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## Does Freedom Require Order?

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The apparent paradox of the relationships between free will and causality has tested the ingenuity of philosophers for ages. On the one hand, so one of the central arguments goes, if causality pertains to human life and actions, then our thoughts, feelings, and actions are determined by factors prior to and outside of our consciousness, and thus any sense of acting freely, of free choice, of being a free agent, is illusory. On the other hand, if we assume that no causality constrains our freedom to act as we choose, can our actions or choices have any effect on ourselves or the world, if there is no causality to connect our efforts to our desired consequences? And, if we need causality to make our actions efficacious, can we avoid the conclusion that we too are caught in matrix of causes that, once again, should make us doubt our own free will?

The handiest solution to this classic problem, advanced by some, perhaps slightly desperate philosophers, is to claim that the physical and natural world is enmeshed in a causal matrix, while human beings—whether because of having a soul, or being at a higher level of complexity—exist independent of this causality and thus enjoy free will, while at the same time being able to tap into the causality of the world to effect their desires. This latter argument strives, or so a cynic might say, to make philosophically respectable the all too human desire to have it both ways.

A sociological version of the free will question might be framed in terms of the relationship between personal freedom, or agency as we sometimes like to say, and social order. On the one hand, we have the individual and the at least conceptual possibility of freedom unrestrained by external influences. John Stuart Mill famously defined freedom as the ability to act without external interference. On the other hand, we have society, a social order, defined at least in good part normatively, i.e. specifying correct and incorrect thoughts and actions, and reinforced by sanctions, institutionalized rewards and punishments. On one side, we can imagine the free

individual acting without interference; on the other side, we can observe organized constraint channeling action according to established norms and rules.

The apparent opposition between the free individual and constraining society is reminiscent, however, of arguments about the relationships between free will and causality, and their seemingly awkward and confounding connections. This is how the parallel might appear: Individual freedom, as defined to me by a recent science graduate of a Spanish university, is doing anything that you want, a definition not far from John Stuart Mill's. But "doing" usually involves more than just impulsive actions; it also involves the consequences of the actions, presumably consequences desirable from the point of view of the actor. Let us try to think of some examples:

!Let us imagine that my young Spanish friend wishes to go out and hear some good music live, at a concert or night club. He not only wishes to go, but expects that the ticket or entrance fee that he paid will be honoured, and that the musicians will play the music they are expected to play. Then, when the music and post-concert festivities are over, he expects to be able to return home. He does not want to be robbed, beaten, enslaved, or killed in the course of his outing, although he probably does not give these possibilities much conscious thought.

!In fact, my young Spanish friend is more adventurous than is satisfied by concerts or even day trips, and goes in for international travel, specifically crewing on sailboats on international passages. Leaving his own country, he expects to be admitted to other countries, and to be treated by their authorities with respect as a legitimate traveler, and to be able to mingle happily with local people. He does not want to be blocked from entering other countries, to be incarcerated there, or to be refused exit when he wishes to leave.

!Now, I do not know this for sure, but I imagine that my friend expects eventually to return to Spain or perhaps another EU country and to take up a job commensurate with his scientific credentials, to receive a salary and eventually a pension, and to be able to invest in whatever type of property—a house, a car, a boat (all environmentally friendly, of course)—is required for his life, and perhaps for a family. He would certainly not expect to be regarded as unemployable, or to go without financial security, or to go without the basic (environmentally friendly) necessities of life.

Being free thus appears to mean more than "doing what I want"; it also means "getting the results that I want" and "not being victimized in the course of my

efforts.” Getting expected results and avoiding victimization requires that other people follow regular courses of action, respond in predictable ways, and respect one’s established rights, avoiding violating one’s rights. These “regular courses of actions” and “respect of rights” are matters of social order, which is the specification of proper behavior and sanctions to back up proper behavior.

That one expects that a purchased ticket will admit one to an event, and that the event will take place more or less as advertised, is based on a system—implicit or explicit, conventional or institutional—of contract law. If A buys a ticket, A must be admitted to the event to which the ticket pertains, and the event must take place, or else the seller of the ticket has broken the contract and is liable to some kind of negative sanction. Similarly, if one agrees to barter a basket of fish for a basket of fruit—recollections of Malinowski’s Trobriand islanders in *Crime and Custom in Savage Society*—and one takes the fruit without giving the fish, one has broken a contract, and is liable to negative sanctions, if only the withdrawal of further exchanges. But in fact, when the breaking of contracts becomes known publicly, one’s public reputation suffers, and many others than the cheated horticulturalist avoid transactions with the crooked fisherman.

International travel, whether by sailboat or otherwise, can give one a sense of freedom. Many sailboat cruisers, people who live on their boats and make long passages, have taken up this activity and way of life precisely in order to gain greater freedom. One cruiser I met, a middle-aged man sailing a large catamaran with his wife and children, told me that he was happy to leave the U.S. and go cruising, because he was fed up with endless restrictions, regulations, and laws, all taken, in his view, to absurd degrees of intrusiveness and control. He has just headed through the Panama Canal and is on his way to the South Pacific. Another cruiser, from inland America, ridicules North Americans who come to the islands of the Caribbean and complain that everything is not perfectly in conformity with North American norms. “In the islands, folks don’t care, so you can do as you like. A bit of inconvenience is a small price to pay for freedom.”

While it is true that (many) folks in the islands are more relaxed about visitors—their status, work, residence, environmental practices, etc.—than many North American government agencies, municipal, state, and federal, the “islands” no more tolerate “anything goes” than any other society. Nor would yachties or any other foreign visitors wish it so. In fact, each island society has its immigration, customs, residence, and work regulations and agencies, all regulated by law and rule, all policed by agencies. As well, there are elaborated judicial institutions, with criminal and civil codes, and enforcement agencies, directed toward island society as well as

visitors. The bureaucratic procedures which visitors must follow, as well as the regulations that require them, are not only controls and constraints, restricting freedom of visitors. They are also facilitating, providing legitimate statuses and thus rights and freedoms to visitors. Visitors can legitimately come and stay for a period; are free to move around in the society; may anchor, moor, dock, or haul out their boats; can purchase supplies and services; and may leave without hindrance if they have broken no laws. Furthermore, legitimate visitors are protected by civil and criminal law, giving them freedom to circulate and engage with others without fear of victimization. International visitors thus depend upon judicial structures of island societies to enjoy the freedom of entry, residence, circulation, and exchange in security. Beyond that, the existence of the society itself, for example the availability of stores with needed supplies, and commercial and professional offices with services, depends upon the judicial structures that allow and secure societal actors to go about their business. Visitors on a yacht, for example, do not want to arrive at a new island to be shot at, have pirates try to kill them and take their boat, or find no willingness on the island to receive visitors, or discover that no supplies or services are available. This is not the freedom that my young Spanish friend wants or expects, because without order, free action cannot bring the desired results.

Our need and desire for order extends well beyond our desires that our current free actions are efficacious. We want a reliable order to extend well into the future. All of our plans and preparations—for our education, career, material accumulation, family life, retirement—depend upon reliable responses through long periods of time from relevant others. We enter into university, not just to enjoy the immediate satisfaction of academic inquiry, but to win credentials that will serve us in the future in building a career, whether a post in an organization or a self directed enterprise. Our choice of academic training, of a specific career, presumes an ongoing need for those with our training, for societal demands and institutional places for us. Our material aspirations—for funds to support our lives, our families, houses, cars, boats, computers, books, travel, etc.—depend for fulfilment upon career development and economic institutions that can provide financial compensation for work. Retirement requires supporting funds from savings, pensions, and the like, all dependent upon economic institutions and government regulation over decades. “Freedom 55,” as one retirement plan advertises itself, requires long term planning and long term reliability in the institutions in which one invests.

When I said to my young Spanish friend that freedom requires order, that even uninhibited action unconstrained by others is useless unless there are reasonably reliable results of the action, and that reliable results require a relatively stable social

order, he balked. “I feel so hemmed in and oppressed by all this talk about order, about control,” he said. “I had in mind something like anarchy, in which you can do anything you want.” Aside from his total misunderstanding of anarchy, disappointing (if not entirely surprising) in a young Spanish graduate, my friend resisted going beyond his impulsive desire for the image of unimpeded action to a consideration of the order that he implicitly assumed and took for granted. But we must not.

If freedom requires order, and order requires constraint and control, wherein does freedom lie? Freedom resides in choice, in selecting among available alternatives, in making those choices freely. Negative cases are fairly obvious. Slaves must do as their master bids; soldiers and sailors must follow the orders of superior officers. Little in the way of choice is left to slaves and the lower ranks of the military. We would rightly say that they have little freedom. Their societies—societies with slavery, and militaries—are structured to insure obedience and preclude choice among the lower ranks.

In “traditional” societies, such as tribes, the social order provides many opportunities for choice in some spheres, while in others little choice is possible. For example, among the Yarahmadzai Baluch of southeastern Iran (Salzman 2000), the way in which people make a living is to a degree discretionary. Because of the climate and topography, most Yarahmadzai engage in pastoral nomadism, raising goats, sheep, and camels, as well as date palm horticulture, and small scale grain cultivation. In the past these tribesmen were predatory raiders, returning with foodstuffs, carpets and other valuables, livestock, and captives to be sold or used as slaves. With raiding suppressed by the Iranian government, the tribesmen currently supplement local production with migrant labor, trading, and smuggling. Both within and among these various fields of economic activity, the tribesmen face multiple and repeated choices: to emphasize goats, sheep, or camels, to cull some and not other animals, to breed some and not others, to migrate here and not there, to stay with one herding group or join another, to engage in date palm and/or grain cultivation, to pursue rainfall cultivation or irrigation cultivation, to seasonally or longer leave the tribal territory for migrant labour or trading or smuggling, to consume any surplus, or distribute it, or invest it, and so on. Yarahmadzai tribesmen spend much of their social time discussing the various options, both to clarify each person’s preference and to shape group consensus, for herding groups must also make decisions repeatedly, especially about migration. Individual tribesmen have considerable freedom in deciding among the various economic activities and strategies, and would not willingly give up their agency in these fields.

What is not discretionary among the Yarahmadzai, but is obligatory, is

membership in lineage groups that are mandated with responsibility for security, for defense and vengeance. Each Yarahmadzai is born into a lineage group and has responsibilities of solidarity with the other members of the group. In the group's collective responsibility, each member stands for the group and for each other member. Tribesmen are not free to choose one or another group; they are members of the group they were born into. Tribesmen cannot decide to represent the group or not; they represent the group whether they like it or not. Tribesmen may not withdraw their services and stand aside, or they risk being expelled and becoming a free target with no allies and no security. For the Yarahmadzai, the lineage system is a compulsory institution about which the individual has little say, little freedom. Of course, individuals can and do advocate among alternative policies and alternative courses of action for their group. They are free to speak and advise. But in the end they are obliged to follow the group consensus. And, above all, they may only act within the lineage framework.

Islam is also compulsory. No other options are offered, or would be acceptable. There is no concept of freedom of religion. In the case of the Yarahmadzai, Sunni Islam is mandated. All members of the tribe are expected to submit to Allah as specified by the Sunni tradition. Of course, there are some choices within this framework. Islam calls for certain practices, including the statement of submission, regular prayer, fasting during Ramadan, giving alms, and the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, and, some would add, fighting *jihad*, holy war against infidels. But the regularity of conformity is open to some considerable variation, as is any associated pious feeling, and individuals do choose various degrees of religious engagement. As well, some tribesmen commit more fully to Islam by going to study in religious schools, or sending their children to do so, by becoming a *mulla*, learned in Islam, or sending a child to become a *mulla*. As well, some tribesmen join Sufi brotherhoods, such as the Nakshbandi, to enhance their religious expression. But these freedoms are within the restricted framework of Sunni Islam, and it is not conceivable for a tribesman that there would be another option available. Of course, this is consistent with the established view in Islam that an apostate, someone who renounces Islam, must be punished by execution.

In sum, traditional societies—such as nomadic tribes, hunting bands, horticultural tribes—mandate many forms of behavior and belief, while allowing ranges of freedom in certain areas of activity. Membership in a traditional society requires the sharing of many common characteristics, as Durkheim long ago pointed out in *The Division of Labor in Society*. He argued that the “mechanical solidarity” of these societies was based on similarity. The basing of solidarity on similarity of

course restricts choice and thus freedom. Durkheim contrasts traditional societies with modern societies—Western European societies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century—arguing that they are bound together by contractual agreement, which allow transactions among those divided by specialization and division of labour, this form of solidarity being called “organic solidarity.” Such societies provide a wide range of freedom, for discretionary contractual agreements require voluntary decisions by the contractors who presumably consider all available or at least known options. Furthermore, the division of labor and specialization provide alternative occupations and professions, which become potential choices for citizens. In such a society, the ranges of acceptable behavior and belief are considerably wider than in traditional society, with freedom of religion, of political ideology, education, residence, dress, association, speech, and so on, greater and tending to increased tolerance and diversity. Attempts to impose uniformity upon modern, complex societies—as in the cases of fascist Spain and Italy, Nazi Germany, and communist U.S.S.R.—have failed, although after imposing monstrous human cost.

Freedom, it appears, is not something that the individual can “have”; rather, it is something that the social order confers. On the one hand, the existence of social order, and preferably orderly continuity, is necessary to make any free decision efficacious and therefore meaningful. On the other hand, it is the particular structure of society that encourages or discourages ranges of choice and thus freedom for the individual. Freedom of choice requires alternatives, and therefore complex societies characterized by multiplicity are most likely to exhibit freedom for individuals. What we rather cavalierly call “lifestyles” are distinct patterns resulting from series of free choices among many alternatives by individuals.

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