

**SOLVING A RIDDLE:  
A 'RÄTSEL' FROM DR. MISES'S RÄTHSELBÜCHLEIN**

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**Abstract**

*We present here a 'Rätsel' (riddle) taken from the Räthselbüchlein ([1875]), published by Fechner under the pseudonym of Dr. Mises. Generally, the 'Rätsel' witness to Fechner's great passion for irony and jest, a passion which remained all his life – despite serious health problems – and for which he was known and appreciated by scholars of his time. The 'Rätsel' presented here is of interest for its 'psychological-psychophysical' meaning: It talks of mind ('Geist') and of the five senses.*

**Fechner's aptitude for jokes and riddles (*Rätsel*)**

It is well-known (see, for example, Heidelberger, 1993) that when he left school, Fechner attended the Academy of Medicine in Dresden and enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine at Leipzig University, where he followed lectures also in Logic, Botany, Zoology, Physics, Chemistry, Pharmacy, Anatomy, Physiology, Obstetrics, and Algebra.

Fechner's decision to study Medicine soon proved to be an unhappy choice. Although he completed his studies, he did not feel totally fulfilled in this discipline and decided against practising it. Such a negative reaction towards Medicine found expression in the satirical contributions which he published under the pseudonym of 'Dr. Mises'. In 1821, 'Dr. Mises' caused the explosion of the 'case' of the Moon, satellite of the Earth, and made of iodine. In the years 1822-1825, other treatises appeared of a medical, botanical and angelological nature, in particular on the comparative anatomy of angels. None of this undermined Fechner's enthusiasm for Science, which remained the fundamental interest of his life. Physiology, Physics, Chemistry, and Meteorology number among his fields of research; in 1834, he became Professor of Physics and, in 1835, he founded the first Institute of Physics in Germany, in the newly-built *Augusteum* of Leipzig.

Differing theories have been forwarded regarding the meaning of the pseudonym 'Dr. Mises', which was never explained by Fechner. The title 'Dr.' ('Doctor') could have an ironic twist. The most likely hypothesis about the surname 'Mises', which appears without a first name, is that it comes from the French word *mise*, thus in the plural *mises*. The term is also used in German to indicate the stake in gambling or the capital that accrues on a life insurance policy. According to this interpretation, when he uses the pseudonym 'Dr. Mises', Fechner defines himself as a 'player' or 'investor'. On the choice of the pseudonym 'Dr. Mises', Gundlach (1992) may be consulted.

Fechner's passion for irony remained alive, even after his depression and the blindness which assailed him in 1839; following these events, Fechner was obliged to interrupt his activity as a Physics professor, and Wilhelm Weber, Ernst Heinrich's brother, was called on to substitute him. Fechner had attended Weber's Physiology lectures at the University and had, as he himself remembers, obtained the 'correct conception of Science' (Heidelberger, 1993). Despite some improvement in his health, visual difficulties and migraines never left Fechner, who declared his own incapacity to return to the chair of Physics. Even though he maintained the title of Professor in this field, in 1846 he began to hold lectures on various subjects which spanned from Philosophy of nature through to

Anthropology, to the relationship between body and mind, to Psychophysics and Aesthetics. He began again to publish satirical essays and riddles (*Rätsel*), still with the pseudonym of 'Dr. Mises' (see Fechner, [1875]).

The life-long love which Fechner had for the *Rätsel* was well-known among scholars who were his contemporaries. This, for example, is shown by the presence of a *Rätsel* in the unpublished correspondence which he kept up with the German philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano (1838-1917) on various subjects, the main one being that of Psychophysics, from 1874 to 1878 and which was in two phases (May-July 1874; October 1877-January 1878) (see Antonelli & Zudini, 2010).

In the second phase of correspondence, there is space to digress from the scientific and indulge the playful as with the riddle (*Punschrätsel*) posed by Brentano to Fechner at New Year 1878 (31.12.1877) and conserved in Brentano's *Nachlass* at the Houghton University of Harvard (see also Gustav Theodor-Fechner-Gesellschaft, 2001, *Briefe: Franz Brentano an Fechner*). The *Punschrätsel* stands as witness, in Brentano's intentions, to the points of contact between him and Fechner, who under the pseudonym of 'Dr. Mises' had written a booklet of riddles similar to the ones which Brentano himself would have liked to publish for Christmas 1877 but instead published only two years later (see Brentano, 1879). Brentano was well-known at the time for his linguistic talent: From 1874, he was a professor at the University of Vienna where his lectures were attended not only by the most important figures of the time – from the philosopher Edmund Husserl to the future President of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, Thomas G. Masaryk, to Kasimir Twardowski, Alexius Meinong, Christian von Ehrenfels, Alois Höfler, Sigmund Freud, and Rudolf Steiner – but also by high society: He was in demand in the fashionable 'salons', where his poems were recited and the riddles, for which he was famous – and had invented – circulated: the *Dal-Dal-Rätsel*. Brentano, a defrocked Roman Catholic priest, had married the younger, cordial, pure and simple Ida von Lieben and, through this marriage, entered the circles of high finance, by now integrated into Christian society but which remained essentially Jewish (see Rossbacher, 2003). He was further known for his abilities in chess, which led him to publish essays on chess theory (Brentano, 1900, 1901, 1903).

### **Some remarks on Dr. Mises's *Räthselbüchlein***

The fourth edition of Dr. Mises's *Räthselbüchlein* contains a collection of riddles which had appeared in the *Gedichte* (1841), in many editions (of 1846, 1847, 1849, 1850) of the *Nieritz' Volkskalender*, in the *Brockhausische illustrierte Jugendzeitung* (of 1847 and 1848), in the *Die Gartenlaube* (1863) and in the *Daheimkalender* (of 1874 and 1875), with the addition of hitherto unpublished riddles. Of particular importance is the illustrated periodical *Die Gartenlaube*, which constitutes a precious source of information for the history of German culture. This periodical, which appeared for the first time in 1853, with a circulation of several hundred thousand copies and a readership of several million people, had a most varied run. It went from being a family periodical to a polemical radical newspaper in the early 1860's, maintaining its image as a newspaper for the common people. It was an effective witness of liberal ideas after the proclamation of the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope in 1870, during the *Kulturkampf*. It was a supporter of Jewish life in Germany, especially that of the family life to be taken as an example. Later on, it became part of the ideology favoured by the National Socialist Party.

In the preface to the *Räthselbüchlein*, the author mentions how the work first began as an enjoyable game; inactivity due to a long illness, the impossibility of dealing with more important commitments because of two eye operations and finally a sort of propensity

for riddles and tricks produced the material for this booklet. The aim of the author was that this booklet would be the means, for the reader, to pass happy, pleasant hours, more agreeable than those passed by the author himself in its preparation.

The first edition of the booklet, printed in 1850, held 140 riddles; the second edition, of 1858, contained 142 riddles, and the third edition, of 1865, 162 riddles. The fourth edition, which we are analysing, contains a further 41 riddles and is of a more elegant typographical aspect in order to satisfy the tastes of the public. The order of the riddles is determined by the length of the text (first the longest, then the shortest ones) and not by the content.

### **The Rätsel on 'Der Geist und die fünf Sinne'**

We present below the *Rätsel* 'Der Geist und die fünf Sinne', the only one dealing with a psychological-psychophysical theme (Fechner, [1875], no. 8, p. 20f.).

The *Rätsel* goes as follows:

*Ich weiß ein hohes, schönes Schloß,  
Drin wohnt ein mächtiger König,  
Der hat ein schnelles Flügelroß,  
Das kümmert die Weite wenig.*

*Bald braust es hin wie Wetterstrahl,  
Bald geht es langsam am Zügel;  
Fünf Thore führen zum Königssaal,  
Davon hat jedes zwei Flügel.*

*Durchs erste Thor bringt man hinein  
Dem König die köstlichsten Gaben,  
Was schön von Formen oder Schein,  
Das will der König haben.*

*Durchs zweite Thor ziehn ein ins Schloß  
Der Sänger und Spieler gar viele,  
Wenn ab der König stieg vom Roß,  
So freut er sich am Spiele.*

*Durchs dritte Thor hinaus man sieht  
In einen schönen Garten,  
Wo manche Blume duftend blüht,  
Dem König aufzuwarten.*

*Ein zweiter Garten ist noch nah,  
Wo süße Früchte hangen;  
Das vierte Thor ist dazu da,  
Daß sie ins Schloß gelangen.*

*Zehn Ritter stehn am fünften Thor,  
Je fünf auf jeder Seite,  
Die schickt der König oft hervor,*

*Bald friedlich, bald zum Streite.*

*Die Ritter zu der rechten Hand  
Sind tapfrer als die linken,  
Die werden meistens nur gesandt,  
Wenn jene etwa hinken.*

*Geöffnet sind den ganzen Tag  
Die Thore all' des Schlosses,  
Bis Abends müd' darnieder lag  
Der Herr des Flügelrosses.*

*Auflösung: Der Geist und die fünf Sinne.*

Translated into English, it goes as follows:

*I know a beautiful castle high up,  
Where a powerful king lives,  
Who has a fast, winged horse,  
Which fears no distance.*

*Now it darts like lightning,  
Now it walks slowly;  
Five entrances lead to the king's room,  
Each one has two doors.*

*Through the first entrance are carried  
The most delicious offerings to the king.  
All that is of beauty to behold,  
All this the king wishes to have.*

*Through the second entrance  
Many singers and actors enter the castle.  
The king alights from his horse,  
And delights in the performance.*

*Through the third entrance, there is a view  
Onto a beautiful garden,  
Where many scented flowers bloom  
To be offered to the king.*

*A second garden is also nearby,  
Where sweet fruit hung down;  
The fourth entrance serves  
To let it into the castle.*

*Ten knights stand at the fifth entrance,  
Five on each side.  
They are sent by the king*

*Now in times of peace, now in times of war.*

*The knights on the right  
Are more valorous than those on the left,  
They are sent only  
When the others limp.*

*All day are they open,  
All the castle entrances,  
Until evening, when he goes to sleep,  
The lord of the winged horse.*

*Solution: The mind and the five senses.*

That is, there is the head in which the mind/brain resides, which has the faculty of thought. Thought is able to be as fast as lightning but also slow. There are five ways to the mind, that is the senses. Five entrances, each with two doors, that is pairs of dedicated organs.

The first entrance, through which the mind is offered all that is beautiful to behold, is sight, with the two organs being the eyes. Into the castle, through the second entrance, that is hearing with the ears, come sounds and voices, for the mind's delight. The third entrance, that is the sense of smell, through the nostrils of the nose, admits smells and perfumes. The fourth entrance, that is taste, gives access to flavours. Finally, the fifth entrance; it is made up of 10 elements, the two hands, right and left, each with five fingers and represents touch. The right hand is used more because it is usually stronger and the left hand is only used in times of necessity, when the right hand deserts its duty. The five entrances remain open, that is in operation, until evening when the mind sinks below the level of consciousness.

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