

Second Chapter

Freedom: The Traditional Philosophical Approach

In the previous chapter, we have tried to explain the problem regarding human freedom to be dealt with. Philosophers have tried to solve the above in their own respective ways of thinking. More philosophers engaged them to the problem, more the problem became complicated. Neither can it be avoided because freedom is a key concept especially of moral philosophy. Sartre and existentialists find the attitude of the traditional philosophers towards the problem wrong. Our next task then is to preview the tradition regarding the philosophical approaches to human freedom.

Aristotle: For Aristotle actions are of three kinds,-

1. Voluntary (*ekousion*) acts. An act originated by the doer with the knowledge of the particular circumstances of the act.
2. Involuntary or unwilling (*akousion*) acts, which are the simplest cases where people do not praise or blame. In such cases person does not choose the wrong thing, for example if the wind carries the person off, or if a person has a wrong

understanding of the particular facts of a situation. Note that ignorance of what aims are good and bad, such as people of bad character always have, are not something people typically excuse as ignorance in this sense. “Acting on account of ignorance seems different from acting while being ignorant”.

Because ethics is a practical rather than a theoretical science, [Aristotle](#) also gave careful consideration to the aspects of human nature involved in acting and accepting [moral_responsibility](#). Moral evaluation of an action [presupposes](#) the attribution of responsibility to a human agent. But in certain circumstances, this attribution would not be appropriate. Responsible action must be undertaken [voluntarily](#), on Aristotle's view, and human actions are involuntary under two distinct conditions: ¹³

First, actions that are produced by some external force (or, perhaps, under an extreme duress from outside the agent) are taken involuntarily, and the agent is not responsible for them. Thus, if someone grabs my arm and uses it to strike a third person, I cannot reasonably be blamed (or praised) morally for what my arm has done.

Second, actions performed out of ignorance are also involuntary. Thus, if I swing my arm for exercise and strike the third party who (unbeknownst to me) is standing nearby, then again I cannot be held responsible for having struck that person.

Notice that the sort of ignorance Aristotle is willing to regard as exculpatory is always of lack of awareness of relevant particulars. Striking other people while claiming to be ignorant of the moral rule under which it is wrong to do so would not provide any excuse on his view.

As we'll soon see, decisions to act voluntarily rely upon deliberation about the choice among alternative actions that the individual could perform. During the deliberative process, individual actions are evaluated in light of the good, and the best among them is then chosen for implementation. Under these conditions, Aristotle supposed, moral actions are within our power to perform or avoid; hence, we can reasonably be held responsible for them and their consequences. Just as with health of the body, virtue of the soul is a habit that can be acquired (at least in part) as the result of our own choices.

3. "Non-voluntary" or "non willing" actions (*ouk ekousion*) which are bad actions done by choice, or more generally (as in the case of animals and children when desire or spirit causes an action) whenever "the source of the moving of the parts that are instrumental in such actions is in oneself" and anything "up to oneself either to do or not". However these actions are not taken because they are preferred in their own right, but rather because all options available are worse.

It is concerning this third class of actions that there is doubt about whether they should be praised or blamed or condoned in different cases.

Aristotle's concept of action especially that of voluntary, is very important in the history of moral philosophy. The concept of voluntary action is probably the first significant attempt to understand human action in connection with freedom of will. Aristotle did not use the term "freewill" but the concept is there in the name of "deliberate choice".

Deliberate choice (*proaireses*):- "seems to determine one's character more than one's actions do". Things on the spur of the moment and things done by animals and children can be willing, but driven by desire and spirit and not what we would normally call true choice. Choice is rational, and according to the understanding of Aristotle, choice can be in opposition to desire. Choice is also not wishing for things one does not believe can be achieved, such as immortality, but rather always concerning realistic aims. Choice is also not simply to do with opinion, because our choice makes us the type of person we are, and are not simply true or false. What distinguishes choice is that, before a choice is made there is a rational deliberation.

Although the virtues are habits of acting or dispositions to act in certain ways, [Aristotle](#) maintained that these habits are acquired by engaging in proper conduct on specific occasions and that doing so requires thinking about what one does in a specific way. Neither demonstrative knowledge of the sort employed in science nor aesthetic judgment of the sort applied in crafts are relevant to morality. The [understanding](#) (Gk. *Diánoia*) can only explore the nature of origins of things, on Aristotle's view, and [wisdom](#) (Gk. *Sophía*) can only trace the demonstrable connections among them.

But there is a distinctive mode of thinking that does provide adequately for morality, according to Aristotle: practical intelligence or [prudence](#) (Gk. *Phrónêsis*). This faculty alone comprehends the true character of individual and community welfare and applies its results to the guidance of human action. Acting rightly, then, involves coordinating our desires with correct thoughts about the correct goals or ends.

This is the function of deliberative reasoning: to consider each of the many actions that are within one's power to perform, considering the extent to which each of them would contribute to the achievement of the appropriate goal or end, making a deliberate choice to act in the way that best fits that end, and then voluntarily

engaging in the action itself.¹⁴ Although virtue is different from intelligence, then, the acquisition of virtue relies heavily upon the exercise of that intelligence.

Deliberation (*bouleusis*), at least for some people, does not include theoretical contemplation about universal and everlasting things, nor about things that might be far away, nor about things we can know precisely, such as letters. “We deliberate about things that are up to us and are matters of action” and concerning things where it is unclear how they will turn out. Deliberation is therefore not how we reason about ends we pursue, health for example, but how we think through the ways we can try to achieve them. Choice then is decided by both desire and deliberation.

Wishing (*boutesis*) is not deliberation. We cannot say that what people wish for is good by definition, and although we could say that what is wished for is always what appears good, this will still be very variable. Most importantly we could say that a serious (*spoudaios*) man will wish for what is truly most beautiful and most pleasant. People are most often misled by what they think is most pleasant.

Now it considers choice, willingness and deliberation in cases which exemplify not only virtue, but vice. Virtue and vice according to Aristotle are “up to us”. This means that although no one is willingly unhappy, vice by definition always

involves actions which were decided upon willingly. (As discussed earlier, vice comes from bad habits and aiming at the wrong things, not deliberately aiming to be unhappy). Lawmakers also work in this way, trying to encourage and discourage the right voluntary actions, but don't concern themselves with involuntary actions. They also tend not to be lenient to people for anything they could have chosen to avoid, such as being drunk or being ignorant of things easy to know, or even of having allowed themselves to develop bad habits and a bad character. Concerning this point, Aristotle asserts that even though people with a bad character may be ignorant and even seem unable to choose the right things, this condition stems from decisions which were originally voluntary, the same as poor health can develop from past choices; and 'while no one blames those who are ill formed by nature, people do censure those who are that way through lack of exercise and neglect'. The vices then, are voluntary just as the virtues are. He states that people would have to be unconscious not to realize the importance of allowing themselves to live badly, and he dismisses any idea that different people have different innate visions of what is good."¹⁵ Now we can say that, according to Aristotle virtue is a mean. It's a mean between two extremes one of which is an excess and the other a deficiency is the proper trait. The virtue of courage is 'golden-mean' between rashness and cowardice; the virtue of

truthfulness about one's talents between boastfulness and self-depreciation; the virtue of liberty between prodigality and miserliness. Virtue does not consist in the choice of the absolute mean, but of the mean relative to the individual's ability, temperament, and circumstances. Thus mean or virtue is not given, it has to be achieved. If one has to achieve something one must have freedom to do such. It is clear from Aristotle's account of ethics that moral life is not a settled life; morality is a matter of practice. Human being thus is looked upon as an agent in Aristotle's philosophy and without freedom agency is an incomplete idea.

Spinoza: We are accustomed to thinking of freedom involving lack of constraint. For Spinoza, such a state of affairs is not good or desirable since the unrestrained person can make up an enormous range of possible actions, some desirable, some not. Real freedom in Spinoza's sense is freedom from the possibility of erroneous action or behavior, that is, a really free human being would be completely determined to do or think the right thing. A really free human being would be free because his or her actions were determined by higher causes. Whether such a person was still being controlled by another forces would no longer matter.

Our mind's essence is a certain sequence of ideas in the infinite intellect: ideas of the same sequence of actions in motion and rest. When we regain some of those

ideas and cause the corresponding actions, we get back on track with our essence. Instead of acting according to what affect us, we act according to the order of the infinite intellect. This is what Spinoza means by “following the laws of your own nature, and this, for him, is freedom”.

Spinoza express this in the following way: “so long as we are not torn by affects contrary to our nature, we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect “. Provided that we are not completely overpowered by sad passions, we are capable of determining the order and the connection of our own bodily changes, according to the order of adequate ideas.

But this proposition seems to lead to a problem. Spinoza has just reminded us that all things in nature happen necessarily. Surely it cannot be that we freely *choose* how to order and connect our bodily affections, or that we are *responsible* for aligning our bodily affections with the order of adequate idea. If our actions are necessarily determined, how is it that we also have the potential to “order and connect “our activities? How do we reconcile Spinoza’s determinism with his claim for self-determination and his denial of free will with his affirmation of freedom?

Spinoza's is not saying that we freely choose how to order and connect the affections of the body. Our freedom does not consist in the ability to make free choices. But it is important to see that Spinoza's denial of free-will is not a denial that we make choices or cause-events. We choose to read the book and we caused the book to be picked up and opened. Spinoza does not deny any of this, but he does say that our choices and acts originate in our will, uncaused by anything else. There can be no acts that *originate absolutely* in the human will: rather, every act, every choice is necessarily determined by an infinite chain of causes. Since 'the will and the intellect are one and the same', our choices are not different from the other ideas we think. Choices are ideas determined by other ideas in the mind, with parallel actions determined by physical events in the body.

The fifth book of *Ethics* is entitled "Of Human Freedom". One of the more perplexing parts of Spinoza's account is his use of the notion of human freedom. We are accustomed to thinking of freedom involving lack of constraint. For Spinoza, such a state of affairs is not good or desirable since the unrestrained person can make up an enormous range of possible actions, some desirable, some not. Real freedom in Spinoza's sense is freedom from the possibility of erroneous action or behavior that is, a really free human being would be completely determined to do or think the right thing. A really free human being would be free

because his or her actions were determined by higher causes. Whether such a person was still being controlled by other forces would no longer matter.

A person becomes free first by understanding as fully as possible what causes human beings to behave as they do. The understanding may in some cases lead to an adoption of the different causal nexus as in the case of the people who stop smoking because of rational considerations. The person presumably first understands what it is that has produced the craving for nicotine, further realizes that addiction can be overcome by various physical and psychological activities. If one can then gear one's life to being caused by these anti-smoking activities, a change in behavior is possible. But this does not prove that human beings have any freedom and self-determination but through rational effort can alter the deterministic path.

Hume: Any discussion regarding the traditional view of free will is incomplete without a discussion of Hume's theory of free will. We consider Hume's view as "Traditional" only as a background to the existentialist concept of freedom. However, with respect to his philosophical ancestors, Hume is more a tradition breaker than a traditionalist. As a philosopher, Hume belongs to the empiricist tradition but within this tradition he is the most radical in rejecting some of the widely accepted metaphysical positions even by the empiricists. He is also

significantly different from his ancestors in holding neither determinism nor indeterminism with regard to freedom of will. He is a compatibilist in this regard.

There is a basic contrast between two alternative interpretations of Hume's compatibilist strategy: the "classical" and "naturalistic" interpretations. According to the classical account, Hume's effort to articulate the conditions of moral responsibility, and the way they relate to the free will problem, should be understood primarily in terms of his views about the *logic* of our *concepts* of 'liberty' and 'necessity'. Free and responsible action must be *caused by the agent*. There is, therefore, no *incompatibility* between free will and determinism. On the contrary, free and responsible action *requires* causal necessity. So interpreted, Hume's arguments involve observations about the logical relations that hold between the key concepts involved in this dispute. In contrast with this, the naturalistic approach maintains that what is essential to Hume's account of the nature and conditions of responsible conduct is his *description* of the role that *moral sentiment* plays in his sphere.

Lying at the heart of Hume's compatibilism are three conclusions that constitute the core of his compatibilist position on this subject generally understood:

1. Actions that are subject to moral evaluation are not distinguished from those that are not by an *absence* of cause. Responsible or morally free actions are

caused by our own willing, whereas non-free actions are brought about by causes external to the agent.

2. A liberty which means “a negation of necessity and causes” has no existence and would make morality impossible.
3. Necessity, properly understood, is the constant conjunction of objects and inference of the mind from one object to the other.

Hume’s key point is that free actions are those that are *caused by the agent’s willings and desires*. We hold an agent responsible because it was his desires or willings that were the determining causes of the action in question. Action caused in this way is voluntary and involuntary when caused in some other way. There is, therefore, no incompatibility between an action being causally necessitated and it being a free action for which the agent is responsible. On the contrary, morally free and responsible action *requires* that an agent caused his actions through his willing.

The spontaneity argument, as Hume presents it, is generally thought to contain the seeds of an essentially forward- looking and utilitarian account of moral responsibility. That is, Hume, following thinkers like Thomas Hobbes, points out that rewards and punishments serve to cause people to act in some ways and not in others and that this is clearly a matter of considerable social utility. Hume’s brief

remarks on this subject have been further developed by other compatibilists with whom Hume is often closely identified.

The account of Hume's compatibilist strategy provided so far has been almost entirely concerned with the significance of the liberty arguments. On this view of things, Hume's distinction between two kinds of 'liberty' is what is central to his overall strategy. If this is correct, then there is not much that is really new about his general approach, as the liberty arguments are familiar features of earlier compatibilist writings. Contrary to this view, however Hume makes clear in his *Abstract of the Treatise* that it is his views about "necessity" that puts "the whole controversy in a new light".¹⁶

This is establishing that people must make inferences in the moral realm are closely related. For people to live in society, they must be able to infer the actions of others from their character, and – in the opposite direction but parallel to this – for people to regard one another as responsible, they must be able to infer character from actions. Hume proceeds to demonstrate that we draw inferences concerning motives and actions even though "it may seem superfluous to prove" this.

When we examine Hume's effort to reinterpret the causal relation and explain its relevance to the free will dispute, it becomes apparent that there is a deep ambivalence in the classical compatibilist strategy in respect in this issue. That is,

the compatibilist, on the one hand, seems to argue that were we to remove “causal necessity” from the relation that holds between agent and action then we will thereby remove the basis on which attributions of responsibility are founded. In these circumstances there would be nothing to connect any agent with any action. On the other hand, compatibilists also argue that we must remove “metaphysical” necessity from our conception of the causal relation so as to rid it of all suggestion of compulsion and constraint. In this way, we find that the compatibilist strategy has sought to find an account of the causal relation that has to be “weak” enough to avoid implying compulsion and “strong” enough to connect agent and the action. The regularity theory of causation, evidently, is thought to allow the compatibilist to travel this middle path. However, it may be argued, against this view, that the regularity theory in fact constitutes something of an Achilles heel for the compatibilist position. That is, the regularity theory, we may argue, not only fails to strengthen the compatibilist position.

Kant: According to Kant if the will of man is not free, then morality is not possible, because in that case the will would be determined by something foreign to it and its imperatives would be hypothetical. To show that our “ethics based on reason” is more than a figment of the imagination; therefore, we must show that the will is free.

Since morality and autonomy, as we have just seen, are cognate or correlative concepts, we cannot use the *concept* of one to establish the *reality* of the other. Any argument that “we must be free because we are morally obligated”¹⁷ since “morally obligated” means “subject to a categorical imperative” and “free” means autonomous or “determined by no hypothetical imperative.”¹⁸

Kant is the most significant and widely discussed moral philosopher in philosophical history. Kant believed in limited Government and maximum freedom.

The *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant wants to systematize our moral intuitions in order to give us a method for deciding moral controversies. That is issues where our consciences or intuitions may disagree with other. Act according to that maxim that we can will as a universal law of nature.

Kant point out that the only unconditionally good thing in the world, as per our understanding, it is good will. Good fortune, health, happiness widely understood is not *unconditionally* good, because when married with a bad will they become a source of condemnation for an impartial spectator. We do not appreciated the evil man who achieves his goal and rides off into the sunset savoring his victory. We condemn him and want his plans are frustrated. Nothing, more serious than being happy is to be *worthy of happiness*, that is, to have a good will.

For Kant an important assumption necessary for moral responsibility. It is the idea that we give the moral law to our own wills. We can say for ourselves “this is the right thing to do, and so I will do it”. Seriously it is impossible for us to freely determine our own wills but it must be possible for us if we are to aware ourselves as morally responsible beings.

The moral law takes the form of categorical imperative. For Kant all particular moral laws can be summed up in a fundamental categorical imperative. For each individuals the equal freedom is perfectly consistent with the ultimate inequality in the degree of possessions. Categorical imperative focuses on the notion that human beings are special because they have the capacity for moral responsibility. For Kant this capacity gives each individuals a dignity. This means we must not trade off the legitimate rights and interests of any human being for anything else. We must not treat others as a means only to some other end, but always as ends in ourselves.

Most probably the other more frequently quoted form of the imperative is highly abstract. “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”¹⁹ On the other hand think about the principle or rule that justifies our actions, then chalked out whether it is

universalizable. If so, it is an acceptable principle or rule us to follow, if not it is not.

The understanding of individuals dignity implies that everybody have rights or we have an enforceable duty to respect the equal freedom or freedom of individuals. That's why we can't stirring on the freedom of one person to help one or many others. For example, it would be unfair to kill a healthy person to distribute his organs to several sick persons, even if doing so was necessary to save two or more lives. Every individual has dignity that must not be stirring, no matter what.

Therefore, Kant recognizes the law of equal freedom to persue happiness consistent with each individuals freedom.

For Kant the equal freedom is a civil state perfectly consistent with the ultimate inequality of the mass in the degree of its possessions, whether these take the form of physical or mental superiority over others.