

The Philosophy of Freehood

A Primer for Organic Thinking and Heart-Thinking

A systematic approach to spiritual development

Preface to the Revised 1918 Edition

1/9

1. Two root-questions of the human soul-life are the focal point, toward which everything is directed that will be discussed in this book.
2. The first question is whether it is possible to view the human being in such a way that this view proves itself to be the support for everything else which comes to meet the human being, through experience or science, and which gives him the feeling that it could not support itself.
3. Thereby one could easily be driven by doubt and critical judgment into the realm of uncertainty.
4. The other question is this: can the human being as a being of will claim free will for himself, or is such freehood a mere illusion, which arises in him because he is not aware of the workings of necessity on which, as any other natural event, his will depends?
5. No artificial spinning of thoughts calls this question forth.
6. It comes to the soul quite naturally in a particular state of the soul.
7. And one can feel that something in the soul would decline, from what it should be, if it did not for once confront with the mightiest possible earnest questioning the two possibilities: freehood or necessity of will.
8. In this book it will be shown that the soul-experiences, which the human being must discover through the second question, depend upon which point of view he is able to take toward the first.
9. The attempt is made to prove that there is a certain view of the human being which can support his other knowledge; and furthermore, to point out that with this view a justification is won for the idea of freehood of will, if only that soul-region is first found in which free will can unfold itself.

2/5

1. The view, which is under discussion here in reference to these two questions, presents itself as one that, once attained, can be integrated as a member of the truly living soul life.
2. There is no theoretical answer given that, once acquired, can be carried about as a conviction merely preserved in the memory.
3. This kind of answer would be only an illusory one for the type of thinking, which is the foundation of this book.

4. Not such a finished, fixed answer is given, rather a definite region of soul-experience is referred to, in which one may, through the inner activity of the soul itself, answer the question livingly anew at any moment he requires.

5. The true view of this region will give the one who eventually finds the soul-sphere where these questions unfold that which he needs for these two riddles of life, so that he may, so empowered, enter further into the widths and depths of this enigmatic human life, into which need and destiny impel him to wander.

3/1

1. - A kind of knowledge seems thereby to be pointed to which, through its own inner life and by the connectedness of this inner life to the whole life of the human soul, proves its validity and usefulness.

4/10

1. This is what I thought about the content of the book when I wrote it down twenty-five years ago.

2. Today, too, I have to write down such sentences if I want to characterize the purpose of the thoughts of this book.

3. At the original writing I limited myself to say no *more* than that, which in the utmost *closest sense* is connected with the two basic questions, referred to here.

4. If someone should be amazed that he finds in the book no reference to that region of the world of spiritual experience which came to expression in my later writings, he should bear in mind that in those days I did not however want to give a description of results of spiritual research but I wanted to build first the foundation on which such results could rest.

5. This Philosophy of Freehood does not contain any such specific spiritual results any more than it contains specific results of other fields of knowledge; but he who strives to attain certainty for such cognition cannot, in my view, ignore that which it does indeed contain.

6. What is said in the book can be acceptable to anyone who, for whatever reasons of his own, does not want anything to do with the results of my spiritual scientific research.

7. To the one, however, who can regard these spiritual scientific results, as something toward which he is attracted, what has been attempted here will also be important.

8. It is this: to prove how an open-minded consideration of these two questions which are fundamental for *all* knowing, leads to the view that the human being *lives* in a true spiritual world.

9. In this book the attempt is made to justify cognition of the spiritual world *before* entering into actual spiritual experience.

10. And this justification is so undertaken that in these chapters one need not look at my later valid experiences in order to find acceptable what is said here, if one is able or wants to enter into the particular style of the writing itself.

5/5

1. Thus it seems to me that this book on the one hand assumes a position completely independent of my actual spiritual scientific writings; yet on the other hand it also stands in the closest possible connection to them.

2. These considerations brought me now, after twenty-five years, to republish the content of the text almost completely unchanged in all essentials.

3. I have only made somewhat longer additions to a number of sections.

4. The experiences I made with the incorrect interpretations of what I said caused me to publish comprehensive commentaries.

5. I changed only those places where what I said a quarter of a century ago seemed to me inappropriately formulated for the present time.

(Only a person wanting to discredit me could find occasion on the basis of the changes made *in this way*, to say that I have changed my fundamental conviction.)

6/6

1. The book has been sold out for many years.

2. I nevertheless hesitated for a long time with the completion of this new edition and it seems to me, in following the line of thought in the previous section, that today the same should be expressed which I asserted twenty-five years ago in reference to these questions.

3. I have asked myself again and again whether I might not discuss several topics of the numerous contemporary philosophical views put forward since the publication of the first edition.

4. To do this in a way acceptable to me was impossible in recent times because of the demands of my pure spiritual scientific research.

5. Yet I have convinced myself now after a most intense review of present day philosophical work that as tempting as such a discussion in itself would be, it is for what should be said through my book, not to be included in the same.

6. What seemed to me necessary to say, from the point of view of the Philosophy of Freehood about the most recent philosophical directions can be found in the second volume of my Riddles of Philosophy.

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Rudolf Steiner

The Science of Freehood

Paragraphs 1-7: Freehood question and opponents ignore possible conscious action

Paragraphs 7-13: connecting question and the compulsion of reason and motives

Paragraphs 13-19: Decisions come from thinking, feeling, various motives of body and mind

4. Spinoza's freehood: conscious of desire

10. Freehood defined by Kant

16. Steiner says stop!

3. Spinoza's rolling stone

5. Spinoza's error

9. Knowl. Of reasons

11. compulsion of reason

15. rational thinking not analogies

17. Knowing the reasons

2. Spencer Spinoza's answer

6. Hartmann: unfree motives

8. consc. motives, then freeh.

12. motives determ. will

14. how of decision making

18. Gemuet, thought, love and actions

1. Question of freehood

7. Connecting freehood question

13. no freehood With compulsive motives

19. Question of thinking

Philosophy of Freehood,
chapter one in organic form

I.

Conscious Human Action

1/14

1. Is the human being in his thought and action a spiritually *free* being, or is he compelled by the iron necessity of purely natural law?
2. Upon few questions has so much acute thought been brought to bear as upon this one.
3. The idea of the freehood of the human will has found warm supporters and stubborn opponents in large numbers.
4. There are people who, in their moral fervor, label anyone a man of limited intelligence who dares deny so obvious a *fact* as freehood.
5. Opposed to them are others who regard it as the height of unscientific thinking for anyone to believe that the lawfulness of nature is broken in the sphere of human action and thinking.
6. One and the same thing is thus proclaimed, once as the most precious possession of humanity, and again as its most fatal illusion.
7. Infinite subtlety has been employed to explain how human freehood can be consistent with the laws working in nature, of which the human being, after all, is a part.
8. No less is the trouble to which the other side has gone to make understandable how such a delusional idea as this could have arisen.
9. That we are dealing here with one of the most important questions for life, religion, praxis and science, must be felt by anyone who possesses any degree of thoroughness at all in his character.
10. 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, The Old and the New Belief), has nothing more to say on this question than these words: "With the question of the freehood of the human will we are not concerned.
11. The alleged freehood of indifferent choice has been recognized as an empty illusion by every philosophy worthy of the name; the moral evaluation of human actions and attitudes, however, remains untouched by this problem."
12. Not because I consider that the book in which it occurs has any special importance do I quote this passage, but because it seems to me to express the view to which the thinking of most of our contemporaries manages to rise in this matter.

13. Today, everyone who claims to have grown beyond the elementary school level of science appears to know that freehood cannot consist in choosing, at one's pleasure, one or the other of two possible courses of action.

14. There is always, so we are told, a perfectly definite *reason* why one carries out just one particular action from a number of possible actions.

2/10

1. This seems obvious.

2. Nevertheless, down to the present day, the main attacks of the opponents of freehood direct themselves only against 'freedom of choice.'

3. Even Herbert Spencer, who lives in opinions which are gaining ground daily, says (Principles of Psychology): "*The fact that everyone is at liberty to desire or not to desire*, which is the real proposition involved in the dogma of free will, is negated as much by the analysis of consciousness, as by the contents of the preceding chapter (of Principles...)."

4. Others, too, start from the same point of view in combating the concept of free will.

5. The seeds of all the relevant arguments are to be found as early as Spinoza.

6. All that he brought forward in clear and simple language against the idea of freehood has since been repeated innumerable times, but as a rule shrouded in the most hair-splitting theoretical doctrines, so that it is difficult to recognize the straightforward train of thought - which is all that matters anyway.

7. Spinoza writes in a letter of October or November, 1674: "I call a thing *free* namely which exists and acts from the pure necessity of its nature, and *compelled* I call a thing which is determined in its being and action in a fixed and precise manner by something else.

8. Thus, for example, God exists freely, although with necessity, because he exists only through the necessity of his nature alone.

9. Similarly, God knows himself and all else freely, because it follows solely from the necessity of his nature that he knows all things.

10. You see, therefore, that I place freehood not in free decision, but in free necessity.

3/5

1. "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 way.

2. In order to see this more clearly, let us imagine a perfectly simple case.

3. A stone, for example, receives from an external cause, after striking it, a certain quantity of motion, by reason of which, after the impact of the external cause has ceased, it necessarily continues to move.

4. The perseverance of the stone in its motion is due to compulsion, not to inner necessity, because it must be defined by the contact of an external cause.
5. What is true here for the stone is true also for every other particular thing, however complicated and multi-talented it may be, namely, that everything is necessarily determined by external causes to exist and to act in a fixed and definite manner.

4/6

1. *"Now, I ask you to suppose that this stone, while moving, thinks and knows that it is striving, as best as it can, to continue in motion.*
2. *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 because it wants to.*
3. *But this is precisely the human freehood that everybody claims to possess and which consists only in the fact that people are conscious of their desires, but do not know the causes by which they are determined.*
4. Thus the child believes that he desires milk freely, the angry boy that he desires vengeance freely, and the coward flight.
5. Further, the drunken man believes that he speaks of his own free will what, sober again, he would have rather left unsaid, and as this prejudice is innate in all people, one is not lightly freed from it.
6. For, although experience teaches us often enough that people are barely able to temper their desires, and that, moved by conflicting passions, they see the better and pursue the worse; yet they consider themselves free because there are some things which they desire less strongly, and some desires which they can easily inhibit through the recollection of something else which it is often possible to recall."

5/16

1. Because here a view is so clearly and definitely expressed, it is easy to detect the fundamental error that it contains.
2. Just as a stone carries out a particular movement in response to an impact, so does the human being, with the same necessity, carry out an action if he is driven by some reason or motive.
3. Only because a person is consciousness of his action, does he consider himself to be its originator.
4. But in so doing, he overlooks the fact that a cause drives him that he must follow unconditionally.
5. The error in this train of thought is soon discovered.

6. Spinoza, and all who think like him, overlooks the fact that the human being not only is conscious of his action, but also can be conscious of the causes by which he is led.
7. Nobody will argue that the child is *unfree* when he desires milk, or the drunken man when he says things which he later regrets.
8. Neither are aware of the causes, which are active in the depths of their organism, and which exercise irresistible control over them.
9. But is it justifiable to lump together actions of this kind with those in which a person is conscious not only of his actions but also of the reasons which cause him to act?
10. Are the actions of human beings really all of one kind?
11. Should the act of a soldier on the battlefield, of the scientific researcher in his laboratory, of the statesman in the most complicated diplomatic negotiations, be placed scientifically on the same level with that of the child when he desires milk?
12. It is no doubt true that it is best to seek the solution of a problem where the conditions are simplest.
13. But the inability to discriminate has before now caused endless confusion.
14. There is, after all, a far reaching difference whether I know why I do something, or whether that is not the case.
15. At first sight this seems to be a self-evident truth.
16. And yet the opponents of freehood never ask themselves whether a motive of my action which I recognize and see through, is to be regarded as compulsory for me in the same sense as the organic process which causes the child to cry for milk.

6/6

1. Eduard von Hartmann asserts in his Phenomenology of Moral Consciousness that the human will is dependent on two chief factors: motives and character.
2. If one regards human beings as all alike, or at least the differences between them as negligible, then their will appears as determined from *without*, namely, by the circumstances which come to meet them.
3. But if one bears in mind that various people make a mental picture into a motive of action, only if their character is such that through this mental picture a desire is aroused in them, then the human being appears to be determined from *within* and not from *without*.
4. Now a person believes - because, in accordance with his character, he must first adopt as a motive, a mental picture forced upon him from without, - that he is free, that is, independent of outside impulses.
5. The truth, however, according to Eduard von Hartmann, is that: "even though we ourselves first adopt a mental picture as a motive, we do so not arbitrarily, but

according to the necessity of our characterological disposition, that is, we are *anything but free.*"

6. Here again the difference remains absolutely ignored between motives which I allow to influence me only after I have permeated them with my consciousness, and those which I follow without possessing any clear knowledge of them.

7/3

1. This leads us directly to the standpoint from which the subject shall be considered here on.

2. May the question of freehood of will be posed at all by itself, in a one-sided way?

3. And if not: with what other question must it necessarily be connected?

8/3

1. If there is a difference between a conscious motive of my action and an unconscious urge, then the conscious motive will result in an action which must be judged differently from one that springs from blind impulse.

2. The first question will concern this difference.

3. And what this question yields will then determine what position we have to take with respect to the actual question of freehood.

9/3

1. What does it mean to have *knowledge* of the reasons of one's actions?

2. One has paid too little attention to this question because, unfortunately, we have torn into two what is really an inseparable whole: the human being.

3. One has distinguished between the knower and the doer and has left out of account precisely the factor which comes before all other things: the one who acts out of knowledge.

10/2

1. It is said: the human being is free when he is solely under the dominion of his reason, and not of his animal passions.

2. Or again, that to be free means to be able to determine one's life and action according to purposes and deliberate decisions.

11/3

1. Nothing is gained by assertions of this type.

2. For the question is just whether reason, purposes, and decisions exercise the same kind of compulsion over a human being as his animal passions.

3. If without my co-operation, a rational decision emerges in me with the same necessity with which hunger and thirst arise, then I must by necessity obey it, and my freehood is an illusion.

12/2

1. Another form of expression runs: to be free does not mean to be able to *will* as one wills, but to be able to do as one wills.

2. The poet-philosopher Robert Hamerling expressed this thought with great clarity in his Atomistic Theory Of The Will: “the human being can certainly do as he wills, but he cannot will as he wills, because his will is determined by *motives*.”

[THE NEXT PARAGRAPH 12a/10 HAS A DASH AND IS PARENTHETIC. THUS THERE IS PARAGRAPH 12/2 PLUS AND A REMARK OFFSET BY A DASH IS NOT CONSIDERED PART OF THE THOUGHT-FORM.]

12a/10. –

1. He cannot will what he wills?

2. Let us consider these words more closely.

3. Have they any reasonable meaning?

4. Freehood of will would then mean being able to will without having a reason, without motive.

5. But what does willing mean if not *to have a reason* for doing, or trying to do, this rather than that?

6. To will something without reason or motive would be to will something *without willing it*.

7. The concept of will cannot be divorced from the concept of motive.

8. Without a determining motive the will is an empty *faculty*: only through the motive does it become active and real.

9. It is, therefore, quite true that the human will is not "free" inasmuch as its direction is always determined by the strongest motive.

10. But on the other hand it must be admitted that it is absurd, in contrast with this “unfreehood,” to speak of a conceivable “freehood” of the will which would consist in being able to will what one does *not* will.

13/6

1. Here again, only motives in general are mentioned, without taking into account the differences between unconscious and conscious ones.

2. If a motive affects me, and I am compelled to follow it because it proves to be the "strongest" of its kind, then the thought of freehood ceases to have any meaning.

3. How should it matter to me whether I can do a thing or not, if I am *forced* by the motive to do it?
4. The primary question is not whether, when a motive has affected me, I can act upon it or not; but whether there are only such motives which impel with absolute necessity.
5. If I *must* want something, then I may well be absolutely indifferent as to whether I can also do it.
6. 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.

14/1

1. The question is not whether I can carry out a decision once made, but *how the decision comes about within me*.

15/13

1. What distinguishes man from all other organic beings arises from his rational thinking.
2. Activity he has in common with other organisms.
3. Nothing is gained by seeking analogies in the animal kingdom to elucidate the concept of freehood for the actions of human beings.
4. Modern science loves such analogies.
5. When scientists have succeeded in finding among animals something similar to human behavior, they believe they have touched on the most important question of the science of humankind.
6. To what misunderstandings this view leads is shown, for example, in the book Die Illusion der Willensfreiheit, 1885 by P. Rée, where the following remark on freehood appears: "It is easy to explain why the movement of a stone seems to us necessary, while the volition of a donkey does not.
7. The causes which set the stone in motion are external and visible.
8. But the causes which determine the donkey's volition are internal and invisible: between us and the place of their activity there is the skull of the ass. . . .
9. One cannot see the determining causes and therefore we judge that they are non-existent.
10. The will, it is explained, is, indeed, the cause of the donkey's turning round, but is itself independent; it is an absolute beginning."
11. Here again human actions in which there is a consciousness of the motives are simply ignored, for Rée declares that "between us and the place of their activity there is the skull of the ass."

12. Rée has not the slightest clue, judging from his words on this topic, that there are actions, not indeed of the ass, but of human beings, in which between us and the action lies the motive *that has become conscious*.

13. And he proves it again a few pages further on, with these words: "We do not perceive the *causes* by which our will is determined, hence we think it is not causally determined at all."

16/1

1. But enough of examples which prove that many argue against freehood without knowing in the least what freehood is.

17/6

1. It is completely obvious that an action which the agent does, without knowing why he does it, cannot be *free*.

2. But what about an action for which the reasons are known?

3. This leads us to the question of the origin and meaning of thinking.

4. For without the recognition of the *thinking* activity of the soul, it is impossible to form a concept of knowledge about anything, and certainly about an action.

5. When we know what thinking in general means, it will be easy to get clear about the role that thinking plays in human action.

6. "Thinking transforms the soul, with which animals are also endowed, into spirit," says Hegel correctly, "and hence it will also be thinking that gives to human action its characteristic stamp."

18/20

1. On no account should it be maintained that all our action springs only from the sober deliberations of our reason.

2. To call *human* in the highest sense only those actions that proceed from abstract judgment is far from my intention.

3. But as soon as our conduct rises above the sphere of the satisfying of purely animal desires, our motives are always permeated by thoughts.

4. Love, pity, and patriotism are mainsprings for actions which cannot be analyzed away into cold concepts of the intellect.

5. It is said: here the heart, the *Gemüt* hold sway.

6. Without question.

7. But the heart and the *Gemüt* do not create the motives of action.

8. They presuppose them and let them enter into their inner domain.

9. Pity enters my heart when the mental picture of a person who arouses pity appears in my consciousness.

10. The way to the heart is through the head.

11. Love is no exception.
12. Whenever it is not merely the expression of bare sexual instinct, it depends on the mental picture which we form of the loved one.
13. And the more idealistic these mental pictures are, just so much the more blessed is our love.
14. Here too, thought is the father of feeling.
15. One says: love makes us blind to the failings of the loved one.
16. But this can be considered the other way round and expressed: love opens the eyes just for these good qualities.
17. Many pass by these good qualities without noticing them.
18. One, however, perceives them, and thereby love awakens in his soul.
19. What else has he done but made a mental picture of what hundreds have failed to see?
20. Love is not theirs, because they lack the *mental picture*.

19/2

1. We may grasp the matter as we wish: it becomes more and more clear that the question of the nature of human action presupposes that of the origin of thinking.
2. I will turn next, therefore, to this question.