

What is the Path to Freedom?

Rudolf Steiner on his *Philosophy of Freedom*

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"Each one of us has it in themselves to be a free spirit, just as every rosebud has the potential to be a rose."

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Path Of Rudolf Steiner

"My purpose was to write a biographical account of how one human soul made the difficult ascent to freedom."

"I found my own way as best I could, and then, later on, described the route that I had taken."

In a letter to Rosa Mayreder, "If you had rejected my book, it would have been incomparably painful for me... I don't teach. I relate what I have inwardly experienced. I relate it as I have experienced it."

Asked which of his books he would most want to see rescued if catastrophe should come upon the world, Rudolf Steiner replied without hesitation: *The Philosophy of Freedom*.

In the first decade of the 20th century, August Ewerbeck got word that there were intimate circles in which Rudolf Steiner gave special esoteric training to those admitted to them. So he asked his teacher whether he too might be allowed to attend, and received the astonishing reply: "You don't need to! You have understood my *Philosophy of Freedom*!"

Once asked, for which of his books he would be remembered as writer, Rudolf Steiner answered, "For my *Philosophy of Freedom*."

In a conversation with Rudolf Steiner in 1922 Walter Johannes Stein asked, "What will remain of your work in thousands of years?"

Rudolf Steiner replied: "Nothing but the *Philosophy of Freedom*," and then he added: "But everything is contained in it. If someone realizes the act of freedom described there, he finds the whole content of Anthroposophy".

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Path of Science

The *Philosophy of Freedom* is the result of introspective observation following the methods of natural science.

“I was not setting forth a doctrine, but simply recording inner experiences through which I had actually passed. And I reported them just as I experienced them.”

“What I was really trying to do in *The Philosophy of Freedom* was to locate freedom empirically and thus put it on a solidly scientific basis.”

Galileo took a seminal role in launching the first revolution in the physical sciences, and a key element in this revolution was the rigorous, sophisticated observation of physical phenomena. Darwin likewise launched a revolution in the life sciences on the basis of decades of meticulous observation of biological phenomena. By using the *Philosophy of Freedom* as a map for making introspective observations of inner life an opportunity exists for a 21st century revolution in our understanding of the mind sciences.

“For one of the things most centrally needed is clarity on the path of inner striving, a clarity of inner striving comparable to the clarity of external striving. Not vague mysticism, but brightest clarity.”

The pure thinking of science (rightly understood) is the sole avenue leading to the spirituality of the future.

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Path of Study

Incomprehensible!.... Baffles the experts!..... You'll never finish it!..... It's a tangle of thought!.... These are Rudolf Steiner's comments on the disappointing experience of readers when he first published *The Philosophy of Freedom* in 1894.

“Back in the 1890's when the book was published, people hadn't the least idea what to do with it. It was as though Europeans had been given a book in Chinese and couldn't understand a thing it said.”

“Readers often stop reading the book soon after they begin it for the simple reason they would like to read it as they do any other book. Other popular books are read on a chaise lounge letting thought pictures pass in review before one's mind.”

“That is the reason why it is not exactly popular with people who read a book for information only. It was intended to involve the reader, page by page, in the actual activity of thinking, to serve merely as a score read with inner thought activity as the reader advances on his own from thought to thought.”

“In *The Philosophy of Freedom* readers have to keep shaking themselves to avoid being put to sleep by the thoughts they encounter. One has to try with all of one's human strength to activate one's inner being, to bring one's whole thinking into motion.”

“Now what kind of reader approach did *The Philosophy of Freedom* count on? It had to assume a special way of reading. It expected the reader, as they read, to undergo the sort of inner experience that, in an external sense, is really like waking up out of sleep in the morning.”

“The least honest are those who read *The Philosophy of Freedom* as they would any other book and then flatter themselves that they have really taken in the thoughts it contains. They've kept on reading

strings of words without anything coming out of it that might be likened to the striking of steel on flint.”

The reading of the *Philosophy of Freedom* should not be a mere reading, it should be an experiencing with inner shocks, tensions and resolutions.

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Path of Pure Thinking

What I called pure thinking in my *Philosophy of Freedom* was certainly not well named when judged by outer cultural conditions. For Eduard von Hartmann said to me:

“There is no such thing, one can only think with the aid of external observation.”

And all I could say in reply was:

“It has only to be tried and people will soon learn to be able to make it a reality.”

When is an action free? Only when it has its origin in pure thinking.

The *Philosophy of Freedom* is a path, a method leading to the actual experience of a thinking detached from the body-soul make-up.

“Freedom dawns when we enable the will to become an ever mightier and mightier force in our thinking.”

Out of pure thinking there can flow powerful impulses to moral action that are no longer determined by anything but pure spirit.

Rudolf Steiner declares, “The intention in my *Philosophy of Freedom* is that the reader must lay hold --with his own thinking activity-- page by page, that the book itself is only a sort of musical score, and that one must read this score through inner thinking activity in order to progress continually, out of his own resources, from thought to thought. Who does not sense that he has in a manner been lifted above his ordinary way of thinking into a thinking free of the sense perceptible and that he moves altogether in this, so that he feels that he has become ‘free’ in his thinking from the limitations of the corporeal nature, ---such a person has not really read in the true sense of the word this *Philosophy of Freedom*.”

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Path Of Thought Training

“The primary purpose of my book is to serve as thought training, training in the sense that the special way of both thinking and entertaining these thoughts is such as to bring the soul life of the reader into motion in somewhat the way that gymnastics exercise their limbs.”

“Catharsis is an ancient term for the purification of the astral body by means of meditation and concentration exercises. If a reader takes this book as it was meant and relates to it in the way a virtuoso playing a composition on the piano relates to its composer, reproducing the whole piece out of himself, the books organically evolved thought sequence will bring about a high degree of catharsis.”

”The book is a structured organism, and to work one’s way through the thoughts it contains is to undergo an inner training. A person to who this has not happened as a result of study need not conclude what I am saying is incorrect, but rather he has not read it correctly or worked hard and thoroughly enough.”

”Those who had no desire to undertake the uncomfortable and demanding pursuit of clear thinking were little attracted to the direction taken by *The Philosophy of Freedom*.”

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Path of Philosophy

The question of freedom cannot be settled by philosophical argument. Nor is it simply granted to us. If we want to be free, we must work through our own inner activity to overcome unconscious urges and habitual thinking.

Today's materialism seeks to reduce us to totally unfree creatures completely determined by heredity and other influences. The experience of pure thinking is the only possible way of refuting materialism and is attainable by anyone with the "goodwill" to undertake this path.

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Path of Freedom

When, in the bright circles of the spirit,
The soul calls forth
Pure energy of thinking,
It lays hold on knowledge of what freedom is.

When, entering fully in life,
Free, conscious man
Shapes reality from willing,
Then freedom is made living fact.

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

Steiner initially divides the problem of free will into freedom of thought and freedom of action. He argues that inner freedom is achieved when we bridge the gap between our perception, which reflects the outer appearance of the world, and our cognition, which give us access to the inner structure of the world. Outer freedom arises when we bridge the gap between our ideals and the constraints of external reality, letting our deeds be inspired by what he terms moral imagination. Steiner considers inner and outer freedom as integral to one another, and that true freedom is only achieved when they are united.

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Path of Ethical Individualism

We hear calls for an improvement of public morality, but this overlooks the fact that moral action is a characteristic only of the free individual.

Actions motivated by instincts, reflexes, dispositions, maxims, commandments, social and religious customs and even laws are not truly moral.

A deed can only be described as moral in the truest sense when the individual has intuited the moral principle for the particular situation concerned and brought into play the imagination needed to realize that principle in the deed.

The idea and the love of the deed it engenders in the individual is all the motivation that is needed.

If this seems like a recipe for anarchy, then in a certain sense it is, that is in the sense that no external governance prevails, only the free individuality.

What I have outlined here is what Rudolf Steiner called ethical individualism. Free moral action involves moral intuition, moral imagination, and moral technique.

Moral Intuition: The capacity to intuitively experience the particular moral principle for each single situation.

Moral Imagination: The ability of imagination to translate a general moral principle into a concrete mental picture of the action to be carried out.

Moral Technique: The ability to transform the world according to moral imaginations without violating the natural laws by which things are connected.

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Path of Clairvoyance

When a man in the eighteenth century said, “Embolden yourself, O man, to make use of your powers of reason,” these were considered the words of a great enlightener.

Today a still greater challenge must ring out, that is, “Embolden yourself, O man, to recognize your concepts and ideas as the first stage of clairvoyance!”

The reader of *The Philosophy of Freedom* should be able to say to oneself: “Now I know, through this effort of my mind in thinking, what pure thinking really is.”

Then what I should like to call modern clairvoyance ceases to be anything miraculous.

That this clairvoyance should still appear as something particularly miraculous comes from people not wishing to develop the energy to bring activity into their thinking.

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Path of Cosmic Logic

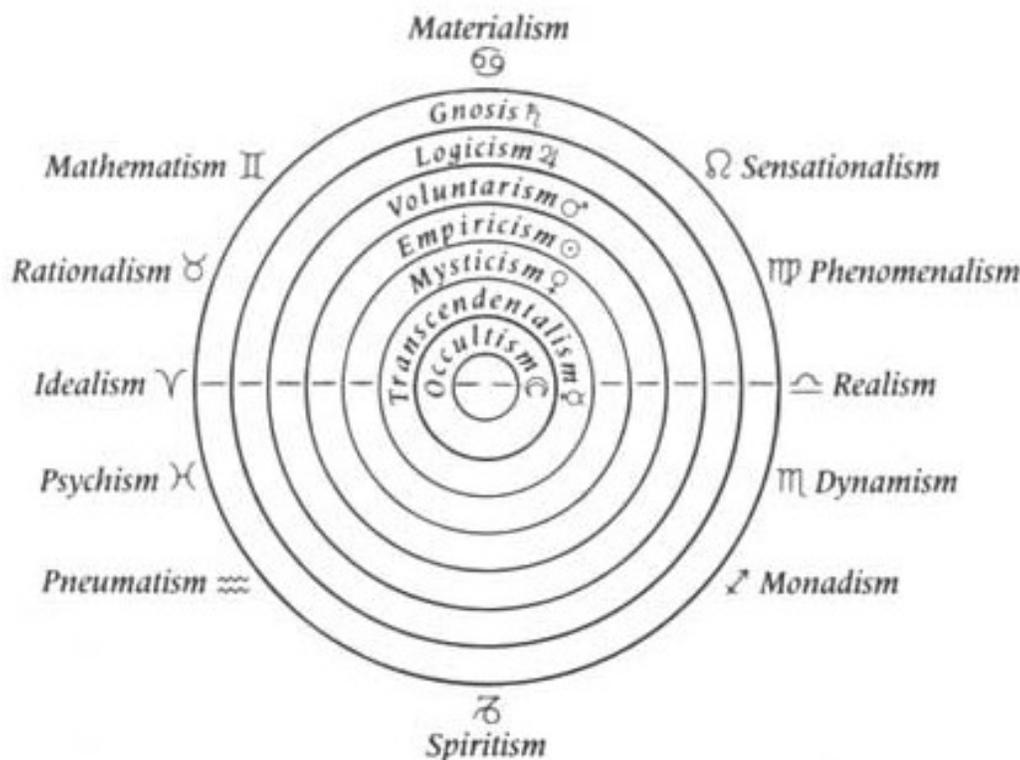
Rudolf Steiner, while writing *The Philosophy of Freedom* was not concerned with philosophy as such, but with working out for himself the means of expression which, in its very thought-formation could bring about the transformation of those forces which had been brought to highest possible peak in pure scientific thinking and now could become the spring board for a final leap into new realms.

"In 1894 I made the attempt with my *Philosophy of Freedom* to provide a philosophic basis on which to approach spiritual science. It presents the wide range of human standpoints, often masquerading under such strange philosophical names, in a way that leaves the reader free of attachment to any particular approach and able to let the various concepts speak for themselves, as though each were a photograph of one and the same object taken from many different angles."

“For in the case of a book like this, the important thing is so to organize the thoughts it contains that they take effect. With many other books it doesn’t make a great deal of difference if one shifts the sequence, putting this thing first and that later. But in the case of *The Philosophy of Freedom* that is impossible. It would be just as unthinkable to put page 150 fifty pages earlier as it would be to put a dog’s hind legs where the front ones belong.”

“Within this book thinking is experienced in a way that makes it impossible for a person involved in it to have any other impression, when he is living in thought, he is living in the cosmos. This relatedness to cosmic mysteries is the red thread running through the book.”

The *Philosophy of Freedom* is a thought organism whose structure is depicted in Steiner's World-Outlook diagram found in his Human and Cosmic Thought lectures. Steiner states the World-Outlook diagram indicates the logic of the Spiritual Hierarchies of the cosmos. "...their logic was indicated in the diagram I drew for you."



"One must be capable of thinking idealistically with the idealist and materialistically with the materialist. For only thus will the faculty of the soul be awakened that can become active in spiritual intuition."

The thoughts were not influenced by the author's personality. He let himself be guided by what the thoughts they contained produced as the fruit of their own activity and were structured accordingly.

"One can't bend and twist pure thinking to one's subjective will. Thinking itself thinks. The spiritual beings of the higher hierarchies enter free thinking and then your thinking receives its content from above."

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Path of Anthroposophy

"Anyone interested in looking for them will find the basic principles of anthroposophy already enunciated in this book."

"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."

"The members (of the Anthroposophical Society) read it, but reading is not the same as understanding. They took what I offered, not as something issuing from my mouth or written in my books, but rather as what this one thought 'mystical,' that one 'theosophical,' another something else again."

“A person desirous of entering the higher worlds must accustom himself to the kind of thinking in which each next thought grows out of the preceding one. This is the thinking in my *Philosophy of Freedom* and *Truth and Science*. These books are not written in a way that allows arbitrary placement of thought. They developed as an organism grows, one thought evolving from another.”

The content of *The Philosophy of Freedom* is not contrived or the results of mystical superstition, but rather in the strictest sense the result of introspective observation verifiable by others.

"Too many seeking experience in all sorts of unclear paths, nebulous mystical approaches, attached themselves to what anthroposophy was trying to achieve in clarity. This group of people attracted the attention of a lot of ill-disposed persons who now attack what people with whom I have no connection whatsoever have been saying. But in these attacks they attribute to 'me' what these vague mystics have produced as their own twisted version of something intended to meet the urgent needs of our modern culture. What is needed is the brightest clarity in everything that has to do with thinking, not vague mysticism.”

"The trouble is *The Philosophy of Freedom* has not been read in the different way I have been describing. That is the point, and a point that must be sharply stressed if the development of the Anthroposophical Society is not to fall far behind anthroposophy itself. If it does fall behind, anthroposophy's conveyance through the society will result in its being completely misunderstood, and its only fruit will be endless conflict!"

The proper study of this book gives the reader an inner attitude that enables him to stand entirely on his own feet in relating to anthroposophy. It teaches him to present it on his own authority rather than on that of someone else.

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Path of Free Community

“The free human being lives in confidence that he and any other free individual belong to one spiritual world, and that their intentions will harmonize.”

What appears as the common goal of a community is usually determined by the top down authority of a few leaders who are followed by the others.

The *Philosophy of Freedom* bases the independence of the human being upon the awakening of pure thinking as the origin of freedom and impulse to moral action.

How can we work together in freedom? Can pure thinking be applied to a group?

Taking life's ordinary concerns as a starting point, group discussion can rise to the level of pure conversation, or rather pure thinking as a group experience that results in group insight, real relationship between person and person, and a powerful impulse to joint activism.

Most of us are so habituated to what has always been done that we find it impossible to conceive of a leaderless society.

In a true anthroposophical community, the leader -- if there may be said to be one -- are impulses to action arising out of pure conversation that is no longer determined by anything but pure spirit.

“No leaders or external measures can bring about anthroposophical community building. It has to be called forth from the profoundest depths of each one's consciousness.”

“If we turn toward thinking in its essence, we find in it the power of love in the depths of its reality.”

“Anthroposophy is independent of anthroposophical societies and can be found independently of them. It can be found in a special way when one human being learns to wake up in the encounter with another and out of such awakening the forming of communities occurs.”

“Here, on the one side, we see an elemental, natural interest in the life of the Anthroposophical Society, a life that may have certain familial characteristics, but that has the good aspects of the familial as well. On the other side we find no interest in that life, and instead just a general conception of an Anthroposophical Society... As things stand today, both points of view are justified, so justified that unless we can quickly develop a wholly different form of discussion, the best thing we could do (I am just expressing my opinion, for the decision will have to be made by the Society) would be to leave the old Society as it is and found a union of free anthroposophical communities for those who want something entirely different. Then each party could carry on in the way that suits it. We would have the old Society on the one side, and on the other a loose but closely related confederation of free communities. The two societies could work out ways of living together.” *Awakening To Community, Lecture VI*

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Path of Individual Initiative

Many ethical individualists today are applying their idealism in re-imagining our relationship to the environment and one another.

They are actively forming civil society organizations to forward: ecological sustainability, economic justice, human rights protection, political accountability and peace.

Using the tools of modern communication technology to organize –texting, cell phones, the internet, even twitter—a bottom up rising of ethical individualists is taking place.

An awakened human spirit working collectively with others can change the world. The possibilities are extraordinary.

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Path of A New Social Order

“If the ideas contained in my *Philosophy of Freedom* are to be further developed and applied to external social life, so that these truths may become clear to a larger circle of people, it will be necessary to build a superstructure of the truths of spiritual science on the foundation of that philosophy.”

Building upon his *Philosophy of Freedom* Rudolf Steiner went on to write dozens of books and delivered over 6000 lectures on a variety of themes. This has inspired others to apply his innovative and holistic approaches in medicine, science, education, special education, philosophy, religion, economics, agriculture, architecture, the arts and other fields.