

Freedom as the Efficacy of knowledge

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In this paper, I am primarily concerned with freedom in the metaphysical sense, not with political freedom. Nevertheless, some of my examples will have political import, and I do believe that there is a relation of theoretical support between the conception of freedom which I am defending and the conception of political freedom that I would wish to defend; and, on the other hand, between the conception of political freedom that I am opposing and the conceptions of political freedom that I regard as mystifying. Some of the criticisms which I will attempt to refute have been made in the context of political polemics, and some of the problems I attempt to solve have arisen - among other places - within a politically oriented tradition of philosophy, namely Marxism.

It may therefore help to avoid misunderstandings if I state at the outset that the conception of political freedom to which I adhere is that which identifies freedom with the power to get what one wants, to remove obstacles to satisfaction. I reject on the one hand neo-liberal notions of 'purely negative' liberty which rules out only deliberate interference, and on the other, idealist notions which permit expressions like 'being compelled to be free'.

Roads to freedom ?

There have been two main metaphysical notions of freedom. They may be called (though the terms are a bit unsatisfactory) the voluntarist and the intellectual notions. According to the voluntarist notion, freedom is an attribute of 'the will' - different possibilities are presented to the will, whether by 'impulses' or culture, and it chooses between them, being itself undetermined causally in its choice. This view has often been found philosophically unsatisfactory in the form stated, but reappears in its essential features in other forms. Examples: the idea of 'reason' conceived as providing itself with its own ends, as in Kant; and Sartre's 'fundamental choice', which takes place at the pre-reflective level, yet has many of the characteristics of the traditional 'free will'.

The intellectual notion is that freedom is rational self-direction, i. e. direction by reason, which indeed receives all its motives from 'outside', from impulses and their culturally modified forms, which is in other words 'a slave of the passions'. This does not of course mean that though intrinsically having different ends from the passions, it is subordinated to them. Rather, the very essence of reason is the service of the passions, by acquiring knowledge of the world in which they must be satisfied and initiating rational action to satisfy them; also by raising the awareness of those passions themselves to the level of knowledge, and dealing with contradictions within and between them. Reason is a link in the causal chain between a desire and its satisfaction. In Freud's terms, reason is the reality-principle - a modification of the pleasure-principle in the service of which it remains, based on the perceptual system and linked to motility, aimed at securing 'the line of maximum

advantage' rather than 'the line of least resistance'. This notion of freedom has sometimes been expressed in formulas like 'freedom is knowledge' or is 'the knowledge of necessity', or, less happily, 'the consciousness or recognition of necessity'.

I do not intend in this paper to prove the truth of the intellectualist conception of freedom. My grounds for believing it to be true are concerned with the fact that it accounts for our experience of freedom in a way that is compatible with a scientific realist ontology. I intend rather to show that it is coherent, and does not lead to some of the consequences which it has been thought to by its opponents. However, though I do not think it necessary to show that the intellectualist view accords better with our self-experience than others in order to prove it, there are certain ways in which it does. In particular, it allows for degrees of freedom, whereas voluntarist freedom is an all-or-nothing thing. Insofar as our actions - motivated by 'passions' - are based on self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, they are more free. Insofar as we are ignorant of forces outside us, we are at their mercy. And insofar as repression hides our desires from us and displacement presents to us as our desires things that will not really satisfy us, we are at the mercy of our own unconscious.

Now knowledge in itself tells us about how things are: they can only change in accordance with causal laws, which can of course be the objects of knowledge. We can change things, but our activity itself must also obey these laws. No process which takes place only in our consciousness can change things, unless it issues in such action. Changes in consciousness itself are products of processes governed by causal laws. In order to satisfy our desires we must act on the world; both the desire and the action occur as part of law-governed processes; to a greater or lesser extent, knowledge of these processes also occurs as part of these processes, and it is the effectivity of this knowledge that we call 'freedom'.

The voluntarist sees all this not as a theory about how we can become freer and change the world, but as a denial (implicit at least) that we can do so at all. I want to show that he is mistaken in doing so, and to understand the nature of this mistake.

The intellectualist position has been stated in the following terms by Engels:

'Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves - two classes of laws which we can separate from each other at most only in thought but not in reality. Freedom of the will therefore means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with knowledge of the subject. Therefore the freer a man's judgment

in relation to a definite question, the greater is the necessity with which the content of this judgment will be determined' (Anti-Dühring, pp136-7)

Of course, the voluntarist will have no trouble in accepting that our power can be increased by means of knowledge of the external world. But just because he accepts that, he is driven towards dualism; every extension of our power over nature is a result of greater knowledge of natural necessity. But if this knowledge can be universally extended, he has cause to worry about 'free will'. Certainly this is Kant's road to dualism: 'The starry heavens above (i.e. science, which requires determinism) and the moral law within (which requires free will).'

Engels is explicitly rejecting this dualism: we are subject to the laws of natural necessity as are other phenomena, so that knowledge of these laws constitutes our mental freedom as well as our power over nature, from which it is not essentially different.

This position of Engels has been repeatedly criticised within the Marxist tradition, by thinkers of a voluntaristic tendency. Part of what provoked me to write this paper was the bafflement I feel at the way important thinkers like Lucio Colletti can state their determinist opponent's position with great clarity, and yet fail to see that it is a consistent one, or that it does not have the anti-activist implications attributed to it. The same misunderstandings have been reiterated time and again, and each attempt to dispel them, however lucid, seems doomed to be misinterpreted in the same way. The debate cannot get any further until the voluntarists start criticising the intellectualist position as it is actually held, rather than as they imagine it to be. It seems to me that the epistemological obstacle in this matter is a dualistic metaphysics which the voluntarists seem to assume as if it were an obvious fact - indeed the assumption seems to be unconscious. There are a whole lot of voluntarist texts which only make sense on this assumption (e.g. all the 'western Marxist' attempts to show that the reformism of the Second International stemmed from determinist philosophical premises which were shared by the Bolsheviks). And this goes for non-marxist and semi-marxist criticisms (Berlin and Sartre) as well. I take Colletti as an example because I have more respect for him as a philosopher and as a Marxist than for most. In particular, he cannot be suspected of anti-scientific prejudices. Yet when Engels or Plekhanov say that human activity is part of a law-governed historic process, Colletti interprets them as saying that human activity has no effect on the course of history, that it is a mere epiphenomenon. He sees such activity as necessarily an intervention, from outside any law-governed process. Hearing that human activity is also governed by these laws, he can only interpret this as meaning that these law-governed processes and human activities exist alongside each other, but that there is a one-way action of the process on the activities. That the human activities are an essential part of this process, having both causes and effects within it, he seems unable to conceive. Here is how he replies to Plekhanov:

Plekhanov:

'the man who appears to be the cause of a given social phenomenon can and must in turn be considered a consequence of those social phenomena which have contributed to the formation of his character and the direction of his will. Considered as a consequence, social

man can no longer be considered a free agent; the circumstances which have determined his actions do not depend upon his will. Hence his activity now appears as an activity subordinated to the law of necessity'

Colletti:

'The argument could not be clearer: man, who in his own consciousness imagines himself to be the cause, is in reality the effect and nothing but the effect.'

(Colletti, From Rousseau to Lenin p68. Plekhanov quoted in the Colletti text)

Now Plekhanov has not in fact said that man is only an effect not also a cause; he has said that man is not only a cause but also an effect, and therefore that the process as a whole is an unbroken causal chain. The word 'appears' which might have led Colletti to assume that the causal efficacy of human action is being denied, occurs also in the last sentence, where it cannot have that sense. Moreover on p70, Plekhanov is quoted as saying:

'Social Democracy considers historical development from the standpoint of necessity, and its own activity as a necessary link in the chain of those necessary conditions which combined, make the triumph of socialism inevitable. A necessary link cannot be superfluous. If it were suppressed it would shatter the whole chain of events.'

This should make it indisputable that Plekhanov's view of human activity is not the epiphenomenalist one Colletti is ascribing to him. The dualist source of Colletti's inability to see what Plekhanov is saying is revealed in another passage where he accuses the Marxists of the Second International of emptying the concept of the economy of its socio-historical content, reducing it to that of technology. The rationale of this accusation seems to be that he can only conceive of human activity and processes subject to natural necessity as two mutually exclusive orders of being; hence if anyone says that economic processes are governed by causal laws, he can only assume that they exclude human activities from 'the economic'.

Colletti paraphrases the intellectualist formula 'freedom is the recognition of necessity': 'Freedom, in other words, is consciousness of being determined.' (p69). This is the most usual interpretation of this formula by its opponents. It is taken to mean that as we can't affect the future we had better accept what comes: che sera sera; what can't be cured must be endured, and so on. No doubt there have been philosophers who hoped that the 'recognition of necessity' would lead to such attitudes. Marcus Aurelius says: 'instead of praying to be granted or spared such-and-such a thing, why not pray rather to be delivered from dreading it, or lusting for it, or grieving over it...' (Meditations, book 9-40). This view still has its adherents. In reply to the frustration of the Street Fighting Man, the Beatles sing:

'You say you'll change the constitution
Well you know
We all want to change your head
You tell me it's the institution
Well you know
You better free your mind instead'

Sometimes (by no means always) such a view is justified by its adherents in terms of an intellectual-

ist ethic, i. e. if you only knew enough, you would know that nothing could be different from what it is, and you would resign yourself. This attitude is sometimes attributed to Spinoza, and Colletti feels Spinoza's presence lurking behind Plekhanov, Engels and Hegel. He quotes a conversation between Plekhanov and Engels to illustrate their admiration for Spinoza. Sebastiano Timpanaro, criticising Colletti's voluntarism, agrees that the intellectualist formula is inadequate, but:

'Not because of its anti-voluntarism, but because of its anti-hedonism; because it denies the importance of the meaning of freedom as the absence of painful constraints and the presence of all those conditions which ensure the happiness of the individual; and because it insists that man not only recognize necessity but also glory and efface himself in it. Thus, it is part of that conception of philosophy as asceticism and self-repression . . . which Marxism utterly rejects.' (On Materialism p106)

But he goes on to defend Engels' use of this formula in that it is meant 'not so much in the Spinozist sense of an acquiescence in and apotheosis of reality, as in the Baconian sense that nature obeys us only if we obey it.' Unquestionably, Timpanaro's interpretation of Engels is correct. After all, Engels says elsewhere:

'Only very exceptionally, and in no case to his and other people's profit, can an individual satisfy his urge towards happiness by pre-occupation with himself. Rather it requires preoccupation with the outside world, means to satisfy his needs, that is to say, means of subsistence, an individual of the opposite sex, books, conversation, argument, activities, objects for use and working up. Feuerbach's morality either presupposes that these means and objects of satisfaction are given to every individual as a matter of course, or else it offers only inapplicable good advice and is not therefore worth a brass farthing to people who are without these means.'

('Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy')

So clearly Engels cannot agree with Marcus Aurelius, John Lennon and Paul McCartney. What is more a matter of dispute is whether Spinoza did. Certainly if Stuart Hampshire's interpretation is correct, his views are very close to those of Engels, but there is no time to go into this question here.

Determinism and fatalism

What I do want to argue is that the Stoic interpretation of the intellectualist formula is not only not the only possible version of the intellectualist position; it is actually not even a coherent version of it at all (at any rate, given a few factual assumptions which I think anyone will allow).

According to the Stoic version, when we know that everything happens in accordance with necessity, we know that it could not be otherwise, and this prevents us from fretting. Knowledge of necessity therefore has effects on human consciousness - it makes it resigned instead of discontented. But then one must ask: If human consciousness is itself part of the reality governed by necessary laws, and is affected in accordance with them, does it not also have effects in accordance with them? If so, then the occurrence of this phenomenon - the knowledge of necessity in human consciousness - will cause the world to be different from what it would have been

had that human consciousness remained ignorant. And this difference will consist precisely in the fact that the person concerned will behave in different ways - in this case, more resigned ways - than he or she would have done otherwise (together with all the manifold effects, near and remote, of such behaviour). Epictetus the slave, instead of revolting against his slavery like Spartacus, will accept it - and if enough slaves do likewise, history will be different from what it would have been had enough slaves been like Spartacus.

But if this is the case, the original assumption that the only behaviour which the knowledge of necessity would make rational is resigned behaviour, is false; for differences in the content of human knowledge can have real effects, and the way one interprets the world will determine the way one will change it. Either the Stoic must admit that his advocacy of Stoicism is pointless, for the non-resigned behaviour of non-stoics is also necessary; (in which case the belief that instruction can change behaviour must be abandoned); or there is no a priori reason for thinking knowledge will lead to resigned behaviour rather than some other kind - it will depend on the content of the knowledge.

Why, if this is so, should it be assumed that knowing the world more will lead to changing it less? If one comes to know the causes of a particular form of human misery, and the means by which human action could remove those causes, such knowledge will motivate such action.

The only factual assumption which could make sense of the stoic position would be the notion that the human cognitive faculty is a mere observer, epiphenomenal to processes going on in the world, with no effects on those processes, even those of them that are human actions. But this is an absurd notion - we could make no sense at all of human action without recognising that knowledge of the world is involved in it, at however rudimentary a level; and the increase of knowledge through science quite obviously increases our power over the world and changes our behaviour towards it.

Why then is the accusation so widespread that intellectualism and determinism lead to resignation and passivity, while voluntarism alone justifies the transformation of the world? Certainly it cannot express a historical correlation, for the opposite correlation obtains. No one has been more activist in changing things than determinists like Mohammed, Calvin, Cromwell and Lenin, while voluntarism has most often been invoked to justify adaptation, 'the will' being set up against our inclinations (as in Catholicism, Kantian and Existentialist Protestantism, etc.) However, this does not worry voluntarist critics, who simply charge activist determinists with inconsistency.

The accusation must rest on the confusion of determinism and fatalism - often, the inability to see that these are different, even when it is pointed out. This inability can only rest on the dualistic separation of the realm of human thought and the realm of causal processes.

For example, take Isaiah Berlin's 'Introduction' (actually a postscript) to his Four Essays on Liberty. He says on page xiii:

'I have been charged with confusing determinism with fatalism. But this too is a complete misunderstanding. I assume that what is meant or implied by fatalism is the view that human decisions are mere by-products, epiphenomena, incapable of influencing events which take their

inscrutable course independently of human wishes. I have never attributed this un- plausible position to any of my opponents. '

Yet on the very next page he quotes Kant to the effect that this 'weak determinism' (i.e. the non-fatalistic kind) is 'a miserable subterfuge'. A few pages later he is saying:

'Men evidently find it perfectly possible to subscribe to determinism in the study and disregard it in their lives. Fatalism has not bred passivity in Moslems, nor has determinism sapped the vigour of Calvinists or Marxists, although some Marxists feared it might. Practice sometimes belies profession, no matter how sincerely held.' (pp. xvi-xvii)

He has simply collapsed determinism back into fatalism, and attributed inconsistency to determinists for not acting as if they were fatalists.

The doctrine of fatalism indeed makes perfectly good sense, and if it were true, it would indeed be the case that knowing what was 'necessary' (e.g. from a fortune-teller) would have no effects, for its apparent effects on behaviour would have been fated too. Thus it was precisely the action taken by Laius to prevent the fulfilment of the prophesy concerning his son Oedipus, which in fact 'led to' its fulfilment.

However, as Popper has pointed out, scientific laws do not predict the future in this way, but rather state under what conditions particular events will occur - though Popper, absurdly enough, attributes historical fatalism to Marxists.

Engel's law ..?

Now to return to Engels' formulation: it may be noted that the laws of nature and of society are put on a par here by Engels. There is a tendency for Marxists of a voluntarist bent to see socio-historical laws as somehow 'unreal' and an effect of 'alienation' or 'reification', and to imagine that in a socialist society there would be no such laws. Engels on the other hand while expressing a similar point about the collective self-direction which socialism would make possible, does not use a voluntarist model of this possibility; it would consist, just as does our freedom in relation to nature, in the rational use of knowledge of laws to obtain our ends. Of course it is not a simple matter of knowledge of those laws here, for within capitalist society, vested interests make rational planning impossible beyond a certain point, however great the development of knowledge of socio-economic laws. But the point is that where the voluntaristic Marxist sees an original freedom alienating itself and producing an appearance of socio-historical determinism, Engels sees such determinism as the original reality, and such freedom as is possible in this area as consisting in the knowledge and use of it. (See p331 of Anti-Dühring for verification of this.)

At this point it is perhaps worth mentioning a common confusion in Marxist theory - that between the distinctions between economic and political practices, and between determinism and free will. Certainly political activity requires a conscious 'decision' in some sense that economic does not. From this it is often concluded that in the economic realm determinism reigns, but political activity is free (in a voluntaristic sense). Determinist Marxism is simply equated with economic Marxism. Yet there is clearly a difference between maintaining that there are laws governing historical processes at all levels - economic, political and ideo-

logical - and maintaining that politics and ideology are mere epiphenomena of economics(1).

A related confusion concerns 'the role of the individual in history'. Human individuals live and act in accordance with the principles of biology, psychoanalysis etc as well as of historical materialism. In certain conditions, events determined by these laws can have significant historical effects - e.g. Lenin's death and Stalin's paranoia. This means that historical explanation cannot be a closed system - i.e. historical developments cannot necessarily be explained purely in terms of the concepts of historical materialism as a theoretical science. This is not a feature specific to human history - in the concrete application of any science, allowance must be made for the fact that any concrete event will be liable to have determinants which cannot be theorized in the concepts of the theoretical science in question. But this 'indeterminacy' is relative to a particular set of theoretical concepts - those of a particular science - it can in no way make room for 'free will'. Thus if a doctor predicts that a patient will recover, and that patient is killed by a hospital roof collapsing on him, no one thinks that this throws doubt on the doctor's competence, let alone on determinism.

This illusion of indeterminacy arises within historical materialism when e.g. the transformation of an economic structure by political action occurs. The transformation cannot be explained within economics. Thus, the process of the socialisation of labour and the concentration of capital under capitalism can all be accounted for within economic theory, but the transition from capitalist to socialist relations of production cannot - a theory of the political is also required for that. But historical materialism of course includes such a theory. If indeed the concepts of historical materialism became inapplicable in revolutionary periods, that theory would be all but useless for the workers' movement.

Knowing thyself

So far I have discussed knowledge of laws of nature and society as ways to enlarge freedom. I now come to the question of individual self-knowledge or self-awareness. This could potentially have various roles in transforming practice. It might lead in certain contexts to Stoic resignation - learning not to set one's heart on what one cannot obtain. It might also lead to self-acceptance, to admitting 'I am like that, there's nothing that can be done about it', and perhaps to the elimination of feelings of guilt about what one is. Or it might lead to the effort to change what one is like, on analogy with using knowledge of the outer world to change it. I do not want to deny that each of these have their place, though all, I think, have rather small places. What would result from self-knowledge in each given case would depend, not on the nature of self-knowledge in general, or on any prior moral commitment, but on the content of the self-knowledge in each particular case.

However the main type of self-knowledge that I want to consider is that which is involved in psychoanalysis. This is not the place to go into this in detail, but rather to note its peculiarities and differences from the possibilities mentioned above.

Suppose in the course of analysis an analysand becomes aware of a desire to kill his father. I am assuming that this is not merely a matter of accept-

1 Indeed, the greater 'consciousness' that characterises political rather than economic struggle has been theorized by Lenin precisely in terms of the intervention of knowledge, i.e. of Marxist theory, without any recourse to voluntarism. See What is to be Done?

ing the analyst's interpretation to the effect that he unconsciously has this wish, but a genuine abreaction of the desire. This increase of self-awareness will not lead him to say: 'Well, it's not practicable for me to kill my father, so I shall just have to acclimatize myself to his continued existence.' Neither does he say: 'So I'm the sort of man that wants to kill his father! At least I won't feel guilty about it.' And nor does he say: 'How dreadful! I'm a potential parricide. I must train myself to have only loving thoughts towards my father.' Of course he might initially say any of these things, but the solution is for him to recognise that the original situation in which the desire to kill his father was an intelligible response has now passed, and that it will be more satisfying to direct his energies in other directions. It is necessary to say this because of a particular reactionary objection to psychoanalysis, and a particular ambiguous response to it. Many moralists when first confronted with psychoanalysis react by saying: 'If we have all these repressed desires for incest, parricide and sexual violence, it is better to keep them repressed.' To this the psychoanalyst is likely to reply: 'The person who becomes aware of these desires is less likely to act on them, not more. Once they are raised to consciousness it is possible to deal with them.' This reply is essentially correct, but the vagueness of the term 'deal with' leaves the way open for a possible moralistic misunderstanding. For after all, psychoanalysis is aimed at enabling people to fulfill desires which crippling neuroses prevented them from fulfilling, not at reconciling them to frustration.

The picture which the expression 'deal with' may call up is that of turning on a light (bringing the repressed into consciousness) so that one can arrest the burglar (the unacceptable wish) that was previously concealed by the darkness. The act of arresting the burglar then looks like an act of 'free will' for which the illumination was merely a precondition. But a better analogy would be that of a hallucination which is dispersed by the very act of turning the light on. Actually it is not quite that simple; better still is the analogy Freud himself uses - the wish is like the archaeological treasures of which Freud was so fond. Once brought into the light of day, they are subjected to a process of weathering, from which their previously entombment had preserved them. Moreover these repressed wishes which are residues of childhood do not disappear without trace; a wish is an idea combined with an emotive charge (cathexis). When brought into consciousness the idea is subject to the weathering of rational criticism; the emotive energy is then released for other purposes.

But the point I am making here is that it is the abreaction and subsequent consciousness of the wish which is itself effective in dissipating it; it does not merely make it vulnerable to an additional act of free will. This is a genuine case of freedom as the knowledge of necessity at the individual level, which is not a mere case of resignation, self-acceptance or self-discipline.

(The qualification 'of necessity' may indeed seem superfluous and even misleading here, for it is not primarily the causal laws that are the objects of knowledge. It would be better to say 'freedom is the effectivity of knowledge within a process governed by causal laws'.)

As I have said, I think there is a place for all the three responses to knowledge that I have left out of consideration above; but that place is concerned with

man's biological being, rather than his psychological or social being.

In the case of self-acceptance: it is by no means the case that one has to accept as permanent characteristics of oneself the contents of the unconscious as revealed by psychoanalysis; however, self-knowledge is I think incompatible with, for example, the ascetic repudiation of sexuality. The acceptance of one's biological being is the only attitude towards it compatible with self-knowledge. (This in no way implies that one need accept the use made of biological characteristics by a given culture - e.g. gender roles.)

But there are also aspects of the realm of biological necessity which we cannot and should not 'accept' in any positive sense, but must nevertheless resign ourselves to. Such are the irremediably tragic facts of transience, old age and death. There is a sense in which acceptance without morbidity is the only reasonable response to these facts, given their unavailability. But this 'acceptance' should certainly not weaken the desire to struggle against them by medical science, humane living conditions and so on. Neither does it invalidate what Dylan Thomas was saying in his poem 'Do not go gentle into that good night'.

Finally, there is a place here also for an element of self-discipline, of conscious training and direction of one's desires, based on knowledge of them and of the real possibilities of their fulfilment, recognising that 'the line of least resistance' is not necessarily 'the line of greatest advantage'. This needs stressing because some critics of Freud from a radical standpoint have disliked his insistence on the importance of the reality-principle and a strong ego, and have accused him of being an enemy of the instincts, a puritan. Yet in the absence of some control and direction of our impulses, their satisfaction would be extremely crude and in the end self-destructive. If I get hungry, I go and cook myself some food; I don't grab the neighbour's cat and devour it raw, nor do I try to eat the book I am reading. In regard to sexual instincts, the liberation of the pleasure-principle from the reality-principle would not be a prescription for free love, but for rape and masturbation. This in no way means that an anti-instinctual morality can be justified in the name of the reality-principle. Reason is indeed the slave of the passions, but it is the sighted slave of a blind master.

Knowledge and freedom

I now want to return to a point which emerges from the manner in which knowledge liberates in the cases of psychoanalysis and historical materialism. In neither case is the effectivity of knowledge a given. It depends on the distribution and organisation of psychological and social forces respectively. In the case of psychoanalysis, the knowledge must be accompanied by an abreaction of emotion, which alters the organisation of the psychic forces so as to make the previously repressed material accessible to the knowing consciousness. That is to say, it is not knowledge about the repressed wish which subjects it to 'weathering', but the removal of the cognitive barriers between the wish and the conscious, rational part of the mind.

In the case of historical materialism, it is not possible for the capitalist class or its state, as long as it upholds capitalism (as it must), to subject social production to the rational control of society, this can only be brought about by the workers' state which has expropriated the capitalists.

Thus it is not the case that always and everywhere knowledge is of itself effective in liberating us. This is not some metaphysical property which knowledge always has. That would be an idealist illusion - or if you like, a paranoid one - 'the omnipotence of thought'. But it is not that knowledge-plus-something-else constitutes freedom, so that 'free will' could fit in the empty place. Rather, freedom is possible only insofar as things are so arranged (without there necessarily being an arranger) that such knowledge can be effective. Of course, elements of knowledge may also be effective in bringing about a state of affairs in which the effectivity of knowledge is increased. Thus the workers' knowledge of capitalist society may lead to their activity in overthrowing it, which in turn greatly extends the effectivity of knowledge of socio-economic laws.

It is now possible to give an account of the phenomenon referred to in everyday discourse as 'free will' - an account which both preserves distinctions such as free action/compulsive action, and is compatible with determinism. A person's choices etc are free if they are amenable to reason. So we can say 'he acted freely, i.e. he could have done otherwise' without either implying that he could have escaped or did escape causal determinism, or meaning no more than that his acting otherwise was logically possible. It is meant that he could have done otherwise had good reasons been presented to him for so doing.

For example: Freud's patient known as the Wolf-Man later underwent a second analysis by Ruth Mack Brunswick for a monosymptomatic hypochondria, involving the delusion that his nose was deformed and unsightly following a minor operation (2). Although not psychotic, and in other respects amenable to reason, nothing could persuade him that this was not so, until the unconscious sources of his belief were made conscious. The unfreedom, the compulsiveness of this complaint consists just in this imperviousness to reason. The raising of repressed ideas to consciousness makes them subject to rational criticism.

Now the Wolf-Man himself was one of those who wanted to show that psychoanalysis and free will were compatible; he held that once analysis had done this work of making conscious, it depended on free will what attitude the patient took to the material which had been made conscious. But given that the urge for consistency and factual accuracy of ideas is a characteristic of consciousness, it is hard to see how the Wolf-Man could have chosen to go on believing that his nose was deformed after a successful analysis. The efficacy of reason does not presuppose 'free will' in the metaphysical sense, though it accounts for the difference between free and un-free action.

Another example: the statement attributed to Martin Luther 'Here I stand, I can do no other', has been the subject of some debate in the controversy over free will, as it is a case of the self-attribution of constraint in a case of an eminently free act, in the everyday sense of 'free'. I mention it here as I think I can claim Luther's authority (for what it is worth) for my position. Luther had devoted a whole book to attacking the notion of free will, so I am not impressed by those who wish to explain away the apparently determinist implications. Nevertheless no one, I take it, would want to doubt that Luther, in refusing to repudiate his doctrines,

2 See *The Wolf-Man and Sigmund Freud*, ed. Muriel Gardiner, Penguin

was acting as freely as anyone ever does - as freely as the legendary 'smiling bridegroom'.

The solution of this supposed contradiction is given by Luther himself: 'Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason... I am bound by the scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.' His 'bondage' was to what he thought he had good grounds for believing. His 'freedom' was his openness to argument.

Something parallel to this amenability to reason appears at the political level as well. There are many humane and well-intentioned individuals who urge us Marxists to seek change by reason rather than by violence. They urge for instance that more good would be done by convincing people of the desirability of preventing ecological disaster, distributing wealth more equally etc. What we accuse them of overlooking is that there is no mechanism within capitalist society for taking and implementing such decisions. Capitalist politics, like the Wolf-Man's delusion, is not amenable to reason. Socialism would alter the structural determinants of the social 'decision-making' process in such a way as to make it amenable to reason.

Freedom is the efficacy of knowledge; it is extended not only by extending knowledge, but by increasing the conditions of its efficacy; and this cannot be achieved by pure reason, but by activities which, though rationally justifiable, are not limited to those of reasoning.

Ideology & Consciousness

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