

Transforming Our Relationship to Nature

Hannes Weigert, director of The School of Nature, describes the idea behind this new course, which opens January 2005 under the auspices of the Youth Section at the Goetheanum and will wander from Dornach, Switzerland, to Fyresdal, Norway. A large international teaching staff is already in place.

In earlier times Nature was conceived of as being animated with soul. Medieval philosophers called this being "Natura." When we observe Nature today we can still feel a call – as though from a mirror – to awaken the soul capacities within us.

Nevertheless, today our relationship with Nature is fundamentally passive. We conceive of Nature as existing on its own, without any connection to our inner experience. In reality, however, our lives are deeply intertwined with Nature, but we are initially incapable of raising this connection into consciousness. Thus we are called upon to awaken. We are called upon to become inwardly active: rather than accepting Nature as given, we can create our own image of her. We are then inwardly fully present in such images. No longer passive onlookers, we begin to sense within our own formative activity the same forces that work creatively in Nature. Nature is in fact a great artist, and if we wish to experience how she creates, we need artistic sensitivity, formative will, and pictorial imagination.

Nature – the Human Being – Human Civilization

Alienation from Nature is perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of our times. And it is inevitably linked to an alienation from ourselves. This estrangement from our own humanity is certainly one of the main reasons for the numerous social and political problems besetting our society as it moves toward globalization. It is therefore essential that we develop a way of knowing Nature that can resolve this alienation and lead to new ways of working with Nature, our environment, and each other.

As builders of civilization, we are continuously transforming Nature. In this sense, humanity can be seen as a natural force. For this reason alone, a way of knowing that seeks to resolve our alienation from Nature must also encompass the human being. It must in fact encompass Nature, the human being, and human civilization. This broad context calls for a radical departure from the conventional approach that divides our involvement with Nature into many separate specialized disciplines and fields of study. The problem of alienation can be resolved

only by connecting the various disciplines.

In order to achieve a transformation of our relationship to Nature, ourselves, and our civilization, The School of Nature will focus on three areas.

Scientific insight into Nature

In contrast to conventional science that seeks only external knowledge, we will strive to become aware of what we ourselves experience when we observe Nature. The fundamental question underlying our scientific studies will be: to what extent does external Nature reveal its inner nature through our own inner experience?

The exact observation of Nature will be enhanced by aesthetic self-observation whereby, for example, beauty becomes a criterion for the health of the observed environment. Thus the ugliness of degraded landscapes, of areas exploited by industry or other commercial interests is an indicator that such environments are inimical to life.

Another central endeavor of The School of Nature is to experience Nature as a creative agent, as *natura naturans*,* and to discover how Nature's creativity corresponds to our own.

Art

Every productive act has its artistic aspect. In The School of Nature, therefore, art is not a supplementary exercise but rather inherent in all activities. Thinking, the production of meaningful thought-structures, can be experienced as an art. Becoming aware of the creativity in our own thought processes is an important aspect of the observation of Nature. Attending to the creative processes in our own artistic work can become a key to understanding creative processes in Nature. In this sense, self-knowledge becomes a tool for understanding Nature. In addition, artistic activity is a preparation for working in larger social contexts, for example on a farm, or in a business – in enterprises whose scope far exceeds the life of one indi-

vidual. What we are actually doing when we are creatively active is a question of greatest significance for the destiny of humanity and of the Earth because it determines how we deal with ourselves and with Nature. As we know, this can either lead to the beauty of a cathedral or to the drabness of urban sprawl, to a healing medicine or to an atom bomb.

Agriculture

Agriculture is the archetype of all activities that have a lasting effect on Nature. In fact our whole concept of "culture" comes from the word "agriculture." By cultivating

Nature, we can raise it to a level where it nourishes and sustains us. Today agriculture is still a field in which human beings can work in an intimate relationship with Nature. But because this activity brings us into direct contact with Nature, the impact of misguided agricultural practices is particularly destructive. The School of Nature offers its students farming experience that can become a meaningful dialog between Nature and human creativity.

The three areas outlined above may at first appear to be unrelated. When we look at them more closely, however, their interconnectedness becomes apparent. It becomes evident that creative capacities are the basis for science and agriculture or any other cultural activity. Any scientific insight, any practical undertaking, especially one that has an enduring effect (a cultivated landscape, for example), is a productive activity, a creative act, and only possible because the human being is a creative being endowed with artistic capacities.

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* Medieval philosophers distinguished between the finished products of Nature – *natura naturata* – and Nature as creator – *natura natu-*