

STEINER AND THE HUMOURS: THE SURVIVAL OF ANCIENT GREEK SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT: The paper reviews the way in which Steiner schools have attached importance to the categorisation of pupil character and behaviour, drawing on a tradition going back to ancient Greek science.

Keywords: Steiner, temperament

1. LEARNING AND DISCIPLINE IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS

In any school there is an apparent discrepancy between the behaviour of a sizeable minority of the pupils and the behaviour of their parents. Much of this difference can be ascribed to adolescent adjustment and rebellion because the same pupils will, a few years later, exhibit a strong correspondence with the parental pattern, hormonal impulses long having settled. Yet adolescence does not explain everything, for some pupils never mesh with parental norms and twins can act in wholly diverse ways. An explanation for these observations that has gained greater acknowledgement focuses on the temperaments. Reference must be made here to Galen, personal physician to the emperor Marcus Aurelius in the second century AD, for underpinning his entire medical practice is the concept of the temperaments, centred on the polar opposites of melancholy and sanguine, phlegmatic and choleric. Unlike much of ancient Greek science, the temperaments have never completely disappeared from view, although their influence has often waned into comparative insignificance.

My intention is to review the way in which Steiner schools in particular have tried to categorise pupil character and behaviour, since it is the quadripartite nature of these divisions that link these efforts to each other and to ancient Greek science. The importance of such categorising lies in the way schools deal with learning in general, but more specifically with the difficult behaviour that can be evoked as a negative reaction to learning. While there are

variations of the authoritarian approach to discipline through an admixture of punishment and reward (Smith and Laslett, 1993, 97–111), the temperaments in contrast allow for a holistic view of disciplining that may be gentler and more effective for both pupils and teachers, thereby promoting the innate desire for learning which is the goal of every school. Interestingly the temperaments are not acknowledged by any mainstream school either in theory or in practice.

2. GREEK SCIENCE AND THE HUMOURS

At the height of the Roman empire Galen (*On Humours* 19.285K) wrote that the basic element of every living creature was the humour. The four humours – yellow bile, blood, phlegm and black bile – were each charged with either active or passive qualities. They were related to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water; and to the four qualities of hot, cold, wet and dry. Humours were thought to be formed of elements with a combination of an active faculty (cold and hot) and a passive faculty (dry and wet). Thus earth, for example, since it had a dry and cold faculty, was potentially actively cooling and passively drying. What happened when a person fell ill was that an imbalance of the humours had occurred.

Health was determined by the equality and symmetry of the four humours. When they were deficient or excessive, diseases occurred. Galen supposed that this symmetry could be maintained either by drugs or by food. For example, black bile was produced by beef, cabbage and soft cheeses; phlegm by mushrooms, unripe apples and lamb; phlegm could be reduced by bitter almonds and garlic. (Grant, 1997, pp. 4–9) The action of a particular drug or food was not absolute, but was relative to the individual, each person having his or her own temperament. Generally a boy aged four required a strong cooling medicine, should he have a fever, because by nature a child was of a sanguine temperament. An old man of eighty, who had a naturally phlegmatic temperament, needed only a mildly cooling drug for the same condition. In the same way a girl aged four required a less strong cooling remedy because females were by nature of a cold temperament, although there was disagreement about this among ancient authorities. Personality, race and climate were some of the variables which only the experienced physician could know through examination. Not only was the nature of the disease important in a diagnosis, but also the condition, background and personality of the patient were critical (Riddle, 1985, pp. 171–3).

Black bile was produced in the liver. It looked like dark olive-oil. Its acidity and viscosity caused cancers, bowel ulcerations and haemorrhoids. Phlegm was made in the stomach and mouth. As its name suggests, it appeared in nasal mucus and catarrh. It could absorb saltiness, bitterness and sourness, but by itself it had no quality. Yellow bile collected in the bladder and coloured the urine and vomit. Blood was unlike the other humours in that it could clot. Its function was to carry nutriment and water around the body. In health blood tasted sweet, whilst salty or bitter blood signified disease.

There were four mutually interacting qualities, to whose operation was due the genesis and destruction of all things that grow and die. Diseases arose sometimes only from an immoderate increase of the hot or of the cold, or from some opposition of one of these things with another, such as between the dry and the moist; and sometimes because of some combination of these things which increased excessively so as to become a disease, that is hot at the same time as dry, or cold and dry, or hot and moist, or cold and moist.

The following case history is illustrative of the theories concerning the humours and the qualities. The emperor Marcus Aurelius once fell ill. He believed that his stomach had been overloaded during a particularly extravagant feast and had thereby produced too much phlegm, the result of which was a fever because of the cold and moist nature of the phlegm. Phlegm arose from sleep, water, viscous dishes and sea food. If Marcus Aurelius had eaten viscous food, the subsequent delay in digestion would have caused indigestion and a green bile that would appear in the faeces. Galen's recommended remedies for the emperor's condition concur with the theory of the qualities: pepper was obviously heating, whilst Sabine wine, which was thin and dry, was especially good for stomach disorders, the thinness causing no obstructions and the dryness counteracting a moist stomach.

From all this two important observations need to be noted. First, that in antiquity the humours were used explain the physical functions of the body and physiognomical types, the idea of character types related to the humours being a medieval invention, so the humours were discussed only in medical contexts (Singer, 1997, pp. x–xi). Second, that ancient science must be viewed in its own setting and not from a modern angle, for it is far removed from anything that exists today. Singer (1997, p. xlii) summarises this succinctly when he says that although the reading of ancient medicine tracts could be construed as misleading and even dangerous today, their

study does underline the fact that truth, even in the area of science, is never uncontroversial.

3. LEARNING AND DISCIPLINE IN STEINER SCHOOLS

New York in 1875 saw the foundation by Helena Blavatsky of Theosophy, a philosophy which, in drawing heavily from Vedic scriptures, promoted the transmigration of the soul, the mystic union of all mankind and the potential validity of all forms of religious experience for their contribution to the knowledge of the divine. Annie Besant assumed the leadership of the Theosophical Society when Blavatsky died. One of Besant's earliest associates were Rudolf Steiner, head of the German branch of the Society. His own developing beliefs led him in 1907 to break with Theosophy and to establish in 1913 the Anthroposophical Society. In contrast with Theosophy, Anthroposophy looked within man alone for spiritual truth, and whereas the life and crucifixion of Jesus was for Theosophy merely on a spiritual par with the death of Socrates or the sacrificial courage of Mohammed, Anthroposophy held that the life of Jesus was a unique statement both of man's hostility to God and of the world's permeation with God's spirit. The First World War hampered the spread of Anthroposophy, but when the Weimar Republic came into existence, educational experiment was urged in an attempt to encourage democracy. Emil Molt, owner of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, provided the funding that Steiner needed to establish a school run on Anthroposophical principles. What could be more experimental than basing teaching techniques on the temperaments?

At first sight it is perhaps, strange that Steiner should have adapted the Greek theories concerning the humours to his own educational ideas, because in his writings he often criticises the classical basis of the Gymnasium in German schooling, saying that economic life must stem from the present time (1969, p. 22). However, Steiner held that the Greeks lived, at least until the age of thirty, with the connection between the soul and the body, the spiritual and the physical, still intact. He believed (1971a, pp. 23–5) that the soul and the body appear together and develop out of the child together until the change of teeth, when the soul is already freeing itself from the body. At the age of twenty-one the separation becomes much more defined, and by the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth year nothing more can be seen of the way in which the soul-spiritual life is connected with the body. What someone does at this age can be perceived in soul-spiritual life or physical life, but the two

cannot be brought into any sort of connection. Yet this was not always the case: in the remote past the physical-bodily nature was completely dependent on the being of soul and spirit. An old man changed in respect of his bodily nature, but right into extreme old age he continued to feel as only quite young people can feel today. The Greeks were still able to feel the harmony between spiritual and physical-bodily, and they felt this harmony until the age of thirty or forty. The culture and art of the Greeks was, according to Steiner, founded on this unity, which transformed everything theoretical into art. The writings of Hippocrates and Galen permeate Steiner's thoughts on the nature of man, and produce amongst other things a system of classroom management that is in its structure quite unique. For him too Greek movement was living, pristine and natural, since the most important educator was the gymnast; whereas with the climax of Roman civilisation the whole person receded into the background, and instead of beautiful human beings beautiful speech became the aim, the rhetorician usurping the gymnast (1971a, pp. 164–5). Moreover, by looking more closely, it can be seen that Steiner was not objecting to what ancient Greece had to offer the schools of his time, but the attempt to educate children according to what he envisaged (1969, pp. 21–2) as Greek life, which of course was estranged from an industrial society. Steiner (1971a, pp. 164–5) drew an analogy from art, excoriating any attempt to copy earlier painters because this style would lack the vital inspiration from everyday life. Elsewhere (1968a, pp. 9–12) he reiterates the often repeated and justifiable opinion that, with regard to all the realms of human spiritual life, man's greatest riddle in the physical life is man himself. Human beings are endlessly varied in their deepest individual essence. Anthroposophy aims to view people not only outwardly, but also into the innermost kernel. Because the Greeks were still unified in body and spirit, their theories concerning the humours were eminently suitable for adoption in Anthroposophy.

There are, according to Steiner, four types of temperament: sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic. In individuals the temperaments are mixed in the most diverse ways, so that is possible only to say that one temperament or another predominates in certain traits. Temperament inclines towards the individual, thus making people different, and on the other hand joins individuals together in a group, so proving that it has something to do both with the innermost essence of the human being and with universal human nature. Steiner's association with the Theosophical Society implanted the notion (1968a, pp. 9–12) of the transmigration and

reincarnation of the soul. Every single human being, whether he or she enters into physical life, has a succession of lives behind him or her. After death the soul lives in other forms of existence in the spiritual world, and when the time comes again to experience a life in the physical world, it seeks its parents. Each person brings from that former life certain qualities. Earlier incarnations provide the inner kernel of being, and this is enveloped with what is given by the parents and heredity. Hence human beings are composed of two sides: what comes from the family, which is mainly physical; and what has developed from the individual's being, namely a number of predispositions, characteristics and inner capacities. Temperament stands in the middle between what is brought by the soul and what originates from the line of heredity, and it balances the eternal with the transitory.

The choleric temperament (1968a, pp. 28ff) shows itself as active in a strong pulsating blood, and the force of the ego wishes to make itself felt. The choleric person is strong-willed and aggressive. The sanguine person (1968a, pp. 30ff) cannot linger with an impression. The mind hurries from one life impression to another, from perception to perception, from idea to idea; the disposition is fickle. In the melancholic temperament (1968a, p. 32) the densest part of the human being, namely the body, rules the other parts. The inner being has no power over the physical system, and inner obstacles are constantly felt. What cannot be overcome causes sorrow and pain, and this constraint becomes a source of inner grief. It is therefore easy for a melancholic person to feel that life is filled with sorrow and pain. The phlegmatic temperament (1968a, p. 37) is revealed by an inner sense of ease and general complacency.

Steiner (1971a, pp. 135–6) placed great value on being able to enter into and understand children according to their temperament, and the actual seating of the children in the classroom was arranged on this basis. Choleric children, he thought, were likely to thump each other, sanguines to fidget, and phlegmatics to get bored. Thus the ancient Greek medical idea of like reacting with like was used to produce a better situation. The teacher had to bear within him or herself all four temperaments in a harmonious and balanced activity. It can be seen that the ancient Greek theories concerning the humours have been adapted, to shift their emphasis from the purely physical to include the spiritual. Nevertheless the influence of these theories is strong throughout Steiner's writings, even as far as recommendations for food and diet. Steiner (1971a, pp. 24ff) held, as did Galen, that the manifestation of melancholy in children was connected with some irregularity in the function of the

liver. Sugar and sweet things could be prescribed to help normalise the function of the liver. With sanguine children a diet and a reduction in the consumption of sweet things was useful, since any abnormality was caused by an irregularity in the activity of the liver in respect of the secretion of gall.

A choleric temperament (1968b, p. 21) shows itself in impetuous and vehement action. A choleric teacher, when giving instructions, may be prompted by his temperament to handle or treat a child in a way which he or she afterwards regrets. He or she may do all kinds of things to frighten the child, since the child's soul works delicately. The fright may pass quickly away, but none the less be implanted deep inside the physical organism of the child. A phlegmatic teacher (1968b, pp. 24–6) leaves the inner activity of the child unsatisfied: the child wants to be active, but the teacher by his or her nature does not respond to what comes from the child, and so what is striving to flow out finds no other impressions or impulses to meet it. The effects of the uncontrolled teacher on the child reveal themselves in later life: an adult, who as a child was subjected to the choleric outbursts of a teacher, will suffer digestive and metabolic diseases when he or she is over forty-five; anyone who was educated by a phlegmatic teacher will be troubled by nervous disorders and neurasthenia. A melancholic teacher (1968b, p. 26) will be too concerned with him or herself, and so the thread of the child's spiritual and soul nature is continually threatened with breaking, and his or her life of feeling is chilled, the impulses of the soul inside being concealed, sinking back into him or herself rather than being expressed. Later in life the child will suffer from irregularities of breathing and blood circulation. The sanguine teacher (1968b, pp. 26–7) is susceptible to each and every kind of impression. This temperament produces a suppression of the vitality, zest in life and forceful will that well up from the individuality of the child. In order to teach effectively Steiner believed (1968a, pp. 56ff) that teachers had to correct any tendency to swing towards any one particular temperament. For example, a phlegmatic teacher with no interests would be advised to occupy him or herself as much as possible with quite uninteresting things, to be surrounded with many sources of boredom, so that a state of thorough boredom could be reached. Then the apathy will be cured. The phlegmatic person must decide with the intellect that an interest should be taken in something so that matters which are already only worthy of being ignored must be searched for. Occupations in which apathy is justified must be discovered, and thus apathy can be worked out and conquered.

4. THE TEMPERAMENTS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Steiner is not alone in his quadripartite classification of character. Hargreaves (1982, pp. 101–2), for instance, divides pupils into four ‘analytical’ types: the committed or conformist, the instrumentalists without profound commitment, the indifferent or bored, and the oppositionals in overt and sometimes powerful resistance to school. Foy (1977, pp. 107–9) too details four levels of pupil participation: the non-conformers, who are aggressive and often focus on a scapegoat, the passives who are anxious and moody, the facilitators, and the serious conformers who want to pass their examinations. Foy adds (1977, p. 103) that eighty per cent of referrals usually come from groups of students who function at the ‘dull normal range of intelligence’, and who are backward in basic skills of language, reading and numeracy; these students have poor self-esteem, poor application because of the gaps in their knowledge and skills, poor motivation because of their repeated failure, vulnerable personalities through projecting an aggressive image, and a resentment of correction. But Steiner is alone in the way in which he classifies character. What marks out Hargreaves and Foy is the assumption that school is about confrontation between pupils and teachers. Holt (1984, p. 59) alleged that, through mockery by peers and sometimes teachers or mistakes and failings, most children in school found their contemporaries as daunting as their teacher. Steiner never mentions confrontation. He even stresses (1967, pp. 31–2) that teachers should not take it for granted that any one particular temperament is a fault to be overcome. The temperament should be recognised and the question should be asked as to how the temperament might be treated so that the child may reach the desired goal in life, and so that the very best may be drawn out of the temperament.

Steiner (1967, pp. 93ff) suggested several ways of encouraging Foy’s pupils of ‘dull normal intelligence’. For example, a child who from the beginning has scant talent for reading and writing could be placed on a diet which avoided eggs and pastry as far as possible so as to harmonise the humours. If this proved of little use, then for a short time – not more than a week – the child for the first part of morning school should learn on an empty stomach, for Steiner thought that then the child’s capacities would be revealed, and he or she would show greater ability and be more receptive to the teacher. A weakness in arithmetic could be ameliorated by obliging pupils during gymnastic lessons to count the number of steps they took, to add and subtract whilst moving so as to reinforce what is

learnt through exercises in movement. Steiner (1967, p. 101) begged teachers not to overrate what other children lose because of pedagogical concentration on the less gifted ones, since as a rule not very much should be lost provided that, while a subject is presented in the right way for duller children, the brighter ones can be persuaded to pay attention to it also. Steiner was concerned too over girls putting up a certain amount of opposition to traditionally male-dominated subjects like Physics. Foon (1988, p. 52) remarks on some research, carried out at Canberra in Australia, that suggests the type of school attended does seem to have differential consequences for students in terms of their stated preferences and rated achievements in subjects: those attending single-sex schools seem to be less rigidly attached to traditional views about the appropriateness of subject areas by sex. Even today males dominate mathematics and science, whilst English is dominated by females. Steiner argued that patience and attention to eurhythmy would reveal the beauty and pattern in all subjects, and help reluctant and slow learners to a wonderful degree. There should be no justification for streaming or segregation.

Seating children according to their temperament should act, as Steiner put it (1967, p. 59ff), homeopathically. The sanguine and phlegmatic temperaments are frequently found in conjunction; but the phlegmatic temperament never passes over easily into the choleric; the melancholic and sanguine temperaments are also complete opposites. The classroom should be arranged as follows: if the phlegmatics are put together, it is good to have choleric on the opposite side, and to let the melancholics and sanguines sit between them. It is the task of the teacher to discover the temperaments of his or her pupils, with the help if necessary of the other teachers, and to act accordingly: calm and indifferent with a choleric child, with inner sympathy towards the phlegmatic child. Choleric will chatter less when they are sitting together than they would if they were sitting with children of other temperaments, and sanguine children put together in one group do not intensify each other's sanguinity but tone it down. By studying the temperaments and working with feelings, confrontation would disappear. If bad behaviour in the classroom is corrected by other children in the class, feelings are being engaged to re-establish order and support the authority of the teacher. Humour is also a good method of reducing things to an absurdity, especially in minor faults and misdemeanours. Steiner considered (1967, pp. 59ff) that all actual punishment was superfluous and even harmful; the essential point was to arouse a feeling for the objective damage that had been caused and the necessity of making it good.

5. CURRENT PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE AND THE TEMPERAMENTS

Having fallen from their pivotal role with the gradual demise of Galenic medical systems, the temperaments might have been consigned to a footnote in the history of western medicine had it not been for the attention they drew from philosophers. In the 18th century, for example, Kant promoted the idea that sanguine and melancholic types were emotional, while choleric and phlegmatic types were dynamic. This philosophical resurgence, however, was countered by the contemporaneous strengthening throughout Europe of democratic and egalitarian ideals, for the temperaments carried with them the concept that people were indeed born different and unequal. Any perceived differences might have suggested to some the inherent superiority of the clergy and aristocracy.

Even in this century the enthusiasm of modern psychology for the temperaments has been, until now, relatively feeble. What has in particular focused attention on the theory is the problem of past experience and how this effects the moods. To state an obvious truism, people in poverty can be happy, whilst those with security can be anxious. Moreover, it can be difficult for some children to be as relaxed and spontaneous as they would like, even though they have been born into an affectionate and wealthy family (Kagan, 1994, p. xxii). Recent research has tried, with considerable success, to predict adult character by examining childhood personality. So, for example, Paulhus and Trapnell (1998) focus on the behavioural typology that links childhood with adulthood, whilst Eisenberg (1998) suggests that children who tend to dwell on negative emotions are especially likely to be shy as adults. From this research two fundamental types emerge: the uninhibited who smiled when greeting the interviewer and even when failing a particular psychological test; and the inhibited who answered only the questions posed by the researcher and remained taciturn. Crucial to Steiner, there were many physiological differences between these two types: thus uninhibited children had lower heart rates under stress, whilst inhibited children had more allergies. (Kagan, 1994, pp. 124, 134–5, 146–9 and 161) No decision has been made about the primary temperaments of children, since further inquiry is needed to reveal what may be a large number of temperamental constructs. This is not alien to Galen, since ancient science categorised a number of temperamental permutations through combination.

Now take the commonplace that inhibited children are initially fearful of and avoid unfamiliar events (Kagan, 1994, p. 117). Steiner (1971a, 94–5) taught that children should be held back

from developing intellectually too quickly, because, although a child can learn things fast, the physical body is at that stage too soft and has a tendency which later on may cause it to run to fat. If the physical body should be too soft, then the fluid element has an excess of weight in relation to the solid element, and this causes the soul and spirit to make themselves felt too soon and results in a precocious child. During further development of the physical body this precocity is pushed back again, and under certain conditions everything may well be changed, and the child becomes not just an average person, but even someone below average. It could be argued that this brake in intellectual learning causes a child to be at a disadvantage, but in reply this is only a disadvantage by conventional reckoning. Edmunds (1987, p. 96) records that when some children were transferred from a Steiner school to a conventional school at the outbreak of the Second World War, 'their freshness and liveliness of interest took over and most of them went ahead surprisingly well'. This was despite not having been drilled in the usual intellectual way, and having followed a curriculum which did not run parallel to that in other schools. Steiner's gradual approach to learning coincides with what some psychologists would argue: that many shy and quiet adolescents do not inherit this disposition, but develop it through external influences on an initial temperamental bias (Kagan, 1994, pp. 168–9). Thus inhibited children are more affected by reproach than uninhibited children. The former confess to a relatively strict conscience when exposed to disciplining that involves reasoning, whereas the latter have no concept of relation between their conscience and an authoritarian style of discipline.

The problem when examining Steiner schools is how to judge them. Should it be in terms of academic results or personal enrichment? (cf. Gray, 1997, pp. 17). It would perhaps be simple to compare results in examinations, yet the crucial area for Steiner schools of developing the inner being and the ability to feel in children would be a nightmare even to try to measure. Some educationists despair completely. Sanders (1986, p. 5) wrote that research has neither identified the components of effective teaching nor led to any significant improvements in the practice or technology of teaching. In a similar vein McLoughlin (1983, p. 61) lamented that, despite much effort and expense, very little is known about how people learn, the environmental conditions most conducive to learning, why so much of what is learned is quickly forgotten, or why some children learn where others fail to do so. Perhaps such schools should be judged by the standards they set themselves. Sharwood

Smith (1977, p. 423) was impressed by a school which sounds from his description not unlike a Steiner school. There was no streaming, no form orders, no prizes for academic work, no examinations before the General Certificate of Education and the Certificate of Secondary Education during the fifth year (year 11) and the 'mocks' that preceded them. As in a Steiner school (Edmunds, 1987, pp. 81–6), the opening Main Lesson was of considerable duration. Why, asks Sharwood Smith (1977, p. 422), should schools expect their pupils, from the age of eleven, to spend their school day switching from one subject to another?

There are few Steiner schools in Britain. It may be that the philosophy of life belonging to Anthroposophy is a product of German and Eastern thought and so does not graft easily on to an English stem. The use of the ancient Greek theories concerning the humours to help children learn would also seem strange and alien to many people, even naive (Harwood, 1958, p. 158). Yet as has been shown, the four humours and their related temperaments might point to something deeper and more fundamental than other educational systems of reference to character, and might explain why Steiner schools appear to have such success with handicapped children. The four humours of the body describe the condition and process of the physical constitution as the four determinants of temperament: that is impulse, appetite, desire and emotion. Dilts (1976, pp. 14–19, cf. Vaihinger, 1935) reminds us that the theory of the humours, as used in psychology, is no more than a map of reality, not reality itself. Any map of the soul will distort reality, but nevertheless is a useful tool in locating ourselves: areas are simplified, routes are distorted and features are deleted. Nevertheless maps can allow for patterns to be discerned, and for a given purpose – in the case of schools allowing children to develop to their full potential – they may have some use.

The temperaments suggest a plausible solution to the conundrum of behaviour. Every teacher will have encountered sets of brothers and sisters whose outlook and behaviour have by and large been similar, excluding the variable of intelligence as perceived academically. Identical schooling, parental discipline and other external factors have contributed to this approximate homogeneity. Yet there are some striking differences which these generalities do not explain properly. To give real but anonymous examples: the wholly extrovert girl, her painfully withdrawn brother, and their relaxed and sociable parents; or the friendly academic boy, his rebellious and asocial twin brother, and their warm and devoted parents. These differences are elucidated conventionally through

such criteria as sibling rivalry, peer pressure and personality clashes (Riemann, 1997). The theory of the temperaments, on the other hand, while still imperfect, does allow for these differences through nature, and therefore suggests to the individual concerned control through personal restraint, rather than control externally through punishment. There is even a possibility that the temperaments are more than a theory: asymmetries in the left and right hemispheres of the brain have been linked to temperamental qualities, since the domination of the left frontal area results in feelings of happiness, calmness and satisfaction, while the domination of the right frontal area produces sadness, anxiety, tension, worry, guilt and depression (Kagan, 1994, p. 54). Of course environmental conditions can modify behaviour too, so some children learn to control their irritability or even their fear, for psychologists agree that behaviour governed by the temperaments is not immutable. Indeed this was the position with the ancients. The historian Tacitus used to be cited on the fixing of character at birth: the emperor Tiberius, he argued, was evil in his declining years, so his earlier actions must be interpreted through this knowledge. However, Tacitus was criticising the oppressive nature of imperial politics, and uses whatever means for destruction he can find. His contemporary Quintilian, when discussing education, accepted discipline and teaching as major factors in influencing character (Rawson, 1997, p. 91). Progressive schools have often paved the way for other schools in the way children are treated and taught, in the way relations between teachers and children have changed, and in challenging the traditional ideals of education. Education has witnessed the slow move away from purely intellectual pursuits to more physical activities. Yet there has not always been a consistent effort to justify this transition on philosophical or psychological grounds (Childs, 1991, p. 199). Kyle (1994) even suggested that if the point of education were known – that to understand exactly what education is really for – then the means could be devised for accomplishing that end. To this end Steiner argued for man, and not values, as the goal of education. He put forward a difficult and idiosyncratic view of life which forms a kind of imprecise orthodoxy, namely the principle of ethical individualism. This dichotomy is mirrored in the balance between body and soul, soul and spirit, phlegm and yellow bile, blood and black bile. The ancients had claimed physical welfare through this balance; pushing the same idea further. Steiner (1971b, 11) felt that individuals could, through this balance, feeling and thinking, attain greater philosophical achievements.

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