



Pestalozzi on Anthropology

His Teaching about Humans

By Dr. Arthur Brühlmeier, summarised by Dr. Joanna Nair for PestalozziWorld

In 1782 Pestalozzi wrote in a letter: ‘The only book that I have studied for years is the book of man, on him and on experience about him and of him I found all my philosophy’. Pestalozzi explored what human nature is and developed his theories about society, politics, theology, psychology and education from his heartfelt ideas about human nature.

The following are some of Pestalozzi’s fundamental ideas about human nature:

The nature of man is not a uniform thing; it has tensions and contradictions within it. Human nature has two definite sides: ‘sensual’ nature and ‘higher’ nature.

Sensual nature consists of the basic instincts that humans and animals have in common. (Pestalozzi sometimes calls sensual nature ‘animal nature’). These instincts are mainly there to satisfy the needs of the body and so preserve the individual and the human race. They also make humans want to do things that make them feel happy.

Higher nature is what lifts humans to a level above animals. This higher nature consists of the ability to perceive truth, to show love, to believe in God, to listen to one’s own conscience, to do justice, to develop a sense of beauty, to see and realise higher values, to be creative, to act in freedom, to bear responsibility, to overcome one’s own egoism, to build a social life, to act with

common sense, to strive for self-perfection. A 'divine spark' can be seen in a human's higher nature, and this is why a human is considered to be the image of God. For this reason, Pestalozzi often calls this higher nature the 'inner', 'spiritual', 'moral' or 'divine' nature.

Animal nature and higher nature are interrelated, like a fruit and its seed. These two sides of human nature are very different from each other, but they are connected because the higher nature unfolds and develops out of the lower animal nature. The higher nature is permanent and cannot be destroyed; the lower, sensual nature is temporary and can be destroyed. It is the task of education as far as possible to cultivate what is low, in order to bring it to the higher level.

The process described above unfolds in a three-stage course of development, from the natural state through the social state to the moral state.

In the natural state animal nature dominates; higher nature is dormant, like a seed. Curiosity, for example, is part of animal nature, but in higher nature it can develop into a genuine interest in truth. Indolence originates in the tendency to avoid discomfort, but at the same time it is the natural basis for impartiality.

Theoretically there are two natural states – the unspoiled natural state and the spoiled natural state. One has to distinguish between these two:

The unspoiled natural state can only be imagined. It is the state when we live completely in the moment and there is a perfect balance between everybody's needs and the fulfilment of everybody's needs, as in the Garden of Eden before the Fall.

Only the spoiled natural state can really be experienced. When a human takes action to fulfil the needs he or she experiences in the unspoiled natural state, he or she cannot help being selfish, and in taking action spoils the

unspoiled state. Sometimes a human does more than what is needed to satisfy his or her needs, for example, by becoming greedy and eating more than he or she needs.

In the spoiled natural state of humans, entry into the social state of being – being part of a society – becomes necessary to avoid unpleasantness and to think, plan and work together. Entry into the social state is inevitable and cannot be reversed. Through socialisation humans on the one hand get the benefit of rights, but on the other hand, have to fulfil duties and accept restrictions – they have to obey.

Through socialisation humans have created and continue to create a world that does not exist in the animal kingdom, a world of rights and duties and of laws and institutions (State, economy, finance, associations of any kind, communication systems) – in short, civilisation.

Entry into society does not prevent the natural egoism of the individual; society only restricts it and thus protects people from its negative effects. Humans, in the social state live in contradiction to their natural tendencies. Out of egoism or selfishness people desire all those advantages which can only be attained through society. Out of the same selfishness people want to avoid or sometimes refuse all the restrictions and burdens of society, which exist to make social advantages possible.

The State, as the keeper of the legal order that society needs, can enforce the laws of the legal order only if it has the physical power to make disobedient individuals obey the law. The State, in guaranteeing security for the individual, has to do two contradictory things: On the one hand it has to ask everyone not to use physical force for solving conflicts; on the other hand it has to use physical force against those who break the law.

Being part of society does not bring about inner harmony for the individual. Because the need to be part of society is a selfish need, one remains selfish

by continuing to be part of society. Also, the tension in the individual between need and power is increased further because being part of society brings new needs that a person as an individual would not have had, and the powers that a person had as an individual are taken away by society in return for social conveniences.

Thus, society as such can never guarantee the individual real fulfilment but can always only set up a framework in which the individual can gain self-realisation. The individual will remain in contradiction with himself or herself and will suffer from the contradictions that lie in the nature of society. This will go on until the individual realises that real fulfilment can be attained only by voluntarily giving up egotistic or selfish claims. In this way suffering the burdens of social life can make people realise the importance of living as moral individuals.

A moral person realises that he or she has to fulfil a life-task – attaining his or her own perfection. This can only be achieved by the renunciation of selfishness and by the development of the moral powers or the powers of the heart – love, trust, gratitude, public-spiritedness, an eye for beauty, responsibility, creativity, religiousness, doing good of one's own free will etcetera. Through the realisation of morality we transform ourselves into a better form of ourselves and therefore become truly 'free'. The contradictions which are felt in the spoilt natural state and in the social state can only be solved by the attainment of individual morality.

Although ultimately morality takes shape by and large as social behaviour, it can never be ascribed to a group; it is completely a matter for the individual. Morality is not necessarily a matter of being 'good' in manners or behaviour, because this may have selfish reasons behind it; true morality is the individual's success in attaining his or her higher nature without pressure from society.

Humans as physical beings with instincts and needs cannot shed their animal nature except in death. Since each individual is a part of society, taking part in social systems, which are there for his or her self-preservation, the individual cannot live without contradiction. No one can be purely moral if he or she wants to survive physically.

Thus contradiction is part of the nature of humans. This is because different rules apply in each of the three states of being.

As beings of the natural state, humans assert themselves, are egotistical, look to their own advantage and are compelled by natural instincts. They can be called works of nature.

As beings of the social state, humans are part of a social system, the advantages of which they would like to enjoy. But the system only makes these advantages possible as long as the individuals do not refuse to be part of it, despite any frustrations they may have in being part of the system. People are therefore works of society too.

As beings of the moral state, the moral individual is a 'work of himself' or herself. He or she renounces egotistical claims, strives for the well-being of others and perfects himself or herself by developing all the natural powers and faculties that help him or her to work for others.

The natural state and the social state on the one hand and the moral state on the other hand are interrelated. The two states in which animal nature dominates (the natural state and the social state) are the necessary condition for the moralisation of the individual. Moral humans can shape a society or a State in a moral way (as legislators and in the way they observe the laws). Social life would be less of a burden if more individuals felt that their own moralisation is their life-task. Social conditions in themselves are unstable, because they are dependent on the one hand on how many people act egotistically, and on the other hand on how many people understand the real

principles of socialisation. This understanding can come only from individual moralisation.

The three states must be understood as three different kinds of human existence and each human pursuit can be analysed as regards each of the three states. For example, solving a conflict in the natural state is based on the rights of the stronger, in the social state it is based on the current positive law, and in the moral state it is based on dealing with the legitimate concerns of the opponent with understanding and consideration.

All acts and achievements of society can be called civilisation, whereas culture comes about as the result of individuals acting morally. All civilising institutions consider the individual to be the bearer of definite roles, consequently the individual is seen under the collective aspect, and thus civilising institutions always refer to the collective existence of people. In contrast to this, true culture involves taking seriously the individual existence of a person, which means responding to the singularity as well as to the concrete life- situation of the individual.

To cope with certain tasks of the State and of society (like finance, the police, the armed forces) it is essential that human beings understand their roles within society. However - according to Pestalozzi - the concerns of religion, education and charity should be addressed with regard to the existence of the individual.

Everything that is civilising can be handled either by acknowledging the actual purpose of the social community (thus from the moral attitude of the decision-makers), or by following the purely egotistical interests of individuals or groups. If the latter is the case, Pestalozzi considers society to be ruined.

So, Pestalozzi believes there to be four possible ways of human existence:

- A purely natural kind of existence, which is free of social institutions and which can in fact only be imagined

- An existence in which people follow their own selfish desires and show no consideration for the purpose of socialisation
- A restrictedly egotistical kind of existence, which, by acknowledging the social purpose, sees to the legitimate care of oneself
- A moral kind of existence, in which the human lifts himself or herself above egoism and aims at self-perfection, which involves making other people happy.