined Steiner’s public pronouncements after his embrace of esotericism in 1902. The explosion of creativity that marks Steiner’s post-1900 esoteric works has no precedent in his earlier works. It is not just a sudden shift in tone and style and format, but a profound innovation in content. The fluidity of his categories, the imaginative range of his ideas, the willingness to flaunt established modes of knowledge and challenge conventional conceptions of the world – including recognized philosophical models and existing intellectual frameworks – all signal a fundamental departure from his previous approach to understanding reality. The esoteric Steiner after 1900 was engaged in a daring new project, one that diverged in the most elemental ways from what came before.

For any academic with a sympathetic attitude toward Steiner, it is appealing to re-cast his mature esoteric years as a smooth continuation of his early philosophical explorations. That version of Steiner is comforting and familiar, readily compatible with the premises of the modern academic world. It assimilates Steiner’s esoteric teachings into recognizable academic categories. But this approach does not let Steiner’s esoteric texts speak for themselves. It does not allow his mature thinking to unfold according to its own categories and its own promises, which were quite different from conventional academic standards. It does not give Steiner’s esoteric ideas the breathing room they deserve, the chance to develop on their own terms, to follow their own path. It renders these ideas docile and reassuring rather than provocative and unsettling.

In trying to make Steiner more agreeable to a twenty-first century academic readership, Clement has hollowed out the most challenging and most difficult parts of Steiner’s teachings. But it is these very parts that make Steiner such an interesting historical figure. The Steiner we are left with, in Clement’s version, is flattened and tamed. The historical Steiner was much more disruptive and
much more ambitious. To lose sight of that unruly side of Steiner, in the hope of streamlining and updating his message, does not do justice to the acute ambiguities in his thinking. Even sympathetic observers must at some point acknowledge this dimension. Though the sanitized Steiner makes a more attractive candidate for admission to the academy, he is scarcely recognizable in an esoteric setting.

For better or worse, that is the Steiner we need to understand. Rather than rehabilitating or legitimating Steiner, the proper starting point for scholarly engagement is the more demanding project of comprehending Steiner. Whatever its interpretive shortcomings, the painstaking textual work that Clement has put in to this new edition make it an invaluable resource for any scholar studying Steiner. It is also a sign of how far scholarship on Steiner still has to go in coming to terms with this enigmatic figure.

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The aim of this article is to examine how Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical ideas were reflected and put into practice in the lives of the Finnish couple Olly (Olga) Donner (1881–1956, neé Sinebrychoff) and Uno Donner (1872–1958). They encountered anthroposophy in 1913 and subsequently embraced it as the guiding principle of their lives. Through a close examination of these two people we aim to shed light on how a new worldview like anthroposophy, which was gaining followers in early twentieth-century Finland, was also a manifestation of wider changes in religious culture in Europe. Our perspective could be described as biographical in the sense that it has been characterised by Simone Lässig (2008: 11) who writes that ‘the reconstruction of individual life courses helps to discover more about the context – for example, about daily rituals, pious practices, or kinship relationship’. Thus, the biographical perspective serves as a tool for grasping how something as deeply personal as an anthroposophical worldview was understood and practised, not only by Olly and Uno Donner, but also by a larger group of people who in the early twentieth century were looking for new ways to make sense of the surrounding world.

Introduction
As we are aiming to understand and describe a wider group of people through our study of the Donner couple, the question of what group they represent is relevant. In the Finnish context, their way of life was in many ways exceptional, and they did not represent the generic Finnish anthroposophist of their time. They belonged to the educated elite of the bourgeoisie in Helsinki, which, combined with the personal freedom their financial independence granted them, enabled a cosmopolitan lifestyle for them. This also provided the opportunity to explore diverse ways of practising anthroposophy, both within the Anthroposophical Society and in their private lives. Their social circles were European, rather than exclusively Finnish, and they were a part of a transnational network of anthroposophists. As participants of that network, they were less exceptional and represent a group of privileged, well-to-do, transnational and first-generation anthroposophists, who were crucial actors in spreading the movement to several countries.

For this study we have gone through material in a number of archives. The Donner couple’s extensive personal archives are kept in the library of Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland. Because many of the early Finnish anthroposophists have left very scant, if any, archival traces, Uno and Olly Donner’s archive provides a rare view of anthroposophy in the early twentieth-century Finland.¹ Their archive contains an abundance of correspondence in Swedish, German, English, French, and occasionally Russian, to family, friends, and business contacts in both Finland and Europe, together with other personal documents such as passports and calendars. Unfortunately, the letters are mostly written to the Donners, and not vice versa. The references to anthroposophy are many, but more often related to outward activities such as the organisation of the Anthroposophical Society than to matters concerning personal spiritual training and practices. The few letters where the private side of anthroposophy is

¹ Kersti Bergroth is one of the other rare early Finnish anthroposophists who has been studied. See Ristilä 2011, Mahlamäki 2014 and Mahlamäki 2017.
discussed indicate that it was perceived as a personal matter which was openly discussed only with trusted friends who were anthroposophists themselves. The clear evidence of the importance of anthroposophy in their lives, combined with the apparent lack of material concerning its personal dimension, suggests that the Donners have excluded parts of their correspondence from the public archive.

In addition, we have used the archives of the Anthroposophical Societies in Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Through annual reports, annual meeting minutes, membership lists, and the societies’ correspondence we have been able to follow the Donners’ engagement in the Anthroposophical Society. Some documents have been obtained from the patient archive at the anthroposophical clinic in Arlesheim, and from the archives of the Albert Steffen foundation, both in Switzerland.

Together these archival sources provide a window through which it is possible to catch a glimpse of the forms anthroposophy took in the lives of these two first-generation anthroposophists. However, the main part of the archival material concerns the Donners’ more public activities, such as their involvement in the Anthroposophical Society or interest in anthroposophical pedagogy, while their personal anthroposophical practices, beliefs, and views can be traced only through fragments of evidence. This has led us to focus the article on the anthroposophy-related practices and activities in Uno and Olly Donner’s lives, rather than on their doctrinal views or spiritual experiences. Religious views can and do manifest in individuals’ activities both on a personal and public level, and practice – what people actually do – is a fundamental aspect of religion, as research into lived religion has shown (Hall 1997: vii–xiii; Orsi 1997: 3–21; Orsi 2003). Through tracing the activities of Uno and Olly Donner, we seek to study the intersections between the personal and the public, and to show how more obviously public and social activities such as engagement in the Anthroposophical Society also had personal dimensions, and how activities such as meditation, which may be perceived as something private, also had social aspects. Furthermore, this practice-focused approach is relevant because the spiritual and the practical are understood to be closely intertwined within anthroposophy. Hence, the practical applications of anthroposophy should not be seen as mere additions to a spiritual core, but as significant spiritual elements in themselves (Ahern 1984: 50).

The activities we discuss are related to the Anthroposophical Society, art, biodynamic agriculture, pedagogy, self-education and health. Some of them were shared by the couple, some of them were more important to one or other of them; but all are united by a common anthroposophical foundation. Although these practices were unique and personal to the Donner couple, they were also practices that reflected the dimensions and applications of anthroposophy that were developed by Rudolf Steiner, and shared by many members of the Anthroposophical Society. Therefore, examining the practices of the Donner couple sheds light not only on them as individuals, but on new ideas that anthroposophists in Finland and elsewhere were putting into practice. Because anthroposophy was one of several western esoteric movements which gained popularity around and after the turn of the twentieth century, this article also illuminates wider changes in the religious landscape in Finland and Europe.

We begin the article by providing first a short biographical sketch of the lives of Uno and Olly Donner, and a short introduction to Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy. Then we continue by discussing the different practical aspects of anthroposophy: the Donners’ activities in the Anthroposophical Society, their interest in biodynamic farming, pedagogy, self-education, and healthcare.

**Olga Sinebrychoff and Uno Donner**

Olga (Olly) Donner was born as the only child of Nicolas Sinebrychoff (1856–96) and Anna Sinebrychoff (née Nordenstam, 1854–1944). This upper-class family was wealthy and well connected in Finnish society through both personal and professional networks. The Sinebrychoff family had earned its fortune by owning a brewery in Helsinki. Nicolas Sinebrychoff worked as the manager of the company for seven years, until he became ill with tuberculosis, and ten years later died from it. His father was the rich commercial adviser Pavel Sinebrychoff (1799–1883). His mother Anna Sinebrychoff (1830–1904) led the company after the death of her husband, and was
well known for her charity work. Anna Sinebrychoff belonged to the distinguished Nordenstam family, and as a young woman she had a position as the lady-in-waiting at the court of the Russian Czar. Her father Johan Mauritz Nordenstam (1802–82) had carried out the tasks of the governor-general in Finland, among other things, and her mother was a daughter to a Russian officer and related to both Pushkin and Lermontov.

Olly Sinebrychoff spent many of her teenage years in different schools in Europe – as her mother had done in her youth. Through her education she learned to speak five languages (Swedish, German, French, Russian and English), read the classics of world literature, practised writing poems and painting, and as a young girl was already able to evaluate the operas of Wagner. She was interested in painting, writing letters, visiting the opera and theatre, and reflecting on social questions. It is easy to see the roots of her later cosmopolitan life as having originated in the international context of her youth (correspondence between O. Donner and A. Sinebrychoff, vols 20 and 31, ÅA).

Uno Donner (1872–1958) was the son of Otto Donner (1835–1909) and Louise Donner (né Malm, 1834–84). The Donner family had a history in trade, but during the nineteenth century, an orientation towards academic circles had emerged. Uno’s father was a professor of Sanskrit, a senator in the Finnish parliament, and a businessman. His mother Louise was the daughter of Peter Malm, a wealthy Ostrobothnian merchant. After the death of Louise, Uno’s father married Wilhelmina (Minette) Munck (1848–1922), who was the daughter to the university vice chancellor Johan Reinhold Munck. She became the mother of in all nine children in the large family; there were five children from her husband’s former marriage; one from her former marriage and three more were born from her marriage with Otto Donner. Both together and separately, Otto and Minette Donner engaged in various kinds of charity work. The Donner family was well connected to the academic, the political, as well as the economic sectors, and thus firmly rooted within the elite of the bourgeois circles in Helsinki, Finland (Dahlberg and Mickwitz 2014: 117–49, 175–80).

Uno Donner was first intended to have an academic career, but because of his poor health, he switched from the university to an education as an engineer and a businessman. This included studies abroad, and in the spring of 1899 his studies brought him to Dresden, where he met Olly Sinebrychoff. They seem to have fallen in love immediately and their marriage took place in Vevey near Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1900. Uno Donner forged a career in the spinning industry and among other things founded the first spinning company for combed wool in Finland (Dahlberg 2014: 301–3; printed card dated 27.5.1900, Grand-Hôtel du Lac, Vevey, stating the wedding dinner menu, vol. 48, ÅA).

The couple led a cosmopolitan lifestyle. They always had rooms in Helsinki at Bulevardgatan 40, a building owned by the Sinebrychoff family,3 or at Norra Kajen 12,4 a building owned by the Donner family, but they travelled widely in Europe and spent several months abroad every year. Even when they spent time in Helsinki they often stayed at a hotel. From around 1914 until 1921, they lived in Sweden. In Finland, they owned the manor at Gerknäs in Lohja from 1928 until 1946 and, from 1926, they also had a summer villa called Granorp in Karjaa (Donner 1959).

The Donners did not have any children and instead of family life, they devoted their time to various other interests. Anthroposophy was an interest they shared, and one can see reflections of this anthroposophical core in many of their other activities. Uno ran his business affairs from wherever the couple stayed at the time, but apart from that, he worked actively with organising the first Anthroposophical Society in Finland. In addition, he both practised and taught anthroposophy within the society, studied painting, eurythmy, and was the first to experiment with anthroposophical biodynamic farming in Finland. Olly Donner expressed her anthroposophical views in her many novels, but also practised Steiner’s pedagogical and health-related ideas in her home for disabled children and in the school and summer camp that she supported financially. Furthermore, they both practised anthroposophy as a way of spiritual training and self-education.

3 Today the building is known as the Sinebrychoff Art Museum.
4 The building was commissioned by Otto and Minette Donner, and planned by the architect Magnus Schjerfbeck (brother of the painter Helene Schjerfbeck), according to sketches by Sebastian Gripenberg (Dahlberg and Mickwitz 2014: 188–189).
Rudolf Steiner and the Anthroposophical Society

Anthroposophy was the invention of Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). He was born in the village of Kraljevec in the Austrian Empire (present-day Croatia). During Steiner’s childhood the family moved often because of his father’s work as a telegraph operator, but later the family settled down to ensure Rudolf a good education. After high school (Realschule) Steiner studied mathematics and natural sciences, as well as German idealistic philosophy at the Vienna Technische Universität, and then embarked on an academic career. From 1882 to 1897, he worked as the publisher of Goethe’s scientific writings and in 1891 he graduated as a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Rostock. After this, he deviated from the academic path (Zander 2008, Band 1: 122–3).

In late nineteenth-century Berlin Steiner became acquainted with the literary circles and bohemians, but it was in the theosophical circles he found an audience that was interested in his thoughts. He soon became the general secretary of the German section of the Theosophical Society, and held the position from 1902 until 1912. Gradually Steiner’s usage of European traditions and Christian mysticism in his teaching, and his reluctance to accept Jiddu Krishnamurti as the World Teacher led to tensions with the leader of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant. Ultimately, in 1913 Steiner and the German section were expelled. He immediately countered this setback by founding his own Anthroposophical Society, which gained around 2,500 members, most of them having been theosophists earlier who now decided to follow Steiner instead (Zander 2008, Band 1: 123–4, 151–67).

As a thought system anthroposophy is built on an array of ideas that come from different historical currents. During his theosophical years, Steiner was thoroughly acquainted with western esoteric thought, as well as the eastern Hindu and Buddhist influences that were incorporated in theosophy. This theosophical influence is clearly visible in Steiner’s thought, although he preferred to be critical of it himself. Steiner’s original contribution was to westernise theosophy by including elements from Christian mysticism and Rosicrucianism, as well as incorporating a good deal of German Naturphilosophie, such as Goethean thought (Ahern 1984, Lejon 1997).

Steiner’s extensive activity left the world with an enormous body of published lectures on a multitude of topics, which makes it difficult to summarise his central ideas. This short sketch is only meant to present the main aspects that are central to Uno and Olly Donner’s activities. Steiner believed that spiritual skills can be developed in the same way as other skills, so that anthroposophy centres on the idea of developing one’s consciousness in an attempt to join the spiritual in the human being with the spiritual in the universe. Steiner’s cosmology is a complex construction of an evolutionary model encompassing the original state of the spirit over vast eras of time developing into a state of materialisation, and then returning back to the original spiritual state. His own time Steiner regarded as the turning point from materialism towards re-spiritualisation. The path towards higher levels of spiritualisation spans several human lives, through a process of karmic rebirth. The human being that strives towards spirituality has, according to Steiner, four different aspects: a physical body, an etheric body, an astral body, and an ego.6

5 For example, Steiner wrote several of the books that are considered central readings within anthroposophy, during his time as a theosophist: Theosophie (1904), Wie erlangt man Erkenntnisse der höheren Welten (1904), Die Geheimwissenschaft im Umriß (1910).

6 For a more detailed description and analysis of Steiner’s anthroposophical thought, see Geoffrey Ahern, Sun at Midnight (1984) and Zander 2008, Band I & II; for Steiner’s own description, see An Outline of Occult Science (Geheimwissenschaft im Umriß, 1909).
In addition to this theoretical structure, an array of practical anthroposophical applications were developed following Steiner’s ‘indications’: esoteric training through meditative exercises, the arts (eurythmy, speech formation, painting, sculpture, architecture); Waldorf education (also known as ‘Steiner education’); extended medicine; biodynamic agriculture; and, concerning societal organisation, ‘The Threefold Commonwealth’ (Ahern 1984: 50–64). Geoffrey Ahern accurately describes these practices as ‘meditative applications, or applied meditations’ to point out how closely bound the spiritual and the practical are understood to be within anthroposophy (Ahern 1984: 50).

The Donner couple and the Anthroposophical Society
We do not know how Olly and Uno Donner first encountered anthroposophy, but during a visit to London in 1913, their interest had certainly been aroused. Through their friend Harry Collison, a central character in the British Anthroposophical movement, they came into contact with other anthroposophists. The novelty of anthroposophy as both term and movement is visible in the choice of words in the letters. In 1913 Collison still wrote about ‘theosophists’ (H. Collison to O. Donner 27.4.1913, vol. 10, ÅA), while Olly Donner’s mother used the word ‘anthropos’ in her letter to Olly (A. Sinebrychoff to O. Donner 11.12.1913, vol. 22, ÅA).

Through Collison, the Donners were introduced to other anthroposophists, such as Alfred Meebold, leader of a London group (H. Collison to O. Donner 8.5.1913, vol. 10, ÅA), and the Finnish-Danish baron Carl Alphonse Walkeen-Borneman, a true cosmopolite who worked for the anthroposophical movement in all the Nordic countries as well as Germany, England and France (Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls, Biographien Dokumentation, Walkeen-Borneman, Carl Alphonse). During the winter of 1913, Walkeen-Borneman was in London, and Olly and Uno Donner appear to have followed several of his lectures (Oxford University Calendar, vol. 106, ÅA).

Steiner himself happened to be in London giving lectures in May 1913 (Schmidt 1978: 200), and it seems Uno and Olly Donner met with him personally. The mediator was Harry Collison, who in letters dated around the end of April told Olly that he had ‘arranged an interview with the Doctor’ and advised her on what to ask Steiner (H. Collison to O. Donner 27.4.1913 and a letter dated ’Saturday’, vol. 10, ÅA).

After this encounter with Steiner’s teachings the Donners continued to study anthroposophy both through Steiner’s writings, by following his lectures around Europe, and by spending time in Dornach, Switzerland where the Anthroposophical Society’s centre, the ‘Goetheanum’ was being built. Their interest in finding like-minded company is well exemplified in Collison’s letter of 27.4.1913, in which he invites them to Munich with the words ‘Here you would find plenty of friends, artists & theosophists, who would not bore you with tea table gossip, which you have discovered to be all sham’ (H. Collison to O. Donner 27.4.1913, vol. 8b, ÅA). In June 1913 Uno and Olly Donner were convinced enough to both enrol as members in the Anthroposophical Society (membership lists, GD).

For details on Harry Collison, see Hawkins 2011.
The years in Sweden

During the First World War, the Donners settled in Sweden. First, from around 1914 until 1916, they lived in the countryside manor of Beateberg in Uppland, north of Stockholm, and in 1917 they moved to an apartment on Hjorthagsvägen in Stockholm. The war made travelling difficult and cut them off from the European anthroposophical circles. This distressed them, and in 1918 Uno Donner wrote to Alfred Meebold that 'not being able to hear Dr. S. speak in such a long time pains us daily, and we often discuss the possibilities to come to Dornach' (U. Donner to A. Meebold 30.1.1918, vol. 8b, ÅA). The Donners did, however, find the local Swedish anthroposophical circles. It is unclear how or where they first made contact with the Swedish anthroposophists – it might have been in Dornach as well as in Stockholm – but, from 1917 when they moved to Stockholm, they became active members of the local community.

As on many occasions later on, they used their financial means to advance the anthroposophical movement. On 17 March 1917 Uno Donner wrote to Gustaf Kinell, the general secretary of the Swedish Anthroposophical Society, to offer the society an apartment in a newly-built house at Rådmansgatan 14 in Stockholm. The offer was to let the society use the apartment for meetings, lectures, festivities, and other purposes for at least the two following years. Uno Donner promised that he together with Olly would take care of all costs. These included not only the rent, but also the costs for heating, cleaning, light, furniture, necessary tableware, and other utensils, which would all be given to the society as a gift. The Donners’ only wish was that it would remain a secret to the members of the society who was behind the gift. Kinell and the chairs of the groups gladly accepted the generous offer. Later correspondence reveals that the Donners extended the original offer of two years, and provided the society with the apartment from October 1917 until October 1921 (board meeting minutes 25.3.1917 and 31.8.1921, ASS).

On 20 May 1919 both Uno and Olly Donner were registered as members of the Stockholm group that was founded on the same date, and thus became members of the national Swedish Anthroposophical Society (membership list 1913–1931, ASS). Both participated actively in the meetings of the Stockholm group, and, in addition, Uno Donner also gave lectures and beginners courses in anthroposophy (A. Ljungqvist to O. Donner 1919–34, vol. 17, ÅA; calendar of 1918, vol. 106, ÅA). Even after they had moved back to Helsinki, he gave lectures for the group members during visits to Stockholm (Sigrid Henström to U. Donner, April 1925, ASS). On the 30 December 1923, a few years after the Donners’ return to Finland, they were both accepted as members of honour in the Stockholm lodge as an acknowledgment of their services for anthroposophy in Sweden (membership list 1913–1931, ASS).

The Donners also became close friends with some of the members in the Stockholm lodge, especially Mrs Anna and Gustaf Ljungqvist and Miss Helene

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8 Today the street is named Erik Dahlbergsallén.
9 ‘Täglich thut es uns weh diese lange zeit Dr. S. nicht hören zu können und überlegen wir uns oft die Möglichkeiten nach Dornach zu kommen.’
10 Gustaf Ljungqvist (1852–1922) and his wife Anna Ljungqvist (1865–1935) were members of the
Flodin, and kept in touch with them after they moved back to Helsinki. In their letters, they often plan trips and meetings in Dornach or elsewhere in Europe and send their regards to mutual friends in various locations, which reveals that the anthroposophical network of Uno and Olly Donner was above all transnational (A. Ljungqvist to O. Donner 1918–34, vol. 17, ÅA; H. Flodin to O. Donner 1918–35, vol. 12, ÅA).

The return to Finland

After their return to Finland by the end of 1921, the Donners did their best to further the anthroposophical movement there. They were not, however, the first to present anthroposophy in Finland, because Steiner’s reputation had already spread through the theosophical circles. His work had already been translated into Finnish in 1910 by the Theosophical Publishing House in Finland and books were available at the theosophical library which had opened in Helsinki in 1897. Since 1910 there had been lodges within the Theosophical Society in Finland that focused on Steiner’s teachings (documents of the annual meeting 16–17.4.1911, FTS). Steiner had even visited Helsinki twice, for the first time in 1912 giving lectures both for members of the Theosophical Society and for the public. During the second visit in 1913, he no longer was a member of the Theosophical Society, but the founder of the new Anthroposophical Society, which during the same year gained around 150 Finnish members (Pohjanmaa 1937: 48, 60; documents of the annual meeting 21–24.6.1914: 10–11, FTS).

Uno and Olly Donner stepped into the picture when the Finnish Anthroposophical Society was founded in December 1923. The timing was not a coincidence, but related to a larger reorganisation of Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society. Up until then Steiner had chosen to stay outside the official organisation of the society and taken the role of spiritual leader only. In 1923, he decided to reshape the organisation and officially take the lead himself. His need to take tighter control over the society has been explained by its rapid growth which had caused different branches to start quarrelling with each other and drifting apart over the years. In addition to internal struggles, anthroposophy encountered opposition also from the outside. This culminated in an arson attack on the newly-built headquarters in Dornach on New Year’s Eve in 1922/3, which is likely to have fuelled Steiner’s thoughts on the need of restructuring and strengthening the society. He wished for the national societies to be organised and united under the central organisation of the new General Anthroposophical Society which was founded at the annual Christmas conference in 1923/4 in Dornach (Lachman 2007: 209–12; Lejon 1997: 118–21).

When the Finnish Anthroposophical Society was founded in December 1923, it was designed to be one national society that would unite all anthroposophists in Finland, but divided into Finnish- and Swedish-speaking sections. This division was made for practical reasons, to accommodate the two language groups of the members. Uno Donner was elected as both the society’s first chair and general secretary. The task of the general secretary was to take care of the international communications of the national society, most importantly to act as the contact person between the national and the General Anthroposophical Society. The minutes from the founding meeting are not preserved, so we do not know if there were other candidates for the position, but as Uno Donner was not the only one to have been in contact with Steiner and the headquarters in Dornach personally, there might have been other interested candidates. Edvard and Aline Selander had been in contact with both Rudolf Steiner and Marie von Sivers when arranging Steiner’s two visits to Helsinki (Selander’s correspondence with Marie Steiner, RSA). Johannes and Ellen Leino (née Relander) had met with Steiner already in 1908 and apparently were on friendly terms, judging from their correspondence with Rudolf Steiner and Marie von Sivers which continued from 1910 to 1947 (J. and E. Leino’s correspondence with Marie von Sivers; Marie von Sivers’ obituary of Johannes Leino, RSA; Kiersch 2006: 91). Nevertheless, later correspondence between the central board in Dornach and the Finnish Anthroposophical Society reveal that electing Donner as the general secretary was the explicit wish of Steiner himself (R. Steiner and Ita

Theosophical Society in Sweden 1908–13. Gustaf was vice chair, and in 1909–10 the chair of the society. They became members of the Anthroposophical Society in 1913, and Gustaf was a board member of the Swedish A. S. 1913–22 (Forschungsstelle Kultur­impuls, Ljungqvist, Gustaf).

11 Helene Flodin (1875–?) was a drawing teacher, an art historian, and a member of the Anthroposophical Society of Sweden since 1913 (membership list: Huvudmatrikel 1913–31, ASS).
Wegman to U. Donner, 27.6.1924, GD). With Steiner’s support Donner had a mandate that would have been hard, if not impossible, for the others to challenge.

Although Steiner clearly trusted Uno Donner, there are no sources that reveal more details of their relation. The one letter from Uno Donner to Rudolf Steiner, and the letters between Uno Donner and Marie Steiner that are kept in the Rudolf Steiner Archive, are all official in their tone and do not hint at personal relations. Perhaps Steiner was convinced by the time Uno Donner had spent in Dornach and his commitment to anthroposophy; perhaps it also mattered that Uno was well connected both in transnational anthroposophical circles and Finnish society, and perhaps there were other reasons, too. In any case, Uno Donner kept the position as both chair and general secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in Finland from 1923 until the annual meeting in 1931.

During his time as chair and general secretary, Uno Donner strove to realise Steiner’s ideal of one national society. However, shortly after the Finnish Anthroposophical Society was founded, disputes surfaced, and in 1924 three groups even broke loose from the society. First, the Finnish-speaking members decided to found their own, independent society under the leadership of Johannes Leino. Then a small Swedish-speaking group followed the example and set up a group called the Swedish Section of the General Anthroposophical Society, and chose Edvard Selander as their chair. In addition, a group of Vyborg anthroposophists under the leadership of Mrs Wally Homén decided to carry on their anthroposophical work independently (annual report 1925, ASF).

The fact that the national society broke down into four independent groups that Uno did not manage to reunite was a bitter disappointment for him. He tried to convince Leino, Selander, and Homén to stay within the original society by means of negotiations both by letter and face to face. His efforts were, however, unsuccessful and seem instead to have convinced the others that cooperation was impossible (correspondence between U. Donner, W. Homén, J. Leino, and the board of the General A. S. in 1924–5, GD). Some of the reasons behind the schism lay in the tensions between Swedish and Finnish speaking members, which reflected societal debates of the time, but personal disagreements also played a role (W. Homén to the board of the General A. S. 5.10.1924 and 4.6.1925).

In spite of the disagreements, the anthroposophical work went on, and Uno Donner worked intensively ‘for the world-mission of the anthroposophical movement’, as he put it in the society’s 1925 annual report¹² (annual report 1925, ASF). Among other things, he was a generous patron for anthroposophical work. To help the society organise meetings he provided it with an apartment at Berggatan 3 in Helsinki, for which he paid the rent during his entire time as chair for the society. In addition to this, he took care of varied costs during the years to ensure that the Finnish society received updates from the anthroposophical centre in Dornach and could keep up its work (annual report 1931, ASF).

Uno Donner also regularly gave lectures and beginners courses in anthroposophy – mostly for the members only, but sometimes also for the public.

¹² ‘…arbete för den antroposofiska rörelsens världsmission’.

Uno Donner captured Olly writing in one of his sketches.
(annual reports, 1925–30, ASF). In addition to his own lectures, he saw to it that international anthroposophists visited Helsinki. These visits to Finland were part of extensive, and expensive, lecture tours that were usually organised as joint efforts by the board in Dornach and several national societies. The guests were eminent anthroposophists such as Marie Steiner and her eurythmy group (in 1928), Dr Frederik Willem Zeylmans van Emmichoven (in 1925 and 1929), Doctor Karl Heyer (1925), Erich Trummler (in 1929), Roman Boos (in 1930), and Ernst Uehli (in 1930) (annual reports 1928–30, ASF).

For many years, Uno Donner’s anthroposophical work within the society continued peacefully. He was unanimously re-elected repeatedly, as was the rest of the board, with some minor alterations. In 1931 one member, Olga von Freymann, together with some other members of the First Class, wanted to invite Marie Steiner to Finland, and asked Uno for assistance with this. This somehow escalated into a problem and resulted in severe misunderstandings and differences of opinion between Uno Donner and Miss Freymann. Because of the internal quarrels Marie Steiner eventually declined the invitation. This seems to have cost Uno Donner the trust of the majority of the society’s members, because at the next annual meeting in 1931 he was not re-elected as chair (annual meeting minutes and annual report 1931, ASF). Instead, the members elected Donner’s long time vice chair, the painter Werner von Hausen. From the next year, Miss Olga von Freymann chaired the society until 1951 with a few breaks, in total for 13 years.

This was a severe blow for Uno Donner, who from his own point of view had been committed to the task of advancing anthroposophy according to Steiner’s wishes, but now suddenly found himself pushed out of his own society. He reacted with a complete withdrawal from the Finnish Anthroposophical Society, including the immediate withdrawal of the apartment he had so far provided the society with (annual reports 1928–30, ASF). The personal difficulty he had in coping with the situation shows also in his refusal to meet and talk about what had passed with his trusted friend and former vice chair, Werner von Hausen. In several letters, von Hausen pleaded with Uno Donner to meet with him and tried to convince him that his experience and input was indispensable to the anthroposophical movement in Finland. Donner’s response was to indicate that they could meet only under the condition that they would not speak a word about the society (correspondence between W. v. Hausen and U. Donner 1929–32, vol. 8a, ÅA).

Shortly after the breach with his society in 1931, Uno met with Albert Steffen in Dornach to discuss the events that had passed in Finland. In his diary notes on their meeting, Steffen described Uno as an opponent to Mrs Dr Steiner, but the reasons for this remain unclear. During their meeting Uno must also have brought up the personal dilemma the break with the society had placed him in – what should he now do as an anthroposophist? Steffen’s answer was to not forsake anthroposophy. According to him, it was also possible to work for anthroposophy without a society. (Albert Steffen’s diary 2./3.3.1932, ASS)

Uno and Olly Donner seem to have taken Steffen’s advice and shifted their focus to practising anthroposophy in their personal lives rather than within an institutional framework. The break with the Finnish Anthroposophical Society was fol-

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14 E. Trummler (1891–1983), married to the Norwegian Ruth Kaurin, active both in the General A. S. and in the Vidar-group in Kristiania (today Oslo), Norway (Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls, Trummler, Erich).
15 R. Boos (1889–1952), writer and jurist, active in many anthroposophical enterprises (Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls, Boos, Roman).
16 E. Uehli (1875–1959) active anthroposophical writer and lecturer, Waldorf teacher (Forschungsstelle Kulturimpuls, Uehli, Ernst).
17 The First Class was the esoteric school of the General Anthroposophical Society. Committed members of the society could gain access to it after two years of membership in the society, but even then only through the recommendation of a more experienced member of the First Class, usually the chair of a working group or national society. This rule was, however, not always applied to committed first generation anthroposophists (Lejon 1997: 48–50; Kiersch 2016).
18 Steffen was a poet and a writer who became the chair of the Anthroposophical Society after the death of Rudolf Steiner in 1925.
19 In Steffen’s own words, he told Uno: ‘Ich sage ihm, man kann für Anthroposophie eintreten auch ohne die Gesellschaft.’
allowed by a withdrawal from the General Anthroposophical Society too. During the years 1931–2, they did not even pay their membership fees, although they returned as members in 1936 (the membership lists, GD). Also Olly’s correspondence with her anthroposophical friends peters out in the 1930s. Uno and Olly also stopped visiting Dornach for eight years and travelled elsewhere, mostly Aix-les-Bains and Grasse in France, and Lausanne in Switzerland, when they did not stay in Helsinki or at Gerknäs Manor. There may have been also other than purely personal reasons too to avoid Dornach. The General Anthroposophical Society was marked by internal power struggles that followed Steiner’s death, and the atmosphere in Dornach was far from harmonious. The Donners’ following longer visits to Dornach – or actually the nearby Arlesheim – did not happen until the 1950s after the inner schisms of the board in Dornach were overcome (Lejon 1997: 141–5).

Exploring the spiritual through art

Art was one of the ways in which anthroposophy stayed as a part of Uno and especially Olly Donner’s life. Neither one of them was a famous artist, but both cultivated a long-term interest in art, Olly mainly in writing and Uno in painting. Although their interest in art preceded their interest in anthroposophy, it harmonised well with anthroposophical conceptions of art and was connected to their anthroposophical worldview.

Olly Donner had already been actively looking for her means of expression during her youth and early adulthood, and as a member of the Sinebrychoff family, she had opportunities to do so. When visiting a school in Dresden, she took lessons in painting at least in the years 1897–8 (A. Sinebrychoff to O. Donner 9.10.1897, 21.1.1898, 29.1.1898, 1.3.1898, vol. 20, ÅA). Later, in 1911, she experimented with sculpting and took lessons in Rome. Olly’s profession, however, came to be writing. She discovered writing and anthroposophy one after another – her first book was published in 1911 and she developed an interest in anthroposophy around 1913. During her lifetime she published 32 books; novels and poems for adults, and plays and stories for children. Her first manuscripts were in Russian, and later she wrote one book in French, but most of her work was in Swedish (Olly Donner’s manuscripts, ÅA).

Uno Donner, for his part, was an amateur painter, who tried all his life to achieve a balance between being an artist and being a businessman. He studied painting on many occasions, at least in Paris and probably also in Rome (A. Sinebrychoff to O. Donner 21.11.1909, 24.3.1909, 7.3.1911, 13.1.1913, vols 21–2, ÅA) and always painted wherever the couple spent their time. Whenever they resided somewhere for a longer period, he usually also provided himself with an atelier. During the years in Stockholm he rented one at Vattugatan (Lublin & Co Aktiebolag to U. Donner 25.3.1918, vol. 45, ÅA) and Olly’s mother furnished one for him in her summer villa in Björnholm, Espoo (A. Sinebrychoff to O. Donner 1.4.1909, vol. 21, ÅA).

Within anthroposophy, practising art was regarded as central. The task of the artist was, according to Steiner, to bring forth the spiritual aspect that already exists in everything that is sentient. He thought that art enabled the connection between the material and spiritual world and worked as a countercforce to an increasing materialism. Subsequently, every art form was considered to be in touch with one part of the human being; architecture with the physical body, sculpture with the etheric body, painting with the astral body, music with the ego, poetry with the spirit-self and eurythmy with the life spirit (Ahern 1984: 60–1). When making or experiencing art, one was thought to be able to live in those...
different aspects of one’s being and even communicate with the cosmos (Steiner 1913–14).

Olly Donner’s books as well as her comments on her own writing reflect her anthroposophical thinking and anthroposophical art theory in many ways. In the books she discussed themes that are central in anthroposophy; questions of humanity and the spiritual growth of human beings, death, and other existential issues. Often the characters and events of the books seem to exist somewhere in between a fairy tale and the real world. It is clear that the material world is not the only thing that matters in her books – it is more like a thin curtain that hides the things that are much more important. Olly herself said about her writing:

But consciously or unconsciously the writer is always a discoverer[,] If his [the writer’s] temper is more melancholy-choleric, his quest leads to the depths. He is trying to find the key to what is ‘hidden in existence.’ To try to understand what is hidden behind the illusion becomes the thrilling adventure.20 (Olly Donner in Vasabladet, 13.5.1951, trans. Jasmine Westerlund)

For many literary critics the anthroposophical background of Olly Donner’s books was not obvious. They only saw the surface, which to most of them looked confusing. Some critics regarded Olly Donner as a ‘teller of fairy tales’ (Aftonbladet 31.5.1940), even when she was writing for adults. Others mentioned the peculiar, self-made vocabulary of her writing and judged the books to be trivial, artificial, and hard to understand (Svenska Dagbladet 4.4.1941; Nya Dagligt Allehanda 12.6.1927; Stockholms Tidning 24.1.1946; Svenska Pressen 28.12.1932). Nevertheless, many critics admitted that Olly Donner’s books were not mere mass products and described them as interesting, touching, and compelling (Stockholms Tidning 24.1.1946; Dagens Nyheter 6.3.1944; Svenska Pressen 28.12.1932; Östra Nyland, 23.11.1950). Some regarded them as too modern, mentioning the reactions of Olly’s family to her books were mixed. They were often confused and uneasy, and it is possible that Olly did not publish one of her books, or at least postponed the publication, because of the critique her mother had given it. Later Olly’s mother found some positive things to say about the books; she read them again and discovered new and interesting things in them. Also a family friend, Olga Juslin, liked some of the books very much and used to keep one on her table (A. Sinebrychoff to O. Donner 15.2.1914, 6.2.1919, 9.5.1919, vol. 22–3, ÅA; M. Kjöllerfeldt to O. Donner 18.3.1953, 11.12.1953, vol. 16, ÅA).

Some critics were, however, able to recognise the esoteric aspects of the books, and described Olly Donner’s fairy tales as coming from the spiritual world (article from an unknown newspaper, 12.10.1939, vol. 97, ÅA). One critic noticed between the lines ‘the existence of the spiritual world’ (Nyland 6.7.1940) and another wrote that for Olly Donner ‘existence is religious mysticism’21 (Nya Dagligt Allehanda 12.6.1927). The only ones who praised her books were friends who were either anthroposophists or artists themselves (H. Flodin to O. Donner 9.2.1926, vol. 12, ÅA; Ina Lange to O. Donner 19.12[?].1918; 20–25.1.1928, vol. 17, ÅA; Ilmari Hannikainen to O. Donner 18.7.1927, vol. 15, ÅA).

In Olly Donner’s plays for children the fairy-tale world is, naturally, even more visible. There is an inseparable link to pedagogy in this, because the ones who performed the plays were young school and summer camp children from Gerknäs. The ‘Gerknäs fairy-tale theatre’ also performed plays in Helsinki. These plays, as did the children’s books, got a good reception. The critics acknowledged that Olly Donner was able to understand children’s states of mind (Svenska Pressen 28.12.1932) and they praised the atmosphere and richness of her imagination (Hufvudstadsbladet 8.12.1941) as well as the nuances and details in the plays (Svenska Pressen 28.5.1938). The plays that were performed in 1941–2 especially got an extremely positive reception: there were not enough seats for everyone who wanted to see the plays, the children performed admirably, and the costumes, set and the casting were praised (Svenska Pressen 29.12.1941; Nyland 30.12.1941; Hufvudstadsbladet 13.1.1942; Svenska Pressen 19.1.1942).

20 ‘Men medvetet eller omedvetet är författaren alltid en upptäckare[,] År hans sinnesart mera melancholisk-kolerisk, letar hans sökare på djupet. Han söker nyckeln till det “förborgade i tillvaron”. Att söka fatta det som döljer sig bortom “skenet” blir för honom det spännande äventyret.’

21 ‘[T]illvaron som en religiös mystik.’
praises were addressed to Gunnel Wahlfors, the painter who worked as the director in the plays, but Olly's contribution as a scriptwriter was also acknowledged. The plays were said to be have the appropriate humour, morals and atmosphere, to be artistically of a very high level and 'picturesque and able to address the mind of a child' (Hufvudstadsbladet 21.4.1941; Svenska Pressen 29.12.1941; Hufvudstadsbladet 29.12.1941). Olly also composed songs for some of the plays, at least in 1941–2. In the few existing critical mentions, her melodies are said to be good, partly full of spirit, partly brisk (Svenska Pressen 29.12.1941 and 19.1.1942). The Christmas plays were 'legend plays' made in the medieval spirit, and said to be joyful and even burlesque (Svenska Pressen 29.12.1941; Nyland 30.12.1941). Although the critics hardly made the connection, these plays clearly did have a connection to Steiner's mystery dramas, which often are described as 'medieval mystery plays'.

Uno Donner's artistic activity was less public than Olly's writing career, but in October 1915 he did have one exhibition in the Strindberg art gallery in Helsinki. Helsingin Sanomat (23.10.1915) wrote that Uno Donner's debut was a surprise – the only thing commonly known was that he had studied art in Paris and Rome. The critic concluded that Uno Donner was an 'art-making dilettante' to whom art was more an amusing hobby than a 'force that comes from the depths of the soul' and that his pictures were made for the cultivated surroundings, where everything was supposed to be 'neat and smooth'.22 Hufvudstadsbladet (8.10.1915) was more sympathetic and the critic noticed the elegance and the light colours of the paintings. Uno's paintings reminded him of the small art salons in France, but represented past times without offering anything new. Dagens Press (8.10.1915) echoed Hufvudstadsbladet and described Uno Donner's art as 'amateur' in the proper sense of the word, admitting that the paintings were skillfully made. In other words, Uno Donner's skill and a graceful style as a painter was generally recognised, but artistically he was considered old fashioned – a memory from times gone by and from a lifestyle that had almost died out. Nevertheless, the exhibition was a kind of success because eight paintings were sold during the first day (Helsingin Sanomat 9.10.1915).

Although Uno's paintings did not have overtly anthroposophical themes, painting was an activity that had an important, maybe even identity-defining role in his life. He discussed art with his friend, the poet Albert Steffen who became the president of the Anthroposophical Society after the death of Rudolf

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22 'Uno Donner edustaa meillä taiteilevan diletantin tyyppiä,' 'sielun sisimmästä lähtevää paloa,' 'siistii ja sileästi.'
Steiner. Steffen recorded one discussion in his diary in 1932: ‘He [Uno Donner] was a painter, then a businessman, and now he leaves both behind, he must “polarise” himself’23 (2/3.3.1932, AS). This discussion took place shortly after the breach with the Anthroposophical Society in Finland, and the passage clearly indicates that artistic activity had a significant role in Uno Donner’s life – leaving it behind was conscious decision and step towards something else.

Uno and Olly Donner’s interest in art also reflects how prevalent and essential artistic activity was among anthroposophists. Because making and experiencing art were seen as ways to be in touch with the spiritual side of oneself, arts from sculpture to poetry were commonly practised, as were the explicitly anthroposophical forms of art such as eurythmy, speech formation, and mystery plays. This spiritual view on art also made anthroposophy attractive to many artists both in Finland and elsewhere in Europe, and some of them, like Andrei Belyi, Vassily Kandinsky, Hilma af Klint, and Edith Södergran, became nationally or internationally known as original and innovative artists (on Södergran, see Häll 2006; on Hilma af Klint, see Almqvist and Belfrage 2015).

Biodynamic farming at Gerknäs Manor
In 1924, Uno Donner, among 560 other people, took part in Steiner’s agricultural course in Koberwitz/Breslau (Frei Verwaltung des Nachlasses Rudolf Steiner. Personenregister). This was the first course in what later became known as biodynamic farming, and it was arranged at the request of the farmers (Ahern 1984: 58; Lachman 2007: 218–20). Julia Dahlberg and Joachim Mickwitz (2014: 309) write that the Donners had owned several countryside manors24 that they had let go after a short period because of disappointment with the results, which suggests that Uno had an earlier interest in agriculture. From 1928, he started experimenting with the biological-dynamic method, as it was then called, at the newly-acquired Gerknäs Manor in Lohja, Finland.

Biodynamic farming was a response to the changing situation in agriculture, which in the 1920s was becoming a profit-making industry with a strong scientific orientation, which worried farmers. Steiner’s agricultural ideas aimed at returning from the ‘mechanical-materialist’ way of farming to a more ‘spiritually illuminated’ one (Hurter, accessed 1.9.2017). On the surface Steiner’s agricultural ideas have many similarities with organic farming – industrial fertilizers, for example, are not used – but differs from it in the emphasis on spiritual aspects. Steiner thought that a farm with its crops, plants, and animals should be seen as a living organism that should be able to operate as a self-sufficient microcosm (Ahern 1984: 57–8). He recommended using especially designed preparations and magical practices that are intended to ‘dynamise’ nature by directing forces related to the seasons, the phases of the moon, the stars, and the planets to enhance growth (Lachman 2007: 217). With these practices, Steiner switched the focus from a profit making industry to a larger, even cosmic context.

As Uno Donner was the first person in Finland to follow Steiner’s ideas on farming, his methods probably provoked astonishment among the local people. He nevertheless continued farming successfully until the Second World War and managed to both increase the profit on the crops and enlarge the herd of bulls to 130 by 1940. The Anthroposophical Society in Finland made a note of Uno’s venture in their annual report of 1929, although it was something he undertook privately (annual report, ASF). The word spread, and Norway’s Consul General Hans Olsen,25 who was interested in Kirjola Farm in eastern Finland, contacted Uno Donner to learn more about the possibilities of biodynamic farming in the Nordic countries (correspondence between H. Olsen and U. Donner, 1930, vol. 8b, ÅA). Uno’s answer shows that being a pioneer was not always easy and that he had difficul-

23 ‘Er war Maler, dann Geschäftsmann und gibt jetzt beides auf, er müsste sich “polarisieren”’.
24 Esbo gård, Finland, Beateberg, and other properties in Sweden; additionally, we have found out that they owned Noor castle in Knivsta a few months 1918–19, and Skönabäck mansion in Skåne at least 1918–19 (Anna Sinebrychoff to Olly Donner 1.8.1918, 8.9.1918, 21.11.1918, 29.11.1918, 10.12.1918, 14.12.1918, 28.2.1919; Holy Saturday 1919 [19.4.1919], 11.6.1919, vols 22–3, ÅA).
25 Olsen (1859–1951) had been the head of the Nobel brothers’ oil company in St Petersburg, and became Norway’s Consul General in 1906 in Sweden. In his old age he settled in Sweden and in 1928 he became a member of the Swedish Anthroposophical Society (Norsk biografisk leksikon, Hans Olsen; membership list ‘Hufvudmatrikel 1913–1940’, ASS).
ties finding a suitably trained farmer for carrying out the practical work, but that he in spite of this already had preliminary results that he was satisfied with (U. Donner to Hans Olsen 28.6.1930 and 21.7.1930, vol. 8b, ÅA). Olly also engaged in the farm’s affairs and often wrote to her mother about the crops and animals (O. Donner to A. Sinebrychoff 20.12.1939, 9.8.1940, 25.2.1941, vol. 32, ÅA).

H. W. Donner (1959) describes the years Uno and Olly Donner spent at Gerknäs as the happiest ones in their lives. Their contentedness with the place is visible also in Olly’s letter to her mother, in which she describes herself and Uno as ‘countryside people’ who seldom visit the city (O. Donner to A. Sinebrychoff 5.2. [no year], probably 1941, vol. 32, ÅA). It was a time of vibrant anthroposophical activity for both of them. Apart from the farming, Uno combined his technical and artistic skills to design the terraces and garden that today surround the main building, while Olly wrote and elaborated upon her pedagogical interests. In 1944, the land cessions caused by the war forced Uno to give away all but 60 cows and sell such a great proportion of the territory that it became pointless to keep the property (O. Donner to A. Sinebrychoff 25.2.1941, vol. 32, ÅA). In 1944, the family acquaintance Marshal Carl Gustaf Mannerheim bought Gerknäs, and the Donners moved permanently abroad (Dahlberg and Mickwitz 2014: 309–11).

**Olly Donner’s pedagogical interests**

Pedagogy was, besides literature, closest to Olly Donner’s heart. She visited Steiner’s lectures on pedagogy at least in April 1923, when Steiner conducted an ‘educational course for the teachers from Switzerland’ in Dornach (Olly Donner’s notes 15.4.1923, 16.4.1923, 17.4.1923, vol. 100, ÅA; Rudolf Steiner Archive, translated lectures by Schmidt Number). The couple did not have children of their own, but they did affect many children’s lives in Finland.

Olly Donner financially supported a school for small children in Gerknäs. The school was a private Swedish-speaking school financed also by the state, but it had a hard time trying to stay open with its small number of pupils. It was meant for 6–8-year-old children in the first grades. The school had existed before the Donners bought the manor house at Gerknäs, but during their time, the impact of Waldorf pedagogy was clearly visible in the curriculum. Newspaper articles about Gerknäs reported children painting with the ‘wet on wet’ technique, which is a key fea-

![Gerknäs manor in Lohja, Finland.](image-url)
ture of the first grades in a Waldorf school even today. Articles also mention aspects that were not common in the Finnish schooling system in the 1930s and 1940s, such as the children’s ‘unforced will to create’, ‘the experience of joy and freedom’, and the aim to teach the children to see ‘beauty in its different forms’ (article from an unknown newspaper 21.3.1939, Nyland, H:fors bladet, Svenska Pressen 30.8.1942, vol. 97, ÅA).

Rudolf Steiner’s interest in pedagogy had been triggered in his youth when he had worked as a teacher for a hydrocephalic boy. His pedagogy was rooted in his view of human development, which he believed to happen in stages that, reflecting cosmic cycles, last about seven years. He thought that humans develop different sides of themselves during different stages, and arranged education to support this development and to help the child to fully realise his/her potential. In addition, the idea of the four temperaments, the role of the imagination and art are significant components of Waldorf pedagogy. The name ‘Waldorf pedagogy’ derives from the first school that was founded according to his pedagogical principles, for the children of the workers of the Waldorf Astoria tobacco factory in 1919 (Ahern 1984: 62–3).

The ideas of Waldorf pedagogy were connected to a larger wave of reformatory movements directed at the educational system in Germany after the First World War. These movements sought to update the traditional hierarchical education to meet new needs and also to better support and the development of all an individual’s abilities, not just theoretical knowledge. Some of these movements targeted the state’s educational system, while others targeted the pedagogical methods. Steiner’s Waldorf pedagogy belongs to this second group of movements (Lejon 1997: 99–102). It was a success in the sense that it spread quickly. By 1930 there were Waldorf schools founded in Germany, England, the Netherlands, Hungary, Portugal, Norway, Austria, Switzerland and the United States (Freunde der Erziehungskunsts Rudolf Steiners). The first official Waldorf school in Finland was opened 1955 in Helsinki, where it is known as a ‘Steiner school’. The school in Gerknäs did not officially practise Steiner’s pedagogy, but it was nonetheless a pioneer when it comes to Waldorf pedagogy in Finland.

Olly Donner did not only support the school financially, but was interested in the everyday life of the school as well. The teachers wrote her detailed letters about how the children were doing: who was attending the school, who was sick, the circumstances in their homes, the preparations for festivities, their nourishment, and so forth. Although living in hotels around Europe, Olly Donner monitored the school closely, and for example approved the timetables. She also wrote manuscripts for school plays and sent sweets and other small things to the children, who often sent her drawings in return.

Olly Donner was also responsible for a summer camp for children that was held in Gerknäs at least in the 1940s. The aim of this summer camp – as of many other summer camps in Finland – was to give to the children living in cities an opportunity to enjoy clean air, good food, freedom, and outdoor activities in the countryside. After the camp, which lasted two months, the children were expected to return home rounder, brisker and nicely tanned. The children of the summer camps were the usual actors in Olly Donner’s ‘fairy-tale theatre’, which celebrated its 10-year anniversary in 1942. The children’s play, which was prepared together with the children of the summer camp and the children living in the village, was the big event of every summer in Gerknäs. It took many weeks to prepare the costumes and the set and to practise the lines (see Dagens Nyheter 14.4.1940; Svenska Pressen 30.8.1942; O. Donner to A. Sinebrychoff 30.7.1940, 9.8.1940, 12.8.1940, vol. 32, ÅA).

Curative education for the mentally disabled
Olly Donner had yet another pedagogical project in Gerknäs: the ‘Gustafsberg’ nursing home for mentally disabled children that was opened in 1928. The model for this nursing home was ‘Sonnenhof’ in Arlesheim, near Dornach. Steiner and the anthroposophical medical doctor Ita Wegman had founded the Sonnenhof commune only four years before Gustafsberg, in 1924. It was a school and a rehabilitation centre for disabled people, especially for children. At least one boy from the Gerknäs area was sent there in 1931 and was still living there in 1937 when the Donners visited the place – by then he had grown up into a brave young man, speaking fluent German (O. Donner to A. Sinebrychoff 10.4.1937 and 17.4.1937, vol. 31, ÅA).

The anthroposophical basis for curative education is Steiner’s idea that the mind of every person is intact and sane, but that it can be trapped within a sick body, which according to him was what happened with those who were commonly described...
as 'mentally ill' (Steiner 1923). In terms of practical treatment this meant that mentally disabled persons were treated with respect and that the curative education was always individually designed to support the individual development of each patient (Lejon 1997: 102–5). The anthroposophical idea of gradual personal development through reincarnation further supported the view that there are no 'lost cases', and that disabled persons too can develop and thus benefit from curative education.

In an advert 'Gustafberg' was described as a home for mentally disabled children from 3 to 12 years. The treatment consisted of medical care that was supervised by Doctor John Blomstedt26 from the medical section in Dornach, therapeutic eurythmy, massage, and many forms of art therapy. To some extent, primary school teaching was also included. The kitchen is mentioned to be almost completely vegetarian, which illustrates the value put on nutrition (Gustafberg advert, ASF). The nurses Karin Molander and Helga Pethman, who were in charge of the daily care of the children, were trained at the Arlesheim clinic near Dornach. According to Olly Donner’s wishes, Molander and Pethman kept her informed about the advancements the children made. They wrote to her about the children becoming more active, calm or brave, and noticed improvements in their paintings, speech, and movements (H. Pethman’s and K. Molander’s letters to O. Donner 31.1.1928–24.4.1929, vol. 18, ÅA).

The home was closed after only three years, at least partly because of the financially difficult and uncertain times (K. Molander to O. Donner 6.8.1931, vol. 18, ÅA). During its short existence it nevertheless earned a good reputation. In 1928 Thyra Albrecht27 wrote to Olly Donner that the Gustafberg nursing home started to be known ‘in wide circles’ because the counsellor for education (skolrådet) Mandelin had wanted to discuss it with the nurse Helga Pethman. In addition, a Mrs Viljanen who was working to start another nursing home for mentally disabled children had been interested and delighted that Gustafberg was organised entirely according to Dr Steiner’s anthroposophical principles (T. Albrecht to O. Donner 2.4.1928, vol. 9, ÅA).

In the early twentieth century, this kind of home was an exception in Finland, where a law concerning the sterilisation of disabled people was passed in 1935 in order to save the nation from degeneration. According to the law of compulsory education of the

26 John Blomstedt (1878–1950) was a Finnish medical doctor who completed his degree in May 1908, and subsequently worked as a doctor at different locations in southern Finland. He was a member of the Anthroposophical Society from 1925 and the chair of the Anthroposophical Society in Finland in 1939 (Degerman 2014: 55).

27 Thyra Albrecht (1875–1959), was one of the founders of the Anthroposophical Society in Finland and the founder of the library of the society.
year 1921, a child could also be freed from education because of ‘idiocy’ or ‘weak understanding’, and between 1935 and 1936 about 12,000 children were freed from compulsory education (Leppälä 2014: 30, 45).

**Looking for an individual spiritual path**

Practising spiritual training is considered to be a fundamental aspect of anthroposophy. In order to accomplish this, one needed to study anthroposophy, and, and even more importantly, one was supposed to develop one’s consciousness by means of different exercises and meditations given by Steiner (Ahern 1984: 51–4). The numerous travels to Dornach and other locations where Steiner lectured, the active participation in group meetings in Stockholm, Helsinki, and other locations, the reading of Steiner’s lectures, and the preserved notes from many of these lectures, together demonstrate that Uno and Olly Donner devoted considerable time to studies in anthroposophy. Their notes concern issues such as the cohesion between planets, colours and numbers, as well as the cohesion between different eras and parts of the human being, and testify to their profound interest in anthroposophy (see, for example, the notes in vol. 100, ÅA). Their actual spiritual exercises are less well documented and therefore harder to trace, but there are several sources that indicate they were equally devoted to actual spiritual practices.

There are many anthroposophical, so-called ‘basic exercises’ that are meant to train thinking, willing, and feeling, and that are open to everyone. Besides these, Steiner also provided people with personalised meditations. If he was too busy or too far away from the person requesting a meditation, he gave it without meeting the person, based only on his or her name. In the Åbo Akademi University Archives there is a small, undated note with a meditation and a text informing us that it was given to Olly Donner by Rudolf Steiner in London 1913 and that she read it every evening until the spring of 1951. The meditation is ‘The Gospel of John, chapter 1:1–5.’ That Olly used to read it every day almost until the end of her life illustrates her commitment to Steiner’s ‘path of knowledge’ (undated note, after 1951, vol. 100, ÅA).

The best source to Olly’s, and probably also Uno’s, meditative practice is the correspondence between Olly and Anna Ljungqvist that stretches over the years 1919 to 1934. Unfortunately, only Anna’s letters are preserved, but even they alone convey a picture of regular spiritual practice. In her letters, she often mentions her meditations, and the kinds of experiences or visions she had during them. She mentions, for example, visions of the Madonna, the signs of the zodiac and words of Paracelsus. The familiarity of these accounts suggests that Olly probably had similar visions, or at least that visions were a common experience during meditation. In one of her letters Anna wrote about a meditation ‘of the golden calf’,28 that should help a student of anthroposophy to get rid of attraction to the material world. She described herself having had ‘wonderful feelings’ after it and recommended it warmly to Olly. Olly also suggested meditations for Anna, and their way of exchanging experiences suggests that meditation was, if not a daily, at least a very frequent practice for both of them. However, it was not always easy. Anna also writes about being too sick, too tired, or finding it hard to concentrate. Sharing these experiences with a trusted and understanding friend, shows both the individual freedom to enhance one’s spiritual abilities that anthroposophy granted its practitioners, and the determination with which they approached these new skills (A. Ljungqvist to O. Donner, undated, vol. 17, ÅA).

To meditate was also a way to keep in touch with friends even when they were physically far away from each other. Anna Ljungqvist often felt Olly’s presence when meditating, and tried by meditation to help friends who were ill (A. Ljungqvist to O. Donner, undated, 27.11.[no year], 12.10.[no year], 1.10.1919, 15.10.1919, 19.1.1920, 4.8.1921, vol. 17, ÅA). Olly and Uno also used to think of each other every evening at the same time when apart, and Uno often felt Olly’s thoughts when thinking of her (U. Donner to O. Donner 21.10.1919, 29.2.1920, 27.9.1922, 3.10.1922, vol. 10, ÅA). This could be interpreted as a similar kind of meditation, and demonstrates how a practice that was conducted in private, actually had a social function.

The focus on individual spiritual exercise was not characteristic only for anthroposophy. The esoteric

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28 In this meditation, one is supposed to imagine oneself standing in front of Moses, asking him how to get rid of the ties to the material. Then Moses calls for images about the golden calf. If needed, Moses burns the calf and gives the ashes for the pupil to drink (A. Ljungqvist’s undated letter to O. Donner, vol. 17, ÅA).
movements of the time generally had an inclination towards self-reform and 'the spiritual journey of the individual' (Treitel 2004: 68) that was connected to the bourgeois self-consciousness (Owen 2004: 114–16). In anthroposophy, this feature was taken further than in some other movements because Steiner parted with the theosophical emphasis on universal brotherhood, and instead aimed his anthroposophy explicitly towards individual development (Treitel 2004: 97–101).

The appeal of natural medicine

According to anthroposophy, it is not only important to cultivate the mind; also the body needs to be taken care of. In anthroposophical or 'extended' medicine, the aim is to bring the person back into balance by using medicines, homeopathic preparations, art therapies and massage. It was developed by Doctor Ita Wegman together with Rudolf Steiner at Klinik Arlesheim, today the Ita Wegman Institute, which was founded 1921 in Arlesheim, a nearby village to Dornach.

Uno and Olly embraced this side of anthroposophy too, and treated many illnesses at the clinic in Arlesheim. Uno Donner's patient meeting from 1922 tells us that he was treated with warm wormwood bandages, massage, and therapeutic eurythmy in order to cure an imbalance that caused constipation, problems with the throat, and difficulties with sleeping. The eurythmy included forming the letters L and T with the feet apart, the letter D with bent knees and the letter R while standing (the patient meeting with Dr Steiner, 1922, IWI). He improved quickly and left the clinic after four weeks, but came back again at least in 1924–5, 1927, 1928 and 1932. His later treatments included mistletoe injections and different kinds of homeopathic products. The use of mistletoe indicates cancer and it is still today used as an anthroposophical treatment for it.

There are not many mentions about Olly at the clinic, but she visited it as well. According to the patient meeting from year 1922 or 1923 she suffered from knee pain, headache, tiredness and poor digestion, and was prescribed arnica and formic acid as well as massage, among other things. Steiner gave medical as well meditative prescriptions, and he prescribed Olly Donner baths with different medical essences. Unfortunately, they did not have any impact, and 1925 she was in a worse condition than before, now suffering also from fever and swollen feet.

The effect of further treatments remains unknown because there are no mentions of Olly Donner in the clinic's records after this, but she probably continued visiting it together with her husband.

The interest in natural medicine and healing was not typical only for the anthroposophical movement, but for esoteric movements of the time in general. Corinna Treitel (2004: 51, 154–61) connects this growing interest in natural healing to a larger German Lebensreform movement. According to her, the focus on health had been a visible ingredient of the German esoteric movement from the start. As anthroposophy was born in the German context, it is not surprising that health as a theme was incorporated into it. Through anthroposophy vegetarianism and other aspects of natural healing spread to a much wider circle than the German part of the world. In Olly's nursing home, the kitchen was almost entirely vegetarian, and already in the 1920s it was possible to buy anthroposophical medicines in several apothecaries in Finland, to name just a few examples (Gustafssberg advert, Antroposofia: Henkitteteeellinen Aikakauslehti 10/1923, 11/1923, 12/1923).

Epilogue

During their last years Olly and Uno Donner returned to the centre of anthroposophy in Arlesheim by Dornach, and after 1955 they did not much leave the Arlesheim clinic. There they were surrounded by friends whom they had known since their first visits to Dornach (Donner 1959: 38). It could perhaps also be interpreted as a sign of reconciliation and restored relations with the Anthroposophical Society. In September 1956 Olly died at the clinic and Uno stayed there until his death in June 1958. They are both buried in the memorial park next to the Goetheanum, together with Rudolf Steiner and many other early anthroposophists.

Through their diverse anthroposophical activity Uno and Olly Donner had a significant influence on the early development of the Anthroposophical Society in Finland. They were generous patrons of many anthroposophical enterprises, and pioneers of many anthroposophical activities, such as biodynamic farming, pedagogy, and curative education – without their input these fields would likely have developed later in Finland. Although they, especially in Finland, were exceptional with regard to financial resources, social status, and the personal freedom
granted by these, their ways of practising anthroposophy does tell us something about how this new worldview was received. In the transnational anthroposophical circles they had peers who enjoyed a similar lifestyle and who were likely to have shared their ways of practising anthroposophy. In Finland, those who could not as easily dedicate themselves entirely to self-development, could also study anthroposophy through the meetings of the Anthroposophical Society in Finland and practise the spiritual exercises individually – these were not at all elitist in spirit, but meant as exercises anyone could do in between their other daily duties.

In addition to this, the Donners also had a lasting impact in the academic field due to their decision to donate their fortune to the Åbo Akademi University. Earlier, in 1921, also Olly’s uncle Paul Sinebrychoff and his wife Fanny Sinebrychoff had donated their remarkable art collection to the Finnish state, and, which was the most problematic issue for the family, thus donated their shares of the Sinebrychoff company to outsiders. This was not well received by the family, and after hearing about Olly’s and Uno’s plans, Olly’s cousin Marcus Kjöllerfeldt wrote to her to persuade them to drop the idea, even directly calling it ‘a betrayal’ (M. Kjöllerfeldt to O. Donner 29.8.1955, August 1956, vol. 16, ÅA). That Olly and Uno Donner kept to their decision and did donate their fortune to Åbo Akademi University tragically seems to have resulted in a breach with Olly’s family. In the donation letter the purpose of the fund is stated to be promoting research based on strictly scientific principles on religious and cultural history, primarily on the origin and development of different religions and cultures. No exception shall be made for the exploration of more modern phenomena within religion, philosophy, science, art and literature where mysticism and occultism have had a palpable impact.29 (O. & U. Donner’s donation letter, DI)

In 1959, the university used the donation to found the Donner Institute, a research institute that since then has operated according to the principles Uno and Olly Donner designed in their donation. Today it houses the largest specialised library in comparative religion in the Nordic Countries.

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29 Fondens ändamål är att på strängt vetenskaplig grund befrämja religionshistorisk och kulturhistorisk forskning, främst med beaktande av mysteriereligionernas och ockultismens inflytande på olika religioners och kulturers uppkomst och utveckling. Icke heller göres något undantag för utforskandet av mer moderna företeelser inom religion, filosofi, vetenskap, konst och litteratur där mystik och ockultism gjort sig kännbart gällande. Bestämmelser för fonden för Religions- och kulturhistorisk forskning, daterat Arlesheim 29.3.1956, DI.

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PhD Jasmine Westerlund works as a teacher of creative writing and is writing a biography of the author Olly Donner. She also discusses Donner in the interdisciplinary research project ‘Uuden etsijät’ (‘Seekers of the New: Esotericism and the Transformation of Religiosity in the Modernising Finland, 1880–1940’). Her dissertation in Finnish literature at the University of Turku dealt with female artist novels (2013). She has also written many articles concerning women and art, for example ‘Äiti, luostarisisar, taiteilija. Naisen rooli uskonnoissa Signe Stenbäckin tuotannossa’, Nainen kulttuurissa, kulttuuri naisessa (University of Turku, 2015) and ‘Oma tila vai kuoleman odotushuone?’ in Kipuspisteitä (Utukirjat, 2015).
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DI Donner Institute, Turku/Åbo, Finland
FTS Archives of the Finnish Theosophical Society, Helsinki, Finland
GD Goetheanum Dokumentation, Archive of the General Anthroposophical Society, Dornach, Switzerland
IWI Archives of Ita Wegman Institut, Arlesheim, Switzerland
RSA Rudolf Steiner Archiv, Dornach, Switzerland
ÅA Åbo Akademi University Library, Manuscript Collections, Uno and Olly Donner’s collection, Uno and Olly Donner’s picture collection

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Anthroposophical Society

The General Anthroposophical Society is an "association of people whose will it is to nurture the life of the soul, both in the individual and in human society, on the basis of a true knowledge of the spiritual world."[3][4][5] As an organization, it is dedicated to supporting the community of those interested in the inner path of schooling known as anthroposophy, developed by Rudolf Steiner.

The Anthroposophical Society was founded on December 28, 1912 in Cologne, Germany, with about 3000 members. Central to this founding was Rudolf Steiner, who acted as an advisor and lecturer. The members of its original Executive Council were Marie von Sivers, Michael Bauer, and Carl Unger.[6] The Society was re-founded as the General Anthroposophical Society in 1923/4 in Dornach, Switzerland. It includes an esoteric School of Spiritual Science.

The Society's headquarters is at the Goetheanum, located in Dornach, Solothurn, Switzerland. The Society has national Societies in many countries, including every English-speaking country.[7] Its primary activities include organizing members' meetings and conferences, supporting research, and providing communication channels for a variety of purposes. The Society also encourages sustainable initiatives in the many practical fields in which its members are active.

As of 2013, the Society has approximately 52,000 members. Formal branches of the Society have been established in 50 countries, and smaller groups are active in 50 further countries. About 10,000 institutions base their work on anthroposophy,[8] including schools, farms, medical practices, and communities for the handicapped.

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Origins
The Anthroposophical Society traces its history back to 1902, when Rudolf Steiner became General Secretary of the German branch of the Theosophical Society. Prior to this time, Theosophy had made little headway in Germany; despite some visits by Helena Blavatsky, a founder of the Theosophical Society, to Germany and its prominent Theosophists, it was not until after her death in 1891 that a single Berlin Lodge was officially chartered in 1894. Its nominal leadership by Dr Huebbe-Schleiden was supported by the ongoing efforts of Count and Countess Brockdorff, under whose auspices Steiner was first asked to lecture to an audience including German Theosophists in August 1900. His spiritual ideas found a responsive audience here, as many German Theosophists had found in Theosophy only an imperfect reflection of their own beliefs.[9]:29, 36, 42–3

Throughout Steiner's term in office, the German branch worked quite independently of the rest of the Theosophical Society;[10] in particular, Steiner sought to link to European philosophy and science and to Christian esoteric traditions, while the Theosophical Society was both geographically and spiritually based in Adyar, India.

Besant's tolerance for the differences in their approaches grew strained over the years. By 1907, Steiner had shifted from Theosophical terminology to his own vocabulary and the uniqueness of his approach was becoming increasingly apparent, for example at the International Congress at Munich in May 1907. Later that year, "by mutual consent", the esoteric circle Steiner had founded as an offshoot of the Theosophical Society's Esoteric Section (E. S.) became a wholly independent institution.[11][9]:44

Gathering tensions over a variety of issues, including the rapid growth of the German section and its increasing activity in areas outside of Germany, came to a head when the leadership of the Theosophical Society declared that they had found the reincarnated Christ in a young boy named Jiddu Krishnamurti. Followers of Krishnamurti, most of whom were Theosophists, founded the Order of the Star in the East in 1911. Steiner's opposition to this order was made unmistakable by his 1912 declaration that no member of the new Order could remain a member of the German Theosophical Society. By the end of that year, Besant had induced the General Council of the Theosophical Society to revoke the charter for the German Section, which was under Steiner's leadership. In February 1913, Steiner and a group of prominent German theosophists founded a new society, the Anthroposophical Society, with the intent of pursuing a more Western path of spirituality than that nurtured in the Theosophical Society.[9]:45

The German branch had numbered only a single Lodge and a few individual members when Steiner became its head in 1902. By 1913, it had burgeoned to 69 Lodges, 55 of which (about 2,500 people) left with Steiner to be part of the new Anthroposophical Society. The General Council of the Theosophical Society issued a new charter to the 14 Lodges which remained in the Theosophical Society, which were once again led by Dr Huebbe-Schleiden.[9]:43, 45–46 The early Anthroposophical Society was predominantly German-speaking, though there were some founding members from other European countries, particularly the Netherlands.[9]:45 Its inaugural general meeting was held in January 1913 at Berlin.[12] English anthroposophy was limited to a small anonymous club until after World War I.

After a split occurred between younger members, many of whom were founding or active in new initiatives such as a school, a curative home for the handicapped, a medical clinic, and a farm, and who had formed their own "Free Anthroposophical Society," and the older members, the anthroposophical society was formally refounded, with new leadership, in December 1923.[4] Both groups came together in the new version of the society.

A conference was first called to refound the society. At this conference, which became known as the Christmas Conference, Steiner suggested that a meditative verse he had created for the occasion, the Foundation Stone Meditation, should become the spiritual cornerstone of a renewed anthroposophical movement. This movement should for the first time become unified with the Society that nurtured it.[4] At this time, the Anthroposophical Society was renamed as the General Anthroposophical Society and affiliated national societies were formed.[9]:49
Steiner gave a series of lectures on world history over the course of the eight-day conference, and established a *School of Spiritual Science* as his esoteric school, which became a new focus for ‘esoteric’ commitment and authority. While there was no requirement for membership in the General Anthroposophic Society, First Class members had to have been members of the General Society for 2 years, and accept ‘inner responsibility’ for Anthroposophy." [9]:49, 61

**History**

On November 1, 1935, the National Socialist regime banned the society in Germany for its "close relations with foreign freemasons, Jews and pacifists." The order issued by Reinhard Heydrich stated that, as a result of its opposition to the National Socialistic idea of Volk, the activities of the Anthroposophical Society endangered the National Socialistic state.[13] Jewish teachers at the Waldorf schools were consequently dismissed.[14]

From the 1930s until the 1960s, disputes over two separate issues, publishing rights for Steiner's books and the spiritual direction of the society, led to the Anthroposophical Society being effectively divided into several groups with little connection. Through efforts on all sides, the splinter groups merged again into the present Society in the early 1960s.[15]

**Organization**

**United States**

The *Anthroposophical Society in America*, headquartered in Ann Arbor, Michigan, is one of over seventy national societies of the international General Anthroposophical Society, headquartered at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland. The American Society has branches, groups, and sections in over 36 states.[16][17]

The goal of the Anthroposophical Society in America is to further the work of Rudolf Steiner. It is a non-sectarian, non-political association devoted to such ends. It supports study groups, regional branches, the School for Spiritual Science in North America, and the Rudolf Steiner Library.[16]

The administrative offices for the U.S. Society are located at the Rudolf Steiner House, 1923 Geddes Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan.[16][18]

The U.S. Society is governed by a General Council. Current members of the General Council are[19]

- John Bloom, General Secretary
- Dennis Dietzel, Central Region Representative and Council Chair
- Carla Beebe Comey, Member at large and Council Secretary
- Jack Michael, Member at large and Treasurer
- Dwight Ebaugh, Member at large
- Mickey Leach, Western Region Representative
- David Alsop, Member at large

The professional staff is led by a leadership team of[19]

- Marian León, Director of Programs,
- Deb Abrahams-Dematte, Director of Development, and
- Katherine Thivierge, Director of Operations.
A partial list of branches follows:

- The Chicago Branch[^20]
- The Los Angeles Branch[^21]
- The New York City Branch[^22]
- The Portland Branch[^17]
- The Seattle Branch[^23]

**Principles**

The founding principles of the society were:

1. The Anthroposophical Society is to be an association of people whose will it is to nurture the life of the soul, both in the individual and in human society, on the basis of a true knowledge of the spiritual world.

2. The persons gathered at the Goetheanum in Dornach at Christmas, 1923, both the individuals and the groups represented, form the nucleus of the Society. They are convinced that there exists in our time a genuine science of the spiritual world, elaborated for years past, and in important particulars already published; and that the civilisation of today is lacking the cultivation of such a science. This cultivation is to be the task of the Anthroposophical Society. It will endeavour to fulfil this task by making the anthroposophical spiritual science cultivated at the Goetheanum in Dornach the centre of its activities, together with all that results from this for brotherhood in human relationships and for the moral and religious as well as the artistic and cultural life.

3. The persons gathered in Dornach as the nucleus of the Society recognise and endorse the view of the leadership at the Goetheanum (represented by the Vorstand [Executive Council] formed at the Foundation Meeting): 'Anthroposophy, as fostered at the Goetheanum, leads to results which can serve every human being as a stimulus to spiritual life, whatever his nation, social standing or religion. They can lead to a social life genuinely built on brotherly love. No special degree of academic learning is required to make them one's own and to found one's life upon them, but only an open-minded human nature. Research into these results, however, as well as competent evaluation of them, depends upon spiritual-scientific training, which is to be acquired step by step. These results are in their own way as exact as the results of genuine natural science. When they attain general recognition in the same way as these, they will bring about comparable progress in all spheres of life, not only in the spiritual but also in the practical realm.'

4. The Anthroposophical Society is in no sense a secret society, but is entirely public. Anyone can become a member, without regard to nationality, social standing, religion, scientific or artistic conviction, who considers as justified the existence of an institution such as the Goetheanum in Dornach, in its capacity as a School of Spiritual Science. The Anthroposophical Society rejects any kind of sectarian activity. Party politics it considers not to be within its task.

5. The Anthroposophical Society sees the School of Spiritual Science in Dornach as a centre for its activity. The School will be composed of three classes. Members of the Society will be admitted to the School on their own application after a period of membership to be determined by the leadership at the Goetheanum. They enter in this way the First Class of the School of Spiritual Science. Admission to the Second or Third Classes takes place when the person requesting this is deemed eligible by the leadership at the Goetheanum.

6. Every member of the Anthroposophical Society has the right to attend all lectures, performances and meetings arranged by the society, under conditions to be announced by the Vorstand.
The organising of the school of Spiritual Science is, to begin with, the responsibility of Rudolf Steiner, who will appoint his collaborators and his possible successor.

All publications of the Society shall be public, in the same sense as are those of other public societies. The publications of the School of Spiritual Science will form no exception as regards this public character; however, the leadership of the School reserves the right to deny in advance the validity of any judgment on these publications which is not based on the same training from which they have been derived. Consequently, they will regard as justified no judgement which is not based on an appropriate preliminary training, as is also the common practice in the recognised scientific world. Thus the publications of the School of Spiritual Science will bear the following note: 'Printed as manuscript for members of the School of Spiritual Science, Goetheanum, ... Class. No one is considered competent to judge the content, who has not acquired - through the School itself or in a manner recognised by the School as equivalent - the requisite preliminary knowledge. Other opinions will be disregarded, to the extent that the authors of such works will not enter into a discussion about them.'

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

The Anthroposophical Society shall hold a regular General Meeting at the Goetheanum each year, at which time the Vorstand shall present a full report with accounting. The agenda for this meeting shall be communicated by the Vorstand to all members, together with the invitation, six weeks before the meeting. The Vorstand may call special meetings and fix the agenda for them. Invitations to such meetings shall be sent to members three weeks in advance. Motions proposed by individual members or groups of members shall be submitted one week before the General Meeting.

Members may join together in smaller or larger groups on any basis of locality or subject. The headquarters of the Anthroposophical Society is at the Goetheanum. From there the Vorstand shall bring to the attention of the members or groups of members what it considers to be the task of the Society. The Vorstand communicates with officials elected or appointed by the various groups. Admission of members will be the concern of the individual groups; the certificate of membership shall, however, be placed before the Vorstand in Dornach, and shall be signed by them out of their confidence in the officials of the groups. In general, every member should join a group. Only those for whom it is quite impossible to find entry to a group should apply directly to Dornach for membership.

Membership dues shall be fixed by the individual groups; each group shall, however, submit 15 Swiss Francs for each of its members to the central leadership of the Society at the Goetheanum.

Each working group formulates its own statutes, but these must not be incompatible with the Statutes of the Anthroposophical Society.

The organ of the society is the weekly „Das Goetheanum“, which for this purpose is provided with a supplement containing the official communications of the Society. This enlarged edition of „Das Goetheanum“ will be supplied to members of the Anthroposophical Society only.

The Founding Vorstand will be:

- President: Dr. Rudolf Steiner
- Vice-President: Albert Steffen
- Recorder: Dr. Ita Wegman
- Members: Marie Steiner and Dr. Elisabeth Vreede
- Secretary and Treasurer: Dr. Guenther Wachsmuth

These principles were originally intended to serve as statutes as well; the legal requirements of registering such societies led to an expanded set of statutes,[24] however.
See also

- Anthroposophy
- Biodynamic agriculture
- Camphill Movement
- Threefold social order
- Waldorf education

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3. First principle of the original statutes; see statutes section of this article.


10. In his autobiography, Steiner mentions that he and the leader of the larger society at the time, Annie Besant, agreed to foster independent esoteric schools in harmony with one another: "No one was left in uncertainty of the fact that I would bring forward in the Theosophical Society only the results of my own research through direct vision. For I stated this on all appropriate occasions." Rudolf Steiner, The Course of My Life: an autobiography, Anthroposophic Press (1986), ch. 30, p. 299 (emphasis in original). ISBN 0-88010-159-8

11. Steiner stated in his Autobiography that he had joined the E. S. for 'the sole purpose of informing (himself) of what took place', and that he was uninfluenced by it. Rudolf Steiner, Rudolf Steiner: An Autobiography, ed. Paul Allen, Rudolf Steiner Publications, New York, 1977.


17. Portland Branch (http://www.portlandbranch.com/).


22. NYC Branch (http://www.asnyc.org/) Accessed 2009-11-02


External links

- The Goetheanum (http://www.goetheanum.org/?L=1) - headquarters of the General Anthroposophical Society


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