

'O man, your organism is the organism of a sensory shell in which a divine being rests and lives.'

19 What is Man?

How about a little philosophy? In this chapter I would like to present the philosophical standpoint on which my book is based. It has become important in my life and has helped me to order my thoughts and understand human life better.

What is man?

Like every true thinker, Pestalozzi wanted a sound intellectual foundation for his political proposals and campaigns, and especially for his educational theories. For him, that meant to be clear in his mind about the ‘nature of man’, about ‘man in his essence’. His reflections and observations went so far that he had no qualms about calling himself an ‘authority on human nature’.

Pestalozzi developed his anthropological ideas in his philosophical magnum opus, *Meine Nachforschungen über den Gang der Natur in der Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts (1797)*. (*My Investigations into the Course of Nature in the Evolution of Mankind*). I will summarise its main ideas below.

Man’s Twofold Nature

Unlike animals, which are always in harmony with themselves, man’s existence is marked by *tension* and *inner conflict*. For Pestalozzi, the reason lay in man’s twofold nature, the two sides of which he called ‘animal’ and ‘higher’ human nature.

19 What is Man?

Our *animal nature*, also often called our *sensory nature*, comprises all those aspects of our life which serve our own survival and that of the species, and which tie us to our physical bodies and our sensory system. It drives us to satisfy our needs and makes us seek pleasure and avoid pain, feel all sorts of feelings such as like and dislike as well as prompting us to indulge our lethargy and selfishness.

Our *higher nature* makes possible those things that raise us above the animals: our ability to recognise truth, practise love, believe in God, listen to our conscience, exercise justice, develop a sense of beauty, recognise higher values and act on them, be creative, act in freedom, bear responsibility, overcome our own selfishness, develop communal life, follow the dictates of reason, seek to improve ourselves. Pestalozzi was convinced that a 'divine spark' manifested itself in this human potential, which made man into an image of the divine. He therefore often also called our higher nature our 'inner', 'eternal', 'spiritual', or 'divine' nature.

These two sides of human nature are different in essence but they are bound together in their appearance, since our higher being is rooted in our animal nature and grows out of it. Thus it is the task of education to raise our animal-sensory nature as far as possible to the higher level. He recognises the value of our lower nature, as long as it does not impede the development of our higher potential.

Pestalozzi's Investigations

The view of human nature set forth here runs through the whole of Pestalozzi's thought. It was mainly in his writings after 1800 that he expressed it with such clarity but it is also the basis of the idea behind the *Investigations* mentioned above. Starting out from the experience of inner conflict and the question of its origin and purpose, he came to the conclusion that human life takes place in three different 'conditions'. These are three different modes of existence, each with its own laws, namely the *natural condition*, the *social condition*, and the *moral condition*. In the first two it is our animal nature that is dominant, and in the moral condition, our higher nature.

The Natural Condition

The natural condition is regulated by two opposing drives: *egoism*, serving the self, and *goodwill*, directing the self to others. Within the framework of social life, goodwill can be mixed and can even have a destructive effect — for example when it appears as naive good nature — but it is the natural basis for our morality, for it is from goodwill that love gradually emerges.

Within the natural condition Pestalozzi distinguishes between the *pure, uncorrupted* form and the *corrupted* form. In the *uncorrupted natural condition* our needs and the powers we have to satisfy them are permanently in *balance*. We do not want more than we are capable of and what we are capable of is no less than what we need. We abandon ourselves to the pure enjoyment of the senses and enjoy unthreatened security. Everything we do is directed towards the moment; we are unconcerned about the past or the future. There are no obstacles in the way of our egoism, it serves our survival alone, which no one contests or makes difficult for us. Egoism and goodwill are in harmonious balance. We are without guilt, for we obey our natural instincts, which have not yet been corrupted. No one hampers our natural urge for freedom so that it does not turn to violence.

In this idea of uncorrupted, natural man it is not difficult to see Rousseau's picture of the noble savage, a picture, moreover, which even today has lost none of its seductive power. But Pestalozzi draws a clear distinction between himself and his spiritual forebear in emphasising that the uncorrupted natural condition is not something of which we can have direct experience. It vanishes with 'our first cry', for that is audible proof of the disproportion between the infant's needs and its actual powers. The uncorrupted natural condition is a construct of *thought*, but that is what makes it effective, because it allows us to *imagine* the lost harmony we seek to recover. Of course, Pestalozzi realised that this purely natural harmony based on instinct is of necessity irretrievably lost to us. There is no return to animal simplicity, free of problems. Our lost harmony must be restored by other means — by morality freely accepted, as we will see later.

19 What is Man?

The direct experience we have of man as we know him is of the *corrupted* natural condition. By that Pestalozzi understands man as a creature of instinct and urges, a self-centred 'animal'. In this corrupted natural condition the balance between our desires and needs and the powers required to satisfy them has been lost. In contrast to our situation in the uncorrupted natural condition, we find ourselves to be weak, inadequate and in need of help, our lives characterised by fear, exertion, struggle. As long as no one gets in our way, we are still full of goodwill, for that is in line with our lethargy and the fact that in general we feel more comfortable in concord with others than in dispute. Since, however, our daily worries arouse our egoism, we all more or less seek power, which results in a struggle of everyone against everyone else. Individuals — as long as they are still in the corrupted natural state — have no compunction about forcing through their desire for power and possessions at others' expense. They claim the right to 'natural freedom', that is to do whatever they like, if necessary with recourse to violence.

The Social Condition

We find a first solution to the trials and tribulations of the corrupted natural condition by entering the social condition. Pestalozzi examines the *process of socialisation* from two aspects. Firstly, he sees it as an irreversible historical event lying far back in the past and characterised by the invention of property, with all its consequences, in particular the creation of 'positive law', that is law that supersedes natural law. Secondly, he sees 'socialisation' as a process that is happening all the time as individuals, now reasoning beings, become aware of their corrupted natural being. The corrupted natural condition is only distinct from the social condition *in theory*, for the egoistical struggle for power and possessions in the corrupted natural condition assumes the existence of property. In this situation the concept and regulation of property are 'social', but the selfish, ruthless pursuit of one's own interests at the expense of others' is 'animal'. Since in our everyday experience animal selfishness and property are almost inseparable, and since in our selfishness we resort to all available social means, including posi-

tive law, in the pursuit of our own interests, Pestalozzi also called the social condition the *modified natural condition*.

Let us remind ourselves what it was that brought about socialisation in the first place. We sought security and an easier way of satisfying our needs by collective means, above all by acquisition, possession and the division of labour. It is the task of law to regulate this and to apportion the fruits of socialisation to everyone.

Now it is a fundamental aspect of law and therefore of every social order, that to secure the individual's rights it must *impose duties* on him and curtail his *natural freedom*. This leads to conflict within ourselves, for our entry into the social condition has not eliminated our egoism. The same egoism that motivated our socialisation, in order to enjoy its advantages, keeps causing us to try and shake off the consequences of that step. The result is that in the condition of socialisation we can never achieve the purpose for which we entered that condition. We become socialised in the hope of recovering the lost harmony between our needs and our powers, and it is precisely that harmony that we can never achieve in the social condition. On the contrary, the social process arouses more and more new needs while at the same time making the individual less and less free by its ever more complex dependencies, and more and more weak by the increased division of labour and reduction in the skills demanded of him.

Since when we are socialised *and nothing more* we are anything but reliable socially, the social state is always unstable. Its quality depends on the extent to which it is regulated by just laws and the extent to which individuals keep to those laws. If we — as lawgivers, rulers or simple citizens — respect social justice, then we help to stabilise the social state and create the conditions that will allow the individual to rise to morality. If, on the other hand, we disregard the laws and social justice, we undermine the social condition and are in constant danger, as individuals, of sinking back into the animal condition. We will, to quote Pestalozzi, become tyrants, slaves or barbarians.

It is unthinkable for Pestalozzi that we should be satisfied simply with becoming collectivised and civilised, not least because the social condition is in no position to guarantee fulfilment to the individual. Despite that, the social condition is unavoidable as a necessary inter-

19 What is Man?

mediate stage in our progress from the natural condition to the moral condition. The thing that distinguishes the social condition from the natural condition is our ability to keep our instinctive reactions in check, even if only as a response to social pressure. This habituation to *external obedience* to the laws is a prefiguration of our *inner obedience* to our own conscience. In fact everything we suffer under the conditions and contradictions of the social condition has a deeper meaning. According to Pestalozzi, we must feel the deficiencies of being united merely on a social level ‘deeply for as long as it takes’ for us to recognise that our lost harmony can only be re-established when we grasp the opportunity of moral freedom and desire good and our own wholeness of our *own free will*.

The Moral Condition

With that we rise to the *moral* condition. This rests on the independent power within us, on the ‘divine spark’. Thanks to this power, which in its essence is independent of the animal and social conditions, we can *make ourselves whole*. In Pestalozzi’s own words: *I [he means human beings in general] possess a power within myself to present all the things of this world to my inner self, independent of my animal desire and my social circumstances, entirely from the point of view of what they can contribute to my inner improvement, and to accept or reject them according to that point of view alone. This power is independent within my innermost being and in no way the consequence of any other power of my nature. It exists because I exist, and I exist because it exists. Its source is the feeling present in my innermost being that I can make myself whole if I let what I ought to do rule what I want to do.*

This independent power is, however, quite individual — ‘*it is not shared with anyone else*’ — and therefore morality is individual as well, for ‘*no one can feel: “I am” for me; no one can feel: “I am moral” for me.*’

For Pestalozzi, therefore, morality is not external to us, something that expresses itself in good social institutions, just laws and the tradition of good habits. Morality is always the action of our individual will resulting from a free decision of our conscience and can be recognised from the fact that in performing it *we freely overcome our own egoism*.

It is only through this moral will that we can re-establish our lost harmony with ourselves and overcome the contradictions within ourselves because our will is directed towards what reason and conscience tell us is necessary. Through such a free, moral act we become *'our own creation'*, we become 'human beings' in the true sense of the word. And to become a 'human being' is the foremost and essential task and vocation of each of us and we will continue to suffer under the contradictions of our nature, under the imperfections and demands of society until we come to recognise that it is we ourselves who are responsible for a fulfilled existence.

Morality, then, is entirely bound to the decision of each individual. No one can make a person moral apart from that person himself; other people and social conditions can only make this easier or more difficult or suggest it. Amongst other things, Pestalozzi wrote: *For me the only purely moral motives to do one's duty are those which belong entirely to my individuality. Every motive to do my duty which I share with others is not moral; on the contrary, it is in the nature of such motives that they always tempt me to behave in an immoral way, that is not to see the deceptiveness of my animal nature and the injustice of my social hardening. The greater the number of those with whom I share my duty, the stronger and more varied the temptations to immorality which are connected with that duty... All the things I do as a member of a group, of a community — even more the demands I have to make as a member of a guild, a party, always dehumanise me to a greater or lesser degree. The larger the group, the community, the guild or the party, from which my rights and duties derive, the greater the danger of dehumanisation, that is social hardening against all the claims morality makes on that duty and those rights.*

Banding together to realise one's own interests, which are proclaimed as good, may produce some welcome social changes, but according to Pestalozzi such collective action has nothing to do with true morality.

Nothing could be more wrong than to accuse Pestalozzi of asocial individualism because of this. The fundamental aim of morality — to achieve wholeness by overcoming our own egoism — is essentially social. Pestalozzi cannot imagine morality in any other way than as the individual's personal devotion to others and to the community in active

19 What is Man?

love. Beyond that, it is precisely through our individual moral actions that we have a constructive effect on society.

His unequivocal call to us to live a moral life does not make Pestalozzi a utopian dreamer. He freely admits that it is *impossible* for us to act in a *purely* moral way since we are permanently involved in society and are also natural creatures with urges and needs, the satisfaction of which must take priority over moral action if we are to survive. Thus Pestalozzi clearly accepts the inner conflict and tension that is part of our nature. Inner peace and harmony with ourselves and the world can never be something we possess permanently, it can only be something we experience with each new act of our own will.

The Application

Pestalozzi's philosophy makes us aware that all essential phenomena of human life (for example power, freedom, peace, conflict resolution, marriage, occupation) in fact have *three meanings*, which are contradictory because our natural, social and moral lives *are each subject to different laws*. What is appropriate to one condition could well be in conflict with the laws of another. *Power*, for example, — as institutional power — belongs to the social condition, which could not survive without it, but it is of no use in arousing moral life. Similarly *suspicion* is a must in society, without checks everything would get out of hand. But in our personal lives, which should be based on the morality of those involved, suspicion is corrosive.

If we are not conscious of this, there is a danger that in any debate we will fundamentally misunderstand what others are saying. This happened in the eighties of the last century in the discussions on peace. Whilst some had the peace of a polity in mind, i.e. a value belonging to the social condition that had to be defended if the worst came to the worst, others were talking about a concept of peace that was based on the Bible and therefore connected with the moral condition. Their in part absolute demands were founded on their belief in a 'pure morality' which, according to Pestalozzi, we human beings can never possess.

The same kind of thing happens in the often very impassioned discussions within the church, in which love and power are seen as oppo-

sites without the participants realising that *every* institution has to work within a power structure and the love of the individual belongs in a very different context. With his philosophy Pestalozzi is suggesting we should on the one hand recognise that contradiction is an ineradicable part of human life, whilst on the other attempting — as far as is possible in practice — to abolish it in our own actions.

Pestalozzi himself illustrates the threefold nature of human acts with various examples and I will take the one from *religion* here. As *natural* beings we respond to the numinous with fear and make physical images of God and the world beyond. The *social* aspect of religion appears in religious communities, each with its own customs, norms and power structures. Religion is only truly *moral* as a personal consciousness of the divine, as an existential response to the divine experienced within oneself. But it is typical of Pestalozzi — who knows that *pure* morality is impossible — that he does not reject the natural and social aspects, despite the clear hierarchy of value in this threefold view. On the contrary, he sees them as means of ‘steering us towards’ the moral, though only as long as the means do not hinder the end.

Pestalozzi’s Philosophy and Education

It follows that teaching can also be analysed using Pestalozzi’s theory of the three conditions. Our professional work is also subject to the inevitable contradiction:

As *natural* beings we want our work to be enjoyable, to be as easy as possible to carry out and to bring us recognition and financial reward.

As *social beings* we have a contract which on the one hand grants us rights and power (for example the simple right to work in the school and earn our living), and on the other puts us under obligations, for example to keep to the school hours, to get through the syllabus, to see that the school rules are obeyed, to take part in promotion procedures and selection mechanisms, to continue our professional development and to observe all the statutory requirements.

It is only the *moral aspect* of our work that provides real fulfilment. We contribute to the overall progress of the children in our care towards

19 What is Man?

full humanity by developing their faculties while respecting them as persons, by opening up their senses, introducing them to the variety of the world and doing all we can to help them grow up into good people. No one can order us to do this and the more all-embracing the quality assurance systems that are introduced, the less will we produce that quality which rests solely on the moral freedom of the individual.

In Pestalozzi's 1815 book, *'To the Innocence, Seriousness and High-mindedness of my Age and my Fatherland'*, the difference between the social and the moral was at the centre of his analysis. He contrasts 'collective existence' and 'civilisation', which belong to the social condition, with the 'individual existence' and 'culture' which characterise the moral condition. For our purposes it is significant that he insists that education and upbringing in general unquestionably belong to individual existence.

If we look at the present situation in schools and the changes that are currently taking place, it is unfortunately clear that developments are going in the opposite direction. The purely social (entrenchment behind legal and institutional requirements and therefore standardisation and the reliance on power) is becoming ever more dominant in the educational sphere, threatening to smother what Pestalozzi understands by culture. Consideration of individual factors, for both teachers and pupils, goes by the board and with it the measure of freedom which is indispensable for fruitful educational work. The teacher's relationship with pupils is becoming increasingly strained. The more we teachers have to carry out legally ordained measures, which run counter to the pupils' wants, needs and wishes, the more they will see us as enforcers of an anonymous machine instead of as helpers who understand and engage with their individual personalities.

Naturally the organisation of compulsory schooling is unthinkable without social regulation. However, those who regulate it ought to be clear that it should be a *framework* which should allow the real business of schools — education founded on a moral community and aimed at developing the morality of all involved — to proceed on the basis of freedom and personal commitment. Different laws operate in the education of young people than, say, in road construction. There the state itself can *effect* the full realisation of its projects, and that goes for all

19 What is Man?

other areas that are concerned with perfecting things or systems. But that does not work with schools. There the educational administration and educational policy cannot *effect* anything, they can only make it possible or, unfortunately, more difficult.

The realisation of the wishes formulated by the state is always the responsibility of those directly involved: teachers and pupils. However much energy is put into perfecting, or at least modifying, systems, results will only improve when those involved are determined that they will improve. And they will be all the more determined, the less their freedom and their scope for creativity is curtailed and the less they are reduced to the role of executive functionaries.