



FREEDOM THE ONLY END

By F. McEachran

THE IDEAL OF FREEDOM, which occupied so important a position in philosophic discussion in the nineteenth century, is now rarely referred to. The vocabulary of collectivism now includes such euphemisms as discipline, work, unity, strength, solidarity, but the word freedom, if used at all is limited to the sense of freedom from foreign control or influence. In the older liberal countries such as England, France and America, the word has become corrupted so that its use is now largely a matter of the traditional façade, behind which, hardly concealed, lies the socialist background. A "free" school or a "free" library does not mean a school or a library which we have chosen freely to go to without state direction, but a school or library which we can (ostensibly) use for nothing. It is a development completely in harmony with the modern trend. A socialist state is ultimately a state where everything is free in this sense. But freedom, in the old meaning of the individual being able to make his own decisions, goes by the board.

It is a solacing and strengthening thought, however, to note that whatever may happen to society as a whole, or even to individual organisms as they grow up, the beginning of life is always exactly what nature intended. The characteristics of slavery, bureaucracy or monopoly are acquired, not inherited. Every child begins life as a perfect anarchist, autonomous to act for itself on self-impressions, but innocent of any super-imposed law. How quickly the clamp is put on, of course, varies with the social environment—less quickly in Europe than in Asia and perhaps least of all in the newer countries.

However cleverly its definition may be twisted to serve certain ends, freedom is worthy of philosophic study because it fulfils the two ends of metaphysics which all philosophy fulfils — the explanation of the self and the explanation of God, other than which no real problem exists. Freedom simply says that you exist and you develop and you take the consequences.

It is this which raises the philosophy of freedom on to a much higher level than any philosophy of collectivism. The man who rejects freedom, who blames the environment, who praises the state, who worships power, can never say "I am responsible; it was I who did it," and can never have the real joy of success or the real sorrow of failure. He can have other joys, and other sorrows, no doubt, but they are of a borrowed or vicarious kind.

They are blurred and indistinct, since they refer not to a man but to many men, to the vague whole which society creates. Such half-joys and half-sorrows are debilitating, depriving man of the real joy of living, of real victory and real defeat. It is the tragedy of modern civilisation that as the official position grows no individual is responsible for anything and only departments can be brought to blame. The mechanism of the spirit grows apace and the real ego dies.

We have seen that the biggest act of original sin is to meet freedom and reject it, which may well be the "sin against the Holy Ghost." Those in power will try almost anything to maintain their position — the worst methods with the best: flogging, imprisonment, death; and also charity, benevolence and paternal love — but they will not try freedom. They will try to improve on the laws of nature; they will mitigate their impact when they think it serves their purpose; they will pay lip-service to them and often blaspheme and condemn them, but the one thing they will not do is to let them work. They will see their industries and the industries of others ruined, their agricultural crops and those of others distorted and even destroyed, and they will invent the subtlest and most devious nostrums for self inflicted ills; they will subsidise the employer and the employed, the producer and the consumer; they will build up vast armies and fight great wars — but there is one thing they will not do, and that is to let freedom work. Until they acknowledge and restore freedom neither they, their victims nor their descendants will enjoy the blessings of peace. If man prefers the way to ruin, he is free to pursue it, and God serenely awaits the issue.

It is evident that, in the last resort, our philosophy is theology, and one of an uncompromisingly teleological kind. If there really is a main line of evolution, if freedom of the individual organism be its only meaning, and if that main line, must, in the end, prevail, then quite definitely the universe has a purpose. Otherwise it would be arguable that freedom was not the end, that the collectivist bees and ants are on the better path and they, not man, lead to the delectable city. Or it might be argued that species how extinct were on the right road, only to be exterminated *ante diem* by a malicious accident. Or again, that some lesser organism, the monkey perhaps, or the lizard, might one day catch us up and inherit the

true crown. All these possibilities and many others are there to be discussed, but all suffer from the same defect that it is man, not they, who thinks, judges and passes sentence. His gift for freedom has brought him so far; it is hard to think it will not bring him to a final and good end.



PATTERN FOR REALITY

IF THE OUTLOOK described in the preceding pages appears somewhat dark, the reader is warned not to be unduly pessimistic, and above all, not to ask too much. The point of view advanced is not rosy, it is true, and it even suggests that the world may get worse before it gets better, but it does so in no other interest than that of the truth, which is, after all, the final criterion. The truth gives the world a meaning, and out of that meaning, hope for humanity may arise.

Stated more philosophically, the matter is simply this. There are running through the whole of reality two sorts of existence corresponding to the logical ideas of universals and particulars, and these two levels never exist apart. What their existence or their relation to each other may be on the level of physical science we do not know, and as regards its significance for man, we do not greatly care. On the other hand, the co-existence of these levels in the human (and perhaps animal) sphere is of the utmost importance for man, and contains the key to a large part of human vicissitude.

Now through the multiplicity of particulars which constitutes the world of nature, there runs a series of connections between universals, known in scientific parlance as "the laws of nature," which happen to be of the greatest use to mankind. We cannot prove this logically — we merely induce it from our experiences — but in practice it makes all the difference to human life. The old adage to follow nature means in this sense to pick out nature's laws or uniformities or universals and to apply them in our social and economic life. The result will be, as experience shows, a general harmony in the *res humanae*.

Now in practice, although it is possible for the individual to know and not to do, it is not possible for society; and whatever society as a whole knows, it always does. When only a few people knew that slavery was wrong, and society as a whole accepted it, it went on. When most people saw it was wrong, it stopped — not before. The transition from the first of these states to the second is, of course, a long and possibly painful process. But it does happen in the course of human events. Universals when seen universally are always put into practice.

The fight to perceive and implement the universal pattern is the major fight in the history of civilisation. It follows that the acts of individuals only assume importance when linked up with the potentially universal pattern, and this implies, of course, that the acts of the first correspond in some sense to reality. It means, further, that no single man can change the course of history, and that all apparent exceptions to this rule such as Julius Caesar, Confucius, Mohammed, Kemal Ataturk, are apparent only. Changes do occur, and new universal patterns do arise, but only by virtue of long ages and many minds. Chattel slavery, as one example of this, lasted some nine thousand years, and is perhaps not yet completely dead in the minds of backward peoples. Again, the influence of Christ, which has for many years been brought to bear on the Western mind, has today probably less effect than it had in the first three centuries of our era. But, as we now see that it has hardly had time to prove itself — that it has in fact hardly yet been tried — there is still hope for the future.

Progress, then, is the slow discovery and application of natural law, a process which may take thousands or even millions of years. The "uniformities" we discover in nature, and to which we give the name "law," may be erroneously formulated for purely subjective reasons, as when Ptolemy thought the sun went round the earth and was later corrected by Copernicus. They may start by being correct and then become faulty through mere cosmic lapse of time; thus the "objective" laws of the solar system, such as Kepler's laws of planetary movement, may change gradually as the cosmic dance draws to its end. A formula might work well for a few million years, only to reveal itself, after the lapse of a thousand million, seriously divergent from the facts. A new formula would then be devised, adequate to the next milliard years, and so on.

A similar but more intimate case is the law of nature that makes men demand and produce food in order to live, and which impels them to slaughter the lower animals in millions. The slow change in subjective feeling on this matter, which already prevents men eating their own kind (except on rare and exceptional occasions), may well lead in the end to a completely vegetarian society where the very idea of eating flesh becomes abhorrent. It may be that the development may go even beyond that and that a "universal" which forbids any "living" food may be created, a suggestion on which I will refrain for the moment from speculating. The world has a long way to go yet, that is all.

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