

The Method of Spiritual Science

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Much has been written about the development of the method of natural science since 1900 but very little about the development of the method of spiritual science during the same period (Spiritual science is here taken to include the applications of the method in the various spheres of contemporary culture).

This may be partly because Rudolf Steiner was so highly qualified that it will be a long time before anyone else is able to surpass his attainments. However, the pursuit of any science is a co-operative enterprise whose character is determined by the abilities of the participants. The history of the method of spiritual science is closely related to the development of the abilities of the individual workers.

In view of the wide field of interest and the great scope for further development, it is natural that work up to now should have consisted mainly of studies and research by individuals or small groups in specific fields such as plant morphology, agriculture, medicine and mathematics. It would have been impracticable, during this period, to have advanced in these various directions while, at the same time, co-ordinating all activities into a systematic and cohesive approach.

However, after more than half a century, during which far-reaching changes have taken place in the general scientific, technological and social spheres, there are indications that a review of the current situation is needed. How do we describe the method of spiritual science in the form in which it is being applied to-day? The contemporary situation is complex. There are differing viewpoints within the Anthroposophical Society: moral, aesthetic and social impulses have arisen within or on the fringe of the scientific sphere during the last thirty years: there is serious interest in the work of Rudolf Steiner outside the Anthroposophical movement: holistic trends are developing in many aspects of contemporary life.^{1,2,3}

In his book «Man or Matter», Ernst Lehrs describes the method of spiritual science as an extension and enhancement of the method of natural science.⁴ The investigator is required to develop his artistic, moral, intellectual, experimental and social abilities. The degree to which this may be possible, in human terms, within say, a period of 30 years, and in such a way as to achieve a unified and systematic method, can only be ascertained by observation of the developmental process of the last few decades.

Rudolf Steiner's description of world evolution and other results of his spiritual researches are of great importance in relation to spiritual science. Initially these exist

in the form of a general background but aspects may be progressively incorporated into the main body of spiritual science as experimental or other forms of «objective» verification become available – for example, descriptions of early Earth evolution may be verified by means of geological discoveries.

A special situation exists in regard to the social basis of spiritual science to-day. The rise of modern science has taken place as an integral part of contemporary culture, but the development of spiritual science, during the last hundred years, has proceeded under different social conditions – for well-known reasons. A special effort is therefore needed to-day, if spiritual science is to be provided with the universal social basis appropriate to the pursuit of scientific enquiry.

A Three-Part Review.

The foregoing considerations suggest that a three-part review could be undertaken, to advantage, in order to clarify the present position, as follows:

- a) a detailed review of the historical development of the method of spiritual science during the last hundred years. The character of spiritual science changed after the death of Rudolf Steiner, since there was then no-one who could speak with first-hand authority in this field – although there was great promise for the future.
- b) an assessment of the method of spiritual science to-day and the relationship between spiritual science and contemporary life.
- c) an outline plan of the way in which it is intended that spiritual science will develop during, say, the next thirty years, having regard to the stated objective of eventual integration into contemporary culture.

Holistic Science

These three steps will not be further elaborated here but a contribution may perhaps be made, from another standpoint, by attempting to develop an approach to spiritual science directly out of the conditions and realities of to-day, making use, where appropriate, of advances made during the last sixty years and of current spiritual and cultural impulses, and including everything that is publicly available from the work of Rudolf Steiner.

This approach is envisaged as supplementing, not replacing, all that has been achieved up to now in the Anthroposophical sphere. Since it, in effect, makes a new start I have designated it «Holistic Science» – for convenience and purposes of identification. Both existing and new approaches are directed towards the goal of a comprehensive and co-ordinated understanding of man and Nature. Two characteristics of the new approach are:

- 1) It is free from any historically-acquired associations or affiliations and
- 2) it forms, from the outset, an integral part of contemporary culture.