

English Translation Of Geist

The *Philosophy of Freedom* is a study of the mind. The German word for mind is “Geist”, but it can also be translated as “spirit”. Some English translators resort to using “spirit” which is confusing because the English word “spirit” gives the sense of something more universal, less personal than “mind”. Others translate Geist as “spirit/mind” to help convey the meaning of the term.

For Steiner, the human spirit is that part of us that thinks, the spirit is experienced directly in the act of intuitive thinking. Intuition includes the “AH HA!” or “Eureka!” discovery or sudden mental revelation in which one's mind now perceives a new or different fit or solution of pieces of a puzzle or problem. The thinking described in *The Philosophy of Freedom* starts at a level we would call mental; but it then leads the human being to the experience of truth by penetrating deeply into the phenomena of the universe.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION NOTES

This first English translation of Rudolf Steiner's *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* has only been available if you were fortunate enough to locate one of the rare 1916 books. For this reason alone it seems appropriate to republish it now, yet this edition is distinct in other ways. It is the only translation sanctioned by Rudolf Steiner himself. The joint translators, Prof. and Mrs. R. F. Alfred Hoernlé, were selected for their outstanding qualifications.

“their thorough knowledge of philosophy and their complete command of the German and English languages enabling them to overcome the difficulty of finding adequate English equivalents for the terms of German Philosophy.” H. Collison, 1916 Editor's Note, *The Philosophy of Freedom*

R. F. Alfred Hoernlé was trained in philosophy at Oxford and taught it at Harvard. He was familiar with the philosophical issues of Steiner's day. A review of Hoernlé's book *Studies in Contemporary Metaphysics* (1920) said he had a flexible and assimilative mind and:

“He has had quite exceptional opportunities for seeing contemporary philosophies in the making and for understanding, from personal experience, how far a set of philosophical opinions can bear transplanting from one country to another... a very staunch believer in the truth of the philosophical tradition.” 1921 Oxford University Press

This Hoernlé translation is based on the original, unrevised German *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* published in 1894. The other translations, available up to now, are not based on the original *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*, instead they are based on the 1918 revised edition. Rudolf Steiner revised the original German text twenty-five years after it was originally published. The Hoernlé translation is also unique to the extent that later translations have been influenced by the thought and terminology of theosophy and spiritual science.

To explain why *The Philosophy of freedom* was revised and came under the influence of theosophy it is necessary to understand the two different periods of Rudolf Steiner's life. The first is his ascent to freedom that began with training in mathematics, science, and philosophy culminating in his philosophy of life founded upon individualistic truth and ethical individualism. *The Philosophy of Freedom* describes his path to freedom and contains the ideas he formed in this first period. In the second period of his life Steiner converted to theosophy and began speaking of his clairvoyant research into spiritual realms.

Steiner intended that this first period, as it is expressed in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, stand independent of his later work in theosophy and spiritual science. In 1906 he says:

"You will find nothing at all in *The Philosophy of Freedom* that is derived from clairvoyant communications of spiritual science. It is written for the express purpose of disciplining thinking without any mention of theosophy." Rudolf Steiner, Berlin Oct. 20, 1906

Rudolf Steiner's original aim in *The Philosophy of Freedom* is to justify individualistic truth. This is presented in Chapter I, The Aim of Knowledge, that was part of the original 1894 edition:

"It is no longer enough merely to *believe*, we want to *know*. Belief demands the acceptance of truths that are not quite clear to us. But the individuality that seeks to experience everything in the depths of its own being, is repelled by what it cannot understand. The only *knowing* that satisfies us is one that does not submit to outer norms, but rather springs from the inner life of the personality." Rudolf Steiner, in the original *Philosophy of Freedom*, Chapter I, The Aim of Knowledge.

In 1900 Steiner entered the second period of his life and his work took a new direction. He began lecturing on his clairvoyant research into spiritual realms to the Theosophical Society (later in the Anthroposophical Society that he started with a group of theosophists). Before this, Steiner seemed willing to speak to any group on a variety of topics, but now he gave lectures regularly on spiritual science to members of the Theosophical Society. This new direction likely led to his revising *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* in 1918 for the benefit of his theosophy followers who he regularly encouraged to read the book, but without much success as they were having great difficulty with it.

"Changes of text have been made only where it appeared to me that I had said clumsily what I meant to say a quarter of a century ago." Rudolf Steiner, 1918 Preface to the Revised Edition

The principles of individualistic truth found in the first chapter of the original *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* were removed and replaced with a new preface giving the book a new aim, that of justifying his later research into the spiritual realm. Steiner explains in the new preface added in 1918:

"The aim of this book is to demonstrate, prior to our entry upon spiritual experience, that knowledge of the spiritual world is justified." Rudolf Steiner, 1918 Preface to the Revised Edition

Other 1918 revisions included the book's fundamental opening "question of freedom" which was revised to include a theosophy based preconception with the addition of "spiritual being":

1894 original: Ist der Mensch in seinem Denken und Handeln frei,...

1918 revision: Ist der Mensch in seinem Denken und Handeln [ein geistig freies Wesen]...

1894 original: Is man, in his thinking and action free,...

1918 revision: Is man, in his thinking and action [a spiritually free being],...

The circle of the Anthroposophical Society became the authority to sanction and publish future translations after Steiner's death in 1925. The encroachment of theosophy continued in 1936 with revisions made to the Hoernlé translation by theosophist/ anthroposophist Hermann Poppelbaum, Director of the Anthroposophical Society, such as always translating "Geist" as "spirit" rather than "mind". While recognizing the excellence of the Hoernlé translation, Poppelbaum's aim was to correct it according to the Society's developing perspective on Steiner thought. Poppelbaum's objective was to,

"check certain words and phrases from the strictly Steiner point of view." 1939 *The Philosophy Of Spiritual Activity*, Editor's Preface to the Fourth Edition

Theosophy enters again in 1964 with the popular Michael Wilson translation:

“Any work describing Steiner's point of view in terms of English philosophy would have to deal with the mind as a central theme, but here our task is to introduce readers to Steiner's concepts of spirit and soul.” Michael Wilson, 1964 *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Introduction by translator Michael Wilson

In 1995 Zen Buddhist and Anthroposophist Michael Lipson brings a Zen philosophy to his translation by avoiding attachment to words. Lipson's flexibility with words permits him to re-title the book *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*:

“By approaching Steiner through inadequate and changing English terms, we are the more likely to face the inadequacy of all terms, and leap to his meaning.” Michael Lipson, 1995 *Intuitive Thinking as a Spiritual Path*, Translator's Introduction

The unedited *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* and Hoernlé's first English translation remain true to the individualistic mood of thought out of which the book was originally written. This is what makes the first edition of *The Philosophy of Freedom* distinct from others. It was written for everyone who is striving to “live and let live” as free human beings, including those who may not have an interest in Steiner's later spiritualistic writings.

“this book occupies a position completely independent of my writings on actual spiritual scientific matters... What I have said in this book may be acceptable even to some who, for reasons of their own, refuse to have anything to do with the results of my researches into the spiritual realm.” Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Freedom*, 1918 Preface to the Revised Edition

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