

**RUDOLF
STEINER**

ON HIS BOOK

**THE PHILOSOPHY
OF FREEDOM**

**Selections arranged
and annotated
by
Otto Palmer**

Rudolf Steiner
on his book
The Philosophy of Freedom

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Dedicated to
The Community of Free Spirits
for whom Rudolf Steiner wrote.

Introduction

More than seventy years have passed since the first appearance of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. After that, a quarter of a century elapsed before Rudolf Steiner made up his mind to bring out a second edition of the book. “It would have been possible to keep on publishing new editions,” he said at the time, “and I don't doubt they would have found a market. But that would just have meant only that *The Philosophy of Freedom* sold well. In the case of my more basic writings I was never interested in having lots of copies floating around the world. My real concern was to have these writings understood and the impulse in them actually working.”¹

Many further editions have been published since these words were spoken. The time now seems ripe to bring together what Rudolf Steiner himself said and wrote by way of furthering an understanding of this book and of the goal he intended it to serve.

No other book Rudolf Steiner wrote was as often and exhaustively discussed by him as *The Philosophy of Freedom*. He not only refers to it, as in the case of others of his writings, to call attention to some particularly interesting matter treated in its pages; he points again and again and yet again, from every imaginable angle, to what he intended this work to accomplish—indeed, to initiate. The reader will see from the chronological listing of Steiner's comments included at the end of this volume

that from 1905 until his death in 1925 not a year passed without some discussion of this first work. The list does not pretend to be complete, however. It would have to include many further references to achieve the status of a true archive, but that task can be undertaken at leisure. Meanwhile, the listing in the appended table may be regarded as containing the most basic references.

The Philosophy of Freedom is a path, a method, as anthroposophy itself is—a method leading by philosophic means to the actual experience of a thinking detached from the body-soul makeup. This is a thinking that cannot be allowed to remain mere thought but must instead become experience based on “soul observation” as the subtitle of the book indicates. As such, it is the first stage of supersensible experience. The second is moral intuition, described in the section called “Moral Fantasy.”

Experience of the kind referred to offers the only possible means of refuting materialism, both the scientific materialism of the West and the dialectical materialism of the East. They cannot be refuted by pure logic, for in the closed circuit of the thought systems on which they are based both types have built themselves impregnable fortresses. There is not the tiniest loophole through which one might creep to threaten their hold. They can only be countered by the most solid experience, by the actual fact of experiencing the supersensible in the thinking process. One cannot argue about that experience with people unwilling or unable to attain it, anymore than one can argue with a blind man about the light and color that his defective organism keeps him from perceiving. The experience of pure thinking

remains a matter of having the “goodwill,” as *The Philosophy of Freedom* says, to undertake it.

The shape of the future depends entirely upon how the human race thinks today. The way we think about ourselves conditions what we will become. Angelus Silesius said, “Man, what thou lovest, into that art thou translated. Lovest thou God, God thou becomest, and earth thou becomest, lovest thou earth.” Nowadays it is not so much what we love that is the decisive element as what we think. We take on the shape of the image formed by the way we think about ourselves. So we might change the Silesian mystic's saying to “Man, what thou thinkest, into that art thou transformed. Thinkest thou spirit, spirit thou becomest, and beast thou becomest, conceivest thou thyself as a mere body.”

The question as to which is right, the materialistic view of man and universe or the spiritual one, is not primarily theoretical; it is a question we must settle with our wills. Do we want man to be a threefold being endowed with body, soul and spirit, or just a body and soul with a few spiritual attributes? Or is a body with a few soul attributes all we really want? It is up to man alone to decide this issue.

A person able to understand this can also see that *The Philosophy of Freedom*, which poses this world historic problem, thereby lifts itself out of the realm of mere theory to take its rightful place among the decisive factors affecting mankind's future evolution, for it becomes the means to a practical rather than a theoretical overcoming of materialism.

This book offers those who study it the possibility of making

themselves truly “free spirits.” Materialism does just the opposite. It seeks to reduce us to creatures completely determined by heredity and other such influences, hence totally unfree and little better than animals. That is what materialism has set out to do, and let us not deceive ourselves; it can do it.

Anyone anxious to participate in shaping future man into a spiritually threefold being will have to activate his thinking, to set himself inwardly in motion. Following a path means moving one's feet, not standing still. If one cannot rouse oneself to do this, one resembles a person who studies a map carefully and knows exactly where the path goes, but never starts out to travel it. The map is all that interests him.

The Philosophy of Freedom can, of course, be taken just this way; what would become of freedom were it otherwise?

Nevertheless, to read it that way means taking a more theoretical approach to the study of the path Steiner opened up. That is perfectly justified within certain limits. But there is a danger in it—the danger of becoming too much involved in following up the quotes from Spinoza, Fichte, Hamerling and the various others and making them more of an object of study than is at all necessary for a grasp of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Such a procedure is quite proper, however, in the case of Steiner's book *The Riddles of Philosophy*² because of that book's more historical character.

The quotations included in *The Philosophy of Freedom* were put there for a quite different purpose. That purpose stands out clearly if we leave out the names of the philosophers quoted and consider their thoughts alone, a procedure that

changes nothing of consequence in the structure of the book. Then these thoughts serve partly as an obstacle course for the strengthening of our own thinking, partly as prods to stimulate us to reach out for new ideas, and partly as fences to keep our thoughts from straying off in wrong directions. These various goals are fully served by the extent of Steiner's quoting, a fact that relieved him of the necessity of coming to grips within the confines of this book with contemporary developments of philosophic thought. As he said, "There is no need to deal with them in a book with the particular purpose I intended this to serve." These words were followed by a reference to *The Riddles of Philosophy*, which does deal fully with them.

If one responds, as suggested above, to the tutelage the quotes provide, one begins to notice that the thoughts presented in this book are not arranged in a set abstract logical sequence, but instead conduce to a thought dynamics, a veritable thought eurythmy. What we have here is philosophy as an art of thinking.

A person engaging in this dynamic mode of thinking has to activate his will, which gives rise to the "thinking will" that Rudolf Steiner refers to again and again as so essential. Once the reader succeeds in setting this thinking will in motion it is only a question of how far he can develop it, for there are no limits to its possible intensifying.

So he launches out on the path that Rudolf Steiner cleared for him. Quotes to be found in the following pages indicate the importance that Steiner attached to this path as one—though not the only one—that can be taken.

Travelling this path leads to two significant encounters. One is

with oneself, with one's own being. The other is with the true essence of thinking. In these two encounters a man experiences himself within thought's very being. This makes him an individual whose life is lived in a pendulum-swing between knowledge that is common property, and his own, fully individual, moral intuitions. Put another way, he learns to transform ideas into ideals. The idea of freedom is a free gift offered him but it is up to him to make this idea activate his will. If he does so, the idea becomes an ideal.

When he enters thus into possession of his individuality at the point of its origin in the supersensible, he has used every aid that philosophical means can offer him to develop the consciousness soul. As many of his statements show, Rudolf Steiner sees the individual, and the morality issuing from and based upon individuality, as the foundation upon which human society is built.

A person who lifts himself to a truly individual level in the sense of *The Philosophy of Freedom* has, by the same token, developed the capacity to find the concepts and ideas that belong to the phenomena with which the surrounding world confronts him. He lifts himself toward the ideal of the "free spirit" and works to make it a reality.

His efforts in this direction bring forth yet another kind of harvest. He develops an organ, intuition, that not only enables him to have ideas of his own, but to absorb those of others as though they were his. He is thus able to blot out his own world of ideas in order to let another's light up in him. So he comes to understand his fellowman and to develop into a social being.

This enables him to advance from the stage of the consciousness soul in which individualism reaches its highest development, to that of spirit self, which is alone capable of finding solutions to the large and small problems of community life.³

We now turn to a discussion of the most important works of other authors on *The Philosophy of Freedom*.

In this connection Carl Unger deserves to be mentioned first. The regard Rudolf Steiner had for Unger's work can be gauged by a remark he made in a lecture entitled *Philosophy and Anthroposophy*.⁴ We quote it here at considerable length not only because his words characterize Unger's work; they also set up significant guidelines for anthroposophical work in general.

The scientist of today is totally unaware of the fact that in the last analysis a truly scholarly spirit has to be based on a thorough-going development of the art of thinking so that this may serve as a solid ground for grasping reality. You will feel, as you hear me say this, what a blessing it is to see efforts being made in the Anthroposophical Society to work in an absolutely ideal way toward the goal of establishing epistemological principles. The fact that, here in Stuttgart, we have in Dr. Carl Unger an extraordinarily outstanding worker in this field can be regarded as a truly beneficial element in our movement. For the real depths of this movement will not make themselves felt in the world just because there are people in it who want to listen to accounts of supersensible worlds. Its success will rather be

due to those who patiently develop a technique of thinking that provides a solid foundation for really successful work, an inner scaffolding for activity in the higher world.

The Philosophy of Freedom was implicit in Unger's thinking, as everything he wrote demonstrates. His final book was *The Language of the Consciousness Soul*⁵ a treatise on the guidelines given the Anthroposophical Society by Rudolf Steiner after the Christmas Conference. Although Unger does not mention *The Philosophy of Freedom* until he discusses Guidelines 109-111, it is implicit in everything he says up to that point.

Guideline 109: “To become truly aware of Michael's activity within the cosmic whole is to set the riddle of human freedom in cosmic perspective and thus to solve it, insofar as its solution is a necessity to earthly man.”

Guideline 110: “For freedom is an actuality, the immediate possession of every human being who is a true man of his time. Nobody can say that there is no such thing as freedom without denying a perfectly patent fact. But the possession of freedom could seem to run counter to the rule of cosmic order. Such a thought evaporates, however, as one contemplates Michael's mission in the cosmos.”

Guideline 111: “My *Philosophy of Freedom* demonstrates the fact of freedom as a content of modern human consciousness. The account of the Michael mission given here tells the story of freedom's cosmic origin and development.”

From this point on, Unger constantly quotes from and discusses *The Philosophy of Freedom*. He entitles Section 52 of his commentary “The Michael Aspect of *The Philosophy of Freedom*.”

Further commentaries by Büchenbacher, Leiste, Hiebel, Stockmeyer, Witzenmann and others are listed among the references at the end of this volume.

The statement is made in *An Outline of Occult Science*⁶ that “these books [*The Theory of Knowledge Based on Goethe's World Conception*⁷ and *The Philosophy of Freedom*] occupy an important middle position between knowledge of the sense world and that of the spirit. They make available what thinking can attain to when it lifts itself above the level of sense observation but stops short of engaging in spiritual research. A person who lets these books work upon his whole being already stands in the spiritual world; he perceives it, however, as a world of thought.” A thinking schooled in *The Philosophy of Freedom* and working along the lines of the ideas it stimulates knows exactly what this statement means.

When a person confronts the sense world he is overwhelmed by the onrush of impressions and can hold his own against them only by working his way through to the concepts that belong with and complete them. Percepts exist without his doing, but he has to find the concepts that belong to these.

Thinking is discovered to be a “higher percept” among percepts, for in this case the object of observation and the product of thought are qualitatively identical. Thinking lays hold upon itself in the thinker; the thinker lays hold upon himself in

thinking. We are concerned here neither with given facts nor yet with questions remaining to be answered. Instead, everything is pure activity, the activity of thinking on the one hand, the thinker's activity on the other, both laying hold on their own being as they act. Here we have a thought world wholly contained and self-containing.

In this thought world man lives in two realms of reality: that of thinking and that of his own ego-being. His life in the world of thought is what gives him this double nature. It separates him from everything about him, yet also serves as the means of his connection with it, for it is thinking that enables him to grasp the inner aspect of phenomena. The thought world thus enables him to develop all the thoughts and ideas that he needs for an understanding of the sense world.

Anthroposophy, which makes its first appearance in the form of ideas, works in this thought realm on those ideas and concepts which the spiritual investigator develops by means of his spiritual perception and for its furtherance. To the extent that he communicates them to his fellowmen they form a body of a priori facts lacking the factor of perceptibility.

Thus, on the one hand, man finds himself standing in the sense world as in one half of reality, lacking the concepts needed to complete it. He lives in a self-contained world of thought that embraces his concepts and perceptions. When both factors are taken hold of by an energized thinking, observation and intuition merge and are one. On the other hand, man is the recipient of ideas that come to him from the spiritual world, and with these he stands in the other half of reality, which the spiritual world

constitutes. What he lacks here is the corresponding percepts. The purpose of spiritual schooling is to guide him to them.

In the lecture quoted above, Steiner describes the situation in which he found himself within the Theosophical Society:

A person was by no means judged by what he contributed. Instead he was Fitted into stereotypes of certain pet notions and phrases....No one really cared what I was saying and publishing. Of course the members read it, but reading is not the same thing as understanding.... They took what I offered, not as something issuing from my mouth or written in my books, but rather as what this one thought "mystical," that one "theosophical," another something else again.... It was not a particularly appealing or ideal situation in which to bring out a new edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom*.⁸

Here we are being shown an incapacity to enter into the thoughts and ideas of other people, a habitual connecting of certain terms with certain concepts. Habits of this kind get in the way of understanding others' thinking. *The Philosophy of Freedom* has among its many goals that of freeing the reader from fixed thinking habits. If one allows oneself to be guided by the book and enters into the patterns of movement generated by the thoughts it develops, one can reach a capacity to form absolutely exact concepts.

But this alone is not enough. Even if one is able, for example, to think the concept "etheric body" as Steiner would, picturing it not just as attenuated matter or, in other words, conceiving it as

something physical, this concept, like many another, is only too apt to remain an isolated one without relationship to others in an organic whole. One has a handful of parts and pieces but the spiritual link is missing. The thinking will is alone able to supply this link, assigning separate concepts and ideas their place of belonging in the total thought sphere.

Steiner has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the thinking will, not only for individuals pursuing occult training but for the advancement of the whole human race.

Considering the danger that *The Philosophy of Freedom* runs of being put in the same category as other philosophies, I feel obligated to assemble Steiner's many and varied comments on this book. Academic philosophy shows a certain wise instinct in ignoring it, for in a sense it represents the end of the road for philosophy and the beginning of something that is wholly new. The book sets forth clearly indeed the philosophic goals still to be achieved.

My sense of obligation outweighs my concern lest this volume present another danger, that is, that the reader will rest content with familiarizing himself with Steiner's comments and use this as an excuse for not developing his own thinking will. This is a risk that will have to be taken.

If one decides to go ahead and undertake the task of assembling and editing what Steiner had to say about his *Philosophy of Freedom*, one finds oneself confronting enormous difficulties.

For one thing, the wealth of writings and lectures is so great that years are bound to pass before one has assembled all the

relevant material. The editor has deliberately contented himself with making just a small beginning at that task, aware that even this much was possible only because of work previously done by others.⁹ It is to be hoped that still other workers will carry the task through to completion.

A further difficulty is that of deciding where to begin and where to end quoted passages, since these are almost never rounded statements that can stand by themselves. One is, of course, tempted to include every word with any bearing on the subject but to do that would mean allowing this volume to grow to undesirable proportions.

Furthermore, one cannot simply arrange the quotations in chronological order, suitable though such an arrangement is in the case of the chronological table appended at the end. The material at hand has to be presented in some sort of topical arrangement so we settled on the one that follows. Quite aside from all the alternatives that existed in the matter of thematic grouping, however, questions still remained as to the allocation under various headings of passages to be quoted, for it was found that every quotation fitted equally well into some other category. No decision made on this score was really inevitable; some other would have suited just as well. That lay in the nature of the material dealt with, and since there were no perfectly obvious, objective solutions, one had to make arbitrary choices, as has been done here.

The first section of this book presents a short prologue. In it are discussed Steiner's doctoral dissertation, *Human Consciousness Comes to Terms with Itself* (later published

with the title *Truth and Science*), submitted to Heinrich von Stein at the University of Rostock, and a letter of Steiner to Rosa Mayreder, surely one of the most touching documents ever to issue from his pen. A quotation from his autobiography is included that throws light on the part Rosa Mayreder played in the development of the theme of freedom.

Let us put what Steiner says in this letter in context with the following remarks of his. “I had the feeling that I was setting down thoughts that the spiritual world had given me up to the time of my thirtieth year,”¹⁰ and “This is in no sense a personal work.”¹¹ We do not hesitate to call attention to this seeming contradiction, which will serve as a stimulus to the thinking of the well-disposed, though it affords ill-wishers an unearned triumph.

Finally, this section describes the history of the book from the viewpoint of its author as he surveys it thirty years after its first appearance.

Was it necessary to assign a special chapter to the book's goals and purposes? Indeed it was! As one carries out this survey one finds a great variety of aspects receiving emphasis as the years went by. Then, some attention had to be paid to the book's artistic composition. The sections entitled “New Thinking” and “New Willing (moral fantasy)” touch on the very core of the book and lead over into the Stuttgart lecture of February 6, 1923, entitled “New Thinking, New Willing,” which is reproduced here almost in its entirety. What makes its appearance as ethical individualism in the new willing described there is examined in the following section from its social aspect. Between the sections on thinking and willing are inserted

Steiner's sharply delineated comments on “The Sphere of Freedom.”

It is surely fitting to point out in connection with the latter section that the impulse to freedom is an essential aspect of mankind's task in the fifth post-Atlantean period. This is the basic theme of the lecture, *Episodische Betrachtung zum Erscheinen der Neuauflage der Philosophie der Freiheit* and we regret having to omit it here.¹² It is certainly the most important and comprehensive commentary Rudolf Steiner ever offered on this subject.

The section which examines *The Philosophy of Freedom* as “A Book of Exercises” is allotted a considerable share of pages. Three different phases stand out distinctly. Around 1907, the book's relationship to Rosicrucian disciplines is stressed; in 1910, its contributions to the anthroposophical path; after the appearance of the second edition in 1918, the emphasis is on the task of lifting the scientific thinking that has served as a schooling for all mankind to the level of a spiritual-scientific means of understanding the universe.

There follow some refutations of critics, of people with differing viewpoints and of enemies. After Steiner's extremely vigorous repelling of attacks by exponents of traditional religious standpoints, it must seem the more surprising to find the last section speaking of the “Pauline” character of this theory of knowledge and to see it shining out at the end as a book of redemptive practices in the pursuit of knowledge.

The longer and more intensively one concerns oneself with the material on which this book is based, the more inclined one is to

entitle it “Rudolf Steiner Courts Understanding for his
Philosophy of Freedom.”

Otto Palmer

Wolfhalden, July 11, 1964

CHAPTER I

How The Book Came To Be

As he looked back over his life, Rudolf Steiner found *The Philosophy of Freedom* playing a very decisive role in it. He began concerning himself with the problems the book deals with when, as a young man of nineteen, he entered the Technical High School in Vienna and applied himself to the study of philosophy, among a number of other subjects. In Chapter Three of his autobiography he says:

As time went on, the life of thinking came to seem to me a reflection in the physical man of what the soul experiences in the spiritual world. Thought-experience meant living in a reality so palpable as to make any questioning of it absurd. But the world of the senses was by no means so real. It is there, to be sure, but one cannot grasp it as immediately as one does one's thoughts. Elements or beings can be working behind its facade. Yet it is the world man finds himself set down in. So the question arose: Is this physical world full reality? When a person develops thoughts about it which he derives from within and applies to its illumination, is he bringing a quite alien element to bear on it? This would not seem to accord at all with his actual experience as he confronts the sense world and penetrates it by means of thinking. Thoughts seem rather to be the

medium through which the sense world expresses its own nature. The pursuit of this train of thought occupied a significant place in my inner life at that period.¹

Here we glimpse the book in embryo.

The same chapter of Steiner's autobiography describes the degree of success this pursuit of knowledge had. "I was developing a state of mind that allowed me to feel capable of defending my view of the spiritual world before the forum of scientific thinking. I was twenty-two at the time these experiences were occupying me."²

While coming to grips with the philosophy of pessimism, of which his friend Mme. delle Grazie was an adherent, Steiner addressed a piece of writing to her which he called "Nature and Our Ideals." He says of it that it contained the seeds of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. He quotes it at length in Chapter VII of his autobiography, thereby calling attention to the early stages of an evolutionary process that had progressed far enough for him to make a first written statement of it. At the end of Chapter VIII we read:

At the age of twenty-seven, then, I was beset by questions and riddles related to external aspects of human life, whereas the nature of the soul had all the while been revealing itself to my inner perception in ever more clearly delineated forms as a world for itself. In all spiritual work I put my sole reliance on its contemplation. And this work tended increasingly in a direction that led, several years later, to my writing

*The Philosophy of Freedom.*³

A further reference to the author's time of life is found in Chapter XVI:

I can certainly say that the world of the senses had a shadowy, pictorial aspect in my experiencing of it. It passed in review before my soul like a series of pictures, whereas my connection with the spiritual world was absolutely real and genuine. It was in Weimar, in the early 'nineties, that I felt this most keenly. At that time I was giving *The Philosophy of Freedom* its final touches. I felt that I was setting down in it the thoughts the spiritual world had given me up to the time of my thirtieth year. What had come from the outer world merely provided the stimulus.⁴

Steiner was thirty-three when the book appeared in 1894. It is therefore accurate to say that the germinating, ripening, writing and publishing of *The Philosophy of Freedom* spanned a fourteen year period of the author's life, from his nineteenth to his thirty-third year.

Rosa Mayreder was the outstanding personality who did most to further the book's evolution:

This was the period during which *The Philosophy of Freedom* was taking ever clearer shape within me. Rosa Mayreder was the person with whom I talked most about it as the book developed. She relieved me of some of the inner loneliness in which I lived.

Her goal was that of perceiving human personality in all its immediacy, whereas my interest lay in exploring the cosmic panorama which this personality comes to seek when organs of spiritual vision awaken in the soul's depths. Many a bridge was found between the two approaches, and in later life I often recalled with warmest gratitude memories of walks that Rosa Mayreder and I took through glorious Alpine forests, talking the while about what freedom really meant.⁵

This was Steiner's memory of it. But we also have another record, set down just after the book appeared, in the form of a letter from Steiner to Rosa Mayreder, dated November 1894:

Most esteemed and gracious lady!

The words you have written me about my *Philosophy of Freedom* are very *important* to me. I prize in you, among many other qualities, the modernity of your artistic feeling. You have the ability to look at life in the only way it can be viewed in the present era. You are one of that community of "free spirits" of which we dream. I wanted to present you with a real book in this "freedom philosophy" of mine. Your feeling that it measures up to this goal in some degree affords me the greatest reassurance and satisfaction I could have hoped for. I know the exact place where my book belongs in the current of present-day spiritual developments and can point out the exact spot where it carries Nietzsche's line of thinking further. I can make the calm statement that it expresses ideas that are missing in the work of

Nietzsche. I confess to my friends—but to them alone—that the fact that Nietzsche can never read my book now pains me. He would have seen it for just what it is: personal experience in every single sentence. But I must tell you that if you had rejected my book it would have caused me incomparable distress. You say that the book is too short, that every chapter has the makings of a book in it. To the extent that you mean this objectively, I can only agree. My reason for writing it as I did, however, was purely subjective. I was not setting forth a doctrine, but simply recording inner experiences through which I had actually passed. And I reported them just as I experienced them. Everything in my book is written from this personal angle, even to the shaping of the thoughts it contains. A theoretical writer could cover more territory, and there was a time when I might have done so. But my purpose was to write a biographical account of how one human soul made the difficult ascent to freedom. In such an ascent one cannot spare any attention to others in the party as they try to negotiate cliffs and precipices, so preoccupied is one with getting up and over them oneself. One's longing to reach the goal is too keen to consider stopping and pointing out the easiest way ahead to other climbers. And I believe I would have fallen had I attempted any such thing. I found my own way up as best I could, and then, later on, described the route that I had taken. Afterwards, I could have found a hundred other different ascent-routes that other climbers might have followed. But at the time I had no desire to write about any of these alternative paths. My method of getting over many a chasm was

an individual one, deliberately singled out to be such. I struggled through thickets in a way peculiar to myself alone. And only when one reaches the goal does one realize that one has actually made it. Perhaps the time for handing on theory in a matter like this is already over. Philosophy, except where it is real, individual experience, holds scarcely any further interest for me....[6](#)

We can also assign to the rubric of help received from other people the strange meetings Steiner describes in Chapter XX of his autobiography. Their strangeness lay in the fact that he never met in the flesh either of the two personalities whose post-mortem influence upon him was so strong. He says:

... My contact with these two souls was a source of strength to me in writing my *Philosophy of Freedom*. What I was trying to set down was, firstly, the outcome of my philosophical thinking during the 'eighties, and secondly, that of my concrete, *general* experience of the spiritual world. My efforts were strengthened by participating in the spiritual experience of the two souls referred to. I witnessed in them the kind of ascent which the soul owes to having had a scientific outlook, and I saw at the same time what fear noble souls like these have of entering into the will-aspect of that point of view. These souls shrank from its ethical consequences.

In my *Philosophy of Freedom* I therefore sought for the force that leads from the ethically neutral world of scientific concepts into the world of moral impulses. I tried to show how a person who, as a result of living

in ideas based on material existence rather than still being poured into him from a spiritual source, recognizes himself to be a self-sustained, spiritually endowed nature, can also develop out of his own being an intuitive capacity for experience in the moral sphere. For this reason, moral ideas light up in the form of individual ethical impulses in persons who have attained to freedom just as scientific ideas do in the contemplation of nature.⁷

We may say, then, that *The Philosophy of Freedom* owes its development in part to thoughts bestowed by the spiritual world, to the unique, warmly human participation of Rosa Mayreder, and to Steiner's experience of the post-mortem life of two friends in the spirit whom he had never encountered on the earth.

* * *

The doctoral thesis written by Steiner for Heinrich von Stein at the University of Rostock must also be listed as a contribution to the book's process of becoming. It was called "Human Consciousness Comes to Terms with Itself." We find the following comment on it in Steiner's autobiography:

Von Stein was a person of quiet bearing, well along in years, with kindly eyes that seemed both gentle and penetrating as they watched over the progress of his students. Every sentence he spoke was characterized by the cool tone of the philosophic mind. That was how he appeared to me from the first, when I visited him before my examination. He

said, "Your dissertation is not quite as required. It is obviously not written under professorial guidance but its content is such that I accept it gladly."⁸

Despite the wise insight with which Heinrich von Stein treated him, Steiner realized that it behooved him to exercise a little caution. He pictures the situation in a lecture given in 1919:

The whole development of the concepts I had in the field of epistemology culminates in the last two pages of my book *Truth and Science*, where I show that man is the scene of action for cosmic deeds that take place in him, and that what he does takes place in conjunction with the cosmos, from outside rather than from inside himself. These last two pages are the most important part of my *Truth and Science*. Because they are the most important and weighty, because they deal most intensively with what needs changing in the modern outlook, I had to wait to write them in their present form until after this little book, which originally served as my doctoral dissertation, had been accepted. The last two pages were missing from it as a dissertation, for science could hardly be expected to draw consequences from it that would have to mean changes in its whole outlook. The epistemological groundwork laid in the dissertation was a comparatively innocuous, objective philosophical train of ideas. But what followed from it was something that could be added only at a later date when the book was printed.⁹

If we interest ourselves in the number of pages Steiner

devotes in his autobiography to discussing *The Philosophy of Freedom*, we see that it stretches from page 143 in Chapter VIII to page 336 in Chapter XXIII. The most comprehensive exposition of the content of ideas in the book is found in Chapter X. We quote only the beginning and the end of that chapter here:

When I look back over the course of my life, its first three decades seem to me to form a unit by themselves. After that I went to Weimar, where I worked for almost seven years in the Goethe-Schiller Archives. I look back on the time spent in Vienna between the first journey to Weimar described above and my later move to Goethe's city as the period that brought to a certain conclusion what I had been inwardly striving toward up to that moment. This brought me to the point of starting preliminary work on my *Philosophy of Freedom*.

The fact that the sense world was not true reality to me played a vital role among the ideas through which my convictions found expression at that time. In my published writings of the period I kept emphasizing that the human soul shows itself in its actual reality when it engages in a thinking that is not based on the world of the senses but rather transcends the level of sense perception in free-ranging activity. I pictured this 'sense-free' thinking as the element that makes the soul at home in the spiritual being of the world...[10](#)

I wanted to show that a person who rejects sense-free thinking as a purely spiritual element in man can

never grasp what freedom is, but that one instantly understands it when one grasps the reality of sense-free thought.

Here too, I was less concerned at that time with describing the purely spiritual world in which man experiences moral intuitions than with stressing the spiritual nature of these intuitions themselves. Had it been the reverse, I would have had to begin the chapter on moral fantasy in my *Philosophy of Freedom* as follows. "The free spirit acts in accordance with his impulses, that is, with intuitions experienced by him in the purely spiritual world in which he lives remote from nature but unaware of that spiritual world in his ordinary consciousness." But at that time my concern was simply to demonstrate the purely spiritual nature of moral intuitions. So I pointed out the fact that these intuitions exist in the totality of man's world of ideas and therefore said, "The free spirit acts on his impulses, i.e., out of intuitions which thinking selects from the total content of his world of ideas." A person who is not taking the spiritual world into account and would therefore not set down the first sentence could not fully subscribe to the second either. Statements along the lines of the first sentence are, however, to be found in plenty in my *Philosophy of Freedom*, as, for instance, where it states that the highest stage of human life is conceptual thinking without reference to any specific content of perception. We determine the content of a concept purely intuitively, by resort to the ideal realm. Concepts of this kind are not based on specific percepts—meaning here, sense perceptible percepts. If, at that time, I had wanted to write about

the spiritual world rather than limit myself to pointing out the spiritual nature of moral intuitions, I would have had to include a discussion of the difference between sense perception and spiritual perception. But my only concern then was to emphasize the non-sense based nature of moral intuitions.

My world of ideas was moving in this direction as the first epoch of my life drew to a close at the age of thirty and the Weimar period began.¹¹

We see from these passages that the book's development coincides with the fourth seven-year period of Steiner's life. It was conceived before that period began and published after its completion.

One of the copies of the first edition contains the following lines written in by Steiner:

Eternal becoming in thinking
Every step a deepening
Overcoming the surface,
Penetrating the depths.¹²

* * *

And now a comment on the following statement by Steiner, taken from Chapter XVIII of his autobiography: "I first became acquainted with Nietzsche's writings in 1889. The ideas expressed by me in *The Philosophy of Freedom* were not in the least influenced by his."¹³

Steiner's attitude toward Nietzsche can be gathered from the letter to Rosa Mayreder quoted earlier in this section. To make it still clearer, let us quote from another letter, this time to Pauline Specht, that throws light on the matter. In it, Steiner comments on Nietzsche's "Antichrist," which had just been published. He was already familiar with the book, having read it in manuscript. He goes on to say:

I consider Nietzsche's breakdown one of the worst evils that could have befallen us in our present-day concern with science. Had Nietzsche remained mentally balanced, we would never have witnessed the revolting Nietzsche-craze that meets our gaze wherever we look. That would, of course, have meant having fewer readers who understood him by comparison with the many he now has who, far from furthering any real understanding of him, actually stand in the way of it.

I feel his illness particularly painfully because I am firmly convinced that my *Philosophy of Freedom* would not have gone unnoticed by him. He would have seen that it carried to a further point many questions he left unanswered. He would surely have agreed that his view of morality, his "immoralism," is finally resolved in my *Philosophy of Freedom*, and that when his "moral instincts" are properly sublimated and traced back to their origin, they turn out to be what I have called "moral fantasy." The chapter on moral fantasy in my *Philosophy of Freedom* is just what is missing from Nietzsche's "Genealogy of Morality" in spite of the fact that the

book's whole content trends toward it. His “Antichrist” is simply added proof that I am right in this conviction.[14](#)

We encounter the same view again where Steiner mentions the French philosopher Lichtenberger (cf. the section of this book entitled “Confrontations”).

CHAPTER II

The Book's Aims and Artistic Composition

“When a person is charged by his karma with establishing anthroposophy in Central Europe, something must live in this anthroposophy of Goethe's conviction that the element that is the lifeblood of art is also the element of truth, that the element that comes to expression in painting, sculpture and even architecture must also live in truth's thought structure. Indeed, it must be stated, as I tried to do in the first chapter of my *Philosophy of Freedom*, the chapter now put at the end of the new edition, that the philosopher, the founder of a new world conception, has to be an artist in the way he deals with concepts. This image of the conceptual artist is not the usually accepted one, but it is the one I had to base my book on. Everything in it is born of one and the same spirit.”¹

Such is the description Steiner gives of the artistic element permeating *The Philosophy of Freedom*. He says:

Life is made up of many different realms, and every one of them calls for a different kind of scientific approach. But life itself is a unity, and to the extent that science devotes itself to exploring separate areas it loses sight of the living oneness of the cosmos. We must have a science concerned with discovering in the separate scientific fields elements

capable of leading us back again to that living wholeness. Investigators in special scientific fields use the facts they discover to build up a picture of the world and its workings. This book has a philosophic goal: that of making science itself alive and organic. The single sciences are only preparatory steps toward the science we are envisioning here.

A similar situation exists in the art realm. A composer works according to the rules of composition. Music theory is a body of knowledge that one must have acquired before starting to compose, and in composing, the laws of composition are made to serve life, to create something absolutely real. Philosophy is an art in exactly the same sense. Real philosophers have always been conceptual artists. The ideas of humankind were the artistic medium in which they worked, and in their hands scientific method became artistic technique. This endows abstract thinking with concrete individual life; ideas become living forces. When this happens, it means not merely knowing about things but transforming knowledge into a real, self-controlling organism, and our true, active consciousness lifts itself above the level of a merely passive taking-in of facts.

My book addresses itself mainly to the question of how philosophy deals as an art with the subject of human freedom, what the nature of freedom really is, and whether we already possess it or can develop it.²

If someone were to ask what constitutes the artistic element in the book, we might answer that the thoughts in it do not follow one another in formal, abstract logical sequence; that would have made the book pedestrian. Instead, they are all dynamic movement. Concepts and ideas spring to life, attract and repel each other, conflict with and thus hinder or harmonize and thus further one another, until their liveliness reaches a peak in the chapters “The Idea of Freedom” and “Moral Fantasy,” gradually settling down thereafter. This peak comes of the confluence of the various themes, each of which had previously been handled by itself.

In the first section called “Knowledge of Freedom,” the reader is shown that concepts and percepts are active factors, and observation and intuition the functions carried out by them. In Chapter IX we find that at a certain level the two factors as well as the functions they exercise are completely merged. This fact, ascertained by soul observation, lies at the root of the view, of drives and motives underlying human action that the book develops. Studying them in detail leads to the further discovery that drives and motives too coincide at their highest level. In this merging, in the sphere of knowledge, of concept and percept, intuition and observation, and of drive and motive in the moral sphere, the drama of thinking arrives at its denouement. Now moral fantasy, a wholly new phenomenon, appears on the scene, and though fantasy is ordinarily thought of as the source from which artistic creation issues, here it is shown to be the wellspring that gives rise to moral action.

Now let us look ahead a little (cf. Section II) to comments

Steiner made in reply to Eduard von Hartmann's criticism. They show us that *The Philosophy of Freedom* was not intended to champion a one-sided viewpoint. It keeps shifting dynamically from one way of looking at things to another, in continuous movement around a single, common center. All these differing approaches talk together, carrying on a cosmic conversation. This makes the book a work of art from first to last. It was meant to be a shared exercise, not in theoretical thinking but in living experience.

This book, in which the various elements of knowledge and morality are harmonized and differing standpoints unified, is itself the product of experiencing the harmony between goodness, truth and beauty, as the autobiography relates:

At that period I came to see that genuine knowledge, the reflected shining of the spiritual in art and man's moral will form a single whole. I had to recognize in human personality a central core that links it directly with the world's most fundamental being. Man's will issues from this core, and his willing is free when the clear light of the spirit is at work in it. Then he acts in harmony with the spirituality of the cosmos as it creates, not out of necessity but simply living out its own creative nature. Here, in this central core of man, are born his goals of action, springing from "moral intuitions" rather than from some obscure impulse or other, intuitions as clear and transparent as the clearest thoughts. I wanted my contemplation of free willing to reveal to me the spirit that gives the human individual real existence in the cosmos. I wanted feeling-

perception of the truly beautiful to show the spirit at work in man when he acts on the physical plane in such a way that his own being does not just express itself spiritually in free deeds, but so that this spiritual being that he is flows out into a world created by the spirit but not a direct revelation of it. I wanted, in contemplating truth, to *experience* the spirit, revealed in all the immediacy of its own being—the spirit spiritually reflected in moral action, the guide of artistic creation in its shaping of matter. There floated before my soul a *Philosophy of Freedom*, an outlook on life that sees the world of the senses athirst for the spirit and striving toward it in beauty, a spiritual beholding of the living world of truth.³

The same motif, with its stress on the threefold nature of the human being, crops up again a few pages further on:

My *Philosophy of Freedom* is based on experiencing what it means for human consciousness to come to terms with itself. Freedom is *put to practice* in willing, *experienced* in feeling, and *known* in thinking. But the living element in thinking must not be lost sight of in achieving this.

While I was working on my *Philosophy of Freedom* I was constantly concerned to keep inner experience fully present and awake in the thoughts I was setting down. That gives them the mystical quality of inner vision, though that vision retains the character of outer sense perception of the world as well. When one attains to such inner experiencing, one no longer feels any difference between knowledge of nature

and spiritual knowledge. One comes to realize that the latter is simply a further metamorphosis of the former.

The fact that I had this impression was the reason why, later on, I gave my *Philosophy of Freedom* the sub-title "Findings of psychic observation, made in accordance with natural scientific methodology." For when scientific method is faithfully adhered to in spiritual investigation, it provides a sound basis for insight in that realm also.⁴

One of the mottos appearing on the dedication page of this volume is taken from Lecture 2 in the series called *Die Geschichte und Bedingungen der anthroposophischen Bewegung im Verh'altnis zur Anthroposophischen Gesellschaft*.⁵ It tells us something of the purpose intended to be served by *The Philosophy of Freedom*:

Anyone interested in looking for them will find the basic principles of anthroposophy already enunciated in *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Today I only want to emphasize the fact that *The Philosophy of Freedom* constantly points with inner necessity to a spiritual realm, the realm from which we derive our moral principles, for example. This means that in the sense of *The Philosophy of Freedom* we cannot rest content with the physical world, but must continue on into a spiritual world firmly founded in its own reality. That spiritual realm takes on further, concrete reality for us from the fact that man belongs in his innermost being, of which he can become aware, not

to the world of the senses but to the spiritual world. These two points: 1) that there is a spiritual realm, and 2) that man belongs to it with his innermost ego-being, are the basic ones made by *The Philosophy of Freedom*.

In this connection it is especially interesting to come upon references to *The Philosophy of Freedom* in a question and answer period that followed a lecture called “Ernährungsfragen im Lichte der Geisteswissenschaft.”⁶

The first question has to do with the fact that many readers of my *Philosophy of Freedom* cannot see any connection between that book and what has just been enunciated here from a spiritual-scientific standpoint seemingly at odds with philosophy by its very nature. The book is out of print at the moment, but will soon appear again in a new edition intended to be an exact duplicate of the first one. This *Philosophy of Freedom* offers what the philosophic approach can contribute on these subjects. A person approaching them on any other basis will always tend to find himself on shaky ground. This book is a philosophically oriented, thinking approach that takes as its starting point the questions, “What is truth?” and “What is the relationship of truth to spiritual science?” I am simply pointing here to what the book has to say about the relationship of thinking to the sphere wherein thoughts originate. Indeed, if it were ever necessary to show that spiritual science does have a philosophical basis, we would have to turn to *The Philosophy of Freedom*. But nobody who

realizes that a tree one is painting would look different if painted from another angle will find any contradiction between the two approaches.

In the first lecture of the series “Der Mensch als Gedankenwesen”,⁷ the fact that *The Philosophy of Freedom* was (and of course still is) specifically aimed at clarifying man's relationship to the spiritual world is again underlined:

Our modern world is still far from being in a position to study man's interwovenness with the cosmos, his at oneness with it. I made a special point of calling attention to this in my *Philosophy of Freedom*, where you will come across key passages intended to show that underneath his ordinary level of consciousness man is related to the entire cosmos, that he is an integral part of the whole cosmos, that his individual humanness, which makes its appearance clothed in ordinary consciousness, blossoms forth as it were from the commonality of the cosmos. Few readers have understood these particular passages in my *Philosophy of Freedom*.

This section must not be brought to a close without including lines taken from the treasure-trove of wisdom embodied by Steiner in verse form, lines in this case related to *The Philosophy of Freedom*:

When, in the bright circles of the spirit,
The soul calls forth

Pure energy of thinking,
It lays hold on knowledge of what freedom is.
When, entering fully into life,
Free, conscious man
Shapes reality from willing,
Then freedom is made living fact. [8](#)