



*A READER'S JOURNAL*

**Truth and Knowledge, GA# 909**  
**Original Prologue to Philosophy of Freedom**  
by  
**Rudolf Steiner**

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Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2003



This prologue was originally published in the front of his [Philosophy of Freedom](#), and only later appeared as a separate book. In this brief volume, Rudolf Steiner takes on Immanuel Kant and single-handedly

turns a key aspect of Kant's philosophy upside-down. Steiner apparently had a lot of respect for Kant's works of philosophy, but one disagreement that was crucial to Steiner - and missed by so many others lost in the materialistic fog of their shallow reality. Kant showed us that "the foundation of things lying beyond the world of our senses and our reason is inaccessible to our faculty of knowledge." (Page 9) In other words, the *ding an sich* or "thing in itself" cannot be known (This is the *lack* referred to below). In this passage, Steiner clearly states what his aim in this essay is.

**[page 11] The aim of the following inquiry is to remedy the lack described above. Unlike Kant, the purpose here is not to show what our faculty of knowledge *cannot* do, but rather to show what it is really able to achieve.**

Steiner's intent is to show that truth is *not* "an ideal reflection of something real," but rather that truth is a "product of the human spirit, created by an activity which is *free*." Thus he lays the groundwork for his landmark book, [The Philosophy of Freedom](#), that was to follow. In the passage below, we catch a glimmer of why he chose a different title, "The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity," for his American readers. He wished to avoid their confusing a concept of spiritual activity with their entrenched political concept of freedom. Yes, freedom, even [political freedom](#), rightly understood, is a spiritual activity, and that concept is not very well known, up until now.

**[page 11] The object of knowledge is not to *repeat* in conceptual form something which already exists, but rather to *create* a completely new sphere, which, when combined with the world given to our senses constitutes complete reality. Thus man's highest activity, his spiritual creativeness, is an organic part of the universal world-process.**

If the sphere of activity of one human being is encompassed by a man-made law that restricts some and allows other activities, then that one human being is not *free* - that one human's spiritual creativeness is as enslaved as any human slave was by the plantation master on the hill. Human slavery, in any form, acts to the detriment of the evolution of the world-process. "Surely you have overstated the case, Bobby!" some of you may be thinking. No, I have grossly understated it, but I have but these meager messengers called *words* to press into my service. They can only carry messages, not communication. Like anyone knows who has ever received a coded message, the deep meaning of the message must be decoded or "in-formed" by the receiver of the message. That communication process is the essence of in-formation,

rightly understood. The author of the message can only encode the message - if the receivers of the message do not bother to decode the message, it will remain gibberish to them.

Does the abrogation of some laws or customs, such as Lincoln did when he freed the slaves, produce freedom? No, only the abrogation of all man-made laws can produce the "completely free personality" that Steiner discusses in the passage below. He directs our attention to the laws that underlie our individual deeds, our moral ideals. [Let us play the "believing game" of Peter Elbow and believe that living without man-made laws would be a good thing from now on.]

**[page 12] Our moral ideals are our own free creations. We have to fulfil only what we ourselves lay down as our standard of conduct. Thus the insight that truth is the outcome of a free deed also establishes a philosophy of morality, the foundation of which is the completely *free personality*.**

But surely if every one were able to have one's own moral ideal, the world would become a madhouse where a deed resulting from any wild impulse would be permitted! "There, Bobby, you have disproved your own point - we cannot live in a world such as that." Remember the believing game. We certainly do not live in a world such as that today - there are man-made laws everywhere we turn. The US Government regulation on the sale of cabbage is 26,911 words long. Steiner quickly adds a caveat to the above passage about the "free personality" - he says that it "is valid only when our power of thinking penetrates - with complete insight - into the motivating impulses of our deeds." In a very real sense, Steiner is saying that we must develop the ability to decode the deepest meanings of our own deeds as though they came to us as secret messages from our higher self.

**[page 12] As long as we are not clear about the reasons - either natural or conceptual - for our conduct, we shall experience our motives as something compelling us from outside, even though someone on a higher level of spiritual development could recognize the extent to which our motives originated within our own individuality. Every time we succeed in penetrating a motive with clear understanding, we win a victory in the realm of freedom.**

If we do not penetrate to our motives, we are as enslaved by our own motives as any slaves were by the motives of their masters in the history of humankind. In many ways, the elemental spirits that orbit us in our lives are like our slaves. They are called into existence by our thought forms and proceed to play havoc with our lives until we identify the origin of their existence within ourselves.

Epistemology is broadly defined by the dictionary as "the theory of knowledge" but Steiner tells us that it is "the scientific study of what all other sciences presuppose without examining it: *cognition* itself." (Page 27) Clearly if the essential problems of science are not stated or only presupposed, one can hardly expect any clarity to result. Epistemology cannot function properly if it contains unstated presuppositions. Like sidearms in the Old West, we must check our assumptions at the door of knowledge. And since Cowboy Kant didn't do so, Sheriff Steiner blasts off his holsters, and Kant's firepower falls useless to the floor. In the following passage Steiner quotes from Kant, and we can see clearly that Kant states his assumption as if it were a fact.

**[page 35] "I will then limit my assertion to *pure mathematics*, the very conception of which implies that it consists of knowledge altogether non-empirical and a priori."**

So, where does Steiner start? He chooses a starting point that lies outside the act of cognition and thus is not itself knowledge. What is this point immediately prior to cognition so that the very next step we takes propels us into the activity of cognition?

**[page 51] Only our *directly given world-picture* can offer such a starting point, i. e. that picture of the world which presents itself to man *before* he has subjected it to the process of knowledge in any way, before he has asserted or decided anything at all about it by**

## **means of thinking.**

Steiner says that this "world-picture that flits past us, disconnected, but still undifferentiated" is never encountered by us. In a case history of a man who regained his eyesight as an adult, after having been blind since shortly after birth, we find that it is possible for someone to see this direct world-picture under certain special circumstances. Virgil was his name, and his case history was written up by the famous neuropathologist, Oliver Sacks, and was later made into a movie in the 1990's called *At First Sight*. Until Virgil learned how to think about what he saw, he was unable to see more than a crazy-quilt maze of colors and patterns. In fact, Virgil went from a fully functioning blind person to a partially functioning sighted person as a result of his eye operation. If he wandered off the marked path through his own living room, the objects dissolved into meaningless patches of color and he began to trip over objects and get lost. Yes, we have direct evidence that the given world-picture precedes our thinking operations on it.

Errors, in relation to knowledge, cannot occur in our perception of this given world-picture, only in the act of cognition that follows our perception. Any number of optical illusions can be cited as evidence of this. We may have errors in a conception but not in perception because a conception is a joining together of disconnected perceptions into a unity. Building on this, Steiner gives us his definition of the simple word, *idea* - "a concept with a greater content." (Page 61)

He shows convincingly, to those who will take the trouble to check their assumptions at the door, that the content of thinking is more than Kant's "empty thought-forms." Here is the pertinent passage:

**[page 71] The world-content can be called reality only in the form it attains when the two aspects of it described above have been united through knowledge.**

If I may call up the [Structural Differential](#) of Alfred O. Korzybski, the parabola at the top represents the "directly given world-picture" - what AOK called the WIGO or What Is Going On. In the strings that proceed down to the islands below we find the connections or cognition that takes place to create thinking. Each string connects something in the WIGO to an abstraction, in AOK's terminology. In the making of these linkages the process we call thinking evolves. If we were to make two circles, one representing the Territory (the directly given world-picture) and the other the Map (our knowledge or thinking), and then allow the two to overlap, we would arrive at a cogent representation in the overlapped portion of our "I". Here's how Steiner describes it:

**[page 73] The I feels a need to discover more in the given than is *directly* contained in it. In contrast to the given world, a second world - the world of thinking - rises up to meet the I and the I unites the two through its own free decision, producing what we have defined as the idea of knowledge.**

The first step in the [Habit Formation](#) process is becoming conscious of something that you don't know you don't know how to do. That consciousness moves you to the condition of now knowing that you don't know how to do something. Steiner points out that epistemology, the science of knowledge, has, as its very first job, to bring "consciousness to the act of cognition, insofar as it is still an unconscious activity of the I." (Page 75)

In this next passage Steiner gives us the crux of the job of the "I":

**[page 81] Self-observation reveals the I engaged in the activity of building up the world-picture by combining the given with concepts.**

Steiner explains that if we do not make the necessary effort of self-observation, we may, like Kant, Fichte, and others after Kant, imagine that one "spins the world out of the I itself." He admits that Fichte came close, but did not arrive at the "right thought-form which, when supplemented by the given, constitutes reality." Here he sums up his findings:

**[page 85] The present discussion shows that the I is free when it cognizes, when it objectifies the ideas of cognition. For when the directly given and the thought-form belonging to it are united by the I in the process of cognition, then union of these two elements of reality - which otherwise would forever remain separated in consciousness - can only take place through a free act.**

Now the skeptics among you already have your hackles up, thinking something like this, "Our thinking can never approach the world!" I would tell you that it is clear to me that you have never doubted your skepticism. Steiner's response, on the other hand, is simplicity in itself:

**[page 90] Should the sceptic maintain that our *cognitive* thinking can never approach the world, he can only maintain this with the help of thinking, and in so doing refutes himself. Whosoever attempts to establish doubt in thinking by means of thinking itself admits, by implication, that thinking contains a power strong enough to support a conviction.**

Rather than create an epistemological standpoint by presupposition like Kant or by metaphysical axioms like Biedermann, Steiner provides insight into reality by directly observing the process of cognition itself.

How does this create freedom, one might ask? A slave is someone who follows the orders of another - to be free is to be one's own master.

**[page 94] If the I has really penetrated its deed with full insight, in conformity with its nature, then it also feels itself to be master. As long as this is not the case, the laws ruling the deed confront us as something foreign, *they rule us*; what we do is done under the compulsion they exert over us. . . . To carry out a deed under the influence of a law external to the person who brings the deed to realization, is a deed done in unfreedom. To carry out a deed ruled by a law that lies within the one who brings it about, is a deed done in freedom. *To recognize the laws of one's deeds, means to become conscious of one's own freedom. Thus the process of knowledge is the process of development toward freedom. . . . This is the free sphere. Only insofar as man is able to live in this sphere, can he be called moral.***

In the last sentence of the above passage, Steiner produces an insight that resonates with that of Andrew J. Galambos, who begins with his innovative definition of freedom and derives from it that to be free is to be moral! From my review of [Sic Itur Ad Astra](#):

**Galambos gives us an operational definition of morality that is simple, easy to understand and to explain, "any action is moral that does not involve coercion." In other words, any action taken in freedom, is moral, by the definition of freedom.**

As an example of a deed taken in freedom, I offer my own work in [doyletics](#), a science that I recognized could grow out of the pioneering work and insights of Doyle Henderson with my help. My task was to apply my own thinking to the given world-process to form a unity and to give that unity a name, *doyletics*. In the Editorial and Reference Notes at the end of the book were two Notes that contained material important to my work in the nascent science of doyletics, and therefore I include the following quotes and my comments on how they are important to the nascent science of doyletics.

**[page 101-102] Johannes Peter Müller, German physiologist and comparative anatomist, born in Coblenz, July 14, 1801. . . . In his *Handbuch* Müller developed an entirely new principle which he called "the law of specific energy of sense substances." This he expressed as follows: "The kind of sensation following stimulation of a sensory nerve does not depend on the mode of stimulation, but upon the nature of the sense organ. Thus, light, pressure, or mechanical stimulation acting on the retina and optic nerve invariably produces luminous impressions."**

When I read this "law of specific energy of sense substances" the question arose in my mind, "How does this law impact on [doyletics](#)?" After pondering this topic for a while, it came to me that, since doyles are stimulations of the sensory nerves from the amygdaline/limbic region of the brain, such stimulations would have the same results on the sensory nerves as did the original stimulations from the outside world during the original event when the doyle was stored. This was a basic assumption made by Doyle P. Henderson back around 1975 when he began analyzing how it was possible that humans could respond emotionally to thoughts. He knew the brain had no sensory apparatus inside itself, so it must be somehow re-creating the original stimulations in the sensory receptors at various other points of the body. This basic principle that Müller developed leads us to expect exactly the conclusion that Henderson, unaware of Müller's law, came to accept, namely that signals from the brain can re-create in the human senses the exact stimuli that have been previously received from the external world. These stimuli we have come to know variously as emotions, feelings, and, more specifically, by their component name, doyles.

In understanding the evolution of the species, one principle is essential — that *ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny*. I remember first hearing these words from a fellow college student's lips some forty plus years ago and thinking to myself, "What ridiculous stuff those biology students are forced to memorize!" In studying Steiner's works, I have now encountered two men who were instrumental in formulating this basic principle, Haeckel and Müller. Fritz Müller was apparently first with his formulation of *biogenesis* as described by Steiner in the passage in Note 75 in the appendix of this book. Thus stated, biogenesis is the intra-species equivalent of the principle of *ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny*, that is, one's individual development recapitulates one's ancestors' development.

**[page 105] 75. biogenesis, the teaching that living organisms come from other living organisms, as opposed to abiogenesis. The author of the modern formulation of "the fundamental law of biogenesis" was Fritz Müller (1864). Haeckel called Müller's formulation "the biogenetic fundamental law," which can be stated briefly as the teaching that in its development from the egg to adult stage, the animal tends to pass through a series of stages which recapitulate the stages through which its ancestry passed in the development of the species from a primitive form. In other words, the development of the individual is a condensed expression of the development of the race.**

The principle of biogenesis has deep meaning to the science of doyletics for the following reason: during the development of the race we call humans, we first developed doylic memory and later cognitive memory. With doylic memory, humans were able to have primitive memory capability which operated as follows: a vague record of events that occurred to primitive humans were stored along with the physical body states that accompanied them. This record included components of visual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory memory, and kinesthetic experience. The components of the visual and auditory memory can only be called *primitive* when compared to the later capability that was to follow when the neocortex reached its full development. It was the best we had available as a species, at that time.

The visual component was vague because of the limits of visual processing capability of the limbic structures of the brain, the highest brain function of our ancestors at that stage of evolution. The ability to recall feeling, smelling, and tasting was very refined, was distinct and sharp, however, as these had survival benefit, and the senses of feeling, smelling and tasting had been around a very long time, longer than the eyes with their superb visual acuity and image capability. While the eyes of our early ancestors were very sharp, perhaps sharper than our current eyes, their capability to remember the visual components of the events around them paled in comparison with our own due to the reduced size of their neocortex.

Modern scientists like [Joseph LeDoux](#) have shown us that there exists a primitive visual and auditory storage of memories in the limbic system, especially the amygdala, and the visual and auditory components of those memories serve as a pattern that triggers the release of associated doylic memories with their very sharp feeling, olfactory and gustatory components, that is, physical body states of visceral



sensations, proprioceptive sensations, and muscle contractions and dilations, basically all the responses of the autonomic nervous systems that are triggered by the limbic region of our brain via the amygdaline structures and fed directly to the hypothalamus of our root brain, bypassing the neocortex. This bypassing of our higher cognitive functions in the neocortex is why such responses occur so quickly that we tend to characterize them as follows: "It all happened before I knew it." or "Before I knew it, there were tears streaming from my eyes."

What the principle of biogenesis allows us to understand is how we passed through a stage when, as a child, our highest memory capability was similar to these ancient ancestors - we had only the beginnings of a neocortex - and we were only able to store doylic memories, not full-blown cognitive memories as we later came to take for granted. At five-years-old, we passed into a period in which our neocortex, having been fully grown since age three, was able to store permanent, full-fledged cognitive memories, with a level of visual and auditory-digital discrimination far superior to the capability of any of our early ancestors. The structures of our limbic system that provided our ancestors with doylic memory are maintained for the rest of our lives, however, and they faithfully feed up to us those early body state memories upon receipt of the associated trigger. This process of feeding up doylic memory, rightly understood, provides us with the mechanism that enriches our everyday lives with feelings, emotions, and various other physical body states that enable us to experience and re-experience the wonderful times, both good and bad, of our childhood.

In this book of Rudolf Steiner's, *Truth and Knowledge*, written over a hundred years ago, there are ideas that can infuse our thinking about the given world-picture today, if only we take the trouble to decode the message and in-form ourselves with the meaning.



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