THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM

RUDOLF STEINER

• *original, unrevised edition* •

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM

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THE THEORY OF FREEDOM

I
THE GOAL OF KNOWLEDGE

[1] I BELIEVE I am indicating correctly one of the fundamental characteristics of our age when I say that, at the present day, all human interests tend to centre in the cult of human individuality. An energetic effort is being made to shake off every kind of authority. Nothing is accepted as valid, unless it springs from the roots of individuality. Everything which hinders the individual in the full development of his powers is thrust aside. The saying "Each one of us must choose his hero in whose footsteps he toils up to Olympus" no longer holds for us. We allow no ideals to be forced upon us. We are convinced that in each of us, if only we probe deep enough into the very heart of our being, there dwells something noble, something worthy of development. We no longer believe that there is a norm of human life to which we must all strive to conform. We regard the perfection of the whole as depending on the unique perfection of each single individual. We do not want to do what anyone else can do equally well. No, our contribution to the development of the world, however trifling, must be something which, by reason of the uniqueness of our nature, we alone can offer. Never have artists been less concerned about rules and norms in art than today. Each of them asserts his right to express, in the creations of his art, what is unique in him. There are dramatists who write in dialect rather than conform to the standard diction which grammar demands.

[2] No better expression for these phenomena can be found than this, that they result from the individual's striving towards freedom, developed to its highest pitch. We do not want to be dependent in any respect, and where dependence must be, we tolerate it only on condition that it coincides with a vital interest of our individuality.

Note: The paragraph numbering indicates Rudolf Steiner's original paragraphing in the German addition.

[3] Truth, too, will be sought in an age such as ours only in the depths of human nature. Of the following two well-known paths described by Schiller, it is the second which will today be found most useful:

Wahrheit suchen wir beide, du aussen im Leben, ich innen
In dem Herzen, und so findet sie jeder gewiss.
Ist das Auge gesund, so begegnet es aussen dem Schöpfer;
Ist es das Herz, dann gewiss spiegelt es innen die Welt.

Truth seek we both — Thou in the life without thee and around;
I in the heart within. By both can Truth alike be found.
The healthy eye can through the world the great creator track;
The healthy heart is but the glass which gives creation back.
BULWER

A truth which comes to us from without bears ever the stamp of uncertainty. Conviction attaches only to what appears as truth to each of us in our own hearts.

[4] Truth alone can give us confidence in developing our powers. He who is tortured by doubts finds his powers lamed. In a world of riddle of which baffles him, he can find no aim for his activity.

[5] We no longer want to believe; we want to know. Belief demands the acceptance of truths which we do not wholly comprehend. But the individuality which seeks to experience everything in the depths of its own being, is repelled by what it cannot understand. Only that knowledge will satisfy us which springs from the inner life of the personality, and submits itself to no external norm.

[6] Again, we do not want any knowledge that has encased itself once and for all in hide bound formulas, and which is preserved in Encyclopedias valid for all time. Each of us claims the right to start from the facts that lie nearest to hand, from his own immediate experiences, and thence to ascend to a knowledge of the whole universe. We strive after certainty in knowledge, but each in his own way.

[7] Our scientific doctrines, too, are no longer to be formulated as if we were unconditionally compelled to accept them. None of

us would wish to give a scientific work a title like Fichte's *A Pellucid Account for the General Public concerning the Real Nature of the Newest Philosophy. An Attempt to Compel the Readers to Understand.* Nowadays there is no attempt to compel anyone to understand. We claim no agreement with anyone whom a distinct individual need does not drive to a certain view. We do not seek nowadays to cram facts of knowledge even into the immature human being, the child. We seek rather to develop his faculties in such a way that his understanding may depend no longer on our compulsion, but on his will.

[8] I am under no illusion concerning the characteristics of the present age. I know how many flaunt a manner of life which lacks all individuality and follows only the prevailing fashion. But I know also that many of my contemporaries strive to order their lives in the direction of the principles I have indicated. To them I would dedicate this book. It does not pretend to offer the "only possible" way to Truth, it only describes the path chosen by one whose heart is set upon Truth.

[9] The reader will be led at first into somewhat abstract regions, where thought must draw sharp outlines if it is to reach secure conclusions. But he will also be led out of these arid concepts into concrete life. I am fully convinced that one cannot do without soaring into the ethereal realm of abstraction, if one's experience is to penetrate life in all directions. He who is limited to the pleasures of the senses misses the sweetest enjoyments of life. The Oriental sages make their disciples live for years a life of resignation and asceticism before they impart to them their own wisdom. The Western world no longer demands pious exercises and ascetic practices as a preparation for science, but it does require a sincere willingness to withdraw oneself awhile from the immediate impressions of life, and to betake oneself into the realm of pure thought.

[10] The spheres of life are many and for each there develop a special science. But life itself is one, and the more the sciences strive to penetrate deeply into their separate spheres, the more they withdraw themselves from the vision of the world as a living whole. There must be one supreme science which seeks in the separate sciences the elements for leading men back once more to the fullness of life. The scientific specialist seeks in his studies to

gain a knowledge of the world and its workings. This book has a philosophical aim: science itself is to be infused with the life of an organic whole. The special sciences are stages on the way to this all-inclusive science. A similar relationship is found in the arts. The composer in his work employs the rules of the theory of composition. This latter is an accumulation of principles, knowledge of which is a necessary presupposition for composing. In the act of composing, the rules of theory become the servants of life, of reality. In exactly the same sense philosophy is an art. All genuine philosophers have been artists in concepts. Human ideas have been the medium of their art, and scientific method their artistic technique. Abstract thinking thus gains concrete individual life. Ideas turn into life forces. We have no longer merely a knowledge about things, but we have now made knowledge a real, self-determining organism. Our consciousness, alive and active, has risen beyond a mere passive reception of truths.

[11] How philosophy, as an art, is related to freedom; what freedom is; and whether we do, or can, participate in it —these are the principle problems of my book. All other scientific discussions are put in only because they ultimately throw light on these questions which are, in my opinion, the most intimate that concern mankind. These pages offer a "Philosophy of Freedom".

[12] All science would be nothing but the satisfaction of idle curiosity did it not strive to enhance the existential value of human personality. The true value of the sciences is seen only when we have shown the importance of their results for humanity. The final aim of the individuality can never be the cultivation of any single faculty, but only the development of all capacities which slumber within us. Knowledge has value only in so far as it contributes to the all-round unfolding of the whole nature of man.

[13] This book, therefore, does not conceive the relation between science and life in such a way that man must bow down before the world of ideas and devote his powers to its service. On the contrary, it shows that he takes possession of the world of ideas in order to use them for his human aims, which transcend those of mere science.

[14] Man must confront ideas as master; lest he become their slave.

II
CONSCIOUS HUMAN ACTION

[1] IS man free in action and thought, or is he bound by an iron necessity? There are few questions on which so much ingenuity has been expended. The idea of freedom has found enthusiastic supporters and stubborn opponents in plenty. There are those who, in their moral fervour, label anyone a man of limited intelligence who can deny so patent a fact as freedom. Opposed to them are others who regard it as the acme of unscientific thinking for anyone to believe that the uniformity of natural law is broken in the sphere of human action and thought. One and the same thing is thus proclaimed, now as the most precious possession of humanity, now as its most fatal illusion. Infinite subtlety has been employed to explain how human freedom can be consistent with determinism in nature of which man, after all, is a part. Others have been at no less pains to explain how such a delusion as this could have arisen. That we are dealing here with one of the most important questions for life, religion, conduct, science, must be clear to every one whose most prominent trait of character is not the reverse of thoroughness. It is one of the sad signs of the superficiality of present-day thought, that a book which attempts to develop a new faith out of the results of recent scientific research (David Friedrich Strauss: *Der alte und neue Glaube*), has nothing more to say on this question than these words:

> "With the question of the freedom of the human will we are not concerned. The alleged freedom of indifferent choice has been recognized as an empty illusion by every philosophy worthy of the name. The determination of the moral value of human conduct and character remains untouched by this problem."

It is not because I consider that the book in which it occurs has

any special importance that I quote this passage, but because it seems to me to express the only view to which the thought of the majority of our contemporaries is able to rise in this matter. Every one who has gown beyond the kindergarten-stage of science appears to know nowadays that freedom cannot consist in choosing, at one's pleasure, one or other of two possible courses of action. There is always, so we are told, a perfectly definite reason why, out of several possible actions, we carry out just one and no other.

[2] This seems quite obvious. Nevertheless, down to the present days the main attacks of the opponents of freedom are directed only against freedom of choice. Even Herbert Spencer, in fact, whose doctrines are gaining ground daily, says

> "That every one is at liberty to desire or not to desire, which is the real proposition involved in the dogma of free will, is negatived as much by the analysis of consciousness, as by the contents of the preceding chapters" (*The Principles of Psychology*, Part IV, chap. ix, par. 2I9).

Others, too, start from the same point of view in combating the concept of free will. The germs of all the relevant arguments are to be found as early as Spinoza. All that he brought forward in clear and simple language against the idea of freedom has since been repeated times without number, but as a rule enveloped in the most sophisticated arguments, so that it is difficult to recognize the straightforward train of thought which is alone in question. Spinoza writes in a letter of October or November I674,

> "I call a thing free which exists and acts from the pure necessity of its nature, and I call that unfree, of which the being and action are precisely and fixedly determined by something else. Thus, e.g., God, though necessary, is free because he exists only through the necessity of his own nature. Similarly, God knows himself and all else as free, because it follows solely from the necessity of his nature that he knows all. You see, therefore, that for me freedom consists not in free decision, but in free necessity.

[3] But let us come down to created things which are all determined by external causes to exist and to act in a fixed and definite manner. To perceive this more clearly, let us imagine a perfectly simple case. A stone, for example, receives from an external cause acting upon it a certain quantity of motion, by reason of which it necessarily continues to move, after the impact of the external cause has ceased. The continued motion of the stone is due to compulsion, not to the necessity of its own nature, because it requires to be defined by the impact of an external cause. What is true here for the stone is true also for every other particular thing, however complicated and many-sided it may be, namely, that everything is necessarily determined by external causes to exist and to act in a fixed and definite manner.

[4] Now, pray, assume that this stone during its motion thinks and knows that it is striving to the best of its power to continue in motion. This stone which is conscious only of its striving and is by no means indifferent, will believe that it is absolutely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than its own will to continue. Now this is that human freedom which everybody claims to possess and which consists in nothing but this, that men are conscious of their desires, but ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. Thus the child believes that he desires milk of his own free will, the angry boy regards his desire for vengeance as free, and the coward his desire for flight. Again, the drunken man believes that he says of his own free will what, sober again, he would fain have left unsaid, and as this prejudice is innate all men, it is difficult to free oneself from it. For, although experience teaches us often enough that man least of all can temper his desires, and that, moved by conflicting passions, he perceives the better and pursues the worse, yet he considers himself free because there are some things which he desires less strongly, and some desires which he can easily inhibit through the recollection of something else which it is often possible to recall."

[5] It is easy to detect the fundamental error of this view, because it is so clearly and definitely expressed. The same necessity by which a stone makes a definite movement as the result of an impact, is said to compel a man to carry out an action when impelled thereto by any cause. It is only because man is conscious of his action, that he thinks himself to be its originator. In doing so, he overlooks the fact that he is driven by a cause which he must obey unconditionally. The error in this train of thought is easily brought to light. Spinoza, and all who think like him, overlook the fact that man not only is conscious of his action, but also may become conscious of the cause which guides him. Anyone can see that a child is not free when he desires milk, nor the drunken man when he says things which he later regrets. Neither knows anything of the causes, working deep within their organisms, which exercise irresistible control over them. But is it justifiable to lump together actions of this kind with those in which a man is conscious not only of his actions but also of their causes? Are the actions of men really all of one kind? Should the act of a soldier on the field of battle, of the scientific researcher in his laboratory, of the statesman in the most complicated diplomatic negotiations, be placed on the same level with that of the child when he desires milk? It is, no doubt, true that it is best to seek the solution of a problem where the conditions are simplest. But lack of ability to see distinctions has before now caused endless confusion. There is after all a profound difference between knowing the motive of my action and not knowing it. At first sight this seems a self-evident truth. And yet the opponents of freedom never ask themselves whether a motive of action which I recognize and understand, is to be regarded as compulsory for me in the same sense as the organic process which causes the child to cry for milk.

[6] Eduard van Hartmann, in his *Phanomenologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins* (p. 451) asserts that the human will depends on two chief factors, the motives and the character. If one regards men as all alike, or at any rate the differences between them as negligible, then their will appears as determined from without, viz., by the circumstances with which they come in contact. But if one bears in mind that men adopt an idea as the motive of their conduct, only if their character is such that this

idea arouses a desire in them, then men appear as determined from within and not from without. Now, because an idea, given to us from without, must first in accordance with our characters be adopted as a motive, men believe that they are free, i.e., independent of external influences. The truth, however, according to Eduard von Hartmann, is that

> "even though we must first adopt an idea as a motive, we do so not arbitrarily, but according to the disposition of our characters, that is, we are anything but free."

Here again the difference between motives, which I allow to influence me only after I have consciously made them my own, and those which I follow, without any clear knowledge of them, is absolutely ignored.

[7] This leads us straight to the standpoint from which the subject will be treated here. Have we any right to consider the question of the freedom of the will by itself at all? And if not, with what other question must it necessarily be connected?

[8] If there is a difference between conscious and unconscious motives of action, then the action in which the former issue should be judged differently from the action which springs from blind impulse. Hence our first question will concern this difference, and on the result of this inquiry will depend what attitude we ought to take up towards the question of freedom proper.

[9] What does it mean to have knowledge of the motives of one's actions? Too little attention has been paid to this question, because, unfortunately, man who is an indivisible whole has always been torn asunder by us. The agent has been divorced from the knower, whilst he who matters more than everything else, viz., the man who acts because he knows, has been utterly overlooked.

[10] It is said that man is free when he is controlled only by his reason, and not by his animal passions. Or, again, that to be free means to be able to determine one's life and action by purposes and deliberate decisions.

[11] Nothing is gained by assertions of this sort. For the question is just whether reason, purposes, and decisions exercise

the same kind of compulsion over a man as his animal passions. If, without my doing, a rational decision occurs in me with the same necessity with which hunger and thirst happen to me, then I must needs obey it, and my freedom is an illusion.

[12] Another form of expression runs: to be free means, not that we can will what we will, but that we can do what we will. This thought has been expressed with great clearness by the poet-philosopher Robert Hamerling in his *Atomistik des Willens*.

> "Man can, it is true, do what he wills, but he cannot will what he wills, because his will is determined by motives! He cannot will what he wills? Let us consider these phrases more closely. Have they any intelligible meaning? Does freedom of the will, then, mean being able to will without ground, without motive? What does willing mean if not to have grounds for doing, or striving to do, this rather than that? To will anything without ground or motive would mean to will something without willing it. The concept of motive is indissolubly bound up with that of will. Without the determining motive the will is an empty faculty; it is the motive which makes it active and real. It is, therefore, quite true that the human will is not 'free,' inasmuch as its direction is always determined by the strongest motive. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted that it is absurd to speak, in contrast with this 'unfreedom,' of a conceivable 'freedom' of the will, which would consist in being able to will what one does not will" (*Atomistik des Willens*, p. 213 ff.).

[13] Here again only motives in general are mentioned, without taking into account the difference between unconscious and conscious motives. If a motive affects me, and I am compelled to act on it because it proves to be the "strongest" of its kind, then the idea of freedom ceases to have any meaning. How should it matter to me whether I can do a thing or not, if I am forced by the motive to do it? The primary question is, not whether I can do a thing or not when impelled by a motive, but whether the only motives are such as impel me with absolute necessity. If I must will something, then I may well be absolutely indifferent as to

whether I can also do it. And if, through my character, or through circumstances prevailing in my environment, a motive is forced on me which to my thinking is unreasonable, then I should even have to be glad if I could not do what I will.

[14] The question is, not whether I can carry out a decision once made, but how I come to make the decision.

[15] What distinguishes man from all other organic beings is his rational thought. Activity is common to him with other organisms. Nothing is gained by seeking analogies in the animal world to clear up the concept of freedom as applied to the actions of human beings. Modern science loves these analogies. When scientists have succeeded in finding among animals something similar to human behaviour, they believe they have touched on the most important question of the science of man. To what misunderstandings this view leads is seen, for example, in the book *Die Illusion der Willensfreiheit*, by P. Ree, 1885, where, on page 5, the following remark on freedom appears.

> "It is easy to explain why the movement of a stone seems to us necessary, while the volition of a donkey does not. The causes which set the stone in motion are external and visible, while the causes which determine the donkey's volition are internal and invisible. Between us and the place of their activity, there is the skull cap of the ass... The causal nexus is not visible, and is therefore thought to be non-existent. The volition, it is explained, is, indeed, the cause of the donkey's turning round, but is itself unconditioned; it is an absolute beginning."

Here again human actions in which there is a consciousness of the motives are simply ignored, for Ree declares, "that between us and the sphere of their activity there is the skull cap of the ass." As these words show, it has not so much as dawned on Ree that there are actions, not indeed of the ass, but of human beings, in which the motive, become conscious, lies between us and the action. Ree demonstrates his blindness once again a few pages further on, when he says, "we do not perceive the causes by which our will is determined, hence we think it is not causally determined at all."

[16] But enough of examples which prove that many argue against freedom without knowing in the least what freedom is.

[17] That an action of which the agent does not know why he performs it, cannot be free goes without saying. But what of the freedom of an action about the motives of which we reflect? This leads us to the question of the origin and meaning of thought. When we know what thought in general means, it will be easier to see clearly the role which thought plays in human action. As Hegel rightly says, "It is thought which turns the soul, common to us and animals, into spirit." Hence it is thought which we may expect to give to human action its characteristic stamp.

[18] I do not mean to imply that all our actions spring only from the sober deliberations of our reason. I am very far from calling only those actions "human" in the highest sense, which proceed from abstract judgments. But as soon as our conduct rises above the sphere of the satisfaction of purely animal desires, our motives are always shaped by thoughts. Love, pity, and patriotism are motives of action which cannot be analysed away into cold concepts of the understanding. It is said that here the heart, the soul, hold sway. This is no doubt true. But the heart and the soul create no motives. They presuppose them. Pity enters my heart when the thought of a person who arouses pity has appeared in my consciousness. The way to the heart is through the head. Love is no exception. Whenever it is not merely the expression of bare sexual instinct, it depends on the thoughts we form of the loved one. And the more we idealize the loved one in our thoughts, the more blessed is our love. Here, too, thought is the father of feeling. It is said that love makes us blind to the failings of the loved one. But the opposite view can be taken, namely that it is precisely for the good points that love opens the eyes. Many pass by these good points without notice. One, however, perceives them, and just because he does, love awakens in his soul. What else has he done except perceive what hundreds have failed to see? Love is not theirs, because they lack the perception.

[19] From whatever point we regard the subject, it becomes more and more clear that the question of the nature of human action presupposes that of the origin of thought. I shall therefore, turn next to this question.

III
WHY THE DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE IS FUNDAMENTAL

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,
Die eine will sich von der andern trennen;
Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust,
Sich an die Welt mit klammerden Organen;
Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust
Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen.
FAUST, I, 1112—1117.

Two souls, alas! reside within my breast,
And each withdraws from, and repels, its brother.
One with tenacious organs holds in love
And clinging lust the world in its embraces;
The other strongly sweeps, this dust above,
Into the high ancestral spaces.
Faust, Part I, Scene 2.
(Bayard Taylor's translation)

[1] IN these words Goethe expresses a trait which is deeply ingrained in human nature. Man is not a self-contained unity. He demands ever more than the world, of itself, offers him. Nature has endowed us with needs, but left their satisfaction to our own activity. However abundant the gifts which we have received, still more abundant are our desires. We seem born to dissatisfaction. And our desire for knowledge is but a special instance of this unsatisfied striving. Suppose we look twice at a tree. The first time we see its branches at rest, the second time in motion. We are not satisfied with this observation. Why, we ask, does the tree appear to us now at rest, then in motion? Every glance at nature evokes in us a multitude of questions. Every phenomenon we meet presents a new problem to be solved. Every experience is to us a riddle. We observe that from the egg there emerges a creature like the mother animal, and we ask for the reason of the likeness. We observe a living being grow and

develop to a determinate degree of perfection, and we seek the conditions of this experience. Nowhere are we satisfied with the facts which nature spreads out before our senses. Everywhere we seek what we call the explanation of these facts.

[2] The something more which we seek in things, over and above what is immediately given to us in them, splits our whole being into two parts. We become conscious of our opposition to the world. We oppose ourselves to the world as independent beings. The universe has for us two opposite poles: Self and World.

[3] We erect this barrier between ourselves and the world as soon as consciousness is first kindled in us. But we never cease to feel that, in spite of all, we belong to the world, that there is a connecting link between it and us, and that we are beings within, and not without, the universe.

[4] This feeling makes us strive to bridge over this opposition, and ultimately the whole spiritual striving of mankind is nothing but the bridging of this opposition. The history of our spiritual life is a continuous seeking after union between ourselves and the world. Religion, Art, and Science follow, one and all, this goal. The religious man seeks in the revelation, which God grants him, the solution of the world problem, which his Self, dissatisfied with the world of mere phenomena, sets him as a task. The artist seeks to embody in his material the ideas which are his Self, that he may thus reconcile the spirit which lives within him and the outer world. He too, feels dissatisfied with the world of mere appearances, and seeks to mould into it that something more which his Self supplies and which transcends appearances. The thinker searches for the laws of phenomena. He strives to master by thought what he experiences by observation. Only when we have transformed the world-content into our thought-content do we recapture the connection which we had ourselves broken off. We shall see later that this goal can be reached only if we penetrate much more deeply than is often done into the nature of the scientist's problem. The whole situation, as I have here stated it, meets us, on the stage of history, in the conflict between the one-world theory, or Monism, and the two-world theory or Dualism. Dualism pays attention only to the separation between the Self and the World, which the consciousness of man has

brought about. All its efforts consist in a vain struggle to reconcile these opposites, which it calls now Mind and Matter, now Subject and Object, now Thought and Appearance. The Dualist feels that there must be a bridge between the two worlds, but is not able to find it. Monism pays attention only to the unity and tries either to deny or to slur over the opposites, present though they are. Neither of these two points of view call satisfy us, for they do not do justice to the facts. The Dualist sees in Mind (Self) and Matter (World) two essentially different entities, and cannot therefore understand how they can interact with one another. How should Mind be aware of what goes on in Matter, seeing that the essential nature of Matter is quite alien to Mind? Or how in these circumstances should Mind act upon Matter, so as to translate its intentions into actions? The most absurd hypotheses have been propounded to answer these questions. However, up to the present the Monists are not in a much better position. They have tried three different ways of meeting the difficulty. Either they deny Mind and become Materialists; or they deny Matter in order to seek their salvation as Spiritualists; or they assert that, even in the simplest entities in the world, Mind and Matter are indissolubly bound together, so that there is no need to marvel at the appearance in man of these two modes of existence, seeing that they are never found apart.

[5] Materialism can never offer a satisfactory explanation of the world. For every attempt at an explanation must begin with the formation of thoughts about the phenomena of the world. Materialism, thus, begins with the thought of Matter or material processes. But, in doing so, it is *ipso facto* confronted by two different sets of facts, viz., the material world and the thoughts about it. The Materialist seeks to make these latter intelligible by regarding them as purely material processes. He believes that thinking takes place in the brain, much in the same way that digestion takes place in the animal organs. Just as he ascribes mechanical, chemical, and organic processes to Nature, so he credits her in certain circumstances with the capacity to think. He overlooks that, in doing so, he is merely shifting the problem from one place to another. Instead of to himself he ascribes the power of thought to Matter. And thus he is back again at his starting-point. How does Matter come to think of its own nature?

Why is it not simply satisfied with itself and content to accept its own existence? The Materialist has turned his attention away from the definite subject, his own self, and occupies himself with an indefinite shadowy somewhat. And here the old problem meets him again. The materialistic theory cannot solve the problem, it can only shift it to another place.

[6] What of the Spiritualistic theory? The Spiritualist denies Matter (the World) and regards it merely as a product of Mind (the Self). He supposes the whole phenomenal word to be nothing more than a fabric woven by Mind out of itself. This conception of the world finds itself in difficulties as soon as it attempts to deduce from Mind any single concrete phenomenon. It cannot do so either in knowledge or in action. If one would really know the external world, one must turn one's eye outwards and draw on the fund of experience.

[7] Without experience Mind can have no content. Similarly, when it comes to acting, we have to translate our purposes into realities with the help of material things and forces. We are, therefore, dependent on the outer world. The most extreme Spiritualist or, if you prefer it, Idealist, is Johann Gottlieb Fichte. He attempts to deduce the whole edifice of the world from the "Ego." What he has actually accomplished is a magnificent thought-picture of the world, without any empirical content. As little as it is possible for the Materialist to argue the Mind away, just as little is it possible for the Idealist to do without the outer world of Matter.

[8] A curious variant of Idealism is to be found in the theory which F. A. Lange has put forward in his widely read *History of Materialism*. He holds that the Materialists are quite right in declaring all phenomena, including our thought, to be the product of purely material processes, but, in turn, Matter and its processes are for him themselves the product of our thinking.

> "The senses give us only the effects of things, not true copies, much less the things themselves. But among these mere effects we must include the senses themselves together with the brain and the molecular vibrations which we assume to go on there."

That is, our thinking is produced by the material processes, and these by our thinking. Lange's philosophy is thus nothing more than the philosophical analogon of the story of honest Baron Munchhausen, who holds himself up in the air by his own pigtail.

[9] The third form of Monism is that which finds even in the simplest real (the atom) the union of both Matter and Mind. But nothing is gained by this either, except that the question, the origin of which is really in our consciousness, is shifted to another place. How comes it that the simple real manifests itself in a twofold manner, if it is an indivisible unity?

[10] Against all these theories we must urge the fact that we meet with the basal and fundamental opposition first in our own consciousness. It is we ourselves who break away from the bosom of Nature and contrast ourselves as Self with the World. Goethe has given classic expression to this in his essay *Nature*. "Living in the midst of her (Nature) we are strangers to her. Ceaselessly she speaks to us, yet betrays none of her secrets." But Goethe knows the reverse side too: "Mankind is all in her, and she in all mankind."

[11] However true it may be that we have estranged ourselves from Nature, it is none the less true that we feel we are in her and belong to her. It can be only her own life which pulses also in us.

[12] We must find the way back to her again. A simple reflection may point this way out to us. We have, it is true, torn ourselves away from Nature, but we must none the less have carried away something of her in our own selves. This quality of Nature in us we must seek out, and then we shall discover our connection with her once more. Dualism neglects to do this. It considers the human mind as a spiritual entity utterly alien to Nature and attempts somehow to hitch it on to Nature. No wonder that it cannot find the coupling link. We can find Nature outside of us only if we have first learnt to know her within us. The Natural within us must be our guide to her. This marks out our path of inquiry. We shall attempt no speculations concerning the interaction of Mind and Matter. We shall rather probe into the depths of our own being, to find there those elements which we saved in our flight from Nature.

[13] The examination of our own being must bring the solution of the problem. We must reach a point where we can say, "This is no longer merely ' I,' this is something which is more than ' I.' "

[14] I am well aware that many who have read thus far will not consider my discussion in keeping with "the present state of science." To such criticism I can reply only that I have so far not been concerned with any scientific results, but simply with the description of what every one of us experiences in his own consciousness. That a few phrases have slipped in about attempts to reconcile Mind and the World has been due solely to the desire to elucidate the actual facts. I have therefore made no attempt to give to the expressions "Self," "Mind," "World," "Nature," the precise meaning which they usually bear in Psychology and Philosophy. The ordinary consciousness ignores the sharp distinctions of the sciences, and so far my purpose has been solely to record the facts of everyday experience. To object that the above discussions have been unscientific would be like quarreling with the reciter of a poem for failing to accompany every line at once with aesthetic criticism. I am concerned, not with the way in which science, so far, has interpreted consciousness, but with the way in which we experience it every moment of our lives.

IV
THOUGHT AS THE INSTRUMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

[1] WHEN I observe how a billiard ball, when struck, communicates its motion to another, I remain entirely without influence on the process before me. The direction and velocity of the motion of the second ball is determined by the direction and velocity of the first. As long as I remain a mere spectator, I can say nothing about the motion of the second ball until after it has happened. It is quite different when I begin to reflect on the content of my observations. The purpose of my reflection is to construct concepts of the process. I connect the concept of an elastic ball with certain other concepts of mechanics, and consider the special circumstances which obtain in the instance in question. I try, in other words, to add to the process which takes place without any interference, a second process which takes place in the conceptual sphere. This latter process is dependent on me. This is shown by the fact that I can rest content with the observation, and renounce all search for concepts if I have no need of them. If, therefore, this need is present, then I am not content until I have established a definite connection among the concepts, ball, elasticity, motion, impact, velocity, etc., so that they apply to the observed process in a definite way. As surely as the occurrence of the observed process is independent of me, so surely is the occurrence of the conceptual process dependent on me.

[2] We shall have to consider later whether this activity of mine really proceeds from my own independent being, or whether those modern physiologists are right who say that we cannot think as we will, but that we must think exactly as the thoughts and thought-connections determine, which happen to be in our minds at any given moment. (*Cp. Ziehen, Leitfaden der Physiologischen Psychologie*, Jena, 1893, p. 171.) For the present we wish merely to establish the fact that we constantly feel

obliged to seek for concepts and connections of concepts, which stand in definite relation to the objects and processes which are given independently of us. Whether this activity is really ours, or whether we are determined to it by an unalterable necessity, is a question which we need not decide at present. What is unquestionable is that the activity appears, in the first instance, to be ours. We know for certain that concepts are not given together with the objects to which they correspond. My being the agent in the conceptual process may be an illusion; but there is no doubt that to immediate observation I appear to be active. Our present question is: what do we gain by supplementing a process with a conceptual counterpart?

[3] There is a far-reaching difference between the ways in which, for me, the parts of a process are related to one another before, and after, the discovery of the corresponding concepts. Mere observation can trace the parts of a given process as they occur, but their connection remains obscure without the help of concepts. I observe the first billiard ball move towards the second in a certain direction and with a certain velocity. What will happen after the impact I cannot tell in advance. I can once more only watch it happen with my eyes. Suppose some one obstructs my view of the field where the process is happening, at the moment when the impact occurs, then, as mere spectator, I remain ignorant of what goes on. The situation is very different, if prior to the obstructing of my view I have discovered the concepts corresponding to the nexus of events. In that case I can say what occurs, even when I am no longer able to observe. There is nothing in a merely observed process or object to show its relation to other processes or objects. This relation becomes manifest only when observation is combined with thought.

[4] Observation and thought are the two points of departure for all the spiritual striving of man, in so far as he is conscious of such striving. The workings of common sense, as well as the most complicated scientific researches, rest on these two fundamental pillars of our minds. Philosophers have started from various ultimate antitheses, Idea and Reality, Subject and Object, Appearance and Thing-in-itself, Ego and Non-Ego, Idea and Will, Matter and Mind, Matter and Force, the Conscious and the Unconscious. It is, however, easy to show that all these antitheses

are subsequent to that between observation and thought, this being for man the most important.

[5] Whatever principle we choose to lay down, we must prove that somewhere we have observed it, or we must enunciate it in the form of a clear concept which can be rethought by any other thinker. Every philosopher who sets out to discuss his fundamental principles, must express them in conceptual form and thus use thought. He therefore indirectly admits that his activity presupposes thought. We leave open here the question whether thought or something else is the chief factor in the development of the world. But it is at any rate clear that the philosopher can gain no knowledge of this development without thought. In the occurrence of phenomena thought may play a secondary part, but it is quite certain that it plays a chief part in the construction of a theory about them.

[6] As regards observation, our need of it is due to our organization. Our thought about a horse and the object "horse" are two things which for us have separate existences. The object is accessible to us only by means of observation. As little as we can construct a concept of a horse by mere staring at the animal, just as little are we able by mere thought to produce the corresponding object.

[7] In time observation actually precedes thought. For we become familiar with thought itself in the first instance by observation. It was essentially a description of an observation when, at the beginning of this chapter, we gave an account of how thought is kindled by an objective process and transcends the merely given. Whatever enters the circle of our experiences becomes an object of apprehension to us first through observation. All contents of sensations, all perceptions, intuitions, feelings, acts of will, dreams and fancies, images, concepts, ideas, all illusions and hallucinations, are given to us through observation.

[8] But thought as an object of observation differs essentially from all other objects. The observation of a table, or a tree, occurs in me as soon as those objects appear within the horizon of my field of consciousness. Yet I do not, at the same time, observe my thought about these things. I observe the table, but I carry on a process of thought about the table without, at the same

moment, observing this thought-process. I must first take up a standpoint outside of my own activity, if I want to observe my thought about the table, as well as the table. Whereas the observation of things and processes, and the thinking about them, are everyday occurrences making up the continuous current of my life, the observation of the thought-process itself is an exceptional attitude to adopt. This fact must be taken into account, when we come to determine the relations of thought as an object of observation to all other objects. We must be quite clear about the fact that, in observing the thought-processes, we are applying to them a method, which is our normal attitude in the study of all other objects in the world, but which in the ordinary course of that study is usually not applied to thought itself.

[9] Some one might object that what I have said about thinking applies equally to feeling and to all other mental activities. Thus it is said that when, e.g., I have a feeling of pleasure, the feeling is kindled by the object, but it is this object I observe, not the feeling of pleasure. This objection however is based on an error. Pleasure does not stand at all in the same relation to its object as the concept constructed by thought. I am conscious, in the most positive way, that the concept of a thing is formed through my activity; whereas a feeling of pleasure is produced in me by an object in a way similar to that in which, e.g., a change is caused in an object by a stone which falls on it. For observation, a pleasure is given in exactly the same way as the event which causes it. The same is not true of concepts. I can ask why an event arouses in me a feeling of pleasure. But I certainly cannot ask why an occurrence causes in me a certain number of concepts. The question would be simply meaningless. In thinking about an occurrence, I am not concerned with it as an effect on me. I learn nothing about myself from knowing the concepts which correspond to the observed change caused to a pane of glass by a stone thrown against it. But I do learn something about myself when I know the feeling which a certain occurrence arouses in me. When I say of an object which I perceive "this is a rose," I say absolutely nothing about myself; but when I say of the same thing that "it causes a feeling of pleasure in me," I

characterize not only the rose, but also myself in my relation to the rose.

[10] There can, therefore, be no question of putting thought and feeling on a level as objects of observation. And the same could easily be shown of other activities of the human mind. Unlike thought, they must be classed with any other observed objects or events. The peculiar nature of thought lies just in this, that it is an activity which is directed solely on the observed object and not on the thinking subject. This is apparent even from the way in which we express our thoughts about an object, as distinct from our feelings or acts of will. When I see an object and recognize it as a table, I do not as a rule say "I am thinking of a table," but "this is a table." On the other hand, I do say "I am pleased with the table." In the former case, I am not at all interested in stating that I have entered into a relation with the table; whereas, in the second case, it is just this relation which matters. In saying "I am thinking of a table," I adopt the exceptional point of view characterized above, in which something is made the object of observation which is always present in our mental activity, without being itself normally an observed object.

[11] The peculiar nature of thought consists just in this, that the thinker forgets his thinking while actually engaged in it. It is not thinking which occupies his attention, but rather the object of thought which he observes.

[12] The first point, then, to notice about thought is that it is the unobserved element in our ordinary mental life.

[13] The reason why we do not notice the thinking which goes on in our ordinary mental life is no other than this, that it is our own activity. Whatever I do not myself produce appears in my field of consciousness as an object; I contrast it with myself as something the existence of which is independent of me. It forces itself upon me. I must accept it as the presupposition of my thinking. As long as I think about the object, I am absorbed in it, my attention is turned on it. To be thus absorbed in the object is just to contemplate it by thought. I attend not to my activity, but to its object. In other words whilst I am thinking, I pay no heed to my thinking which is of my own making, but only to the object of my thinking which is not of my making.

[14] I am, moreover, in exactly the same position when I adopt the exceptional point of view and think of my own thought-processes. I can never observe my present thought, I can only make my past experiences of thought-processes subsequently the objects of fresh thoughts. If I wanted to watch my present thought, I should have to split myself into two persons, one to think, the other to observe this thinking. But this is impossible. I can only accomplish it in two separate acts. The observed thought-processes are never those in which I am actually engaged but others. Whether, for this purpose, I make observations on my own former thoughts, or follow the thought-processes of another person, or finally, as in the example of the motions of the billiard balls, assume an imaginary thought-process, is immaterial.

[15] There are two things which are incompatible with one another: productive activity and the theoretical contemplation of that activity. This is recognized even in the First Book of Moses. It represents God as creating the world in the first six days, and only after its completion is any contemplation of the world possible: "And God saw everything that he had made and, behold, it was very good." The same applies to our thinking. It must be there first, if we would observe it.

[16] The reason why it is impossible to observe the thought-process in its actual occurrence at any given moment, is the same as that which makes it possible for us to know it more immediately and more intimately than any other process in the world. Just because it is our own creation do we know the characteristic features of its course, the manner in which the process, in detail, takes place. What in the other spheres of observation we can discover only indirectly, viz., the relevant objective nexus and the relations of the individual objects, that is known to us immediately in the case of thought. I do not know off-hand why, for perception, thunder follows lightning, but I know immediately, from the content of the two concepts, why my thought connects the concept of thunder with that of lightning. It does not matter for my argument whether my concepts of thunder and lightning are correct. The connection between the concepts I have is clear to me, and that through the very concepts themselves.

[17] This transparent clearness in the observation of our thought-processes is quite independent of our knowledge of the physiological basis of thought. I am speaking here of thought in the sense in which it is the object of our observation of our own mental activity. For this purpose it is quite irrelevant how one material process in my brain causes or influences another, whilst I am carrying on a process of thought. What I observe, in studying a thought-process, is not which process in my brain connects the concept of thunder with that of lightning, but what is my reason for bringing these two concepts into a definite relation. Introspection shows that, in linking thought with thought, I am guided by their content not by the material processes in the brain. This remark would be quite superfluous in a less materialistic age than ours. Today, however, when there are people who believe that, when we know what matter is, we shall know also how it thinks, it is necessary to affirm the possibility of speaking of thought without trespassing on the domain of brain physiology. Many people today find it difficult to grasp the concept of thought in its purity. Anyone who challenges the account of thought which I have given here, by quoting Cabanis' statement that "the brain secretes thoughts as the liver does gall or the spittle-glands spittle, etc." simply does not know of what I am talking. He attempts to discover thought by the same method of mere observation which we apply to the other objects that make up the world. But he cannot find it in this way, because, as I have shown, it eludes just this ordinary observation. Whoever cannot transcend Materialism lacks the ability to throw himself into the exceptional attitude I have described, in which he becomes conscious of what in all other mental activity remains unconscious. It is as useless to discuss thought with one who is not willing to adopt this attitude, as it would be to discuss colour with a blind man. Let him not imagine, however, that we regard physiological processes as thought. He fails to explain thought, because he is not even aware that it is there.

[18] For every one, however, who has the ability to observe thought, and with good will every normal man has this ability, this observation is the most important he can make. For he observes something which he himself produces. He is not confronted by what is to begin with a strange object, but by his

own activity. He knows how that which he observes has come to be. He perceives clearly its connections and relations. He gains a firm point from which he can, with well-founded hopes, seek an explanation of the other phenomena of the world.

[19] The feeling that he had found such a firm foundation, induced the father of modern philosophy, Descartes, to base the whole of human knowledge on the principle "I think, therefore I am." All other things, all other processes, are independent of me. Whether they be truth, or illusion, or dream, I know not. There is only one thing of which I am absolutely certain, for I myself am the author of its indubitable existence; and that is my thought. Whatever other origin it may have in addition, whether it come from God or from elsewhere, of one thing I am sure, that it exists in the sense that I myself produce it. Descartes had, to begin with, no justification for reading any other meaning into his principle. All he had a right to assert was that, in apprehending myself as thinking, I apprehend myself, within the world-system, in that activity which is most uniquely characteristic of me. What the added words "therefore I am" are intended to mean has been much debated. They can have a meaning on one condition only. The simplest assertion I can make of a thing is, that it is, that it exists. What kind of existence, in detail, it has, can in no case be determined on the spot, as soon as the thing enters within the horizon of my experience. Each object must be studied in its relations to others, before we can determine the sense in which we can speak of its existence. An experienced process may be a complex of percepts, or it may be a dream, an hallucination, etc. In short, I cannot say in what sense it exists. I can never read off the kind of existence from the process itself, for I can discover it only when I consider the process in its relation to other things. But this, again, yields me no knowledge beyond just its relation to other things. My inquiry touches firm ground only when I find an object, the reason of the existence of which I can gather from itself. Such an object I am myself in so far as I think, for I qualify my existence by the determinate and self-contained content of my thought-activity. From here I can go on to ask whether other things exist in the same or in some other sense.

[20] When thought is made an object of observation, something which usually escapes our attention is added to the

other observed contents of the world. But the usual manner of observation, such as is employed also for other objects, is in no way altered. We add to the number of objects of observation, but not to the number of methods. When we are observing other things, there enters among the world-processes —among which I now include observation— one process which is overlooked. There is present something different from every other kind of process, something which is not taken into account. But when I make an object of my own thinking, there is no such neglected element present. For what lurks now in the background is just thought itself over again. The object of observation is qualitatively identical with the activity directed upon it. This is another characteristic feature of thought-processes. When we make them objects of observation, we are not compelled to do so with the help of something qualitatively different, but can remain within the realm of thought.

[21] When I weave a tissue of thoughts round an independently given object, I transcend my observation, and the question then arises, what right have I to do this? Why do I not passively let the object impress itself on me? How is it possible for my thought to be relevantly related to the object? These are questions which every one must put to himself who reflects on his own thought-processes. But all these questions lapse when we think about thought itself. We then add nothing to our thought that is foreign to it, and therefore have no need to justify any such addition.

[22] Schelling says: "To know Nature means to create Nature." If we take these words of the daring philosopher of Nature literally, we shall have to renounce for ever all hope of gaining knowledge of Nature. For Nature after all exists, and if we have to create it over again, we must know the principles according to which it has originated in the first instance. We should have to borrow from Nature as it exists the conditions of existence for the Nature which we are about to create. But this borrowing, which would have to precede the creating, would be a knowing of Nature, and that even if after the borrowing no creation at all were attempted. The only kind of Nature which it would be possible to create without previous knowledge, would be a Nature different from the existing one.

[23] What is impossible with Nature, viz., creation prior to knowledge, that we accomplish in the act of thought. Were we to refrain from thinking until we had first gained knowledge of it, we should never think at all. We must resolutely think straight ahead, and then afterwards by introspective analysis gain knowledge of our own processes. Thus we ourselves create the thought-processes which we then make objects of observation. The existence of all other objects is provided for us without any activity on our part.

[24] My contention that we must think before we can make thought an object of knowledge, might easily be countered by the apparently equally valid contention that we cannot wait with digesting until we have first observed the process of digestion. This objection would be similar to that brought by Pascal against Descartes, when he asserted we might also say "I walk, therefore I am." Certainly I must digest resolutely and not wait until I have studied the physiological process of digestion. But I could only compare this with the analysis of thought if, after digestion, I set myself, not to analyse it by thought, but to eat and digest it. It is not without reason that, while digestion cannot become the object of digestion, thought can very well become the object of thought.

[25] This then is indisputable, that in thinking we have got hold of one bit of the world-process which requires our presence if anything is to happen. And that is the very point that matters. The very reason why things seem so puzzling is just that I play no part in their production. They are simply given to me, whereas I know how thought is produced. Hence there can be no more fundamental starting-point than thought from which to regard all world-processes.

[26] I should like still to mention a widely current error which prevails with regard to thought. It is often said that thought, in its real nature, is never experienced. The thought-processes which connect our perceptions with one another, and weave about them a network of concepts, are not at all the same as those which our analysis afterwards extracts from the objects of perception, in order to make them the object of study. What we have unconsciously woven into things is, so we are told, something widely different from what subsequent analysis recovers out of them.

[27] Those who hold this view do not see that it is impossible to escape from thought. I cannot get outside thought when I want to observe it. We should never forget that the distinction between thought which goes on unconsciously and thought which is consciously analysed, is a purely external one and irrelevant to our discussion. I do not in any way alter a thing by making it an object of thought. I can well imagine that a being with quite different sense-organs, and with a differently constructed intelligence, would have a very different idea of a horse from mine, but I cannot think that my own thought becomes different because I make it an object of knowledge. I myself observe my own processes. We are not talking here of how my thought-processes appear to an intelligence different from mine, but how they appear to me. In any case, the idea which another mind forms of my thought cannot be truer than the one which I form myself. Only if the thought-processes were not my own, but the activity of a being quite different from me, could I maintain that, notwithstanding my forming a definite idea of these thought-processes, their real nature was beyond my comprehension.

[28] So far, there is not the slightest reason why I should regard my thought from any other point of view than my own. I contemplate the rest of the world by means of thought. How should I make of my thought an exception?

[29] I think I have given sufficient reasons for making thought the starting-point for my theory of the world. When Archimedes had discovered the lever, he thought he could lift the whole cosmos out of its hinges, if only he could find a point of support for his instrument. He needed a point which was self-supporting. In thought we have a principle which is self-subsisting. Let us try, therefore, to understand the world starting with thought as our basis. Thought can be grasped by thought. The question is whether by thought we can also grasp something other than thought.

[30] I have so far spoken of thought without taking any account of its vehicle, the human consciousness. Most present-day philosophers would object that, before there can be thought, there must be consciousness. Hence we ought to start, not from thought, but from consciousness. There is no thought, they say without consciousness. In reply I would urge that, in order to

clear up the relation between thought and consciousness, I must think about it. Hence I presuppose thought. One might, it is true, retort that, though a philosopher who wishes to understand thought, naturally makes use of thought, and so far presupposes it, in the ordinary course of life thought arises within consciousness and therefore presupposes that. Were this answer given to the world-creator, when he was about to create thought, it would, without doubt, be to the point. Thought cannot, of course, come into being before consciousness. The philosopher, however, is not concerned with the creation of the world, but with the understanding of it. Hence he is in search of the starting-point, not for creation, but with the understanding of the world. It seems to me very strange that philosophers are reproached for troubling themselves, above all, about the correctness of their principles, instead of turning straight to the objects which they seek to understand. The world-creator had above all to know how to find a vehicle for thought, the philosopher must seek a firm basis for the understanding of what is given. What does it help us to start with consciousness and make it an object of thought, if we have not first inquired how far it is possible at all to gain any knowledge of things by thought?

[31] We must first consider thought quite impartially without relation to a thinking subject or to an object of thought. For subject and object are both concepts constructed by thought. There is no denying that thought must be understood before anything else can be understood. Whoever denies this, fails to realise that man is not the first link in the chain of creation but the last. Hence, in order to explain the world by means of concepts, we cannot start from the elements of existence which came first in time, but we must begin with those which are nearest and most intimately connected with us. We cannot, with a leap, transport ourselves to the beginning of the world, in order to begin our analysis there, but we must start from the present and see whether we cannot advance from the later to the earlier. As long as Geology fabled fantastic revolutions to account for the present state of the earth, it groped in darkness. It was only when it began to study the processes at present at work on the earth, and from these to argue back to the past, that it gained a firm foundation. As long as Philosophy assumes all sorts of principles, such as

atom, motion, matter, will, the unconscious, it will hang in the air. The philosopher can reach his goal only if he adopts that which is last in time as first in his theory. This absolutely last in the world-process is thought.

[32] There are people who say it is impossible to ascertain with certainty whether thought is right or wrong, and that, so far, our starting-point is a doubtful one. It would be just as intelligent to raise doubts as to whether a tree is in itself right or wrong. Thought is a fact, and it is meaningless to speak of the truth or falsity of a fact. I can, at most, be in doubt as to whether thought is rightly employed, just as I can doubt whether a certain tree supplies wood adapted to the making of this or that useful object. It is just the purpose of this book to show how far the application of thought to the world is right or wrong. I can understand anyone doubting whether, by means of thought, we can gain any knowledge of the world, but it is unintelligible to me how anyone can doubt that thought in itself is right.