

In What Respect Are Star Children Different?

Studies concerning the extension of childhood*

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People from different cultures often experience difficulties understanding one another; they are often intolerant or hostile toward one another. We can hardly stand it when people are different. Many exterminated groups of people were not inferior to their executioners, just different and, above all -- less egotistical.

This is not new. In the New Testament (John 15: 25) we find the Lord saying, "they hated me without a cause," which is a quote from two Psalms (69: 4 and 35: 19). "Without cause," but not without ground. For what the Lord represented was true humanity, true nondogmatic wisdom and goodness of the kind which is not based in texts but intuitively finds the moral, creative thing to do in each situation. He reminds His fellow human beings of what they could be; but being faced with the challenge to change in accordance with one's own ideal picture easily tends to call forth hatred against the one who represents this picture. Christ purposely mentions the young child in the New Testament as a kind of ideal for humanity (Matt. 18: 2; 18: 10; 19: 13; Mark 9: 33; 10: 13; Luke 9: 46; 18: 15). And even among His disciples we see a failure to understand the essence of childhood (Matt. 19: 13; Mark 10: 13; Luke 18: 15).

Then, as now, the world of the grown-ups was different from the world of children. The difference only increased with time. What exactly is the difference?

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The different, unnoticed...

Little children experience the world as one with themselves; they identify with it. Grown-ups, on the other hand, experience the world dualistically, in a subject-object relationship. A non-dualistic experience means that there is no distance; a relationship is not established through thinking, but in a dreaming "clairfeelance," The adult, too, makes an immediate connection through feeling; feeling bridges the gap because of the immediate identification which takes place, as is the case in an emotion or in an artistic experience. The "separation" from the world is caused by the antipathy forces¹, or, put in different words, it is brought about by the building up of the "me-feeling."²

The new generation can be broadly characterized as lacking this built-up "me-feeling" in many children. The separation from the world -- spiritual from physical -- is in many cases less pronounced than used to be the case with children of the same age in an earlier generation; as a result, the separating forces take effect later or slower. In this respect, these children are late compared to "normal" children; due to this lateness in development these children are fundamentally different in nature. Sympathy forces predominate, resulting in numerous "deviations" from the usual capacities and achievements required at school, in the kindergarten, or at home.

These new children live in a picture-like³ or feeling "thinking" instead of a linear, conceptual thinking (we can feel the meaning of a picture; it speaks to us aesthetically). Being strongly connected with things, also with their own inner gestures of consciousness, they have difficulties forming concepts, which is the central aim of

education in most schools. Forming concepts always demands a selective narrowing of attention. For example, when we try to awaken a sense for the concept "smooth," we will show the child several objects with a smooth surface; in the process, the child has to disregard form, size, substance and function of the object and focus instead on the intended concept, namely "smoothness." As long as the child still relates to things by identifying, this "disregarding" cannot be carried out; such a child will stay behind when asked to form concepts, because it still experiences "world-inclusively." This is the case with many children who have symptoms variously labeled as ADD, ADHD, dyslexia, or Asperger syndrome -- and also with Star children.⁴ They have difficulty adapting to the world of the grown-ups. When this difference in constitution is not understood by the parents and teachers, these children will quickly be labeled as "retarded," "challenged" or in similar terms. In reality, these children are simply different; they have different capacities that often go unnoticed. Going unnoticed, they are neither valued nor nurtured. Instead, these children are usually blamed for their weak "achievements," and judged and treated as inferior. This often leads to depressions, inferiority complexes, or a lack of self-esteem, all of which are compensated for by resistance, recalcitrance, aggression or a turning inward. A child who is really different in constitution thus becomes a "difficult" child. Then come psychological tests (in which such children often cut a bad figure because they refuse to co-operate); they are given extra tutoring or sent to special schools where too little is demanded of them; they are treated with special drugs, and so on. This descent will easily lead to a collapse: many children end up in the hands of psychiatrists. A child who feels misunderstood will find no sense in life, will give up and withdraw completely, which is another form of being different.

Hyperactivity, too, can be seen as a continuation of the way toddlers live. Almost all healthy little children are very active until the time they begin to speak in sentences; people around them can hardly keep up. We experience this enormous thirst for knowledge and experience as "normal." When this behavior continues into school age, we speak of "hyperactivity."

... and endangered world of the child.

If the sense of self in a bodily sense (the me-feeling) is not built up strongly enough, the functioning of the senses will also be more like the earlier orientation of the little child. Physical perception, based on the physiological functioning of the sense organs, is reinforced by feeling components. As a result, both over-functioning and under-functioning will occur, mostly in the realm of hearing; certain frequencies and noises are heard by these children with painful intensity. Asymmetrical distribution of hearing in the two ears can also cause dyslexia, ADHD, and learning difficulties.⁵ Strangely enough, this abnormal hearing often goes together with abnormalities in the function of other senses. Examples are: excessive seeing,⁶ smelling, tasting and various irregularities in the sense of touch and warmth.

When the child's consciousness is insufficiently independent, being over-immersed in the surroundings, the child will be unable to focus (on the teacher for example), and will be distracted from everything which happens around her (in the classroom for example). Something will be happening all the time: the noises of the turning of pages, the movements of children, street noises, and so on. In fact, these children do not have a lack, but rather an excess of attention. The "butterfly-children"

pick up much more in a short time (by means of their feelings) than the so-called normal children during a much longer period of observation.⁷

All these irregularities can be traced back to a weakness in self perception (sense of their own bodies, sense of self). At the same time unusual capacities can be observed, especially wordless communication without signals ("mind reading"), and the capacity to perceive the essence of other human beings and look through them, be they peers or adults. In society and in school, this can also have its drawbacks. It is striking how many creative people (in many realms) were dyslexic or even autistic, in any case not "normal."⁸

The insufficient "separation" from the world means being less strongly incarnated -- with all the advantages (talents) and disadvantages (not living properly on the earth) that come with it. We know of the many attempts to compensate for this, such as self-destructiveness, aggression, compulsiveness, blind rage, fixations, inflexible holding on to habits, obsession with order, and other symptoms.⁹ All these serve to replace the missing center, the everyday ego. The right solution would be to build up the real I or self, which the Star children seem to have to begin with, something which shows itself in the self-assured and penetrating gaze, present immediately after birth. The phenomena, showing themselves with increasing intensity in the new generation of children, can be summarized in the following insight. These children retain the capacities of small children, and with it the childlike relationship to the spiritual and physical world, longer, often much longer than grown-ups do. In this sense one can speak of a slowing down or retardation.¹⁰ On the one hand this means a more spiritual soul structure,¹¹ on the other hand an adaptation to the world of the grown-ups which is initially slower or more

measured. By making the wrong judgment and taking inappropriate measures, the former can be destroyed, the latter made impossible.

A different way of being human: what to do?

It is no surprise that many parents, teachers and special education teachers do not see, or maybe do not want to see the change sketched above. This change is visible not only in the spirit and soul configuration of many children, but even extends into the biological realm with increased allergies and susceptibility of life forces, various symptoms of which occur more and more. It is hardly possible to understand these fundamental differences without a spiritually oriented psychology; we must also grant that it is difficult to imagine such rapid changes occurring in the development of humanity. We will leave developmental and scientific parallels in the history of mankind out of the present considerations. One shouldn't blame specialists for misinterpreting these developments, yet it becomes more and more difficult to explain the increasing difficulties occurring in the schools and preschools as stemming from environmental influences, not to mention genetic explanations. Rather than discriminating against children who deviate from the norm, prejudices have to be put aside, for the time has come for a systematic scientific study of these children.¹²

Couldn't it be that we, who are older, have a feeling towards these children which is similar to the feeling the contemporaries of the Lord felt arising in themselves towards Him? The children hold up a mirror to us, in which next to the ideal picture of the human being our real picture also appears, and it is hard for us to stand the difference. These children say to us, "We show you a different way of being human, of living together; do

you want to accept it? If so, you would have to do many things differently, and above all you would have to recognize what we bring and stop measuring us with outmoded yardsticks. Look at us, before we become 'difficult'; because in hindsight we are always found lacking."

At the end of this contribution, please allow me a personal note. I would like to reassure all grown-ups who are confronted with the difficulties sketched above: they couldn't have known what comes to meet them. On the other hand I will never give up the hope that increasing numbers of contemporaries, especially among those who are familiar with Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science -- despite its inherent special challenges -- will get a glimpse of what is happening now between the spiritual world and the earth; will in fact gain insights allowing a better understanding of Steiner. I beg you, dear parents, dear teachers: please give a chance to the perspective, which I have tried to stimulate with the considerations above! Perhaps it will offer you helpful truths.

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¹ See Rudolf Steiner in GA 306, lecture 2.

² See Kühlewind, Georg. *Das Goetheanum*. 2001: numbers 19 -- 22, and: Kühlewind, *Aufmerksamkeit und Hingabe* (Attentiveness and Devotion) Stuttgart 1998, chapter 6 to 8.

³ In the third chapter of GA 306, Rudolf Steiner describes this way of thinking as typical for children age 7-14; nowadays it is considered delayed because of the general acceleration.

⁴ Kühlewind, Georg. *Sternkinder* (Star children) Stuttgart 2001.

⁵ Bérard, Guy. *Hearing Equals Behavior*. Chicago 1993.

⁶ Davis, Ron. *The Gift of Dyslexia*. New York 1994, 1997.

⁷ Kühlewind, Georg. See footnote 2.

⁸ See footnote 6 and also Janzen, Cornelia, *Rätsel der Legasthenie* (Riddles of Dyslexia), Stuttgart 2000.

⁹ So also Holtzapfel, Walter. *Der frühkindliche Autismus als Entwicklungsstörung* (Autism in the Young Child As a Hampering to Development). Stuttgart 1981.

¹⁰ In the works of Henning Köhler concerning the problems of these different children this conception is sometimes expressed, but always in the background, as in his books

Schwierige Kinder Gibt Es Nicht (There Are No Difficult Children), 1997; *Was haben wir nur falsch gemacht?* (What Have We Done Wrong?), 2000; *War Michel Aus Lönneberga Entwicklungsgestört?* (Was Michael from Lonneberga Developmentally Retarded?), 2002.

¹¹ Rudolf Steiner describes this more spiritual soul structure in GA 317, 4th lecture, in which he focuses on "crazy" and handicapped children.

¹² We cannot fail to mention that an astonishing conservatism is to be observed in this area on the part of the experts. There is a long list of healing methods and procedures to help affected children, highly individual in nature and to a large degree also dependent on those who extend help. Thus, for example for people who do not speak, supported communication ("Facilitated Communication--FC) is the only way to communicate and this method has been in existence for about 14 years. Several books and papers have been published about autism, for example by Dietmar Zöllner, a veritable scientist of autism, who recently published his third book, next to numerous other contributions, titled *Autismus und Körpersprache* (Autism and Body Language). Then there are children who learn to write completely independently, without "support." There are effective therapies for hearing (AIT, which stands for Auditory Integrational Training; see footnote 5, and also Annabel Stehli's books *The Sound of a Miracle*, 1991, and *Dancing in the Rain*, 1995. The latter contains 22 case histories with highly interesting observations). In the area of the visual therapy Melvin Kaplan (New York) should be mentioned, who has essentially turned around the whole way autistic (and "difficult") children are diagnosed. Attempts have been made to treat the various symptoms with vitamins and nutrition.

Holding therapy and learning to reach by means of pictures belong in this category.

(Irina Prekop, *Hättest Du Mich Festgehalten . . .* [If Only You Had Held Me . . .], 1999;

Glenn Doman, *How to Teach Your Baby to Read*).