2) Steiner's Social Education Philosophy

There is no doubt that Steiner intended that his social ideas could be of value to Waldorf education:

"A teacher reports about the instruction in social understanding.

Dr. Steiner: In the **seventh and eighth grades**, you could give them what is in

"Towards Social Renewal." Steiner, R (1919-22): Faculty Meetings with

Rudolf Steiner, p. 68, pdf online. (My bold)

The aim in this particular lecture is to give an overview of Steiner's social

ideas as a resource for teaching, this is not a curriculum as such but materials for a teacher's creativity to produce one. Further information about Steiner's social philosophy can be found in "Towards Social Renewal" publication that is available on this website.

These social ideas could be used in some basic ways in education: firstly, they could be used as design tools such as in the **geography** and **history** lessons, i.e. as ways to understand and form the lessons. Secondly, the ideas could be used as ways to help children with their social understanding and life generally. Today, we could see the latter of these as a part of the education of "British Values" or in fact "Human Values" more generally [see also: School inspection handbook Handbook for inspecting schools in England under section 5 of the Education Act 2005, 2019].

The Importance of Steiner's Social Philosophy in Waldorf Education

Steiner formulated his social ideas in the wake of the catastrophe of the first World War, around the same time as the founding the first Waldorf School. He saw the root of the war and the consequences thereof in the anti-social behaviour of **individuals** as well as the nature of the then contemporary economic **structures**:

"The current anti-social state of affairs is the result of individuals entering society who lack **social sensitivity because of their education**. Socially sensitive individuals can only develop within an educational system which is conducted and administered by other socially sensitive individuals. No progress will be made towards solving the social question if we do not treat the question of education and spirit as an essential part of it. An **anti-social** situation is not merely the result of **economic structures**, it is also caused by the **anti-social behaviour of the individuals who are active in these structures**. It is anti-social to allow youth to be educated by people who themselves have become strangers to reality because the conduct and content of their work has been **dictated to them from without**." Steiner, R (1919): *Towards Social Renewal, Preface 1920,* p. 14. (My bold)

The primary origin of this anti-social behaviour he located in the education system of the time. This in turn he considered to have is source in an education dictated to teachers from without. For him, the Waldorf School should provide an impulse in the opposite direction.

For Steiner the "social" consists in three spheres or sectors that interact in distinct ways:

"In the course of the last three to four centuries a social life has been formed: a **state/rights life**, a **spiritual/cultural life**, and an **economic life**. This social life, particularly the education system, "resists", we might say, the renewal of the social relationships... But what we strive for here is a *transformation* of the present social configuration".

Steiner, R (1919/20): *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*, Anthroposophic Press, p. 9. (My emphasis)

His claim is that society resisted change and that education as normally conceived is a part of this resistance. So it was his intent that Waldorf Education should provide a means to bring about the beginnings of a positive change to the three spheres of society.

One example of this is Steiner's social philosophy. Steiner intended that Waldorf Education should embody social ideals:

"Obviously, the Waldorf School can be successful only if it is completely inspired by the Spirit that aspires towards the ***threefold nature of the social organism***" Steiner, R (1919/20): *The Spirit of the Waldorf School*, Anthroposophic Press(p. 7). (My emphasis)

This lead him to the conviction that the Waldorf School needs to aim towards an education rooted in the three principles of the social, democratic and freedom:

"Adults will have to live in a social organism which, in regard to the economic aspect, will be social; in regard to the government, democratic; and from the spiritual aspect, liberal, free. ***The great problem of the future will be that of education***. How will we have to deal with children so that they, as adults, can grow into the ***social***, ***democratic***, and *spiritually* [cultural] **free** areas of living in the most comprehensive way?"
Steiner, R (1919/69): *Education as a Social Problem,* Anthroposophic Press, (p. 12)(My emphasis).

The Teachers Social Attributes

For Steiner though, social education is not just a question of teaching children about social concepts, it is also about the exemplification of the social though the nature of the teachers themselves:

"The second thing that we must develop as we work toward a more **humane form of society is a social attitude of teachers... We must find it so that a new love of humanity may come into the relationship between teacher and pupil".** Steiner, R (1919/95): *The Spirit of the Waldorf School, Anthroposophic Press.*

The grounding point for a social attitude is the moral principle of "love of humanity". For him it is this orientation of the teachers toward the children that would lead ultimately to a social attitude to the World. The social then has its grounds in morality;

"We can bring the social question into proper perspective only through a genuine comprehension of morality" Steiner, R (1922/96): *Waldorf Education and Anthroposophy 2,* Anthroposophic Press.

Inner and Outer: Social Sensitivity and Social Form

Steiner's view was the social life consists in at least two different components: an individual's social abilities, or sensitivities, and social form. These has their source in education, in thinking and learning:

"Therefore it is necessary that we not only reflect upon the transformation of single institutions, but that we really adjust ourselves to a genuine transformation in our ***thinking*** and ***learning***, down to their innermost structure". Steiner, R (1919): *Education as a Social Problem*, Anthroposophic Press, p. 111 (my emphasis).

The question then is how can one integrate the two components within the three sphere of the social life which he then goes on to describe? The key is to have social values and abilities that coincide with the appropriate social principle of the spheres of the social form: sensitivities or abilities in freedom, equality and "brotherhood" – if these are established as ***social sensitivities*** then the ***social forms*** can work; if not the latter will always struggle to succeed if not they may fail outright.
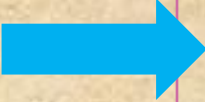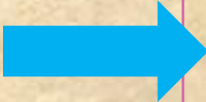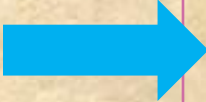
The Nature of the Social Threefold Idea

As we will see, Steiner's views on the social realm consisted in a three – dimensional approach. He saw society as consisting in what he called "three spheres": the **cultural**, the **political / legal** and the **economic**. These he considered to have distinct principles, but that in a real life society are in a constant state of interaction. For him, society is healthy only when these spheres interact in the right way and that if they don't then society and the individuals in it suffer. Steiner's views on society are also called "social threefolding". In terms of this social view, as a philosophy, there are at least two ways to understand them:

1) As a **diagnostic** for how an individual society works, whether it is healthy or unhealthy;

2) As a **prognosis** for how society could be formed in order for it to work healthily.

As mentioned, it is the former of these that is primarily indicated for teaching.

The following table gives a brief overview of the three spheres and their unique principles:

Steiner outlined three distinct spheres for the social life, each with their own distinct principles:

Social Sphere	Social Principle
Cultural / Spiritual	Freedom of the Individual
Political / Rights / Democratic	Equality of Rights
Economic	Association or "Brotherhood" of Needs (cultural, political & economic, see later)

Social Institutions

One of things that needs to be noted here is that these three spheres or sectors are not just about society as a whole or macro scale "institutions", but also "processes". In the cultural sphere, an **institution** might be a school, or a university. It could also be an arts or scientific research centre. In the political sphere, an institute might be a government, or rights bodies or courts of law. In the economic sphere, this might be a bank, or a shop, or a market or a business, however large or small.

Social Processes

A **process,** on the other hand, is that which occurs between individuals or groups of individuals. It is here that Steiner's concept of "social threefolding" is a little more complicated. Any interaction on an individual or small group level may consist in a cultural, political / rights and / or economic process. These spheres can change from moment to moment in their significance and relevance in terms of their interaction. We will consider these in more detail in the following.

The Cultural Sphere

The **cultural sphere**, Steiner describes in terms of areas of the social life such as science, religion, art, philosophy and education, etc. These are settings where ideas and practices are **created** and **proposed**. For him, this is where the *freedom of the individual* is most significant. For instance, a person may generate a new idea in politics, or economics. Other possibilities may be new ideas in science and religion, or new creations in art. What matters, for Steiner, is that individual freedom of **creativity** and **conviction** is paramount in this sphere. Another aspect to this might be the freedom to have individual religious convictions without external pressures from within the society in which we live. For Steiner, what a person believes, or is convinced of is, or should be, a question of individual freedom. The other side of this is that in a healthy society there would be **mutual tolerance** of another persons convictions. For Steiner, when this mutual tolerance is not present is when social problems arise. The limit of this is when actions arise from this individual freedom and begin to have impacts on other people or beings. In the case of the former, one individual's freedom is the limit of another, it is then that different principles come into play. A teacher for example, should not just act out of their freedom, but must consider carefully how this influences the children and the nature of their development.

The Political / Legal Sphere

The **political / legal sphere** is primarily to do with law, rights and governance. It is in this sphere that Steiner argues for **equality** as the primary principle. This sphere may be the easiest to understand as it is that which plays a prominent role in people's consciousness and life. Through the media, we become aware of the actions of political bodies and parties, of politicians and law courts. Steiner proposed however, that this sphere be kept distinct from the cultural and economic spheres. For example, the political sphere, for him, should not dictate the activities of the cultural sphere or economic spheres or indeed be determined by them. Lobbying for political favours from economic bodies should not come into play, nor should political decisions be made on the basis of personal economic gain. Steiner made the case that all persons and groups should be treated equally in politics and law and that any imbalance in this due to, for instance, economic influence, would lead to an unjust society. A member of parliament who has a second job, for example, may have a conflict of interest when it comes to political decision making, so safeguards need to be in place to prevent this happening.

The Economic Sphere

The **economic sphere** is concerned with the production, distribution and consumption of goods. There are many types of goods, they do not need to be "objects" in the ordinary sense of the term. A table or a computer are goods as objects, but a play or a concert are not objects but are goods, economically speaking. All of these things and others can be considered to be goods from an economic perspective.
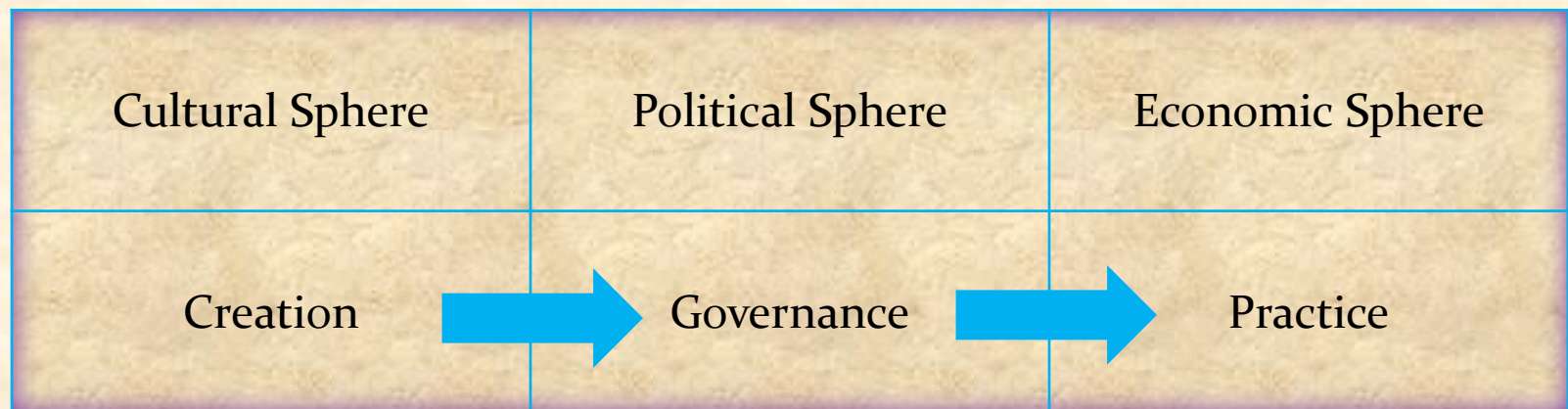
For Steiner, the primary principle that should be at play in the economic sphere is what he calls "brotherhood" and which is linked to the concepts of association and needs. It is important to bear in mind here what he intended with this. Most of the economy of today as it was in his day is governed by the principle of self-interest. So Steiner is not saying that what happens in the economic sphere is as it should be rather that a different principle should. In an earlier lecture series he made the case for enlightened non-self-interest or we could call this economic altruism. We will return to this in a later lecture.
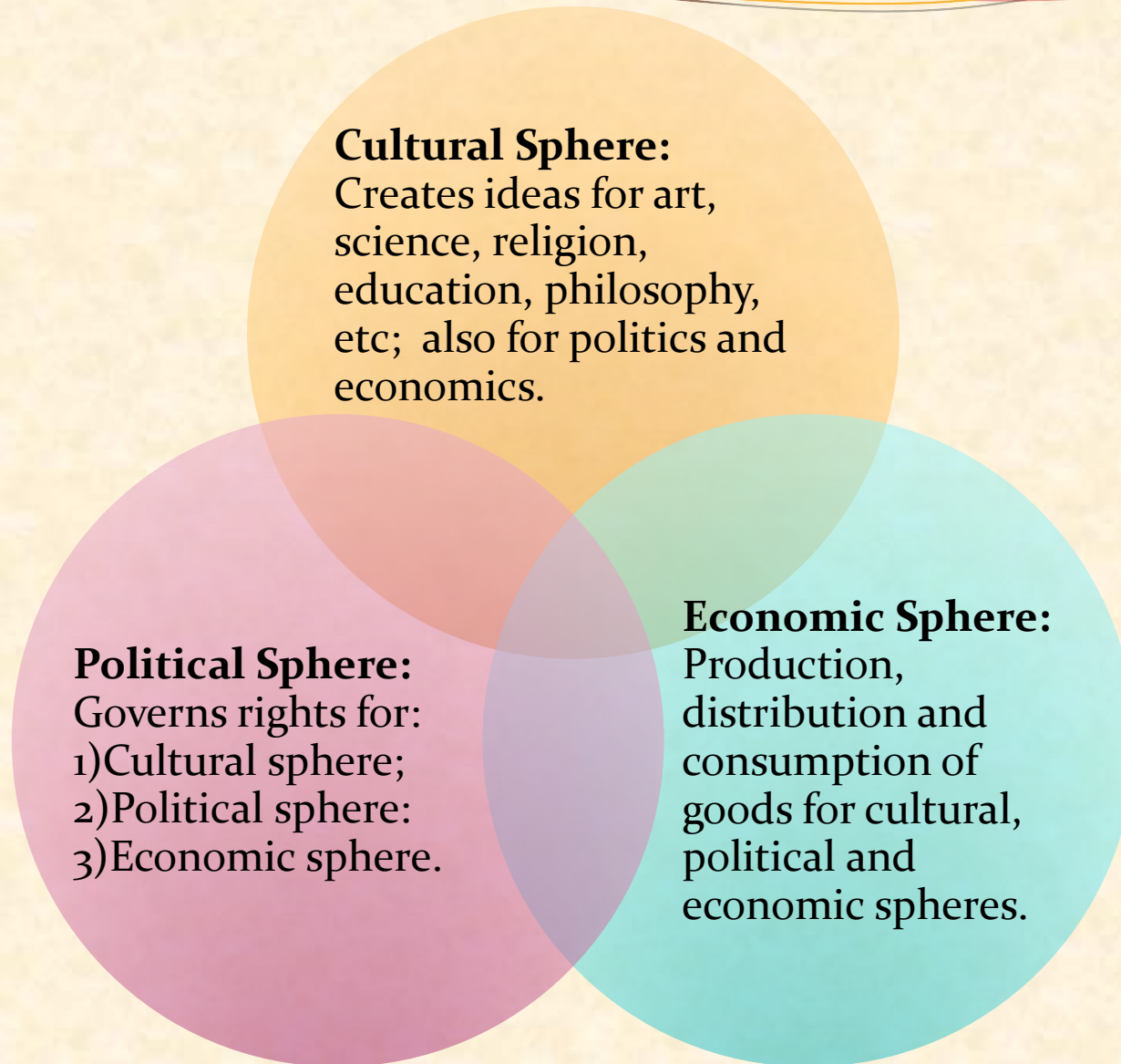
Social Sphere Relationships

As mentioned, Steiner made the case that the social spheres should be kept distinct from each other's functioning, but that they should be connected. In the following two slides, we give a few indications as to how this can happen. The first slide shows how the cultural sphere is the primary creative source not just for itself but also for the political and economics spheres. For instance, individual researchers may produce new ideas concerning culture, politics or economics. At this point of the social process, they are not an integrated part of a society but the ideas or practices of individuals. At this juncture they should be free to have and express their convictions. In the second slide, it is shown how ideas and practices can then flow into the different communities. Here the first column indicates how an individual's creations can become a part of the cultural community, then they can also become a part of the political or economic spheres. In terms of the political sphere, what was an individual's idea can then become a questions of communal governance, such as the creation of a new law or the abolition of an old one. Likewise, an individual can have a new idea of how to do economics, as such it is initially a part of the cultural sphere, but it can then be taken up as an actual practice by many in the economic sphere.

For example, someone may have the idea of "fair trade", this could, in principle, become embodied in law and as such make the transition to the political sector. But then it could become established as a necessary practice in the economic sphere.

The process between the social sphere could then be modelled on the following:

Cultural Sphere	Political Sphere	Economic Sphere
Creation	Governance	Practice

The following slides give some further indications:

Cultural Sphere:
Creates ideas for art, science, religion, education, philosophy, etc; also for politics and economics.

Political Sphere:
Governs rights for:
1)Cultural sphere;
2)Political sphere:
3)Economic sphere.

Economic Sphere:
Production, distribution and consumption of goods for cultural, political and economic spheres.

Cultural Sphere: Freedom	Political Sphere: Equality	Economic Sphere: Association
Human Individuality	**Human Interrelationships**	**Human Relationships to Nature**
Creativity and Individual conviction in Culture: Science Art Religion Education	Governance / Democracy Maintenance of Rights in: **Culture**: Leisure rights Rights to individual conviction **Political**: right to vote. **Economic**: Worker / Manager Equal Rights; Humane Income	Needs based (Goods & Money) Production, Distribution and Consumption of Goods: Cultural Goods Political Goods Economic Goods Human Goods: Food Clothing Housing.
Creation of New Ideas in: Political Thought Economic Thought		

From out of these ideas, it is then possible to create a curriculum suitable for class 7 and 8 as indicated at the beginning of this power point. Obviously, the teacher will need to take great care as to what is right for this age of the learner. In the next power points, we will look at an outline of what this could mean in terms of social citizenship, geography and history, but the possibilities for introducing social education are far greater than in these two subjects. Social education could for instance be included in all subjects such as literature, mathematics and science in ways also appropriate to these areas of the curriculum.