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WORLD-PURPOSE AND LIFE-PURPOSE (The Destiny of Man)

Journal

What is this chapter about? *The concept of human freedom would become dubious if the concept of purpose applies to the world of nature. The concept of purpose is achieved only in human beings when a motive occurring before the action determines the will.*

What is its value? *Purpose originates only in the human mind. In nature there exists only cause and effect. The concept of purpose is rejected even for the spiritual world.*

Purpose Only Springs From Freedom

Steiner discusses the issue of purpose and purposefulness. First, he destabilizes the idea of purpose as a matter of causality, arguing against the commonly held supposition that the purpose of outcome "X" is the thing that determines "X." He will argue, rather, that the outcome "X" (at least in human action) is the thing that determines that which appears to be the purpose.

In the realm of nature, no "purpose" exists, says Steiner, adding that only in the realm of human action do we find anything like purpose. Thus, the blossom of a flowering plant is not the purpose of the root--the flower is governed by the laws (not purposes) of nature. But, a concept formed by a human being indicating a potential future reality (not yet achieved) is the something, indeed the only thing that we can call purpose.

Based on the earlier section on Monism, we can quickly conclude that Steiner would see this human purpose as springing from the inner freedom of the person, and not imposed by any external power.

Study Topics

ethics of purposefulness

12.0 Concept Of Purpose

Overcoming of the concept of purpose in spheres where it does not belong.

12.1 Percept Cause Precedes Percept Effect

The percept of the cause precedes the percept of the effect.

12.2 Conceptual Factor Of Effect

If the effect is to have a real influence upon the cause, it can do so only by means of the conceptual factor.

12.3 Real Influence Of Concept (Action)

A perceptible influence of a concept upon something else is to be observed only in human actions.

12.4 Imagined Purpose In Nature

The concept of purpose, valid for subjective actions, is very convenient for inventing such imaginary connections. The naive mind knows how it produces events itself, and consequently concludes that Nature will do it in the same way.

12.5 Laws Of Nature

Monism looks for laws of nature, but not for purposes of nature.

12.6 Purposes Of Life

Nothing is purposeful except what the human being has first made so, for purposefulness arises only through the realization of an idea.

12.7 Human Destiny

My mission in the world is not predetermined, but is at every moment the one I choose for myself.

12.8 Only Doers Realize Purposeful Ideas

Ideas are realized purposefully only by human beings. Consequently it is not permissible to speak of the embodiment of ideas by history.

12.9 Formative Principle

The formative principle of the totality of nature unfolds and organizes itself.

12.10 Teleology

The theory of purpose maintains that there is a high degree of purpose and plan unmistakably present in the formations and developments of nature.

12.11 Coherence Within Whole

The systematic coherence of the parts of a perceptual whole is simply the ideal coherence of the parts of an ideal whole contained in this perceptual whole.

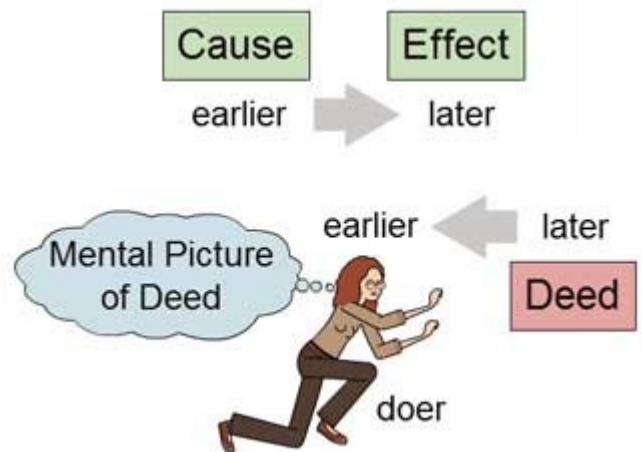
12.12 Purposes Of Absolute Cosmic Being

Wherever there is a systematic linking of cause and effect for our perception, the dualist may assume that we see only the carbon copy of a connection in which the absolute cosmic Being has realized its purposes.

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12.0 Concept Of Purpose

[1] AMONG the manifold currents in the spiritual life of humanity there is one which we must now trace, and which we may call the elimination of the concept of purpose in spheres where it does not belong. Purposefulness is a special kind of sequence of phenomena. True purposefulness is genuinely real only when, in contrast to the relation of cause and effect where the earlier event determines the later, the reverse is the case and the later event determines the earlier one. This is possible only in the sphere of human actions. Man performs an action of which he has previously made a mental picture, and allows this mental picture to determine his action. Thus the later (the deed) influences the earlier (the doer) by means of the mental picture. If the sequence is to have purposeful connection, this detour through the mental picture is absolutely necessary.



To have a purposeful connection the later (the deed) influences the earlier (the doer) by means of the mental picture.

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12.1 Percept Cause Precedes Percept Effect

[2] In the process which we can analyze into cause and effect, we must distinguish percept from concept. The percept of the cause precedes the percept of the effect. Cause and effect would simply stand side by side in our consciousness, if we were not able to connect them with one another through the corresponding concepts.

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12.2 Conceptual Factor Of Effect

The percept of the effect must always follow upon the percept of the cause. If the effect is to have a real influence upon the cause, it can do so only by means of the conceptual factor. For the perceptual factor of the effect simply does not exist prior to the perceptual factor of the cause. Whoever maintains that the flower is the purpose of the root, i.e., that the former determines the latter, can make good this assertion only concerning that factor in the flower which his thought reveals in it. The perceptual factor of the flower is not yet in existence at the time when the root originates.

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12.3 Real Influence Of Concept (Action)

For a purposeful connection to exist, it is not only necessary to have an ideal, law-determined connection between the later and the earlier, but the concept (law) of the effect must really influence the cause, that is, by means of a perceptible process.

human actions are the only sphere in which the concept of purpose is applicable

Such a perceptible influence of a concept upon something else is to be observed only in human actions. Hence this is the only sphere in which the concept of purpose is applicable.

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12.4 Imagined Purpose In Nature

The naive consciousness, which regards as real only what is perceptible, attempts, as we have repeatedly pointed out, to introduce perceptible factors even where only ideal factors can actually be found. In sequences of perceptible events it looks for perceptible connections, or, failing to find them, it imports them by imagination. The concept of purpose, valid for subjective actions, is very convenient for inventing such imaginary connections.



The Naive Realist imagines the Creator constructs all organisms.

The naive mind knows how it produces events itself, and consequently concludes that Nature will do it in the same way. In the connections of Nature which are purely ideal it finds not only invisible forces, but also invisible real purposes.

the mistaken concept of purpose is slowly being driven out of the sciences

Man makes his tools to suit his purposes, so the Naive Realist imagines the Creator constructs all organisms according to this same principle.

The Naive Realist imagines the Creator constructs all organisms according to this same principle.

It is but slowly that this mistaken concept of purpose is being driven out of the sciences. In philosophy, even at the present day, it still does a good deal of mischief. Philosophers still ask such questions as, What is the purpose of the world? What is the function (and consequently the purpose) of man? Etc.

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12.5 Laws Of Nature

[3] Monism rejects the concept of purpose in every sphere, with the sole exception of human action. It looks for laws of Nature, but not for purposes of Nature. Purposes of Nature, no less than invisible forces (p. 77), are arbitrary assumptions.

it looks for laws of Nature, but not for purposes of Nature

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12.6 Purposes Of Life

But even life-purposes which man does not set up for himself, are, from the standpoint of Monism, unjustified assumptions.

Nothing is purposeful except what man has made so, for only the realization of ideas originates anything purposeful. But an idea becomes effective, in the realistic sense, only in human actions.

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12.7 Human Destiny



My mission, at any one moment,
is what I choose for myself.

Hence life has no other purpose or function than the one which man gives to it. If the question be asked: What is man's task in life? Monism has but one answer: The task which he gives to himself.

I have no predestined mission in the world; my mission, at any one moment, is that which I choose for myself. I do not enter upon life's voyage with a fixed route mapped out for me.

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12.8 Only Doers Realize Purposeful Ideas

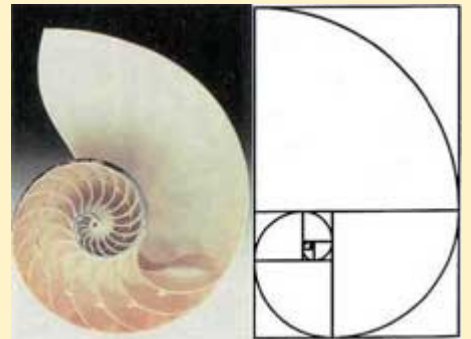
[4] Ideas are realized only by human doers. Consequently, it is not permissible to speak of the embodiment of ideas by history. All such statements as "history is the evolution of man towards freedom" or "the realization of the moral world-order," etc., are, from a Monistic point of view, untenable.

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12.9 Formative Principle

[5] The supporters of the concept of purpose believe that, by surrendering it, they are forced to surrender also all unity and order in the world. Listen, for example, to Robert Hamerling (*Atomistik des Willens*, vol. ii. p. 201):

[6] "As long as there are instincts in Nature, so long is it foolish to deny purposes in Nature. Just as the structure of a limb of the human body is not determined and conditioned by an idea of this limb, floating somewhere in midair, but by its connection with the more inclusive whole, the body, to which the limb belongs, so the structure of every natural object, be it plant, animal, or man, is not determined and conditioned by an idea of it floating in midair, but by the formative principle of the more inclusive whole of Nature which unfolds and organizes itself in a purposeful manner."



The structure of every natural
object is determined by the
formative principle of Nature.

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12.10 Teleology

And on page 191 of the same volume we read:

"Teleology maintains only that, in spite of the thousand misfits and miseries of this natural life, there is a high degree of adaptation to purpose and plan unmistakable in the formations and developments of Nature —an adaptation, however, which is realized only within the limits of natural laws, and which does not tend to the production of some imaginary fairyland, in which life would not be confronted by death, nor growth by decay, with all the more or less unpleasant, but quite unavoidable, intermediary stages between them."

[7] "When the critics of Teleology oppose a laboriously collected rubbish-heap of partial or complete, imaginary or real, maladaptations to a world full of wonders of purposeful adaptation, such as Nature exhibits in all her domains, then I consider this just as amusing—."



Adaptation in nature is realized only within
the limits of natural laws.

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12.11 Coherence Within Whole

[8] What is here meant by purposefulness? Nothing but the consonance of percepts within a whole. But, since all percepts are based upon laws (ideas), which we discover by means of thinking, it follows that the orderly coherence of the parts of a perceptual whole is nothing more than the ideal (logical) coherence of the parts of the ideal whole which is contained in this perceptual whole. To say that an animal or a man is not determined by an idea floating in mid-air is a misleading way of putting it, and the view which the critic attacks loses its apparent absurdity as soon as the phrase is put right. An animal certainly is not determined by an idea floating in mid-air, but it is determined by an idea inborn in it and constituting the law of its nature. It is just because the idea is not external to the natural object, but is operative in it as its very essence, that we cannot speak here of purposefulness. Those who deny that natural objects are determined from without (and it does not matter, in this context, whether it be by an idea floating in mid-air or existing in the mind of a creator of the world), are the very men who ought to admit that such an object is not determined by purpose and plan from without, but by cause and law from within.

an animal is determined by an idea inborn in it constituting the law of its nature



A machine is produced in accordance with a purpose.

point to concepts operating as causes. A concept is never anything but the ideal link connecting cause and effect. Causes occur in Nature only in the form of percepts.

A machine is produced in accordance with a purpose, if I establish a connection between its parts which is not given in Nature. The purposefulness of the combinations which I effect consists just in this, that I embody my idea of the working of the machine in the machine itself. In this way the machine comes into existence as an object of perception embodying a corresponding idea. Natural objects have a very similar character. Whoever calls a thing purposeful because its form is in accordance with plan or law may, if he so please, call natural objects also purposeful, provided only that he does not confuse this kind of lawfulness with that which belongs to subjective human action. In order to have a purpose it is absolutely necessary that the effective cause should be a concept, more precisely a concept of the effect. But in Nature we can nowhere

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12.12 Purposes Of Absolute Cosmic Being



Rejection of an Absolute Cosmic Being implies also rejection of purposes in Nature.

[9] Dualism may talk of cosmic and natural purposes. Wherever for our perception there is a systematic linking of cause and effect according to law, there the Dualist is free to assume that we have but the image of a connection in which the Absolute Cosmic Being has realized its purposes.

For Monism, on the other hand, the rejection of an Absolute Cosmic Being implies also the rejection of the assumption of purposes in World and Nature.