

## L2) The Self-Development of Freedom and Ethical Individualism.

By Dr Robert Rose

The previous power point considered the background conditions for all forms of Self-development from a Steiner perspective. This lecture focuses on two particular aspects of this: the idea of freedom and ethical individualism as conceived in the context of Steiner education. In modules 1 & 2, this was referred to as the 5<sup>th</sup> type of research, namely into freedom and morality.

We will consider what role freedom and ethical individualism have in the teacher's own self-development and their impact on the practice of Steiner / Waldorf Education. This is also of relevance to parents and other parties who have direct connection to, and may influence, this education.

## The Educational Significance of Teacher Autonomy and Freedom

Steiner thought that the **freedom of the teacher** is intimately linked with the development of the **freedom of the child**:

“If one seriously desires to transform the present order of society into one in which social attitudes prevail, then one must not be afraid to place the spiritual-cultural life (including the school and educational system) under its own independent control, because, from such a free, independent system within the social organism, men and women will go forth with joy and zeal to take an active part in all its life. After all, only people who lack this joy and zeal can come out of schools ruled by the state and the economic system; these people feel as deadly blight the after-effects of a domination to which they should not have been subjected before they had become fully conscious citizens and co-workers in the state and the economic system. The growing human being should mature with the aid of educators and teachers independent of the state and the economic system, **educators who can allow individual faculties to develop freely because their own have been given free rein.**” (My bold)

Steiner, R (1915/21): “The Threefold Social Order and Educational Freedom”, paragraph 6, GA 24.

Moreover, Steiner wanted this freedom to be the central impulse in the education that he was proposing:

“The great aim at the Waldorf school is to bring up free human beings who know how direct their own lives”. Steiner 1923/81, A Modern Art of Education, p. 201

“A real education takes care that body, soul and spirit will be intrinsically free and independent”. Steiner 1919/95, The Spirit of the Waldorf School, p. 63

So for Steiner, the development of freedom in the child is fundamentally connected to the freedom of the teacher – **for the child to develop into a free being, the teacher also needs to be free.** But this freedom is not unconditional:

“There are no prescribed rules for teaching in the Waldorf School, but only one unifying spirit that permeates the whole. It is very important that you understand this. Teachers are autonomous... For though there is freedom everywhere the spirit that is appropriate to the age of the children is active in each class... Why do you think that all the teachers approve of the curriculum? They do not find it at all unreasonable. They find it excellent in its very freedom because it is based upon real true human **knowledge.**” Steiner, R (1924): The Kingdom of Childhood, Anthroposophic Press, p. 29/30. (My emphasis)

The freedom that Steiner was talking about is conditioned by the knowledge of how human beings develop and what is appropriate at each age as we have seen from module 3.

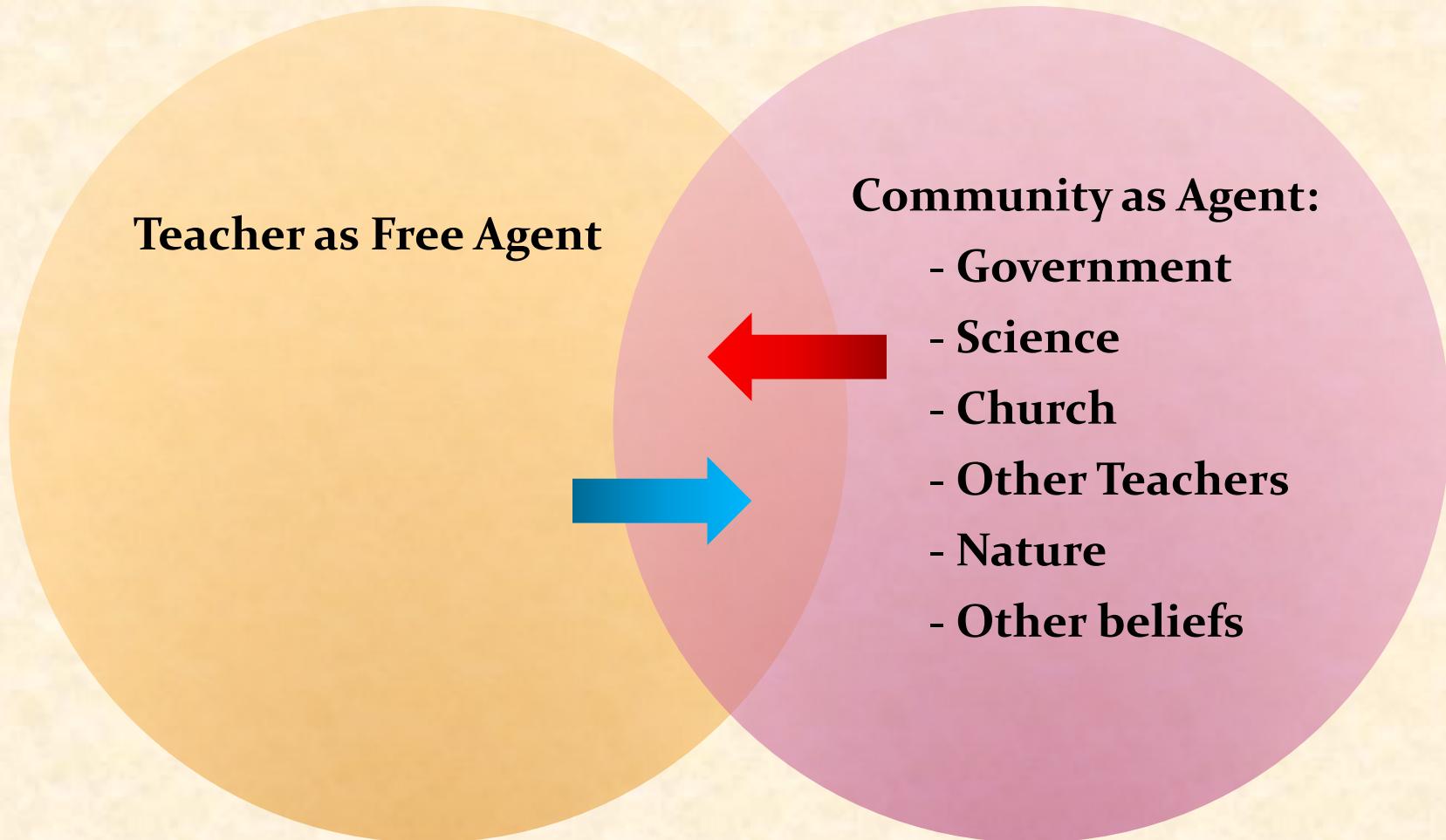
So the question then is: what did Steiner mean by this kind of freedom and how do teachers or parents cultivate it within themselves?

# A Philosophy of Freedom

Steiner's seminal work on the question of human freedom is his book "The Philosophy of Freedom", sometimes translated as "The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity". There is a copy of this attached in the Learning Materials.

**Please read chapter 1 and chapters 9 to 12 now.**

In this book, Steiner makes a fundamental contrast between inner and outer agency as characterising the parameters of the question of human freedom. By extension to the question in the context of teaching this concerns the issue of the agency of the teacher; i.e. whether or not this derives from within or without:



The question that Steiner first poses concerns the question about how does one **know** when the agency for an action derives from the inside or the outside. For him, **in the first step**, this is the question about **consciousness** of the **motives** and **drives** that lead to **decisions** and thereafter **actions**. This is how Steiner sets up the problem of freedom in chapter 1 of his book. Most of the first half of the book is taken up with a consideration of the nature of what it means to know anything at all (what philosophers call epistemology) and which then leads on to how one knows the motives and drives for one's actions in part 2 of the book. It is well worth studying the first half of the book, parts of which we have already considered in modules 1 and 2, so it might be valuable to revisit those now. The rest of this lecture will concentrate on the second half of the book and the question of freedom in so far as it manifests in what Steiner calls "Ethical Individualism".

## Freedom and Ethical Individualism

In chapters 6 to 9, Steiner gives an outline of human nature with a view to the discussion of freedom and ethical individualism. You might like to read these now. If you recall from previous discussions and which can also be recognised in this context, Steiner conceived the human being as having a central “Self” that he called the “I”. This “I” is encompassed by the soul (as the unity of thinking, feeling, willing and perception) and by the physical body. For Steiner, it is the “I” which can either operate out of freedom or be subject to coercive and compulsive forces either from the preset dispositions of the soul and the physical body as well as the outside World in the form of society or nature.

In the previous lecture, we considered the nature of Self-Knowledge, in the “Philosophy of Freedom”, Steiner considers this from a different perspective. In this context, he formulated the problem in terms of what he called “motives” and “drives” (also referred to as belonging to the “characterological disposition”). For him, there are a number of different types of these which play into the carrying out of a deed and which determine if the action is free or not.

Motives are relatively temporary, such as the motive to have a cup of tea, which usually goes away. Drives are relatively permanent such as a specific capacity to think a problem through or even perceive something in the first place.

For Steiner, motives provide the content for an action. They can either be concepts (general principles) or representations (specific “images” of particular action scenarios).

Drives on the other hand are a central part of the character of a person; they are relatively permanent, a skill may be an example of a complex of different spiritual / soul dispositions.

The next few slides represent the various types of motives and drives and the way the “I” can connect to, or live freely with, them:

“I”



**Motives**

- Concepts
- Representations

**Drives / Characterological Disposition**

- Perceiving
- Feeling
- Thinking / Representing
- Conceptual Thinking/ Practical Reason



**Leading to Action  
in  
The World**

# Drives and the Characterological Disposition

## Perception

As Steiner discussed in chapter 4 of his book, perception is the means through which we become aware of the World as well as of ourselves. In the context of the question of human freedom it takes on another perspective in so far as there appears to be certain types of action that arise seemingly directly from perception.

The first of these types of action is **instinct**. Instinct can show itself in many different ways and is regarded by scholars as being dependent on the species of a being. In this context, Steiner is only discussing human instinct and only in respect of the question of freedom. Here instinct is where little or no thought or feeling emerges into consciousness before the action. A flinch might be a simple example of this.

The second type of this kind of action is **moral tact**. This is an acquired characteristic that follows the life pathway of the individual person. This means that moral tact can be very individual, but it can also be a set of skills that a person obtains through self-development or training.

## Feeling

Feeling is often a precursor to action. Feelings can lead to positive as well as negative actions in the immediate moment, a desire on the other hand can be future orientated, long term or short term. Feeling can manifest as liking or disliking, sympathy or antipathy.

## Thinking and Representing

It is thinking and representing that give the primary focus to conscious actions and, as we will see shortly, **generate** the content of an action. In other words, that which an action is about, needs an origin. For Steiner, that origin is the **ability** to produce ideas and representations which then give the focus of the action. If a person is lacking or deficient in either of these, then a specific action either lacks direction or has no direction at all. So for example, if someone has acquired a skill, embedded in this is this ability to think or represent the content related to that skill.

## Conceptual Thinking and Practical Reason

In this, the human capacity to think transcends the past. With Thinking and Representing, we have a particular inner activity which is concerned with bringing past knowledge into the present. Conceptual Thinking, however, is that human ability which can generate **new** ideas, ideals and, in the case of Practical Reason, new practices. On this level of ability, the human being can create new ideas and scenarios for realisation.

# Motives

## Representations

As mentioned earlier, representations are that which give specific content to an action. Lets say you imagine how to cut a piece of wood, or bake a loaf of bread. This inner image acts as the content for the action that is to be performed. Clearly, the inner image (representation) pre-exists the deed and is a kind of plan for it. Obviously, each specific deed will have a sequence of such inner images both as an end point as well as the process of the action.

## Conceptual Systems

A conceptual system is where there is a set of rules that a person follows whether they understand them or not. An example might be the ten commandments. In terms of human freedom, Steiner asks the question of if these are carried out through **insight**. This is the critical turning point for him as rules followed without individual insight cannot lead to free deeds.

## Greatest Welfare of Humanity

This is a particular type of motive in which a deed is judged in accordance with its contribution to humanity generally. For this type of motive, it is not individuals that matter so much, but if humanity benefits as a whole. An example of this might be the motive of “averting climate change” as a concept.

## Progress of Culture

This is more specific than the previous motive in that the consideration does not concern the whole of human existence rather just culture. An example might be improving moral standards or cultivating a more tolerant civilisation. In a time of increasing ethnic diversity within countries, an understanding for the multiplicity of different cultures may help with the progress of mutual tolerance.

## Individual Aims

Steiner makes the argument that motives need not be only general or universal as in the previous cases. Persons can have individual motives, some of which can be egotistical, but some can still serve the community or some other individual. As we will see, for him, individual motives can still be moral.

## Conceptual Intuition

For Steiner, the highest type of motive is the conceptual intuition. In the previous types of motive, Steiner makes the case that the moral concept is based upon a particular representation so that it can be carried out as a deed, but rooted in previous experiences. Conceptual intuition is different at least in this respect:

“But the highest thinkable principle of morality is one which contains no such relation from the start [i.e. between concept and representation (RR)], but springs from the source of pure intuition and only afterward seeks the relation to perceptions (to life)” (Ibid, p. 83)

So a question might be at this point: in what sense is this “pure intuition” the highest principle of moral motive? The answer to this lies embedded in the next statement:

“But at this level he could do something even higher: if in a particular case he were not to proceed from **one** single definite aim of morality, but were to recognize a **certain value** in **all** principles of morality and were always to ask whether the one or the other would be more important here. It may happen that in certain **circumstances** one considers the progress of culture, in others, the general welfare, and in yet others, the furtherance of his own welfare, to be the right aim and motive of his actions. But when all such reasons take second place, then first and foremost the **conceptual intuition** itself comes into consideration. When this happens, then all other motives retreat from the leading position and the idea-content of the action alone is effective as its motive.” Steiner, R (1894): The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity”, Rudolf Steiner Publications, pdf version, p. 85. (My emphasis)

This motive is the highest principle of morality simply because it includes the relative value of **all** moral motives. In the previous types of motive, the focus was on an individual type. One may sense that some people may prioritise only one of these in disregard of the others.

But Steiner is making the case that through the pure intuition it is possible to grasp the concept that includes all moral motives. Hence his idea that it is conceivable that all moral motives have value. For him then, the question of which moral motive to chose depends on the **circumstances or context** in which a person finds themselves.

It is for this reason that just prior to his discussion about the motive of the general welfare of humanity that he introduces the idea of **insight** and its role in the choice of moral motive. For Steiner, a motive about which one has no insight cannot lead to a free deed. It is only with the beginning of insight that this is possible. Moreover, having the insight that all moral motives may have value also frees a person from the constraint of a single one:

“It means moral progress when man does not simply take the command of an outer or inner authority as motive for his action, but strives to recognize the **reason** why a particular principle of conduct should act as motive in him. This is the advance from morality based on authority, to conduct based on **moral insight**. At this level of morality the person will consider the needs of moral life and will let this knowledge determine his actions.” Ibid, p.84, pdf version. [My bold]

In Steiner’s view, when a moral motive is taken from the outside or from the inner life, **if** there is no insight this cannot lead to a free deed. It is only with the awakening of insight, is this possible. Joining this together with the motive of conceptual intuition, here insight yields the view that **all moral motives may have value depending on circumstance**.

From this position, Steiner is then able to formulate the notion that here the highest moral motive joins with the highest driving force. For him, the ***conceptual intuition is a motive free from the specific past and conceptual thinking is a driving force free from past driving forces***. The unity of these two he calls **ethical individualism**.

**Ethical Individualism is then the condition of *free* individual moral activity.**

## Ethical Individualism as Moral Unification

In speaking about the unification of the motives and the drives he states:

“To let this content come to expression is the highest moral driving force and also the highest motive for the one who has recognized that ultimately **all other moral principles unite in this content**. This standpoint can be called ***ethical individualism***.” Ibid, p. 86 (My bold)

Ethical Individualism then is that principle which recognises the value of all moral motives (conceptual intuition) and the highest moral drive (conceptual thinking and practical reason) and chooses the appropriate motive for a given situation. **Ethical Individualism is an Ethical Position that is able to transcend naive adherence to tradition, but at the same time incorporate it through insight and enhance human life through unique individual moral creativity.**

## Ethical Individualism and Goodness

A question that may be asked at this point is: what then is a good deed if everyone can simply chose different moral motives. Steiner's answer to this question is deceptively simple:

“My action will be “good” if my intuition, immersed in love, exists in the right way within the relationship between things; this can be experienced intuitively; the action will be “bad” if this is not the case.” Ibid, p. 87.

Steiner contrasts those situations in which a motive is taken from someone other than oneself, i.e. an external agency or external authority and without insight. For Steiner, the highest level of motive is one derived from ethical individualism. His answer to the question “what is good” is in reference to this perspective.

The above quote then argues that a good deed is based on three Soul / Spiritual capacities and their primary, most fundamental, “virtues”:

Soul / Spiritual Capacity	Moral Motive and Drive
Thinking	1) My Intuition
Feeling	2) Moral Love
Willing	3) Existing in the right way in the relationships between things (and Beings).

For Steiner, a good free deed is one in which all these elements are included. If an intuition is not mine, I am not entirely free; if I do not love a proposed deed, I am not entirely free. If this is the case, then the deed may not be entirely good from the perspective of the actor although it may be good from the perspective of those affected by the action. Furthermore, a prospective deed may be loved and there may be my intuition behind it, but if it does not exist in the right way in the relationships between things and Beings, this can still be bad.

The final step, in which the goodness value of a possible deed then lies, is in **Knowing**, i.e. **Cognising**, the existing relationships in the World and of finding a right way to adapt our actions to the relationships. One aspect to this is that of other human beings. Steiner addresses this question a little further on:

*“To live in love of the action and to let live, having understanding for the other person’s will, is the fundamental principle of free human beings. They know no other “ought” than that with which their will is intuitively in accord; how they shall will in a particular instance, their power of ideation will tell them.”* Ibid, p. 89.

Arguably, a good free deed, for Steiner, needs the recognition that there may be other free beings in the world and that a “right relationship” needs to be found to accommodate this fact. For one free individual, the World may contain other free individuals and **mutual respect** or **tolerance** for that freedom needs to be taken into account in one’s own free deed. It would be this that would have the final say in how good a deed based on ethical individualism is. For Steiner, it is this idea that should lie at the foundation of the social life, including a school context.

But it is not just the freedom of others that is relevant to this idea; it is also the nature and reality of other beings in the World as well as the World itself. To understand this we need to consider Steiner's ideas about moral imagination, moral intuition and moral technique.

## Moral Imagination

In chapter 12 of his book “The Philosophy of Freedom”, Steiner discusses the three basic levels to carry out a good deed: Moral Intuition, Moral Imagination and Moral Technique. It would be good to read this chapter now.

Moral imagination plays a distinct part in the process of carrying out an action. Namely, the activity to transform a general idea into a special situation. We may represent the whole process as follows:

**Moral Intuition:**

**Is the higher thought activity through which a person produces moral ideas – they are non-specific to begin with and range from the purely individual to the communal.**

**Moral Imagination:**

**Is the imaginative capacity through which a specific representation is produced from out of moral intuition and which links to the specific set of perceptions under concern.**

**Moral Technique:**

**In part, this constitutes the knowledge of the laws and beings in the specific situation. That is, it is initially a cognitive activity such as discussed in the first part of “The Philosophy of Freedom” and such as considered in “A Theory of Knowledge”, or the like.**

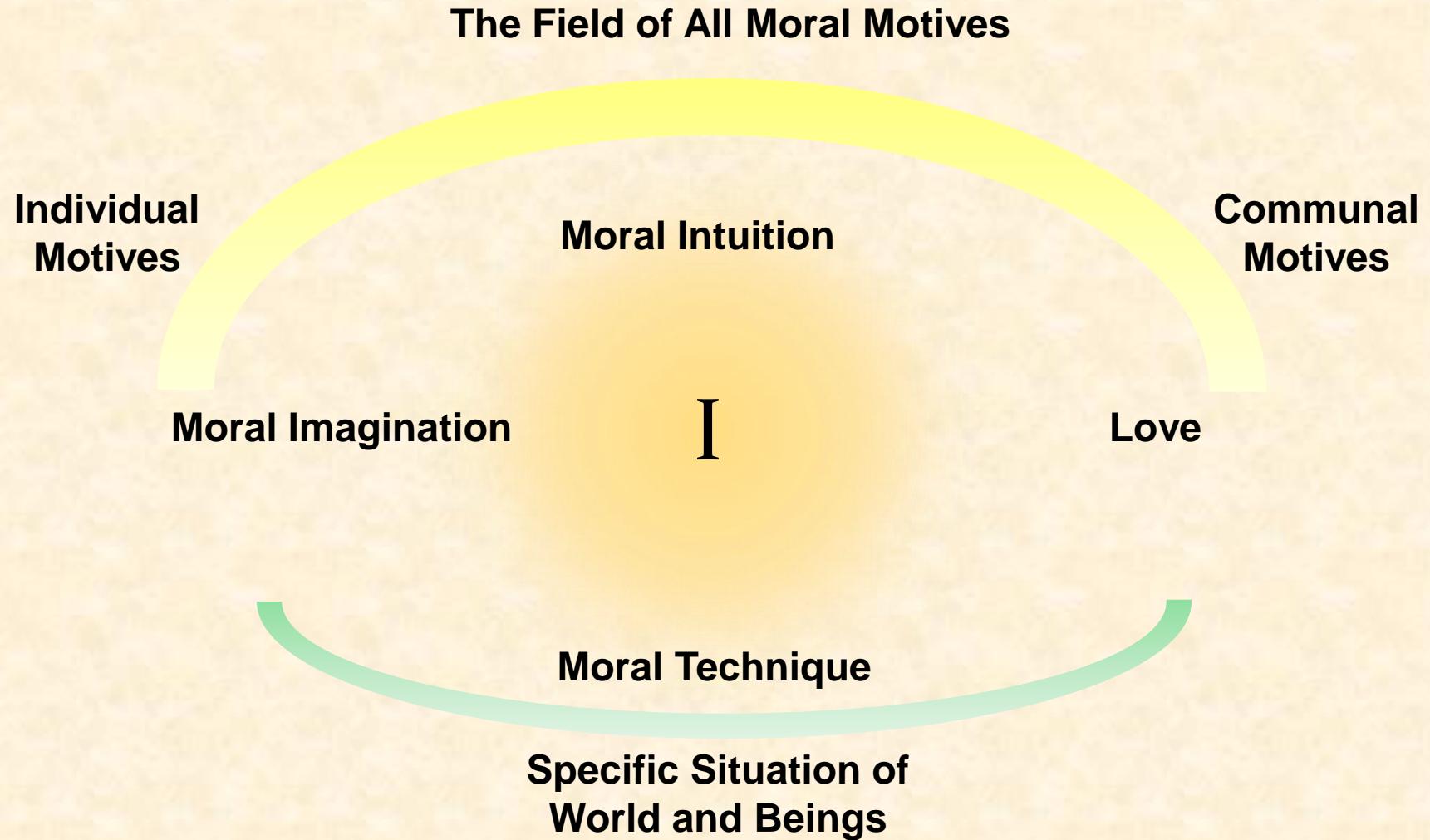
**It also includes the ability to link these to the specific representations created by moral imagination.**

**Moral Technique is dependent on the specialised epistemic activities and resultant knowledge such as discussed in modules 1, 2 & 3, or the equivalent, in that through the different research methods outlined there relevant contextual knowledge can be acquired.**

**Direction of Process**



Bringing the elements of the discussion together we can represent this as:



# Applying this to an Education Context

**Moral Intuition:** Teachers to recognise the relative value of all educational motives, not just those of external authorities or their individual selves. This can mean the recognition of the individualised educational motives of colleagues and that the value of these can depend on very specific contexts in teaching. Through this it may also be recognised that there may be real life contexts in which a specific moral motives may not be appropriate.

**Moral Imagination:** Teachers are capable of creating individualised imaginations for the specific teaching situations in which they find themselves. This means neither rejecting nor blindly accepting imaginations created by others. Moral Imagination requires knowledge derived from Moral Technique for its process of specialisation.

**Moral Love:** Teacher to learn Moral / Ethical Love in relationship to the subjects they teach, the children, parents and colleagues. Moral Love acts as a powerful Driving Force for the realisation of good teaching.

**Moral Technique:** Teachers to be able to acquire knowledge of the specific situation and beings they work with. This includes knowledge of the subjects, the generic child development phase that the children in their care are in; the psychological disposition / temperament of the children; and, importantly, the *individual* nature of the child and parents and other colleagues. Disregarding such contextual knowledge may lead to “bad” teaching irrespective of the presence of the above levels.

At the beginning of this lecture we looked at the idea that the gradual emergence of the freedom of children and young persons in an educational context is dependent on the freedom of the teachers, educators and carers. What this means in a Steiner / Waldorf Education context is that:

**Teaching can occur through free moral intuitions, moral imaginations, enfolded in moral love and in respect of the knowledge content derived from moral technique; for example in terms of the child developmental phases of the individual children you teach as well as of the subject content. In this way, a teacher can be free creatively and still meet the needs of the pupils through situational knowledge content.**

**In this way, students can grow into their own freedom.**

## Exercise: Ethical Individualism in Education

So what does this all mean for teaching? As a practical exercise, consider the various types of motives and drives you have in a practical teaching situation and how they may influence the way you may act.