

# Philosophy of Physiology

(1779)

Friedrich Schiller

THE PHILOSOPHY OF PHYSIOLOGY *was written as a dissertation by Friedrich Schiller when he was a young medical student. It was originally entitled "The Idea of Physiology," and was written in German. In the fall of 1779, Schiller submitted an altered version in Latin, under the title "Philosophia Physiologiae." It was rejected by his teachers, owing to its attack on the medical authorities of the day. The only version which has survived, is a German text with the present title. Since both the original German version, and the later Latin text, have been lost, it is not clear whether this extant text is an incomplete copy of the German original, or of a later, revised text of the Latin.*

*Although some authorities claim, falsely, that the "wise man" referred to by Schiller in Section 1 is the British Empiricist Adam Ferguson, as Anita Gallagher makes absolutely clear, the sage referred to by Schiller can be none other than G.W. Leibniz. One need only compare the concept of happiness expressed by Schiller in Section 1, with that of Leibniz in such locations as his essay "On Wisdom."*

*Also of interest is Schiller's concept of "Mittelkraft," or mediating power, in Section 2. This concept of a third power which mediates between matter and spirit, anticipates the concept of "Spieltrieb," or play instinct, which Schiller later developed in his "Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man." There, Schiller defines the play instinct as a third power, in which the sensuous drive and the formal drive act in combination.*

*Four of the eleven sections of Chapter I of Schiller's work are presented here. These eleven sections are the only ones still extant, and even the eleventh breaks off in mid-sentence. A translation of the full extant text will appear in a forthcoming new volume of Schiller translations. The translation has been prepared by Anita Gallagher, who, along with her husband Paul Gallagher and two other associates of Lyndon LaRouche, Michael Billington and Laurence Hecht, remains a political prisoner in the Commonwealth of Virginia.*

## Plan

First Chapter. THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.

Second Chapter. THE NURTURING LIFE.

Third Chapter. PROCREATION.

Fourth Chapter. THE COHERENCE OF THESE  
THREE SYSTEMS.

Fifth Chapter. SLEEP AND NATURAL DEATH.

## I. THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT

### 1. Destiny of Man

This much will, I think, have been proven firmly enough one day: that the universe were the work of an Infinite Understanding, and were designed according to an excellent plan.

Just as it now flows from the design into reality through

the almighty influence of divine power, and all powers are active and act on each other, like strings of a thousand-voiced instrument sounding together in one melody; so, in this way, the spirit<sup>1</sup> of man, ennobled with divine powers, should discover from the single effects, cause and design; from the connection of causes and designs, the great plan of the Whole; from the plan, recognize the Creator, love Him, glorify Him; —or, more briefly, more sublime-sounding in our ear: Man is here, so that he may strive toward the greatness of his Creator; that he may grasp the whole world with just a glance, as the Creator grasps it. Likeness-to-God [*Gottgleichheit*] is the destiny of man. Infinite, indeed, is this his Ideal; however, the spirit is eternal. Eternity is the measure of infinity; that is to say, man will grow eternally, but will never reach it.

A soul, says a wise man of this century,<sup>2</sup> which is enlightened to the degree that it has the plan of divine providence completely in its view, is the happiest soul. An

eternal, great, and beautiful law of nature has bound perfection to pleasure, and displeasure to imperfection. What brings this characteristic closer to man, be it direct or indirect, will delight him. What distances him from it, will pain him. What pains him, he will avoid; what delights him, he will strive for. He will seek perfection, because imperfection pains him; he will seek it, because it alone delights him. The sum of the greatest perfections with the fewest imperfections, is the sum of the highest pleasures with the fewest sorrows. This is supreme happiness. Therefore, it is the same if I say: Man exists to be happy; or—he exists to be perfect. Only then is he perfect, when he is happy. Only then is he happy, when he is perfect.

However, an equally beautiful, wise law, a corollary of the first, has bound the perfection of the Whole with the supreme happiness of the individual; human beings with fellow human beings; indeed, men and animals, through the bond of universal love. Thus love, the most beautiful, noblest impulse in the human soul, the great chain of feeling nature, is nothing other than the confusion of my own self with the being [*Wesen*] of fellow creatures. And this intermingling is pleasure. Love thus makes the fellow creature's delight my delight; his sorrow, my sorrow.

## G.W. Leibniz: from 'On Wisdom'

Such joy, which man can at all times create for himself, when his mind is well-constituted, consists in the mental perception of a pleasure in himself, and in his mental powers, when one feels in himself a strong inclination and readiness for Goodness and Truth; especially by means of thorough intelligence, which a more illuminated Mind presents to us, so that we experience the main source, the course, and final purpose of all things, and the unbelievable excellence of the highest Nature which comprises all things in itself, and thereby are elevated above the unknowing, just as if we could see terrestrial objects here under our feet from the stars. Then at last we learn entirely from this, that we have cause to take the highest joy, concerning all that has already happened and is yet to happen, but that we seek, nevertheless, to direct as much as is in our power what has not yet happened for the best. For that is one of the eternal laws of nature, that we shall enjoy the perfection of things and the pleasure which arises from it according to the measure of our knowledge, good will, and intended contribution.

However, even this suffering is perfection, and therefore must not be without pleasure. Thus, what were otherwise pity as an emotion, is blended from pleasure and pain. Pain, because the fellow creature would suffer. Pleasure, because I share his pain with him, since I love him. Sorrow and pleasure, that I turn his pain from him.

And why universal love; why all the pleasure of universal love? —Only out of this ultimate, fundamental design: to further the perfection of the fellow creature. And this perfection is the overseeing [*Überschauung*], investigation, and admiration of the great design of Nature. Indeed, all pleasures of the senses, ultimately, of which we shall speak in its place, incline through twists and turns and apparent contradictions, for all that, finally back to the same thing. Immutable, this truth itself remains always the same, forever and ever: Man is destined for the overseeing, investigation, and admiration of the great design of Nature.

## 2. Action of Matter on the Spirit

Having laid this as foundation, I proceed further. When man is supposed to discover the Whole from the particular, he must perceive each individual action in this way. The world must act on him. This is now, in part, outside him; in part, in him. What takes precedence within the inner labyrinths of my own being, is more the subject of a psychology than of a universal physiology. We will assume it [a knowledge of psychology] in the reader, and only where the chain of the whole requires it, venture an intervention into it.

The actions that have priority outside my own self, are movements of matter. All movement of matter is based on impenetrability; a quality of matter, which would uniquely distinguish it from spirit, so far as we understand it. Yet, if spirit is not impenetrable, how is matter supposed to act on it, which, in any case, would only act on the impenetrable? Indeed, the beautiful, animated objects of creation would have to be dead to it; its active power would slumber dead in a boundless, fertile sphere of activity; however, it does not slumber dead in a boundless, fertile sphere of activity. The animated, beautiful objects of creation are indeed not dead to it. Spirit is happy. It is active. Either spirit must be able to be impenetrable without being matter; yet, who could separate the concept of matter from the impenetrability of matter? —Or must the Spirit itself be matter? Thinking would therefore be movement. Immortality were an illusion. Spirit would have to pass away. This opinion, promulgated by force to crush the sublimity of spirit and to allay the fear of the coming eternity, can delude only fools and villains; the wise man derides it. —Or, is our entire representation of a world, a single fabric spun out of our own self? We deceive ourselves; we dream; in this way, we believe we receive our ideas and feelings [*Empfindungen*] from outside. We are

independent of the world; it is independent of us. We interpret, by virtue of an harmony established from eternity, as two clocks wound identically to the second. In this way, the world is thus without design. Freedom and moral approval are phantoms. My supreme happiness is a dream. This view is nothing but a flash of wit of a distinguished thinker, which he himself by no means believed.<sup>3</sup>

Or, it is the direct influence of the divine omnipotence, which gives matter the power to act on me. Each of my representations is therefore a miracle, and contradicts the first law of nature. Had one wished thereby to present the Creator as more powerful, one would have been amazingly deranged. Miracles betray a defect in the design of the world. Weak like a human artist, the Creator has to help in all areas. He would still be great, but I can imagine Him yet greater; His work still more excellent. He is excellent, but not perfect. He is great, but He is not the Infinite.

Or, otherwise a power must exist, which mediates between spirit and matter, and connects the two. A power which can be changed by matter, and which can change spirit. This were therefore a power which is one part spirit, another part material; a being, that were one part penetrable, another part, impenetrable—and can one imagine such a thing?—Certainly not!

Be that as it may, there is actually a power existing between matter (this same thing, whose actions are supposed to be represented), and spirit. This power is completely distinct from the world and the spirit. I remove it; all action of the world is lost to the spirit. And yet, the spirit is still there. And yet, the object is still there. Its loss has created a rupture between the world and the spirit. Its existence clarifies, awakens, and animates everything around it. I call it *mediating power* [*Mittelkraft*].

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## 10. The Action of the Soul on the Thinking Organ

Material association is the foundation on which thinking rests. The guide of the creative intellect. Through it [material association] alone can the understanding combine and separate, compare, reach conclusions, and direct



Rembrandt van Rijn, "The Flute Player," 1642.

the will to volition or rejection. Perhaps this assertion might appear dangerous to freedom. For, when the sequence of the material ideas is determined by the mechanism of the thinking organ, but the understanding is determined by the material ideas, and the will is determined by the understanding, it would thus follow that, ultimately, the will were determined mechanically. But one should listen to what follows.

The soul has an active influence on the thinking organ. It can make material ideas stronger, and, in an arbitrary manner, can be fixed on them, and, consequently, it also makes the intellectual [*geistige*] ideas more powerful. This is the work of attentiveness [*Aufmerksamkeit*]. It also holds sway over the strength of motives, it alone advances motives. And it would now be quite definite, what freedom is. It is only the confusion of the first and second wills [*Willens*] which has caused the controversy over it. The first will, which directs my attentiveness, is the free one; the latter, which directs the action, is a slave of the understanding; therefore, freedom does not lie in the fact that I would choose that which my understanding has recognized as the best (since this is an eternal law); but rather, that I would choose what can direct [*bestimmen*] my understanding toward the best. All mankind's morality has its foundation in the faculty of attentiveness; that is, in the active influence of the soul on the material ideas in the thinking organ.

Now, the more frequently a material idea is brought

to vivid life [*in stark Lebhaftigkeit gesetzt*] by virtue of this active influence, it will thus ultimately retain a certain strength even after that, and, as it were, stand out an aftereffect before all others. It will stir the soul in a more striking way. It will force itself on the understanding more potently in all associations; direct it more powerfully; it will become the tyrant of the second will, where the first will was not exerted in the least. So there can be people who, ultimately, do good or evil mechanically. In the beginning, they did it freely and morally; that is to say, while their attentiveness was still undetermined. But now, even without attentiveness, the idea is still the most lively one; it fastens the soul to itself; it dominates the understanding and the will. Here lies the reason for all passions and dominant ideas; and, at the same time, the finger that points to how to enervate both.

If the soul fixes its attentiveness on several ideas, and brings such ideas into different associations, one says thus: It imagines. If it allows its attentiveness to rest on isolated particulars [*einzelnen Bestimmungen*] of diverse ideas, and draws such particulars out of their associations, one says thus: It abstracts. The former, having gone into new associations deeply through imagination; the latter, having tried to understand ideas from their associations through abstraction, it [the soul] binds ideas again, especially in the thinking organ; indeed, even the consciousness of its own self in these actions appears to bind them into material forms, because it restores this consciousness at the same time with the old ideas. In this case, we say: It remembers. If the soul, by virtue of its attentiveness, unsettles a material idea more forcefully, it will thus also unsettle the adjoining one more forcefully. The association will thus become quicker and more lively. We do this if we recall something or let our imagination play. Therefore, attentiveness is that through which we imagine; through which we reflect; through which we separate and seal; through which we will. It is the active influence of the soul on the thinking organ which accomplishes all this.

And, therefore, the thinking organ is the true tribunal of the understanding, having been subjected to the latter, just as the latter [the understanding] was subjected to it. It [the understanding] is, moreover, completely dependent on attentiveness. For that reason, confusion of spirits is possible in sickness, if and when it is transmitted as far as this organ [the thinking organ], (and how easy it becomes) to turn the wisest into the most ridiculous fools; the thinker into a simpleton; the most gentle person into a fury. It [the thinking organ] is completely dependent upon the understanding, with the exception of the influence of sensation. Therefore, an accurate understanding can produce the most faithful memory. For that reason, a continually busy understanding can destroy it [the thinking organ] by overstraining. The examples of great

thinkers demonstrate both: of Garve, Mendelssohn, Swift, who have put the instrument of their understanding out of tune such that there is no longer a correct tone from them. And, since it is connected so exactly with the reasoning power [*Denkkraft*], I have thus designated it the thinking organ, and not because I considered thinking as a consequence of the mechanism.

## 11. Feelings of the Life of the Spirit

My soul is not only a thinking being; it is also a feeling being. The latter alone makes it happy. The former alone makes it capable of the latter. We will see exactly how the Creator of mankind has bound thinking to feeling. Feeling is that condition of my soul where it is itself conscious of betterment or a change for the worse. Therefore, to make a distinction between it and representation, in representation it [the soul] would feel only the condition of an external being; but in feelings, its own condition.

I see the sunny sky, the starry heaven; I see a confused heap of stones; I hear a spring murmur; the playing of strings echoes. I hear the shrieking of a raven. In all these shifting scenes of my state, there is something common; the representation of an external object. On the other side, however, how very different is not my state, at each of these representations. I see the sunny sky with pleasure, I see the starry heaven with even more pleasure. I turn my eye away from the heap of stones. In this way, I also hear the spring murmuring with pleasure; with even more pleasure, the sound of strings playing. I likewise wish to plug my ear to the shrieking of the raven. What delights me, I call melodious and beautiful; what displeases me, ugly and unmelodious.

However, by virtue of the first law of nature, which stands at the pinnacle of this dissertation on mankind, nothing should delight me, other than what makes me more perfect; nothing should displease me, other than what makes me less perfect. Now, did the melodious, the beautiful, make me more perfect than the ugly and unmelodious? Or, in other words, is it my own state, which is bettered or worsened, . . .

—translated by Anita Gallagher

1. The German noun “*Geist*” carries both the meaning of the English “spirit,” as well as “mind.” It has been translated here as “spirit,” for the most part. It signifies mankind’s non-material power of creative thinking.
2. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716). For this view, see his “On Wisdom,” translated by Anita Gallagher, *Fidelio*, Summer 1994, pp. 78-80. In this essay, Leibniz argues that the happiest soul is the one which has the plan of divine providence most completely in view. [SEE excerpt, Box, page 66]
3. Leibniz’s monads are immaterial substances created by God independent of the world and other monads, which act in a harmony pre-established by the Creator. The pre-established harmony assures that the perceptions of different monads are in agreement, and thus, that they can interact. See G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology*.