THE QUESTION OF GENUINE FREEDOM – PART ONE

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The problem of human freedom is a peculiar one. It amounts to a conflict between one of man's strongest intuitions and some equally strong theological and scientific theorizing that denies the validity of this intuition. Left to his own feelings, a man does not doubt that he freely chooses to "take tea instead of coffee," or to be honest instead of dishonest; that he freely chooses one form of action rather than another, one kind of attitude rather than another, one life-style rather than another, one destiny rather than another. It is only when other considerations (theological and/or scientific) become involved that his intuition of free choice is threatened. And the degree of the threat is, of course, immediately enormous, for with it the whole meaning of human character and human responsibility is brought into question.

One would expect that an assault upon anything as strongly felt and as important as the freedom of human choice would not come from a trivial source, and this is, indeed, the case. In Western intellectual history the questioning of human freedom has arisen from such formidable bastions as classical Christian theology, Newtonian physics, and contemporary psychological theory. In other words, the "freedom" of man has fallen afoul of a God trap, a physics trap, and a psychoanalytic trap.

The God Trap

It will not be necessary for us to go into detail concerning the theological assault on human freedom. It will be enough to say that once when it was fashionable to speculate upon the "omni" character of God, the logical rebound was to assert the insignificance and helplessness of man. Thus we find such God-oriented theologians as Augustine, Thomas and Calvin all asserting doctrines of Election and Predestination, which, or course, amount to denials of the freedom of man to make significant choices concerning his basic character and his ultimate destiny.

This kind of assault did not go unchallenged even in Christian theology. Pelagius, De Molina and Jacob Arminius all argued otherwise, although, with the exception of DeMolina's *The Scientia Media,* the real issue (God's overwhelming character) was not exactly joined.

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However, we shall not continue this theological argument (correctly joined or otherwise) simply because it is in fact no longer an argument. It is no longer the "fashion" of theology to argue for the magnificance of God at the expense of man. Indeed, now, in certain creative quarters, the fashion is completely reversed.

Something of the same can be said about the physics trap. Discussions about "freedom and determinism" *a la* physics are not exactly fashionable either. But the assault from this direction cannot be so readily dismissed because although newer, "freer" notions of the "heavenly mechanics" have come into physical theory, the old faith in cause-effect determinism lingers on.

In modern psychological and psychoanalytic theory the question of free choice versus subconscious coercion is exceedingly moot. To these latter "traps" we will give considerable attention.

We shall begin our arguments concerning human freedom (which we intend to affirm) by observing that to be free does not mean to be unhampered by limitations. In any situation where choosing is involved one will encounter facts that limit or seem to limit the possibility of free choice and action. We shall categorize these limitations as (1) the genetic condition, (2) the kairotic condition, (3) the mechanistic model, and (4) the psychic set.

First, it is obvious that men are limited in what they can do (can choose to do), and some are more limited than others. All men live under the limitations imposed upon them as specific humans. One cannot will to do what is naturally impossible for him to do. I cannot fly like a bird or live 120 years. Also, less gifted men cannot choose to do what more gifted men can do. I cannot perform *gedanken experiments* like a Heisenberg or an Einstein, or play the trumpet with the skill of a Louis Armstrong.

This kind of limitation on human freedom is generally understood and accepted. Ordinarily everyone admits he is not free to do some things. He has not the ability. But he does not consider the fact of human freedom to be seriously threatened by such strictures. Genetic equipment is regarded simply as part of the framework within which human freedom occurs.

The second kind of limitation (kairotic conditions) is of a similar structural nature as genetic limitations. *Kairos* is the Greek word for time, and we are using it as a category for all those limitations which are imposed simply because the chooser is at a certain place at a certain time. The conditions of the moment (which include both the condition of the chooser and the external opportunities for choosing) impose limitations on human freedom. Caesar could not enplane for

Gaul. I cannot decide to visit Moses. As with genetic equipment, so does time and place set a structure of limitations on free choice and free action. But, again, such limitations are ordinarily admitted as part of the system in which free choice functions. They hinder, but they do not destroy human freedom.

With the third category of limitation—the mechanistic model—we arrive at a different order of limitation. This kind, when taken in its traditional rigidity, mouse-traps freedom completely. For whereas the limitations of the genetic and kairotic types simply set limiting channels wherein free choice and action can take place, this third limitation wipes out all channels. It leaves no space at all for freedom to happen in. This is

The Physics Trap

According to the mechanistic model, determinism enmeshes the world, all of it, in a web of causal relationships that absolutely strangle all "free action", both in fact and in principle. Laplace put it forthrightly and to the point when he said:

> We must thus envisage the present state of the unverse as the effect of its previous state, and as the cause of that which will follow. An intelligence that could know, at a given instant, all the forces governing the natural world, and the respective positions of the entities which compose it, if in addition it was great enough to analyze all this information, would be able to embrace in a single formula the movements of the largest bodies in the universe and those of the lightest atoms: nothing would be uncertain for it, and the future, like the past, would be directly present to its observation.[1]

Here we have a system which excludes all forms of free and spontaneous action, and one in which all things could be absolutely known by a sufficiently superior intelligence; often called Laplace's Demon. All the Demon would have to have (a great deal to be sure but not impossible in principle) would be a precise knowledge of present affairs and a precise knowledge of the causal relationships among the different states of affairs. With this knowledge of present events and causal relations, the Demon could absolutely predict all future events, because all events past, present and future, are locked precisely into a system of strict cause and effect. In such a system freedom (human or any other kind) is impossible, both as to fact and as to principle.

[1] *Essai Philosophique Sur les Probabilities*, Paris: Ganthier-Villars, ed., 1921, p.3.

This Laplacian type determinism has not gone unchallenged, of course. Even before Laplace's time David Hume had brought a serious criticism against the meaningfulness of the whole cause-effect notion. Hume observed that "all reasonings concerning matter of fact[2] seem to be founded in the relationship of Cause and Effect."[3] This meant that knowledge of matters of fact involved knowing the causal relationship which links one event to another. Apparently causality involved antecedent events, causal relationships and subsequent resultant events. And Hume could, indeed, observe both the antecedent events and the subsequent events, but he could not see, when he looked for them, any causal relationships. He saw what went before and what came after, but he could not see how what went before caused what came after. He concluded that what one could perceive and hold in mind and think about were sets of events which were contiguous, in succession and constantly conjuncted. But that was all that could be perceived, all that could be held in mind and thought about. The causitive connection was neither observable nor clearly conceivable. It was, Hume concluded, simply an expectation—a habit of expecting certain events to follow other events because they had always been observed to do so in the past.

Seen in this light, causality is not a mighty causitive connection making the Demon omniscient and the entire universe machine locked. It is not a matter of physics or even metaphysics; it is an affair of psychology. It is an expectation, a habit of mind. Hume does not deny that our idea of causality arises from regularities in experience, and he himself is perfectly willing as a person to act upon the pragmatic usefulness of cause-effect relationships. What he is denying is that we have any knowledge other than our experiences of regularity upon which to base our belief in mechanical causality. Unless reasons can be found for asserting the equivalence of "relations of ideas" to "matters of fact," causality remains without logical certainty. No theory of causality has yet succeeded in showing this equivalence.

One might suppose that Hume's criticism would discourage the idea of rigid determinism as a matter of fact concept in scientific thought. But concerning this there seems to be a curious hang-up

[2]Hume drew a distinction between "matter of fact" knowledge and knowledge gained from the "relations of ideas," or stated differently, between empirical/synthetic knowledge and analytical/logical knowledge. He granted that analytical procedures rendered conclusive knowledge about the subject matter involved, e.g., methematics. But empirical procedures were not conclusive because the denial of a matter of fact does not imply a contradiction, and is, in fact, always open to a contradiction, i.e., a contradicting datus could always eventually show up.

[3]*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* C. W. Hendel, Jr., editor, N.Y.: Scribners Modern Student's Library, 1955, p. 117.

among many scientists. They seem to have a mortal fear of indeterminancy. The very man who will, as a good empirical scientist, refuse to admit that any scientific law can be known to be certainly true, will recoil at the suggestion that something less than absolute determinism (that any degree of chance) can be permitted permanently into scientific explanation. Especially the physical scientists of 18th and 19th centuries maintained their conviction that even if the nature of causality remained unknown, it was possible, at least in principle, to know the precise correlations of antecendent and subsequent events, and that this precise knowledge was adequate grounds for what amounted to a faith in absolute determinism and in Laplace's Demon to do what was claimed for it.

But in the 20th century certain developments in submicroscopic research and theory have introduced concepts which threaten "in principle" both Laplace's web-bound world and his omniscient Demon. There is a problem in quantum mechanics which makes certain correlations of position and momentum and of energy interaction and time of interaction necessarily indeterminate. Laplace's Demon is denied the ability to correlate exactly certain atomic processes and states. At least this is a position implied in the theorizing of the Copenhagen school of quantum mechanics. These scientists base their case upon Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, and offer as a substitute for Laplacean determinism the weaker proposition proposed in Niels Bohr's complementarity principle. Heisenberg, on the basis of measurements involving different theoretical methods, has concluded that on the submicroscopic level (in micro-micro-physics) there are pairs of parameters which mutually exclude each other's precise measurements. Each of the pair cannot be determined precisely at the same instant. For example both the momentum *and* the position of a particle are simultaneously indeterminate, nor can the precise energy involved in an interaction *and* the precise time of the interaction be simultaneously determined. It follows (so believe the Copenhagen group) that we must give up the notion of causality as an absolutely universal and precisely specified correlation between all perfectly determinate and precisely specified states.

What the Copenhagen scientists offer in place of ideal causality is Bohr's principle of complementarity. According to this principle we can have *either* a precise geometrical account of submicroscopic facts and processes *or* a precise energetic account. "The first gives a kinematic system (as opposed to a dynamic one) in which spatio-temporal coordinates can be assigned exactly but in which the nature of processes taking place at these locations is imperfectly known; the second gives a system of energy exchanges of unlimited precisions, in which it cannot be known where these exchanges are taking place or where anything is going." Peter Caws, whose statement this quotation is, goes on to say: "Now there are two Laplace's demons; one of them views the world kinematically, the other views the world energetically. But they can never compare notes, and consequently neither of them is able to predict the future in detail. . ."[4]

Following Heisenberg's calculations and the assertion of the uncertainty principle, some persons have been claiming that this has made everybody free because indeterminancy is built into the very nature of atomic structures. But such assertions are rather foolish. For one thing, it is a misreading of what most scientists are themselves saying. They are not making a metaphysical/ontological claim, but an epistemological claim. The Copenhagen group is saying these limitations are limitations of ignorance, but more radical ignorance than former probability ignorance, because this ignorance is built into the theory of micro-micro-physics. It is indigenous and ineradicable. According to the Copenhagen interpretation the world could in fact be locked in rigid mechanical order, but it could never be known to be so. And other physicists—especially the Paris group with de Broglie as spokesman—have not accepted any such *a priori* limitation as imposed by the Copenhagen group. They anticipate new theoretical formulations which will overcome the Heisenberg uncertainty and the Bohr complementarity and restore the Demon to its omniscience.

Our point here is not to argue for freedom on the grounds of submicroparticle uncertainty, but to indicate that Laplace's determinism and his demonic intelligence are not established even where they are declared to be most firmly evident. The uncertainty of the Heisenberg principle has not shattered the model of mechanical determinism and enthroned indeterminacy as the true state of affairs in atoms or anywhere else. But what it has done is weaken the claims of a Laplacean-like assertion that all events are determined by measurable coordinates so tightly fixed that no spontaneous and unpredictable happening is even theoretically possible. It should, perhaps, prompt us to accept the model of mechanistic determinism as a model only — as a fruitful way of visualizing reality from a given perspective; namely, that of the physical sciences, at least above the submicro level. But it certainly cannot be maintained as the only model for describing all experience, not even in physics, much less in describing human experience.

But the fact is that this model in a subtle way has been insinuated

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[4]*Philosophy of Science*, N.Y.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1965, p. 301

into the sciences of human experience, and a form of descriptive/reportorial causality (determinism) operates in psychology as it does in physics. This sort of thing, Gilbert Ryle argues, came about through the dualism of Rene Descartes, and has resulted in what Ryle calls the ghost in the machine and the category-mistake. According to Ryle:

> When Galileo showed that his methods of scientific discovery were competent to provide a mechanical theory which should cover every occupant of space, Descartes found in himself two conflicting motives. As a man of scientific genius he could not but endorse the claims of mechanics, yet as a religious and moral man he could not accept... the discouraging rider to these claims, namely, that human nature differs only in degree of complexity from clockwork. The mental could not be just a variety of the mechanical....
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> Instead of asking by what criteria intelligent behavior is actually distinguished from non-intelligent behavior, he asked, "Given that the principle of mechanical causation does not tell the difference, what other causal principle will tell it?" He realized that the problem was not one of mechanics and assumed it must therefore be one of some counterpart of mechanics. Not unnaturally psychology is often cast for just this role.[5]

Ryle argues that through Descartes' efforts (1) an idea of causality parallel to that of Galileo's mechanistic astronomical world was transported into the inside world of man's psychic experience (2) that this gave rise to what Ryle picturesquely calls the "doctrine of the Ghost in the Machine," which (3) "represents the facts of mental life as if they belonged to one logical type or category.... when they actually belong to another. The dogma is therefore a philosopher's myth,"[6] and amounts to what Ryle calls the category-mistake.

A category-mistake occurs when we connect terms in improper conjunction; when we incautiously mix-up our words and categories. One avoids a category-mistake by keeping terms carefully defined and in their proper categories. Ryle illustrates the mistake by telling of a foreigner visiting Oxford who after having been shown the colleges, libraries, museums, administative offices, and-so-forth, asked, "But where is the university?" Ryle says: "His mistake lay in his innocent assumption that it was correct to speak of Christ Church, the Bodleian Library, the Ashmolean Museum *and* the University... as if

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[5]*The Concept of Mind,* London: Hutchinson and Co., 1962, pp. 18-19, 21-22.
[6]*Ibid.,* p. 16

the University stood for an extra member of the class of which these other units are members. He was mistakenly allocating the University to the same category as that to which the other institutions belong."[7]

A more important category-mistake, in reference to our concerns in this paper, and how to avoid it, Ryle clarifies in his analysis of the two different ways in which an occurence is said to be explained; i.e., two ways in which the word cause is used. The word "because" (which is a corruption of 'by cause') has two different functions in two different kinds of explanation. One of these might be called the "descriptive or reportorial because." If asked how the window got broken, the answer might be, "Because the stone thrown by the little boy hit it." This "because" reports an event—the event which stood to the breaking of glass as cause to effect. But a different kind of explanation could be made representing a different kind of cause and a different category of terms. One might say that the window broke (when the boy hit it with a stone) because glass is brittle. This "because" does not report a happening, but is a statement of the character of a given object. It might be called a "dispositional because" as characterized from the above mentioned "descriptive/reportorial because."

This clarification of the meaning of cause is important in the fact that Ryle points out that these causal types may refer to persons as well as stones and glass. He says:

> When we ask, "Why did someone act in a certain way?" this question might, so far as its language goes, either by an inquiry into the cause of his acting in that way, or by an inquiry into the character of the agent which accounts for his having acted in that way on that occasion.[8]

This notion of a dispositional cause will be critical to our examination of the psychoanalytic trap, for it is with the "character of the agent which accounts for his having acted in that way on that occasion" that we must ultimately deal in the question of freedom or unfreedom in human choices.

But first we must follow Ryle's suggestions on category-mistakes a little further, for although this line of pursuit will not solve the human freedom problem, it will give it some necessary clarification, especially when we clarify such key words as scientific law, necessity, determinism, indeterminism, compulsion, coercion, freedom. It is important, first, to recognize that the term scientific law belongs to the

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 16
[8]*Ibid.*, p. 89.

category of *de*scription words, not to the category of *pre*scription words. Scientific law does not order things to happen, but simply describes how they do happen. And the term necessity, when used as a scientific term, is of the same nature. When used in science talk necessity is not a compulsion word, but means "this holds true in all cases." It means the same as universal. Necessary laws and universal laws are those laws (those descriptions) which hold true everywhere without exception. To say that a natural law holds necessarily means that it holds the same in all cases wherever it is applicable. In this same way determinism and indeterminism are to be understood. The opposite of a scientific law is the non-existence of a law, which means no description, which means a situation of acausality or indeterminism. The opposite of indeterminism is determinism, which means a lawful description, or a reportorial or causal description. But what none of these terms means when employed scientifically is compulsion. Compulsion belongs to a different category of words; such as, force, restrain, push, hinder, coerce, constrain, enforce—and the opposite of coercion is noncoercion or freedom.

Professor Moritz Schlick, in an effort to deal with the human freedom question, draws these key word distinctions carefully, and then makes his move to solve the question of human freedom by employing these distinctions properly. Thus he declares:

> Freedom means the opposite of compulsion; a man is *free* when he does not act under *compulsion*, and he is unfree when he is hindered from without in the realization of his natural desires.[9]

So seen the problem of freedom is not a question of determinism/indeterminism. Determinism/indeterminism is simply a matter of descriptive or reportorial explanation. Determinism means capable of precise reporting. Indeterminate means incapable of precise reporting. Neither term is properly used with reference to the question of human freedom. Freedom is opposed not by determinism, but by its proper categorical opposite, compulsion. Straighten out the linguistic confusion, make the proper word connections, and the problem of human freedom, Schlick believes, becomes illuminated and eliminated. The question of freedom is decided not by scientific law, or determinism, or indeterminism, or necessity, or universality, but by the facts or degrees of frustrating compulsion involved in the situation. The freedom question is the question of whether or not a person is able to choose and/or act to the "realization of his natural desires." Scientific laws (in this case psychological laws) are not compulsions

[9]*Problems of Ethics*, translated by David Rynin, N.Y.: Dover Pub., 1962, p. 149

forcing a person to make certain decisions, but simply statements which describe "the desires he *actually has* under given conditions; they describe the nature of the will in the same manner as the astronomical laws describe the nature of planets."[10]
Having desires, the question of freedom is: can one carry them out effectively, or is he blocked by some external force or factor? For example, a person is free when he has a passionate desire to make love to a certain woman and she is willing and the place is available and they do it. The question of freedom is not a question of whether his passionate nature caused a specific desire, but whether the woman was willing and the place was available. One is unfree not because he has desires that "cause " actions, but because his desires are frustrated; e.g., the woman might refuse or her husband interfere. One is unfree if he is restrained or compelled against his will.

Compulsion (which destroys freedom) is something that acts coercively or restrainingly from the outside, frustrating a desire. Schlick holds that even when a person acts under the influence of alcohol or drugs or mental illness he is being compelled by an influence which may be considered external. In the case of alcohol and narcotics he is being prevented or compelled to make decisions in ways other than "peculiar to his nature." Also, "in the case of a person who is mentally ill we do not consider him free with respect to those acts in which the disease expresses itself, because we view the illness as a disturbing factor which hinders the normal functioning of his natural tendencies."[11]

If Schlick is right the problem of human freedom is more a linguistic problem than a metaphysical one: just connect the proper terms and the problem of human freedom is laid to rest. But unfortunately the Gordian knot is not quite so easily cut, for although such language analysis does help to illuminate the problem, it does not really eliminate the problem. The problem now takes on an uncomfortable psychoanalytic dimension, and we must ask: Even if a person is able freely to choose according to his desires, does he ever, in any significant sense, freely choose *what he desires?* Arthur Schopenhauer seems to have hit the target when he said, "Der man Kann was er will; er kann aber nicht wollen was er will."

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 148
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 151.