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Freedom as an Intellectual Problem

THE TASK

The Bible records the career of the tribes of Israel as they forged a society based on the worship of a divine moral lawgiver, a God who identified both himself and Israel through a covenant of obedience. So successful was this career that the Kingdom was established, the Temple built, and the people settled in a homeland. This, as we know, was the undoing of the moral covenant, the adulteration of the religion, and the beginning of the end of the national state. But in the time of crisis the Deuteronomic editor set down the foundations of the moral law and religion in a classic way. He preserved the ideals that made Israel's unsurpassed contribution to civilization. Pity Babylon and Nineveh, who had no Deuteronomy!

The moment inevitably comes, it seems, when the ideals guiding the career of a given culture succeed so well in taking root that they undermine the social organization that developed them. The changes taking place as new cultural forms replace old ones constitute a crisis, Will the values inherent in the old ideals come to fruit in the new forms? Or will the changes destroy any possibility of incorporating the old values?

One of the most decisive factors in the time of transitional crisis is the role of intellectuals like the Deuternomists. Those who discipline their love for the breadth and depth of wisdom can articulate abstractly and succinctly what is worthwhile in the passing culture and what may be done to reincarnate it in the coming one. This is the intellectuals' conservative function. Beyond this, they can imagine and articulate, again abstractly and succinctly, the new possibilities opened by the social changes. The values of the old culture should be carried along in some form

to enrich the new values; a crisis that fails and comes to chaos has fewer, not more, possibilities for cultural life.

In both its conservative and imaginative function intellect must work *abstractly* and *succinctly*. Abstractly, because it must hit upon the important, leaving aside the trivial that can be changed harmlessly. Succinctly, because its insights must be communicable to all stations in social change where intelligence might be employed. There are many kinds of intellectual abstraction and succinctness—poetic, philosophic, religious, scientific. Where the intellectual community succeeds in this task the crisis stands a better chance of enriching rather than impoverishing human experience.

Our own time is a crisis, marked by revolution and violence, by a strange inappropriateness of all ideologies, by sudden shifts in power from centers of Western civilization to places untouched by the West a few years ago. These signs only mark the crisis. But this point is unexceptional—and it constitutes the problem for this study—that the promise of full freedom to participate in society and in the world's wealth has been heard by nearly everyone. And everyone is demanding the freedom. More pointedly, the freedom to participate is being demanded by peoples whose cultures have not been part of the civilization that developed the ideal of freedom. Some participated in other cultures; others were *in* Western societies but were deprived of the power to *participate* in them. In either case they are not able to take up freedom according to the organized social forms of participation. It seems they can take it up only by revolution of one sort or another.

The freedom of participation demanded throughout the world is the fruit of Western civilization. It derives from Israel and Greece, from the Christian middle ages, from the development of European and American democracy and sense of social responsibility, and most of all from the consummate and peculiarly Western combination of hope and technique. Our crisis is whether the social forms of the various societies of the world, both within and without the civilization of the West, can be changed to fulfill the promise the West has put forth, or whether the violence of revolution will lead to such chaos that freedom anywhere is only a pipedream.

Understanding freedom is at the center of the present crisis.

As an intellectual topic it is profitably approached through many disciplines, especially through the physical and social sciences, through art, literature, law, politics, religion, and philosophy. There is a special advantage to the approach through philosophy, however. Since the crisis forces the question of freedom to be asked radically, the disciplines asking it are forced back to their own roots, to their philosophical foundations. No approach to freedom can escape at least a quasi-philosophical form, and in this sense a philosophical questioning of freedom is the most direct approach. Only religion and art equal philosophy's direct and concrete touch.

Freedom has a history as a philosophical problem. When bondage was associated with the dominance of imitation on decision-making, as it seemed to Plato, freedom was associated with educated and intelligent judgment. When bondage was associated with personal will, as it was in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, freedom was law.¹ For quite different experiential motives, having to do with fear of political anarchy, Hobbes also appealed to law as the guarantor of freedom.² To Rousseau, on the other hand, the very network of legalized convention that had provided the experiential ground of freedom in the middle ages seemed the source of bondage, and he took freedom to be freedom from the artificial.³ In times of pressure freedom has seemed to be the assertion of a strong will against obstacles. When science has made men feel subject to blind but knowable forces, freedom has seemed to be a disengagement from the natural order. When disengagement from nature and society has seemed to bind men into meaningless isolation, freedom has been construed as commitment. Of course, the development of philosophical theories has exercised a causal role in the construction of these larger experiential situations. But the philosophical concept of freedom has been directly responsive to the changes in experience.

This means two things for the philosophical study of freedom. First, it means that freedom must be studied with an eye to con-

1. See R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 107-08.

2. See Hobbes's *Leviathan* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1950), pt. 2, chap. 21, p. 179.

3. See, e.g., Rousseau's *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1911), bk. 1.

crete experiential conditions. The study must be sensitive to literature, the arts, history, social studies, and other areas of reflection dealing with concrete experience. It will have its dialectical aspects as well, to be sure. But there is a necessary inelegance to the study of freedom resulting from the need to appeal to deliverances of experience that have not previously been formed by philosophical discipline.

Second, an adequate study of the concept of freedom must pull together seemingly unconnected strands of the concept's history. What relation is there, for instance, between freedom from jail and freedom from necessitation by antecedent causes? One way of unifying the most diverse historical strands is to do so historically, that is, to tell the story that includes them all. Philosophy's task, however, is to provide a normative concept; it aims to say how freedom *ought* to be conceived if we are to grasp reality well. It must show how the various strands of freedom *ought* to fit together, which is a different kind of fit from a historical one. History enters for the understanding of the various strands of freedom, but it does not dictate the way to unite them in an adequate concept that can articulate and guide culture.

THE HYPOTHESIS

There are *personal* and *social* as well as *religious* dimensions of freedom. At a level of subdivision, there are many dimensions of personal freedom, many of social freedom, and at least two of religious freedom. A "dimension of freedom" is any aspect of human life that can in its own right be called a matter of freedom, or a definition of it.

The dimensions of personal, social, and religious freedom cannot be reduced to one another. No one completely includes the others as proper parts of itself, and none is superior to the others except in ways defined from its own purview. Nor is there a formula integrating all the dimensions together into one unified sense of freedom. What unity there is comes from the concrete unity of the human life or social history.

Personal freedom has to do with the structures or capacities or ways of life that can be considered in relative abstraction from the person's social and religious context. Social freedom has to do with the dimensions of freedom individuals have particularly because

they participate in social groups. Religious freedom has to do with the experience of transcending the ordinary world of experience and returning to it without being bound by it; this experience is religious insofar as it is possible because of some particular connection with God.⁴

Of course, the person is not in fact abstracted from society, and all the dimensions of personal freedom themselves have social dimensions. For instance, freedom of choice is a personal dimension insofar as it is a matter of the determination of the individual will; but the choices open are usually socially structured, and a person learns to choose well, perceptively, and steadfastly through his social interactions. Likewise, a social dimension of freedom, for instance the freedom to appropriate a heritage, involves personal dimensions, in this case the choice involved in appropriation.

The dimensions of personal freedom articulate what it is to be autonomous. The philosophical traditions influenced by epistemological and moral problems usually identify freedom as such with self-determination or autonomy. The dimensions of social freedom emphasize participation in or access to the institutions and organizations of social interaction particularly important for human life. Some political philosophers, most social scientists, and nearly all liberal social leaders, especially activists, interpret freedom in terms of participation.

Autonomy and *participation* are concepts each of which indicates an approach to characterizing the heart of human life. *Autonomy* defines people in terms of their individuality. *Participation* defines them in terms of their interrelations and achievement of humanity through society. *Personal freedom* will be interpreted in Part 2 in terms of four basic dimensions of freedom: external liberty, freedom of intentional action, freedom of choice, and creativity. The main problems involved with each dimension can be spelled out in introductory fashion here.

External liberty, roughly speaking, is the freedom from restraints of all sorts and, according to Thomas Hobbes, is the paradigm of freedom:

4. The dimensions of religious freedom will not be treated in this book. For treatments systematically connected with the approach here, see Robert C. Neville, *God the Creator* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) and *Spiritual Liberation* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

By liberty, is understood, according to the proper signification of the word, the absence of externall Impediments: which Impediments, may oft take away part of a mans power to do what hee would; but cannot hinder him from using the power left him, according as his judgment, and reason shall dictate to him.⁵

Although external liberties can be considered apart from the character of the people possessing them, considered apart they are not ultimately interesting. The liberties must be prized in some way. Furthermore, the distinction between the external and the internal is more subtle than Hobbes thought necessary to take into account. There is a sense in which the external environment through which a person uses his power freely is not as external as the environment that restrains him. This calls for a consideration of more internal factors and raises the general question of how what is internal to individuals and what is external ought to be distinguished.

The second dimension, more internal than external liberty, is a person's freedom of intentional action, his freedom to do that toward which he most inclines, "a mans power to do what hee would," in Hobbes's words.⁶ Concerning freedom of intentional action, an account must be given both of action beyond the person and of the initiation of the action.

Someone is sometimes said to be unfree if he cannot act in the world because the world is so controlled by causal laws that his intentions cannot interrupt, modify, or get expressed in deeds. The difficulty would be that freedom makes no sense because the course of nature is determined without regard for the influences of people's intentions. Assuming the difficulty, if a person thinks he can do something involving the causal processes of nature, he is deceived. This kind of restraint differs from the restraint of external liberty in that it involves the very connection of the intentions, inclinations, and powers of the will with the external world. The problem here is not that the external world impedes certain

5. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pt. 1, chap. 14, p. 106; see also pt. 2, chap. 21, p. 177, "Liberty, or Freedom, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition" and "A Free-Man, is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to doe what he has a will to."

6. *Ibid.*, p. 106; but see Hobbes's own definition of power, pt. 1, chap. 10, pp. 69ff.

actions, nor is it that a person is restrained from willing or choosing; rather it is that he is restrained from translating his intentions into actions. If a person is to be free in this sense, then an account must be given and justified of genuine human agency in the natural and social world.

Many thinkers maintain that freedom of intentional action is all that can ever be intended intelligibly when speaking of the will's freedom.⁷ But the further question can be raised whether a person has the further freedom of choosing what to intend, want, or incline toward. Now if there is the further freedom of choosing, it would seem we are involved in an infinite regress, as Jonathan Edwards pointed out.⁸ The only reason a person would incline toward one alternative rather than another is some prior inclination toward it; and that prior inclination, if freely chosen, would be so chosen only by yet a prior inclination, and so on. To avoid this regress it would seem that if there is this further freedom of determining intentions, it must be freedom in a different sense from the freedom of intentional action.

The third dimension to be distinguished, then, is the freedom to choose between alternatives, a dimension clearly different from the freedom to do *in concreto* what one intends. The third dimension is considerably harder to defend than the second, however, and just because of what is involved in the justification of that second kind. To show that a willing agent can be able to do what he wills, it is necessary for him to be a natural agent of some sort. But if he is a natural agent, is he not determined in his intentions by the causal laws that govern the natural world? Jonathan Edwards claimed that a person's free will consists solely in his ability to do what he is inclined toward and, asserting that every happening must have a sufficient cause, denied that the person has any further freedom of choosing the inclination.⁹ Kant, on the other hand, insisted on a person's freedom in determining what is to be

7. Jonathan Edwards said, in *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 164, "But one thing more I would observe concerning what is vulgarly called liberty; namely, that power for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice, is all that is meant by it. . . . Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, then man is fully and perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom."

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 171-74.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-89.

willed and, agreeing that every event in the natural world has a sufficient cause, excepted the will from that world; he gave up the freedom Edwards insisted on and limited intention to the ideal realm of types.¹⁰ Is there a way of having both sides?

Libertarians often have thought that by denying the doctrine common to Edwards and Kant, namely that the natural world is wholly conditioned by causes, it would be possible to hold both dimensions of freedom.¹¹ One of the reasons it seems imperative to hold to both, however, is that both are essential to account for a person's responsibility for his actions. Without the freedom of intentional action a person would have no actions for which he could be held responsible, and to hold him responsible only for motives seems *prima facie* to be a reduction unreasonable to our moral experience. On the other hand, without the freedom to choose the alternatives willed, a person could be held no more responsible for what he did than the series of causes that gave his will its inclination, causes as far reaching as the whole society.

Yet to deny the complete conditioning of the natural world by causes, to say that the process of events is indeterminate to a degree, seems on its own account to run afoul of responsibility. A person must be the cause of his actions if he is to be held responsible, and he is not responsible for what happens adventitiously. Yet if the causal chain is so indeterminate that the person escapes the conditions prior to him, it seems to be so indeterminate that he is no longer the condition of his actions. If he *is* conditioned, on the other hand, the conditions are responsible and the person is not. So it would seem that simply to deny the determinateness of the process of events is not sufficient to save both intentional action and freedom of choice.

To have both kinds of freedom together involves a more extensive reinterpretation of the causal process of nature than the relatively simple assertion of indeterminateness. A person can employ natural laws to accomplish his ends, but he must have the power of determining which laws of nature will be given occasion to operate in a situation where alternatives are presented. If this

10. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1956), pp. 70-74.

11. See, e.g., the views of Austin Farrer in his *Freedom of the Will*, Gifford Lectures, 1957 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

distinction between the causal processes of nature and the causal power natural to the self to interrupt and modify the external process is allowed, then the indeterminateness of the natural process must also be acknowledged. But the indeterminateness is required here, not to cut a person off from prior conditioning, but rather to allow an opening in the environment into which he can insert the causal sequences that fulfill his intentions.

The distinction between the causation of nature and that of the will makes room for the two kinds of freedom in question. But it does not of itself give an account of how a person goes about deciding between alternatives. It shows only how, if he can choose between alternatives, he can make that choice bear upon what he does in the world. How does a person determine his will or intentions with respect to alternatives? If there is indeterminateness within the deciding process, then the determination may be adventitious. Or the determination may be made by prior inclination, as Edwards maintained. In the former case, a person could be said to be free in his determination of choices, but he would be irresponsible. In the latter case, even if the distinction between the two kinds of causation were to be allowed, the person could not be said to be free in his choice of what to work out in the natural course of events. A third alternative is that a person chooses by adopting a *potential* intention as his own actual one. Making a choice is not just a matter of being a cause that determines an effect to happen but is the adoption of a reason for acting this way rather than that way as one's own reason. In this sense it is a free constitution by the agent of his own moral or intentional nature. Arbitrarily to establish a usage of words, we can say that a free *choice* between alternatives stems from a free *decision* as to what moral reasons one identifies with, a free decision regarding what one's own intentions are to be.

A free agent is one making free choices and acting with intentional freedom in the ways chosen. Over and above being a free agent, however, is the matter of acting well, being a good agent. A good agent is skilled and disciplined to make choices for good reasons. To be able to determine what are good reasons for acting, a person must be sufficiently free from his past and from convention so as to be sensitive to what may uniquely be appropriate. He must, in other words, have a capacity to be creative in

determining what the best alternative is in each new situation. Without creativity, moral process can be only reiteration of standards that gradually lose their value as the conditions they originally measured well erode away. Moral process is either progress or retrogression, and only creativity can generally bring about the former.

Creativity is the fourth dimension of freedom. Not only is it a freedom from the bondage of the past, it is freedom from the alien character of the world. The more a generally creative person works with his environment, the less alien it is to him in each instance. The longer he works, the less likely will he be to find something he has not already influenced before. There are limits to this. A person cannot fully domesticate another person's subjectivity, especially the person's creativity: that is private. Furthermore, even the most creative person will influence things mainly in the proximate environment, and the vast reaches of the universe are beyond his significant power. The alien forces of the universe will get him in the end. But the degree to which a person can be autonomous in the universe depends on his creativity.

Social freedom will be interpreted in Part 3 in terms of four dimensions roughly parallel to those of personal freedom. The first is that of *freedom of opportunity*. Opportunities are viewed here, not as cosmological possibilities for individuals, but as possibilities both valued by the individual and sustained by the structure of society. How is it that certain opportunities come to be valued as matters of social freedom? In one way or another, it must be because the society itself conveys their value to individuals in culture. Understanding freedom of opportunity, therefore, requires a discussion of social values and their relation to other values a person might have.

For an opportunity to be viewed as a matter of social freedom, it must be one that somebody believes important enough to be sustained by the resources of the society as such. If this belief is generally shared through the society, the opportunity can be called a *right* the society should guarantee its citizens. The importance of the social guarantee is that the control of social resources becomes itself an issue, appearing in the other dimensions of social freedom.

What are the basic kinds of opportunities prized as social freedoms? The cosmological model developed in earlier parts of the book will suggest that a person's fundamental relations to the environment is one of receiving and giving. In terms of social rights, this means a right to profit from the environment, and a right to express one's intentions in it. The opportunities therefore can be divided into those of culture and those of participation in organized society.

The opportunities of culture have to do with opportunities for taking up cultural resources as components of one's own experience. This means both that the resources must be available and that the person must be able to appropriate them, an ability arising from experience. The three most important opportunities of culture appear to be (1) the freedom to have an historical heritage, identifying with a civilization-building group; (2) the freedom to enjoy a high culture, bringing the values of civilization and cultured life into personal experience; and (3) the freedom to use one's cultural experience in the concrete interactions of a society. These three add up to the freedom to have a culturally rich identity informing one's social participation.

The freedom to participate in organized society involves opportunities for acting. The most important opportunities appear to be again of three sorts: the freedom to participate in social media, including economic and educational media (without these a person has no power); the freedom to organize for cooperative pursuit of common goals; and the freedom to participate in organized society with a life style unique to oneself, expressing one's heritage, culture, particular stations, and personal choices.

The freedoms of opportunity find their integrating expression in the ideal of a free historical agent, one who is sufficiently in control of historical forces so as to make his personal choices historically efficacious. The possibility of a free historical agent, however, supposes that society does indeed offer live options of how to live—in other words, alternative social forms.

This points to the second dimension of social freedom, *social pluralism*. Without a pluralism of social forms, the freedom of opportunities could be limited to a consistent, totalitarian few, and people could be conditioned to prize them; this is something of the ideal of B. F. Skinner. Without genuine options between

social forms, there is no such thing as freedom of choice on the social level. The problem here, however, has to do not with the mechanism of choice but with distinguishing private choosing from public limitations. The main concept to be analyzed in this respect is the distinction between the public and the private. The hypothesis is that the public has to do with concerns for sustaining an environment for prized kinds of creativity, and the private has to do with concerns for the creativity itself. Social pluralism entails a public guarantee of a plurality of social forms. It also entails a right to privacy and integrity.

How can a person live in a society with many options for social forms without losing his integrity? Does not the unity of life come from consistency of the social patterns in which one lives? The discussion of personal freedom of course suggests that the integrity of life comes from styles of choosing, and indeed this is the third dimension of social freedom, *freedom of integral social life*. The question to be asked here is what kind of experiential style is appropriate for living in a pluralistic situation, so that one is not in bondage to social fragmentation. This raises the prior question, on the cosmological level, of how a person's choosing can be related to his social environment. The experiential style hypothesized has to do with characteristic ways of relating perceptions, thoughts, and actions.

If the environment provides opportunities and options, and the person has an integral social style, how is the social order itself structured? How does change take place in society that reflects the other dimensions of freedom? The answer defended in the hypothesis is *participatory democracy*, the fourth dimension of freedom. A participatory democracy is a social order in which persons influence the conditions under which decisions are made to the extent they are potentially affected by the decisions. Understanding this requires an interpretation of relevance to decision-making, power, authority, and publicity. The concept of participatory democracy is an ideal making demands on all the other dimensions of freedom, but fulfilling them all. So runs our hypothesis.

As philosophers have long known, what one says directly about personal and social freedom is not half as controversial as the categories one selects to set up the problem in the first place. The hypothesis formulated and developed in this book is perhaps

idiosyncratic in its use of cosmology. But it gives a fairly typical American account of social values, in the tradition of Edwards, Emerson, and Dewey; its methodology of social analysis reflects this tradition too. The greatest impact on social thinking in recent years, however, has been that of John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*. Rawls's strategy, stated briefly, is to attempt to formulate social values from a position that brackets out special perceptions and interests. He believes that justice should be defined in its root sense from a nonhistorical perspective, the "original position." The prima facie sense of "equality," so important for the concept of "justice," requires a nonhistorical perspective. The hypothesis regarding freedom put forward in the present book, however, takes just the opposite view. Social values, including justice and freedom, can be appreciated only from concrete historical perspectives. The practical problem is not to abstract from special interests to a position of minimal equality but rather to broaden one's special perspective to include the breadth of the human tradition. The problem is parochial bias, not historically conditioned bias. Although there are many advantages of logical clarity to Professor Rawls's approach, it neglects the very important contribution of the American tradition of social thought and as a result separates social ideals like justice from the push of concrete affairs, perpetuating the unfortunate dichotomy of norms from facts.

A final point must be made about the neglect of religious freedom in the formulation of the hypothesis. For many people, of course, it is the most important kind of freedom, and it certainly has a cosmological character to be investigated. Essential to religious freedom, however, is the fact that it stems from a person's connections with the foundations of existence, the divine, God. Those ultimate foundations are not part of the cosmology to be discussed in this book. Nevertheless, all the other kinds of personal and social freedom also have connections with the foundations of existence. And because this book prescind from those connections there will undoubtedly be a feeling of flatness about the discussions of personal and social freedom. For instance, the discussion of intentional action will treat intention as a kind of causality but will ignore the deep existential problem of making an act of will, of pulling oneself together to "will one thing" in

Kierkegaard's phrase, or to act "possessed of the self" and "without regard for the fruits," as the *Bhagavadgita* puts it. Yet again, the character of creative invention and judgment is discussed, but without treatment of the sense in which one's creativity is at root the action of the elemental powers of the universe. In these and many other ways, the problem of existential freedom in its most poignant depths is a religious or spiritual problem, resting on the connection of cosmological entities with their ground. In other words, the cosmology of freedom is somewhat superficial compared with the ontology of freedom. But the cosmology must come first if the ontology is not to be empty; and it is deep enough for most practical interests.

Freedom is better than bondage, in all the respective dimensions. This fact can be noted in the relentless demands of people for freedom in all guises. But it can be *understood* only in terms of a theory of value. There are several reasons why a theory of value must be developed to defend the hypothesis about freedom, but the most concrete is to show why freedom is good. The answer will be that freedom introduces an intensity of contrast lacking in the bondage appropriate in every dimension.

ABSTRACTIONS

It might be argued that the hypothesis as briefly stated already reveals a fundamental confusion. Some of the elements of freedom and the topics to be discussed in their regard are concrete and practical: the problems of external liberty and social participation are clear examples. Others are abstract and theoretical, problems of philosophers, not of men, as Dewey would say: an example is the choice between alternatives, involving the determinism controversy. This confusion is an instance of the attempt to give philosophy a positive subject matter by intertwining abstract (and empty) problems with concrete, experiential, and positive ones better handled by practical persons, not philosophers. A true philosopher's job, according to this objection, is to show that the abstract problems rest on category mistakes so that people's creative attention is focused on the real practical ones; this is especially true of the problems of freedom.

The answer to this problem is that the really practical prob-

lems include the abstract ones. Granted there is a distinction between problems of adequate conceptualization and those of concrete experience, where the latter involve direct action and brute forces, it is not obvious that only the latter are of practical import. Quite the contrary. In the first place, the way people understand things is important for how they deal with them. This is more true for freedom, close as it is to a person's own identity, than it might be for clearly concrete but impersonal things like rocks and trees.

In the second place, the distinction between the abstract and the concrete is not clear, and it is dubious that freedom is all on the concrete side. Suppose it be said that the concrete is particular and the abstract universal—the view of many nominalists. Then freedom is mainly abstract: even “particular” external liberties are not really particulars; they are general opportunities to do particular acts. Suppose that the concrete is said to be the direct content of consciousness and that the abstract is the classification of the contents—the view of William James.¹² Surely the deliberation about alternatives is abstract then. No matter how the distinction is drawn, the original point still holds; that is, a most practical part of freedom is a person's understanding of himself as free.

“Experience” is not a contrast term to “abstraction.” Rather it includes both the abstract and the concrete. But supposing experience does include both the concrete and the abstract, it may still be objected that the hypothesis just mixes the two in a hodge-podge. If there is any distinction between the abstract and the concrete it is incumbent on an adequate account of freedom to make out the distinction and sort the issues accordingly. This criticism is well taken. But the actual sorting of the issues of freedom is so complex it can be done only in the detailed development and defense of the hypothesis, not in an introduction. As to the more general problem of distinguishing the abstract from the concrete, a brief word is in order.

An abstraction is best conceived as a simplification. It is abstract because it leaves out elements of what it simplifies. As there

12. See James's *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), chaps. 4-6.

are different ways of simplifying a subject, there are different abstractions of it; as there are degrees of simplification, there are degrees of abstraction.

One might object that this characterization misses the essential point, namely that an abstraction is a mental entity and that at least some things simplified by abstractions are real and non-mental.

On the contrary, to conceive an abstraction as a simplification does render that distinction. Suppose, as will be argued below, that mental activity is the process of simplifying the given. In contrast with this a physical activity is the process of rearranging the given elements in different, perhaps novel patterns. More is involved in the process of simplification than mere simplification; in people at least that process is intentionally directed and self-critical. Human activity, if this suggestion is true, must be conceived in terms of both processes, mental and physical. While the physical activity of a person may be analyzed merely in terms of rearrangement and his thought merely in terms of sign-making, to understand the activity as human it must be shown how the physical rearrangement of elements is directed by the process of simplifying sign-making. As to the distinction between the mental and the real, both physical objects and simplifications are real, each in its own way, and both can be simplified when involved in a mental process.

Abstractions are better or worse simplifications. In more practical terms, things may be conceived in a variety of ways, but some ways are better than others. This means there are norms applicable to the process of abstraction. An abstraction is better if it leaves out the trivial and highlights the important. This seems an unexceptional thing to say, but several crucial things follow from it.

First, if an abstraction (for our purposes an abstract conception) is good or bad according to how it distinguishes the trivial from the important in what it simplifies, then the distinction is intrinsic to whatever can be conceived as well as to the conceptions themselves. It is often said that a conception is good if it represents what its object is, and bad to the degree that it represents the object as being other than it is; this view focuses on the mental repetition of structure. But if abstractions are simplifica-

tions, then the structural repetition view is misleading. A simplification *always* is less than what it simplifies, since it leaves elements out. But it is *good* to simplify if what is left out is trivial and what is highlighted is important, a distinction confused in the unsimplified subject.

The second consequence of the claim that abstractions are good if they sort the important from the trivial is that we must ask, Important for what? The only recent school of philosophy to recognize the primacy of normative elements in conception is pragmatism, and at least some pragmatists have answered, Purpose. Things may be conceived in different ways for different purposes. An element is important enough to be retained in an abstract conception if it must be acknowledged in order for the purpose to be fulfilled, and an element is trivial if it can be ignored. According to some kinds of pragmatism, an element that can be ignored for all purposes whatsoever is unreal, merely imagined to exist.

The pragmatic answer is limited, however. In the long run, what is important in the world determines what people's purpose *should* be. Moral questions have the form, Given such and such important conditions, what should be done? Some pragmatists have a tendency to think that the setting of purposes is an arbitrary matter. In small and partial elements of life, it is indeed often arbitrary. But in the large matters people insist that their purposes be good ones. Given a life with friends to enjoy, fulfilling work to do, and an environment to enhance, how should people live? One answers that question according to the apparent real importance of the various conditions.

This suggests that in the long run importance is determined, not by a purpose external to the thing with important and trivial elements, but by some character of the relations of those elements themselves. Here is another way of saying that values are intrinsic to things. Suppose the ranking of importance and triviality in a complex of elements is a function of the relations of elements. Then, to conceive a thing well abstractly is to simplify it by highlighting the particular function of the relation of the elements. This allows for abstract knowledge of objects apart from the knower's specific purposes. *In the long run the best theory is the way things ought to be conceived in order to be dealt with accord-*

ing to their real importance, and the best purposes are those reflecting the theories most adequately simplifying what is important.

Since this interpretation of abstraction depends on unusual metaphysical views, it can be attacked through its metaphysics in many ways; and in those ways it can be defended only through its metaphysics. Those important objections will be dealt with in the defense of the metaphysical position in the next few chapters. But there are two direct attacks that can be dealt with briefly here.

Everyone knows, the objection goes, that there is a crucial distinction between facts and values, and therefore we must be able to conceive the one without the other in some sense. In fact, we can prescind from all questions of value and deal only with the cognitive problems of facts, as the scientists do. Since scientists employ abstractions, abstractions cannot intrinsically be involved with value notions like importance.

The difficulty with this attack is that it is contrary to experience. In experience people rarely deal with things only as facts, but rather as objects of various sorts of interests. A thing is an object of interest because of its apparent importance. Even when there is nothing in an experiential environment to hold a person's attention, and his attentive activity selects first one focal point then another, there is an imputation of possible or real importance to each attentive object. Facts are never brutally experienced as prescinded from values; a person may make the separation, but this itself is to simplify. Even in the case where the simplification aims to state fact prescinded from value, the abstract simplification is determined *normatively* to do just that. It is a good abstraction precisely because it leaves out the value elements as trivial. The norms for a good scientific theory—universality, coherence, elegance, etc.—determine the form of scientific abstractions and what it is good for them to treat as important.

The second attack on the above view of abstractions is that all abstractions distort. Real values are to be found in the concrete content of experience but are distorted when experience is classified by inevitably one-sided abstractions. So, contrary to the claim that abstraction singles out what is important, abstraction distorts the distinction between the important and the trivial by leaving out details in the richness of experience.

This attack amounts to a denial that there are degrees of im-

portance exhibited by things in experience; if there are degrees, then abstractions can distinguish them. Of course there are good abstractions and bad ones; the bad ones are those that do distort. Still there is no reason to say all abstractions distort; they would only distort if there were no differences of degrees of importance so that the relatively trivial could be left aside. This objection serves as a warning, however, against the confusion of abstractions with concrete reality that Whitehead called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness."

FREEDOM AND THEORY

The various elements of the problem of freedom have been simplified in abstract discussion in various ways throughout the history of philosophy. Even the most concrete issues have been given theoretical treatment. The difficulty in understanding freedom, however, is that the kinds of abstractions used to simplify the various elements of the overall problem have not been unified. External liberties are often discussed in terms of political theory. Intentional action is usually discussed in the language of philosophical psychology. Choice between alternatives sometimes is a matter of physical theory, as in the problem of determinism, sometimes linguistic theory, as in the problem of counter-factual conditionals, and sometimes social theory, as in Dewey's usual approach to the matter. Deliberation has been analyzed in terms of moral example and ethical theory. Discussions of the issues of social participation have been disconnected even more.

For a unified account of freedom, therefore, it is necessary to have an abstract theory of the whole that can capture the insights of history and put them in their places. This means the development of a *very* abstract theory, since the ways in which disparate elements can be brought together are likely to be extraordinarily simplified versions of the original discussions. Until such an abstract theory can be presented, the hypothesis about freedom cannot be stated in proper form. The statement in this chapter has only listed the various elements; it has not presented them as unified in a theoretically proper hypothesis. Consequently, the hypothesis can only be grasped properly at the end of the discussion, after the abstract theory has been presented and made plausible.

Philosophy necessarily lives with abstract theory. But philosophy

ought not lose touch with concrete experience. Concrete experience is always more ambiguous than theoretical abstractions can articulate. Not only does it include the trivial with the important, experience is uniquely located in temporal and spatial existence. The meaning of an experience is rarely exhausted in itself but depends on other existential connections. An action can be free in one sense, unfree in another. It can appear to have freedom in a certain dimension but be in fact the opposite of what it seems. And there is an irony in concrete experience that theory cannot articulate.

The fulcrum of a philosophical account of freedom is a theoretical model comprehensive enough to exhibit all the dimensions of freedom in articulated relations. Since the development of this model will involve discussions of topics seemingly unrelated to freedom, the necessity for it should be explained.

Two contemporary schools of philosophy tend to disparage the very task of speculative theoretical models in philosophy. One, linguistic analysis, often claims that "metaphysics is impossible." Of course, it is not impossible as an activity since there are actual examples of it. Rather, the analytical claim is that metaphysics cannot be what it claims to be, a meaningful explanation of experience. Of course few philosophers take seriously today the attempt to develop a reductionistic criterion of meaning; a system or concept is meaningful if people can make progress in understanding it, even if it is silly. Whether a speculative philosophy *explains* is a more serious question. A system that alleges to explain by deducing the world may in fact be impossible; or again it may not. At any rate the system presented here explains as a general hypothesis explains; how well it explains should be determined by a direct examination of it, not by a discussion of its a priori possibility.

Some analytic philosophers, following Peter Strawson, have attempted to distinguish descriptive metaphysics from revisionary metaphysics, cleaving to the former. Descriptive metaphysics articulates the general concepts involved in how we think and talk about the world; revisionary metaphysics tells us how we ought to think and talk. The former seems like safe analysis, though broadened and systematized. The latter seems inventive and to demand from philosophy a special kind of knowledge it lacks. The dis-