

## The Development of Freedom: A Phenomenological Approach<sup>1</sup>

We are often conscious of having to make an apparently unconstrained decision between alternatives, whether it be soup or salad, domestic or import, Republican or Democrat, PBS or CNN, and so on. We are, of course, typically confronted with more than two courses of action and the object of the choice need not be an action but an attitude that entails a series of subordinate or first-order choices. For example, we may find ourselves faced with the choice of being kind, hostile, indifferent, or a range of other attitudes toward someone. But there can be no denying the experience of acting or having an attitude in the wake of a decision in favor of that action or attitude. We accordingly hold ourselves responsible for actions and attitudes that ensue from choices we make. From this perspective at least, it would seem counterintuitive to restrict human freedom to freedom of action or, at least, action sharply distinguished from choices and attitudes traditionally associated with the concept of will.

Yet we also have reason to be skeptical of claims that such choices are free or, at least, reason to question what it means to regard them as free. To the extent that they are rational choices made after consideration of different possible courses of action, they are motivated by reasons that are typically not of our choosing; indeed, reasons, whether construed subjectively or objectively, arguably lie outside the realm of choice altogether.<sup>2</sup> When someone makes a decision ostensibly contrary to that of a normal rational agent, for example, a masochist who chooses a painful course of action or adopts an attitude likely to lead to suffering, neither the subjectively nor the objectively reasonable thing to do is typically a matter of choice. Nor does introspection appear to be an unfailing guide to what is under our control. Social psychologists have invented the terms ‘position effect’ and ‘halo effect’ to account for behavior the causes of which, despite being ready to hand, are not recognized by the subjects themselves.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes we come to realize after the fact (i.e., after a choice) that there was some feature of the chosen alternative unconsciously motivating the decision all along – a point long recognized by advertising agencies and other manipulators of subliminal perception.

The traditional problem for philosophy has been how to describe and interpret this phenomenon properly. Hobbes gives perhaps the most powerful modern expression of one interpretive tendency. While construing freedom as a matter of deliberating, choosing, and not being prevented from carrying out that decision, he recognizes nothing that does not issue from some antecedent cause. The cause of a person’s will is accordingly not the will itself, i.e., not some desire, hope, fear or the like, but something else that is neither part of nor subject to the person’s will. In other words, while the will is the necessary cause of voluntary action, there are necessary causes of the will that are not in the will’s control. Hence, Hobbes concludes:

So that whereas it is out of controversy, that of *voluntary* action the *will* is the *necessary* cause, and by which is said, the *will* is also caused by other things whereof it disposeth not, it followeth, that voluntary actions have all of them necessary causes and therefore are *necessitated*.<sup>4</sup>

Echoing Hobbes’ inference, Voltaire argues that the notion of free will is senseless since all our wishes, like all our ideas, are received and therefore necessary.<sup>5</sup> Despite having a metaphysical vision of the will quite foreign to Hobbes’ and Voltaire’s thinking in other respects, Schopenhauer essentially iterates their view, contending that “a man can surely do what he wills to do, but he cannot determine what he wills.”<sup>6</sup>

More recently, complementing the contentions of these modern philosophers, Harvard psychologist Daniel Wegner acknowledges that we feel that we cause ourselves to behave, but

argues that this conscious experience of willing does not establish that conscious thought caused the action.<sup>7</sup>

The unique human convenience of conscious thoughts that preview our actions gives us the privilege of feeling we willfully cause what we do. In fact, however, unconscious and inscrutable mechanisms create both conscious thought about action and the action, and also produce the sense of will we experience by perceiving the thought as cause of the action.<sup>8</sup>

The experience of conscious will is accordingly an illusion, on Wegner's view, produced by the fallacy *post hoc, propter hoc*.<sup>9</sup> "Just as compass readings do not steer the boat, conscious experiences of the will do not cause human action."<sup>10</sup> Wegner articulates a version of a view broadly shared by many contemporary philosophers, despite differences in details, namely, the view that any conception of human freedom worth indulging is one compatible with a fully causal explanation of human thought and action.

At the other extreme at the outset of the modern era, Descartes insists on the veracity of two ways of experiencing freedom, each emphasized by an opposing theology of freedom at the time. On the one hand, not unlike the Jesuit Molina shortly before him, Descartes designates the experience of not being compelled more to one alternative than another "the lowest grade of freedom [*infimus gradus libertatis*]."<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, this time echoing the Oratorian and Jansenist interpretations of an Augustinian theology of freedom, Descartes contends that "divine grace and natural cognition never diminish freedom but instead augment and strengthen it."<sup>12</sup> Natural cognition in the form of a clear and distinct perception, no less than divine grace, is capable of presenting the will with a perception of the good to be pursued and the will is free to the extent that it chooses that good. As Descartes puts it: "The more I am inclined to one side, either because I understand clearly the proportion of truth and goodness in it or because God thus disposes my innermost thinking, the more freely I choose it."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Descartes interprets human freedom in terms of two, often interconnected experiences, the experience of indeterminateness and the experience of rationally directing our actions. Sartre's conception of freedom, like that of Descartes, is at odds with any deterministic reduction of the experience. But Sartre radicalizes the appeal to experience or consciousness by identifying human freedom with the way consciousness exists for itself, namely, as a basic, irreducible capacity to imagine the world otherwise and act accordingly, a project of negating and modifying the past and present situation.<sup>14</sup> What Sartre recognizes is the often blurred, often repressed potential for resistance, rejection, or renunciation inherent in the very make-up of conscious life. To be sure, there is a built-in inertia to human consciousness, no doubt the product of deep-seated insecurity, that accounts for our considerable talent at smothering this potential, in effect, deceiving ourselves and living in bad faith. Nevertheless, in an existential rendition of Cartesian doubt, Sartre reminds us, too, that we can (apparently) always deny or negate what we think or experience. Accordingly, for Sartre, "to be is to choose oneself" and the human reality is such that, "without any help whatsoever, it is entirely abandoned to the intolerable necessity of making itself be – down to the slightest detail."<sup>15</sup> If most of us cannot help thinking that Sartre gets carried away, in his claims for the scope of both human responsibility and self-deception, we also have to admire the practical import of his views, the challenging awareness that there is always something that we are not doing and that we can concretely do to change things, even if only incrementally, for the better.

Positions like those of Hobbes, Schopenhauer, and Wegner, on one side, and those of Descartes and Sartre, on the other, obviously represent opposite poles of the wide spectrum of

ongoing debate over how to interpret the experience of making choices (and doing so consciously and freely, if that is not redundant). In the following paper I do not criticize these various viewpoints directly but instead present reasons why a human being's freedom to make choices is best understood as a genuine yet fragile achievement, part of an unfinished development. I do so because contemporary discussions of the issue, in particular, frequently suffer from relying too much on snapshot scenarios of human deliberation and action, often accompanied by images of simple causal connections with neurological mechanisms. As a result, they pay insufficient attention to the developmental aspects of the phenomenon or, better, the phenomena generally associated with human freedom.<sup>16</sup> My aim is, in effect, to put the issue of freedom on a firmer, experiential footing than it frequently enjoys in contemporary debates. To this end, I distinguish and relate four asymmetrical, and in many cases cumulative stages to the development of freedom: (1) rudimentary freedom, (2) instrumental freedom, (3) freedom as self-mastery, and (4) the freedom of commitment or interpersonal freedom.<sup>17</sup>

Before proceeding, however, two qualifications are in order, one methodological, the other conceptual. From a methodological standpoint, freedom can be characterized in strictly ontological terms and/or in phenomenological terms. For example, we might inquire into the potential or actuality of freedom with respect to a choice or action, quite apart from the consciousness or experience of the person making the decision or acting. Indeed, much contemporary discussion of freedom, inspired by Harry Frankfurt, focuses on notions of freedom and responsibility for agents oblivious to their freedom or lack thereof. My focus is, by contrast, on the phenomenology of freedom, that is to say, on freedom insofar as it is consciously experienced by someone in the process of choosing or acting. I do so not only because of the constraints of an essay but because I am leery of our capacity to separate the ontology and the phenomenology of freedom and because determining a person's responsibility, the issue that chiefly motivates interest in the problem of freedom, requires – among other things – determining that person's senses of being free.<sup>18</sup> It may appear that this approach strengthens the hand of those who infer the existence of freedom directly from the experience, the very inference that Schopenhauer and Wegner, among others, call into question. But this appearance is deceiving. Determinists of the hard or soft variety can only make their case adequately, that is to say, they can only explain away the experience of freedom, if they have identified it in all its dimensions.

The second qualification concerns the concept of freedom – the nominal definition – presupposed from the outset. The concept of freedom is generally double-barreled, referring to something potential and to something realized. At times we speak of someone being free to choose or act a certain way; other times we speak of a choice or action as an exercise of freedom. So, too, we can distinguish a time when a free choice or action is a possibility from a time when that possibility is no longer in the offing. It bears noting, however, that in either case the experience of freedom is tied to the experience of actual, i.e., realizable possibilities. My main focus in the following remarks is the freedom to choose and act, not as a theoretical possibility or accomplished fact, but as a really experienced potential in an actual situation.<sup>19</sup>

### 1. Rudimentary freedom (elementary freedom)

We seem to be confronted with freedom of a basic sort when we find ourselves thrust into a fluid situation apparently pregnant with more than one possibility that we can effect. Consider the example of passing someone walking in your direction. You can usually go to the left or to the right of the person; you do not experience any constraint, internal or external, forcing you to go

one way or the other and you know from past experience that you are typically capable of going left or right. We accordingly say that you are free to go or even to choose to go left or right (or, equivalently, you are free to go or to forbear going in one direction).

Freedom in this rudimentary sense requires perception, imagination, and sensori-motor know-how: the perceived indeterminacy of the fluid situation, the imagined alternatives and their outcomes, and the awareness of our sensori-motor capabilities relevant to affecting that outcome – the whole of which makes for the “elbow room” requisite for the experience of this basic sort of freedom. Past experience tells us, too, that the particular indeterminacy in question will soon pass, as one or the other alternative possibilities is realized, with or without any active contribution on our part. Still, the situation is uniquely yours or mine in a certain respect; no one else occupies that particular slice of time-space and possesses the corresponding capacity to affect the outcome of the situation insofar as it is that unique situation you find yourself in and I find myself in. Freedom in this rudimentary sense is accordingly a condition of a form of self-determination. Thanks to your perception of your elbow room, you are free in the sense that you experience nothing standing in the way of your doing whatever you decide to do. Herein lies the traditional sense of the *liberum arbitrium*, what Descartes, as noted earlier, considers the lowest level of freedom.

To a great extent, we share this way of being in the world with other animals. Observation of some animals’ behavior strongly suggests a similar capacity to evaluate the as yet undetermined potential of their situation in view of their own capabilities. This capacity is no doubt tied, for humans as well as other animals, to a constant and constantly revised projection of needs and desires onto the specific world respectively enveloping them. Accordingly, in the experience of this rudimentary sort of freedom, the possibilities integral to it do not lay themselves out before us in the form of a spreadsheet or a series of abstract but logically consistent possible worlds. Instead, those possibilities, even when experienced in the indeterminate way suggested by the example of passing someone on the left or right, present themselves within the context of projected needs and desires. Our hopes and fears frame our perception of the indeterminacy of the situation, our imagination of alternative outcomes of it, and our appreciation of our capacity to affect the outcome. In short, the possibilities integral to the experience of this basic sort of freedom have certain parameters.

Rudimentary freedom is so named in part because it reveals a structural dynamic present in freedom at other levels. Freedom is a function of two, more or less co-dependent and co-variant factors or variables, the experience of the power to do or choose to do one thing rather than another (I call this ‘the duality of freedom’) and the experience of the absence of any hindrances or restraints from exercising that power (I call this ‘the contextuality of freedom’). These two factors may be formalized as follows, where  $M$  is some choice or action:

(t1):  $a$  is free in a rudimentary sense with respect to  $M$  **iff**  $a$  is able to enact  $M$  and to refrain from  $M$

and

(t2):  $a$  is free in a rudimentary sense with respect to  $M$  **only if**  $a$  is unhindered by (is free from)  $N$

where  $N$  is some hindrance sufficient to impede the enactment of  $M$  or the choice or action of refraining from  $M$ . Freedom thus always requires the coincidence of a power or capacity and a situation that presents, *first*, more than one way of exercising that power, one of which excludes the other and, *second*, no impediments sufficient to preclude the power from being exercised.<sup>20</sup>

However, the powers as well as the corresponding absence of constraints are always specific and limited. Hence, a more accurate interpretation of the rudimentary sense of freedom would be

(T) *a* is able to (free to) enact *M* and to refrain from *M* **only if** *a* is relatively unhindered by (free from) *N*

The adjective ‘relatively’ serves two functions here: first, it indicates that, for human beings, being free to do something or being free from something is never absolute and, second, that the one aspect of freedom varies in proportion to the another. In other words,

(T') *a* is able to enact *M* or refrain from *M* to the extent that *a* is free from *N*.

(T), understood with the qualification expressed in (T'), provides the basic template of freedom, drawn from the foregoing interpretation of the experience of freedom in the most rudimentary sense.

In other words, these formulations, for all their abstractness, reflect the elementary experience of freedom. Though there may be nothing stopping me from hearing someone speaking in a language foreign to me, I am not free to carry on a conversation with her. I have to possess the capacity to speak the language. Yet I am no more free when I am perfectly capable of speaking the language, but the person speaking to me does not let me get a word in edgewise and peremptorily leaves as soon as she has finished having her say. In this case, I cannot properly be said to be free to conduct or choose to conduct a conversation, since the possibility is simply not open to me.

Rudimentary freedom corresponds to perhaps the most basic experience of freedom, where consciousness of one's aims (and who or what one accordingly is) does not figure in the self-determination (hence, it might also be considered a pre-reflective, at times even unconscious freedom). By contrast, in the next phase of self-determination (designated ‘instrumental freedom’), a person's conception of her aims (and of herself as acting in purposeful ways) plays a central role in her sense of her freedom, i.e., her potential to determine herself.

## 2. Instrumental freedom (prudential freedom)

Each of us learns how to perform a variety of tasks, often of increasing complexity, building upon previously acquired skills. We have to learn to walk before we can run, to form simple sentences before building compound ones, to add before we can multiply. Though we never outgrow the possibilities of such progressions and their opposite, realization of them – as these examples suggest – is perhaps particularly obvious to an individual in the course of “growing up,” often leaving a lasting impression, as a child moves toward adolescence. In the course of this development, we come to distinguish among possibilities and capacities which are means to the realization of other distinct possibilities. The development of capacities building on other capacities to it is typically cumulative, such that the developed capacity, in the course of incorporating capacities instrumental to its realization, becomes itself an instrument to further capacities. To a very large extent the development of these instrumental capacities is automatic but we also can and frequently do become aware of them precisely as means or instruments and work to refine them or build further capacities upon them as our heart becomes set on various ends.<sup>21</sup>

This development of instrumental capacities that are deliberately exercised as means to various ends introduces what I here dub ‘instrumental freedom’, a form of freedom more

complex than rudimentary freedom. Instrumental freedom is a self-conscious capacity to pursue, more or less deliberately, goals that one takes to be distinct from exercise of that capacity itself. Instrumental freedom emerges with one's increasing awareness of the parameters of rudimentary freedom and the development in this awareness is typically tied to an expanding consciousness of the various aims attainable by the exercise of that freedom. This instrumental mode of freedom accordingly develops in tandem with capacities progressively to choose or do what experience and reflection convince me will contribute positively to the pursuit of my goals or interests. In order to enjoy this freedom, it is necessary for me to have some sense, not only of what I am doing, but of what I am doing it for. Instrumental freedom supposes, in addition to the factors of the "elbow room" described above (perceived indeterminacy, imagined alternative outcomes, relevant know-how), a distinctive consciousness of particular aims as one's own, a consciousness that takes the form of an interest in preserving and pursuing some things, purging oneself of others, relative to that development. In short, this freedom consists, not only in having the elbow room to choose or act in accordance with one's perceived capabilities, but in so choosing or acting because those capabilities are perceived as instrumental to achieving particular aims.<sup>22</sup>

When we are driving, our sense of being able to steer the car to the left or the right exemplifies the rudimentary form of freedom. But, in driving to a pre-determined destination, a capacity both constrained and enabled by the roads, the traffic, and the traffic laws, we exercise (and accordingly realize-and-experience) an instrumental form of freedom. As in every case of freedom, the possibilities on hand are delimited, e.g., being constrained to drive the car only on one side of the road. But my awareness of and conformity to this constraint together with my legitimate expectation that others conform to it as well empowers me to drive unimpeded where I want or not (thereby exemplifying the duality and contextuality of freedom in this instrumental sense).

This example of driving in traffic illustrates how instrumental freedom can take the form of an empowerment dependent upon conformity to certain rules. The capacity to read music and play a musical instrument by reading a score provides a similar sort of empowerment. Consider the difference between a pianist and someone completely untutored in playing the piano. Sitting at a piano, both may have the same rudimentary freedom, the same unencumbered capacity to press the keys or even find their way around the keyboard. But only the pianist has the freedom to "play" the piano and, not least, because she has mastered rules, techniques, and so on. Only the pianist enjoys the instrumental freedom of playing the piano deliberately and purposefully.

There are two important, corollary ways in which instrumental freedom also moves beyond rudimentary freedom: a sense of self-directedness entailing elements of personal responsibility and a sense of the cumulative yet fragile character of the capacities that make up these freedoms. While the experience of rudimentary freedom does suppose an awareness of one's capabilities, it does not require any particular sense of the aims attainable by the use of those capabilities. In other words, a person might exercise freedom in the rudimentary sense, described above, independently of her sense of her goals, interests, or identity. But we possess instrumental freedom (and, in that sense, are self-consciously free) to the extent that we do what we want to do precisely because, upon reflection, we decide that this is what we want to do, that choosing or acting a certain way contributes to the pursuit of our aims and is, at least in some sense, in our best interest. Instrumental freedom accordingly develops to a point where, as in the example of driving to a destination, it entails some level of thoughtful or rational discrimination of needs and desires (such that they can become sources of rational motives guiding our choices).

While proto-reasons (*ex post facto*) may be tacitly operative in the exercise of rudimentary freedom, the exercise of instrumental freedom is typically based upon deliberated reasons (*ex ante quem*). In this sense, instrumental freedom can become much less “immediate” than rudimentary freedom, making way for a level of detachment from the components of the elbow room in the course of intellectualizing them (i.e., it renders the perception of the indeterminacy of the situation, the imagination of alternatives, and the know-how more intellectual). But this intellectualizing is a function of directing the choice or action oneself by virtue of what one has taken to be one’s goals or interests, i.e., one’s more or less rationally considered interests, and the proper means or instruments to attain them. It would be irrational and ultimately disempowering for me to choose to drive on the wrong side of the road or on a road that does not lead to where I want to go; so, too, it would be imprudent and counterproductive for the pianist to ignore the difference between sharps and flats.

The concept of responsibility is never identical to the concept of freedom nor is it entailed by the experience of rudimentary freedom. But as reason-giving and a sense of personal identity begin to come explicitly into play, as they do in the exercise of instrumental freedom, so does an incipient sense of responsibility. That is to say, I have this freedom only to the extent that I recognize that certain attitudes and actions are counterproductive, that there are certain sanctions, whether in the nature of things or as a matter of convention, that it is in my interest to respect. Most of us probably learned and tried to give our children a basic sense of right and wrong and the responsibility entailed by those concepts, via appeals to the exercise of instrumental freedom guided by self-interest, short-term and long-term. We presumed that they experienced rudimentary freedom and could come to appreciate the sorts of goals that would entail the experience of instrumental freedom.<sup>23</sup>

The other dimension introduced by the experience of instrumental freedom is a cognizance of the cumulative yet fragile character of that freedom. Given that cumulative character, being instrumentally free is contingent upon ever more complex conditions of the duality and contextuality of this sort of freedom. Injuries that impair motor movement often eliminate the rudimentary freedom that makes forms of instrumental freedom possible (consider, for example, a stroke’s disabling effect on a musician). So, too, a condition sometimes negates a basic form of instrumental freedom and every other form of freedom that supposes that basic form (consider, for example, the effects of amnesia or simply forgetting the purpose of an activity or forgetting the score, in the case of the piano player). Nor are these conditions by any means merely internal; a piano out of tune is no less disabling to a pianist’s performance than her losing concentration or forgetting her place. As these examples remind us, the conditions that enable us to pursue our goals through the exercise of various sorts of instrumental freedom are never completely under our control. The realization of instrumental freedom is fraught with peril.<sup>24</sup>

A synonym for this instrumental freedom is prudential freedom, using the word ‘prudence’ in sense that can be traced back to Cicero.<sup>25</sup> This freedom is prudential precisely because it is a capacity that is the product of a learning curve in which an individual comes to experience the need sometimes to delay short-term gratification for long-term gain (where the delay is instrumental to the achievement of the latter). Here, again, the developmental character of freedom is patent. Not everyone who is free in the rudimentary, arbitrary sense of the term is free to choose or act prudently. Instrumental, prudential freedom requires a person’s awareness or, better, her belief that a certain range and progression of capabilities is optimal for her, under some image or conception of herself and her goals.

### 3. Freedom as self-mastery (virtuous freedom, perfectionist freedom)

The next stage of freedom, while closely related to instrumental freedom, can differ profoundly from it by virtue of coming about only at the cost of achieving or exercising purely instrumental freedom. In such cases, self-mastery or virtuous freedom is a liberating power that a person experiences when she acts, not for the sake of some goal distinct from the exercise of that freedom, but for the sake of some ideal inseparable from freedom (an ideal that embodies that freedom). In order to be the ideal appropriate to this sort of virtuous freedom or self-mastery, the ideal cannot be derived from any combination of the components of instrumental freedom alone. While the aims or interests that underlie instrumental freedom are given or acquired and that freedom consists in the power to pursue them, the sort of ideal operative in self-mastery is always to some extent beyond our reach. In other words, the freedom that consists in actively adopting such an ideal is always only approximating that ideal. By the very nature of the process, the self being mastered and the self that is mastering it do not coincide – even though freedom as self-mastery is defined precisely as the progressive embodiment of an ideal. In order for me to be free to any degree in this virtuous sense, I must have demonstrated the capacity to master at least some (but not all) otherwise recalcitrant tendencies, tendencies that are inconsistent with the ideal, with the prospect of mastering others. This freedom is, in other words, the relative power and the removal of constraints (variants, once again, of the duality and contextuality conditions respectively), that are part of some process of perfecting oneself according to some ideal standard. Freedom as self-mastery is the freedom of self-perfection, a perfectionist freedom.

Instrumental freedom already requires that I impose on myself constraints and restrictions that I have reason to believe will be empowering in the long run. Yet virtuous freedom is not merely an enlightened and tested form of instrumental, prudential freedom. Indeed, self-mastery or virtuous freedom may even run counter to the (instrumentally) free pursuit of a person's conscious self-interest at a particular point in time or stage in her life – and be all the more liberating in some respect precisely for doing so. We have become so accustomed to thinking of freedom in the economical terms of self-interested or prudential choices and actions (as instances of instrumental freedom) that it appears downright counterintuitive to entertain the idea of choices and actions that can be free (liberating and empowering) apart from any perceived long-term goals or self-interest. Nevertheless, there are clear cases of freedom through self-mastery in just this sense.

Let us consider a pair of examples, one from art, the other from ethical life. A dancer at the top of her form typically follows a very disciplined, self-imposed diet and daily regimen of practice and physical workouts for the sake of her art. She is, to be sure, interested in dancing but she may pursue that regimen with the awareness that doing so may not be in her self-interest; that is to say, she may have no reason to believe and perhaps even some reason to doubt that her passionate interest in dancing is really in her interest (or that it is instrumental to achieving her real, long-term interests). Nevertheless, by mastering herself in various ways, she develops a virtuosity that empowers her as a dancer. She is not encumbered by gravity the way a lesser dancer is; she can coordinate moves, leaps, postures at will, but she does so at the beckoning, not of prudential self-interest, but a will bent on the perfection of something beyond it. Her freedom, far from being instrumental to the achievement of something distinct from it, is constitutive of the art of dance. The freedom that comes with this self-mastery is always a freedom from the self defined by some foregoing, restrictive self-interest or aim (restrictive relative to perfection of

the art). The artist may, of course, profit from this self-mastery, she may take great pride in it, and she may accordingly come to take the development of this expertise to be in her interest (thereby transforming her idea of herself and her self-interests). But, even with these ulterior motives, she is free as an artist only to the extent that she is motivated to master herself for the sake of what she takes to be an ideal of her art.

Similarly, to move to another example of this sort of freedom, a virtuous person may analogously master herself for the sake of an ideal and do so knowingly at the cost of the freedom that is instrumental to the pursuit of her self-interest up to that point. Being brave or candid is obviously often dangerous. Yet someone who masters her tendencies to fear or to embellish is immensely more powerful in certain respects than someone who has not. Like the dancer, a person of character is someone with a power to do certain things without certain hindrances or encumbrances. She attains this freedom only by mastering herself in one respect or another for the sake of an ideal that requires the subordination of instrumental freedom and the prudential self-interests served by it. To take the classic paradigm of bravery, a courageous soldier in combat is not encumbered in the way that someone reckless or craven is, which is to say, again according to our basic template, that she is more powerful and less hindered than someone lacking her courage.

A person can deliberately pursue some ideal that empowers her in certain respects, without experiencing or even believing that it serves her self-interest. Indeed, in some cases she may pursue an ideal even with the belief that it is not in her self-interest.<sup>26</sup> However, freedom as self-mastery typically evolves from instrumental freedom and, indeed, does so as the result of a conflict between two or more images or concepts of self-interest. Thus, the dancer's interests, insofar as they are defined by something other than her conception of herself as a dancer, might vie with her conception of her self-interest in perfecting herself as a dancer. In that case, the transition from instrumental freedom to virtuous freedom entails a transformation of one's self-identity and self-interests.<sup>27</sup>

The phenomenon of instrumental freedom is the experience of a relatively unencumbered capacity to make choices that lead me to certain goals distinct from that capacity. By contrast, the phenomenon of perfectionist (virtuous) freedom is the experience of a relatively unencumbered capacity to make choices that accommodate some ideal and that are empowering and liberating precisely because the presence and exercise of that capacity (including the relevant choices, attitudes, and actions) embody that ideal. In short, freedom is now integral to the end and not a mere instrument.

### *Historical interlude*

There is, in modern philosophy, a clear anticipation of the three stages in the development of human freedom that we have been discussing, though the anticipation may seem to be by an unlikely source. John Locke carries on the Cartesian tradition of upholding two distinct aspects of freedom, though the second aspect (as explained below) straddles the divide between instrumental and self-mastering freedom. In a letter to Molyneux he writes: "I cannot have a clearer perception of any thing than that I am free," iterating his claim in the *Essay* that "the source of all liberty" lies in the mind's power, "in most cases, as is evident in Experience, ... to *suspend* the execution and satisfaction of any of its desires."<sup>28</sup> In the *Essay* he also differentiates liberty, more precisely, from volition (as well as from thought). Volition is the power, spurred on by uneasiness or satisfaction respectively, to begin or continue an action in accordance with one's consciously considered (thought) preferences and to do so even if there is

no alternative possibility (*Essay*, II.XXI, 5, 8-10, 15, 29). (As later scholars have pointed out, an addicted, phobic, or indoctrinated person may have volitions of this sort.<sup>29</sup>) In contrast to mere volition, liberty is, properly speaking, a person's power – and, Locke insists, not the will's power – both to do what she prefers to do and to forbear doing it, if she prefers not to do it; in short, “a Power to do or not do, . . . as we *will*” (*Essay*, II. XXI, 56; see, too, II.XXI, 15-17). Freedom in this sense is not the freedom to will what one wills but simply to do what one wants. Though a matter of controversy among interpreters of Locke's thought, his clear articulation of this sense of freedom has led many scholars to interpret him as a compatibilist, if not a determinist, on the issue of freedom.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, Locke contends that the lack of an experience of the indifference between alternatives (the experience of suspending satisfaction of desires, mentioned above or, equivalently, the experience of rudimentary freedom, on my account) would be an imperfection. Yet he also argues – again, echoing Descartes – that determining choices on the basis of deliberation, i.e., a rational examination of the best alternative, is no less a perfection and, indeed, a necessary condition of our being free. As he puts it, “The care of our selves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our *liberty*” (*Essay*, II.XXI, 51). That liberty, he continues, “lies in this, that they [human beings] can *suspend* their desires, and stop them from determining their *wills* to any action, till they have duly and fairly *examin'd* the good and evil of it, as far forth as the weight of the thing requires” (*Essay*, II.XXI, 52). Locke thus explicitly rejects locating liberty in indifference alone, antecedent to thought and judgment, a move equivalent, as he puts it, to placing liberty “in a state of darkness” (*Essay*, II.XXI, 71: 283). Instead it is our “great privilege,” he insists, to be able to examine whether satisfying a desire leads to our “true happiness” and he importantly adds that pursuit of “true Bliss” necessitates this scrutiny (*Essay*, II.XXI, 52, 71).

While necessary for liberty, the capacity to deliberate should not be mistaken for it. Human liberty is the capacity to act on the basis of what, as a result of deliberation, we determine to be the “good of the action” or, equivalently, our “greatest good” (*Essay*, II.XXI, 47, 52). Acting on the result of this deliberation is, as he puts it, “so far from being a restraint or diminution of *Freedom*, that it is the very improvement and benefit of it: ‘tis not an Abridgement, ‘tis the end and use of our *Liberty*; and the farther we are removed from such a determination, the nearer we are to Misery and Slavery.”<sup>31</sup>

This last remark suggests the affinity of Locke's view of freedom with the sense of freedom as self-mastery that I have been describing. Indeed, Locke characterizes his view of this freedom in explicitly moral terms (see *Essay*, II.XXI, 56, 71). However, Locke also gives an account of the freedom-securing good or happiness in terms of the self-interest of the individual choosing and acting; freedom, so construed, is purely instrumental. More likely, he construed what I am calling self-interested instrumental freedom and virtuous freedom as providentially, and not coincidentally, coinciding.<sup>32</sup> But, however we interpret his account of “full-fledged human agency,” as one interpreter (Yaffe) puts it, he follows the modern legacy of Descartes by emphasizing that human freedom is something more than rudimentary freedom and that something more is the determination of human choices and actions, not merely by narrowly determined, prudential self-interests, but by rational knowledge of good and evil.

#### 4. Freedom as self-commitment (interpersonal freedom)

Just as freedom in the sense of self-mastery, as depicted, can run counter to purely instrumental freedom, indeed, such that the latter is an impediment to the former, so, too, self-

mastery can be a hindrance to the achievement of another register of freedom, a range of capacities that demands the renunciation of the unqualified pursuit, not only of narrowly defined self-interests but even self-mastery. Philosophers have arguably paid least attention to freedom in this sense. Nor is this particularly surprising. But the reason is not that most discussions of freedom of choice take their bearings, as noted earlier, from instrumental freedom, understood as our capacity to choose and do what we take to be in our interest. The proclivity to circumscribe consideration of freedom in this manner does explain the relative lack of attention paid to the distinctive empowerment that self-mastery procures. But the sort of freedom that I have my eyes on now comes at the expense of the wholesale pursuit of self-mastery just as much as prudential self-interest. The reason why so little attention has been paid to this final stage of freedom lies in the particular nature of the power and empowerment it entails.

The other forms of freedom discussed center on the empowerment of a freely willing, individual self. By contrast, the power of the freedom now under consideration exists only by being shared. Most discussions of the issue of interpreting the experience of making choices take their bearings from neurologically isolated, mental states of an individual, together with the corresponding contexts and episodes. But there are elevated capacities for choices, that are open to human beings only in their intercourse with one another over time, more precisely, in their shared commitments to one another, commitments that demand acceptance of less, often much less than mastery and control. These shared commitments presuppose a degree of self-mastery, just as self-mastery presupposes self-interest, but they do so also by removing hindrances that self-mastery cannot remove and, in some cases, even creates.

Earlier we noted how obeying traffic laws can be an instance of self-interested, instrumental freedom and how being brave is an instance of freedom as self-mastery. Complying with the traffic laws is a matter of choice and, as the legally enforced character of the action chosen suggests, it is a choice in an interpersonal context. So, too, is the paradigm of bravery, the virtue of a soldier. Freedom as self-commitment or interpersonal freedom differs from these other sorts of freedom, however, precisely by sacrificing self-interest and self-mastery (and the freedoms they embody) to the claims of an interpersonal bond.

Let me try to tease out this sense of freedom with examples, proceeding from the more simple to the more complex. You are only free to play certain games if you have someone else to play with, e.g., an opponent in tennis and both teammates and opponents in baseball. You can only play a duet or form an ensemble with others. The missing person or, equivalently, the missing relation is an impediment to the exercise of these capacities. These examples demonstrate that certain sorts of empowerment demand interpersonal involvement. To be sure, the decision to play a game or engage in an activity requiring others is usually an expression of self-interested instrumental freedom, though for some athletes or musicians it may be more akin to the dancer's freedom through self-mastery. Nevertheless, it is also possible that someone also or even predominantly chooses to play (the game or the music) for the sake of being with the others and what being with them alone can create.

This last remark brings us closer to the most immediate phenomenon of interpersonal freedom, the experience of friendship. As in the case of certain games, a person is only free to be a friend if the befriended person reciprocates in good will and actions. No amount of self-interest or self-mastery can produce the freedom of friendship since it is necessarily bilateral. Yet only in a friendship is it possible to have and exercise certain capacities without constraint, involving attitudes and choices that demand a friend's knowledge of someone for who she is, fondness for her, charitableness towards her.

If we had more time, we might probe various potential settings for interpersonal freedom, from marriage and other social unions to shared governance and religion. Kierkegaard discusses how marriage and religion might exemplify interpersonal freedom; Arendt offers something analogous in the political realm.<sup>33</sup> I think that we could show how these discussions employ versions of our basic template for freedom (involving the tandem conditions of duality and contextuality) on a level that can only be achieved through our commitments to one another.

## Conclusion

This paper presents barely an outline of a possible model for a theory of freedom as a developmental, multi-faceted phenomenon. Common to each stage of freedom is the template of rudimentary freedom that is meant to capture the duality of the phenomenon and its dependence upon a certain context or set of conditions. More specifically, according to that template, freedom is always a capacity or power, i.e., the power both to do and to refrain from doing something where the possession or exercise of that power depends upon the absence of relevant hindrances. In ordinary terms, at each stage of freedom, you are free to do something only if you are free not to do it and you are free from hindrances to doing it. At the same, on this developmental account, freedom comes in stages where each successive stage – instrumental, self-mastering, and interpersonal freedom – empowers precisely by subordinating a foregoing stage.

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<sup>1</sup> For the invitation to develop and present my thoughts on the subject of human freedom, I am grateful to this year's president of the ACPA, Tim Noone. In making this invitation, Professor Noone requested that I might try to convey modern philosophers' contribution to the issue of freedom. So, while developing my own interpretation in what follows, I have made a conscious effort to incorporate a few pivotal modern historical discussions into the paper. For extremely helpful, critical comments on earlier versions of this paper, I am indebted to Patrick Byrne, Aaron Garrett, Patrick Murray, and Matthew Wargo.

<sup>2</sup> For the restricted purposes of this paper, I shelve the difficult problem of identifying the range of phenomena that may or may not be classified as choices in the relevant sense, including so-called 'snap' decisions, decisions made 'on the fly' (where, in contrast to snap decisions, the options are at least present to mind), and habitual or even ritualized choices which are often arguably choices only in a euphemistic sense (e.g., deciding to vote on election day, deciding to vote for certain sorts of candidates).

<sup>3</sup> In an oft-cited but still controversial study, Richard Nisbitt and Timothy Wilson argue that, at least in some cases, subjects cannot identify what motivated them to act; see Richard Nisbitt and Timothy Wilson, "Telling More than We Can Know: Verbal Reports on Mental Processes," *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 231-259. Patricia Churchland cites, as an example of this sort of finding, a study where four identical pairs of pantyhose were placed before subjects who predominantly chose the right-most pair and yet gave explanations other than the positions (e.g., the texture, sheerness, etc.) for what motivated them; Patricia Churchland, *Brain-Wise: Studies in Neurophilosophy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 210.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, Volume 5: *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance* (London: Bohn, 1841), 373; see, too, *ibid.*, 34, 38f.

<sup>5</sup> Voltaire, *Les Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, 36: *Dictionnaire philosophique II*, ed. Christiane Mervaud et al. (Oxford: Alden, 1974), 291ff; see, too, *ibid.*, 15-18; *Philosophical Dictionary*, ed. and trans. Theodore Besterman (New York: Penguin, 1972), 277f; see, too, *ibid.*, 172-175.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *Über die Freiheit des Willens* in *Sämtliche Werke*, 4/II, ed. Julius Frauenstadt (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1919), 17ff.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel M. Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 2f; Wegner cites the views of Voltaire mentioned above; *ibid.*, 323.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 98; see, too, *ibid.*, 325: “The deep intuitive feeling of conscious will is something that no amount of philosophical argument or research about psychological mechanisms can possibly dispel.” One of Wegner’s goals is to explain why we have this feeling; see *ibid.*, 325-342.

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer makes this point as well; see Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Wegner, *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, 318.

<sup>11</sup> Descartes, *Meditations*, trans. and ed. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Fourth Meditation, p. 67; Adam & Tannery, VII, 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’être et le néant: Essai d’ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 61: “...il n’y a pas de différence entre l’être de l’homme et son <<être-libré>>.” On this account, in contrast to the determinist’s scenario, actions are not dependent upon motives or other causes, capable of being described independently of the actions; what counts as its end, cause, and motive depends instead upon actions that are the expression of freedom. *Ibid.*, 513: “La liberté se fait acte et nous l’atteignons ordinairement à travers l’acte qu’elle organise avec les motifs, les mobiles et les fins qu’il implique.” For the English, see *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel Barnes (New York: Citadel, 1969), 25, 414.

<sup>15</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, 516 (*Being and Nothingness*, 416f): “Nous l’avons vu, pour la réalité humaine, être c’est *se choisir*... Elle est entièrement abandonnée, sans aucune aide d’aucune sorte, à l’insoutenable nécessité de se faire être jusque dans le moindre détail... L’homme ne saurait être tantôt libre et tantôt esclave: il est tout entier et toujours libre ou il n’est pas.” Sartre accordingly has no patience for Stoic attempts to reconcile human freedom and deterministic mechanisms. But his impatience is not so much with the self-contradictoriness of that sort of dualism (which he duly notes) as with the distorted picture of human willing it draws.

<sup>16</sup> Some inferences drawn from the study by Nisbitt and Wilson demonstrate the pitfalls of making this assumption. For a brief review of these and other difficulties with their study, see Stephen J. Gould, “Research Introspection as a Method in Consumer Research,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 21 (March 1995): 719-722.

<sup>17</sup> I cannot claim that these stages are in any way exhaustive and it should be evident that each of us moves across these stages. Moreover, while some stages supervene on others, that supervening is itself typically fragile to some degree. We can revert back to a more basic stage which, while not the same as the stage originally experienced as basic, is more akin to that basic stage than the stage that supervened upon it.

<sup>18</sup> The first of these reasons is drawn from the traditional significance of phenomenology for science; the other from the horizon framing investigations of human freedom. Philosophical or scientific attempts to account for or explain the phenomenon of freedom must rely in any case on some description of the experience or observation of it and the traditional task of phenomenology – in physics and as early as the eighteenth century – is to try to exert some quality control on that presupposition. In other words, how can we hope to have a reasonable chance of establishing the ontology without taking the phenomenology fully into account?

<sup>19</sup> In other words, I am endeavoring to describe the experiences of freedom insofar as it can and does characterize a capacity to decide upon an attitude or course of action, a capacity that involves the recognition of other “live” possibilities. Here there is considerable room for quibbling, practically and theoretically, about what makes a possibility a “live” one, that is to say, a concretely realizable one. But for the general idea that we experience such possibilities and that such an experience is necessary for decision-making and deliberation, see Aristotle’s accounts of *prohairesis* and *bouleusis* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, III, 2 (1111b20-31) and 3 (1112a18-1112b12).

<sup>20</sup> These two conditions correspond roughly to Kant’s differentiation of negative and positive concepts of freedom; see Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* in *Akademie Textausgabe*, Band 4 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 446f; see, too, Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (New York: Oxford, 1969), 121f, 130n, 131f.

<sup>21</sup> Our identity, self-interests, and self-identification develop in tandem with instrumental freedom, as we identify ourselves with practices in pursuit of various aims. Part of who we take ourselves to be includes instrumental capacities that we more or less automatically exercise in the course of those pursuits.

<sup>22</sup> By endorsing the pursuit of particular aims, however tacit, through the exercise of instrumental freedom, we identify ourselves with certain interests. In this sense, instrumental freedom is a form of self-interested freedom. That is to say, the exercise of instrumental freedom is integral to who or what, upon reflection, we take ourselves to be or, in other words, in so choosing or acting because it is in our interest to do so. We say that something is in someone’s interest, typically meaning that it promotes, enhances, or improves that person’s fortunes in some way. It would not be in my interest to choose or do something beyond my powers or, equivalently, something beyond the constraints of my circumstances. To be free in the instrumental sense is, in effect, to possess a configuration of self-interested capacities, the possession and exercise of which are instrumental to the acquisition or achievement of some self-interest beyond them. As we shall see below, self-interestedness and instrumental freedom are not always equivalent.

<sup>23</sup> This elucidation of the connection of self-interested, instrumental freedom with responsibility complements Susan Wolf’s argument for the sanity condition of responsibility. However, the next stages of freedom – virtuous and interpersonal freedoms as opposed to merely prudential freedom – are more in keeping with her view that the desire to be sane is “not a desire for another form of control”; see Susan Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility,” in *Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 145-163, esp. 154.

<sup>24</sup> A cognate point can be made in terms of the narrow self-interests that typically frame instrumental freedom. If we say that someone acts in her interest, we typically assume that she is cognizant of a range or ranges of possibilities that are open to her and advantageous to her. Some of these possibilities are innate, but most are acquired. At the same time she is more or less cognizant not only of the possible progressions and retrogressions within each range, but also of their fragility and her responsibility for them. In order for these possibilities to be hers, it is up to her to realize them, though her resolve is never sufficient to make them hers.

<sup>25</sup> Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T. Griffin and M. T. Atkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 59, 75, 126; Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 599, 609; see, too, Kant’s use of *Klugheit* in op. cit., 416f and, as a synonym for *prudencia*, see his *Opus postumum*, *Akademie Ausgabe*, Band 22 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1938), 39; Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).

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<sup>26</sup> In other words, experience of wanting to pursue certain practices does not by itself entail our experience of it being in our self-interest. Someone might deliberately pursue what she believes – rightly or wrongly – to be contrary to her interests.

<sup>27</sup> On the commonplace assumption that whatever one experiences as a desire or interest is one's considered self-interest, one might generalize this experience of conflicting self-interests and contend that all choices, insofar as they are motivated by wants and desires, are in some sense self-interested ones. This line of interpretation can be reductive or supervenient. It is, for example, reductive if one looks to the prudential pursuit of pleasures and pains in order to explain endeavors to perfect or master oneself or to be virtuous. But this line of interpretation is supervenient if someone, identifying herself as the agent of the endeavor to perfect or master herself, regards this endeavor as overriding what she formerly took to be in her self-interest. On this interpretation, both instrumental freedom and virtuous freedom can be self-interested but in that case the transition from instrumental freedom to virtuous freedom entails a transformation of oneself and one's self-interests.

<sup>28</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), II.XXI, 47: 263 (hereafter: *Essay*).

<sup>29</sup> Gideon Yaffe, *Liberty Worthy of the Name: Locke on Free Agency* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 18f.

<sup>30</sup> Those who interpret him as libertarian include Anthony Collins and Jonathan Edwards and, in the twentieth century, Schouls, Yolton, and Dunn; those who do not include Aaron, Yaffe, Berlin, Passmore, and Fraser; for a survey of these differing interpretations, see Peter A. Schouls, *Reasoned Freedom: John Locke and the Enlightenment* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 119-126.

<sup>31</sup> *An Essay*, 48: 264; 52: 267. In Yaffe's insightful analysis, Locke presents three "tries" at an "Elusive Something" beyond freedom of action in order to account for "full-fledged free agency": appeals to deliberation, accordance of volitions with judgments, and – the most promising and successful of the three – volitions determined by the good. As Yaffe points out, neither deliberation required by liberty nor the accidental accordance of volitions with judgments is to be equated with liberty itself; see Yaffe, 59f.

<sup>32</sup> See *An Essay*, II.VII, 129f; Yaffe 68f.

<sup>33</sup> Hannah Arendt, "On Freedom" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin, 1968), 143-171.