

# interpretation

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## FREEDOM AS AN END OF POLITICS

ROBERT F. SASSEEN

## I

Political science is called upon to determine the consequences for freedom of various policies and institutions. This requires investigation both of the policies and institutions, on the one hand, and of freedom, on the other. Otherwise, the efficient pursuit of what is thought to be freedom may result in the establishment of what is, in fact, slavery. The determination of what freedom is, then, is that part of political science which makes possible the meaningful investigation and successful identification of those policies and institutions which preserve or destroy it.

This paper seeks to understand the freedom which can be an end of politics by examining a dominant opinion of what this freedom is. Men often speak of the freedom of falling stones, uncaged tigers or potent gods. It is evident, however, that freedom of these sorts is not dependent upon men. Its existence is a matter of nature, not of human action. The freedom men are for or against, on the other hand, the freedom many have fought for and many have died for – that freedom *is* a matter of human action. It is possible; some men and some peoples have had it. But it does not occur of necessity; many have never had it. It can be lost.

That freedom, then, which men are for or against, which is possible but not necessary, and which requires common human action to establish and keep – that freedom might properly be regarded as an end of political activity. It is an affair of politics. Men establish republican institutions to secure it.

If a man can do what he wants to do, he is free; if he cannot do what he wants to do, he is not free; nor is he free if he does what he does not want. Such is an ancient, yet current and widespread view of freedom. It is a starting point of investigation. The investigation requires that the accepted opinion of freedom be stated as fully as possible, and then submitted to dialectical examination in terms of the consistency of its several parts, and in terms of its adequacy as a conceptualization of the condition men have been willing to fight and die for. Accordingly, we may begin with an essay by Professor R. M. MacIver entitled “The Meaning of Liberty and Its Perversions.”<sup>1</sup> The essay will be cited here both as an introductory statement of this common-sense view of freedom, and as representative of the opinion of many social scientists as well.

“There is no doubt,” Professor MacIver says, “about the universal meaning” of the word “freedom”. “The universality of usage sets it for

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<sup>1</sup> Robert M. MacIver, “The Meaning of Liberty and Its Perversions,” *Freedom, Its Meaning*, ed. Ruth Nanda Ansen (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1940) p. 278.

us.”<sup>2</sup> Freedom consists in the ability to do as one wants or to act as one thinks fit. Everyone knows this.

The child knows it who is forced to work when he wants to play. The savage knows it who is prevented from following his tribal customs. The criminal knows it who is put behind prison bars. The property-owner knows it who is not allowed to use his property as he pleases. Everywhere in human society, for better or worse, there are hindrances and prohibitions set by the will of others to that which we want to do, and everywhere the condition of which we are thus deprived is called liberty.<sup>3</sup>

And that of which we are deprived, to repeat, is the ability to do as we please.

Professor MacIver identifies two “perversions” of meaning and usage that are to be avoided in understanding freedom. Though it is legitimate to speak of restraints to doing as one pleases which originate in nature as well as in the will of other men, it is a mistake to hold that “all restraint is a curtailment of liberty”. It is a mistake to maintain that “liberty exists only in the interstices of the law”. This, according to Professor MacIver, is the first “perversion” of the meaning of freedom. It “misunderstands alike the nature of liberty and the nature of law”. It fails to see that, although “every law restrains some liberty”, law is nevertheless “a necessary basis of social order”, “a system of regulating human relationships”, and hence, a “restraint of restraint” without which “every complex society would be reduced to chaos”. It is a view of freedom which fails to see that the “liberties we possess are relative to the social order in which we live and in large measure are created as well as sustained by that order”.<sup>4</sup> Politics, it seems, is not only not antithetical to freedom; it also makes freedom possible.

This compatibility of law and freedom, however, must not be misunderstood. Professor MacIver warns that it must not “be made the ground for the redefinition of freedom” as a matter of doing only what is lawful. That would be to pervert the meaning of freedom in a second and more dangerous way.

This identification of law and freedom is, moreover, one of the most ancient and enduring misconceptions of freedom. In MacIver’s opinion, this misconception stems from our awareness of internal constraint, or psychological compulsion. We sometimes speak of being compelled by fear or forced by habit. We often speak of “hindrances in ourselves to the fulfillment of the things our hearts desire.” But, Professor MacIver warns, we must not forget that the corresponding conception of freedom as the absence of such internal constraint is an extension, or “analogical variant of the universal meaning” of the term “freedom”.<sup>5</sup> Such an extension of

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280-82.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

accepted usage must not be pushed too far. In particular, it cannot be made to support the view of all those who, distinguishing liberty from license or real from counterfeit liberty, insist that freedom consists in the ability to do, not as one pleases but as one ought.

This, according to Professor MacIver, is worse than error. It is sophistry. It is a view which "sophisticates liberty into its own contradiction", and "enables men to justify in the name of liberty the most extreme suppressions of liberty". It is the view, MacIver continues,

of our modern sophists . . . (who) proclaim that we are free only when we do what we ought to do – or rather what they think we *ought* to do; only when we desire what we *ought* desire - what they think we ought to desire. They say that liberty is self-realization, the realization of the true self . . . in surrender to the "law" of our being, to the law of God, to the law of the State as the organic whole in which we are fulfilled. They do not say that self-realization is good and liberty is good, and seek for some relation between them. They say the one *is* the other . . . These apologists will not face the issue that they value other things more highly than liberty and that they reject liberty for the sake of those other things. That position would at least be honest. Instead they pervert the universal meaning of liberty.<sup>6</sup>

To understand freedom aright, then, it is necessary to avoid such perversion. It is necessary to keep clear of the two pitfalls of identifying law with unfreedom, on the one hand, and of mistaking lawful behavior, on the other hand, for freedom. It is necessary to cling instead to this view of freedom as doing what one wants. This view, MacIver insists, is an "immediate datum, something . . . as ultimate as being warm or pleased or angry". It is thus necessary "simply (to) recognize and accept the universal meaning" of "freedom" as a term signifying the "state of being free"<sup>7</sup> – the state of being able to act as one wishes, wants, or desires unrestrained and unconstrained by things natural or human or divine. It is necessary, in short, to cling to the view of freedom as the ability of each individual to do as he pleases.

There are, however, a number of reasons why it is not possible simply to take "doing as one pleases" for the universal meaning of "freedom". This universal meaning, after all, is not so universal in usage as Professor MacIver would have us believe. The second "perversion" – which has existed from the beginning – is evidence enough of this. If, on the other hand, Professor MacIver does not mean a universality of historical usage when he speaks of the universal meaning of the term "freedom"; if he means instead not a universal but the *generic* meaning of the term, it is still not possible to accept it without qualification. In that case, it is necessary further to specify the generic meaning. After all, one seeks to comprehend not the genus but the species, not just *animal* freedom but the freedom of the *human* animal. In any case, the definition of a word

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 286-87. (Italics in the original.)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

from its usage must not be mistaken for the definition of the reality the word names. Men may sometimes mean what they say, but they do not always say well what they mean. One wishes to know, not the opinion of men, but the nature of the reality about which they have opinions. The purpose of this examination of opinion, one may be forgiven for mentioning, is to proceed from what men say freedom is to the eventual determination of what, in fact, freedom is.

There is, moreover, still another reason for a refusal simply to accept "doing as one pleases" as an adequate conceptualization of the "state of being free". The refusal is born of the experience of psychological compulsion; it is born of the experience of personal as distinguished from environmental deficiency. The refusal is grounded in the experience, precisely, of those "hindrances in ourselves" which MacIver mentions but does not confront. Madness, disease, inhibition, fear, stupidity, ignorance, prejudice, cowardice, intemperance, sloth – these surely are some of the "hindrances in ourselves to the fulfillment of the things our hearts desire" which preclude acceptance of any *unqualified* conception of freedom as the ability to act as one wants, or thinks fit. Not many, after all, are willing to call a madman free on the basis, merely, of his ability to carry out his crazy schemes, to enact his compulsive desires, or otherwise to do what he insanely wants to do.

It is not possible, in short, either "simply to accept" a common usage of the term "freedom" as a definition of the reality meant to be defined, or to stipulate a definition on the basis of that usage, without begging the question of what freedom is. Stipulation is itself a question-begging procedure, and common usage (in the sense of "commonplace") is neither common (in the sense of universally accepted) nor unambiguous.

It is necessary, then, to proceed to a clearer, more adequate conception of freedom. It is necessary to clarify common usage and to develop (not stipulate) a definition of freedom on the basis of an examination of the problems that reveal its ambiguity. The examination of the common view of freedom, in other words, must proceed to an examination of the principles uncommonly adduced to support its acceptance and to qualify its meaning as an adequate definition of human freedom. For this examination we may turn to the study of the different concepts of freedom concluded by Mortimer Adler and his colleagues of the Institute for Philosophic Research.<sup>8</sup>

## II

This common view of freedom as doing what one wants is basically that concept which Mr. Adler calls the "circumstantial freedom of

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<sup>8</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, *The Idea of Freedom* (2 vols.; Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958-1961).

self-realization". He describes it as "a freedom which is possessed by any individual who, under favorable circumstances, is able to act as he wishes for the sake of the good as he sees it."<sup>9</sup> This description is meant to make explicit two distinct points in the insistence that freedom is always, at bottom, a question of doing or not doing as one pleases. The first point is that freedom is a matter of action that the individual himself does, not that he is forced to do by another. This point concerns the origin of an action. For a man to be free his action must be self-originated; it must be voluntary action. It must be "action proceeding from himself," not from another by way of some form of coercion.<sup>10</sup> Let us call this point the principle of self-origination.

The second point concerns the nature or quality of the action itself. This is the point in the insistence that freedom is a question of what one pleases to do as distinguished from, perhaps even in opposition to, what one ought to do. The point is that what is done must not only be voluntarily done. It must also be the enactment of what the individual actually desires to do, not merely what law, obligation or duty requires him to do.<sup>11</sup> Let us call this second point the principle of self-realization.

The two points, of course, are distinct but inseparable aspects of human freedom. Each principle, in other words, is a distinct specification of the single view that freedom is essentially an individual affair, essentially a matter of action which is the individual's own action. The two principles of self-origination and self-realization specify two ways in which an action can be said to be one's own: The individual himself acts; and what he does is characteristically his, bears the stamp of his being and personality, constitutes the realization of his individuality in being and in action.

Freedom is thus seen to be a question of a person's uniqueness as an individual. What is at stake in the issue of freedom is the individual's realization of himself as *this*, not that person. What is at stake for the individual is the alienation or realization of himself – that is, the loss or achievement of *his* good. To be free, then, the individual must himself act, and the action which he initiates must be what he desires to do. *He* must act, and his action must constitute what is *his* good, what is good according to the uniqueness of his situation and his self.<sup>12</sup>

According to this opinion, however, the internal world of the individual – what it is, the constitution of its parts and the hierarchy of their inclinations, in sum, the condition, character, and nature of the person – is basically irrelevant in the conception and issues of freedom. (One remembers Professor MacIver's warning not to peer into the world within ourselves lest we over-extend the meaning of freedom and end up with its re-definition.) So far as the conceptualization of freedom is concerned,

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 173-74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 184-87.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173, 183-89.

the person is taken as identical with the individual as a whole. One must not speak of a "true self" as distinguished from the person who does whatever he wants. The only self is the actual individual, the psychophysical whole named Tom or Dick who says "I", and who stands over and against, separated and distinct from the other, from everyone else and everything else in the external world. The self, so understood, is the only self that counts in the conception of freedom.<sup>13</sup> The derivative principles of self-origination and self-realization, then, must be understood in an equivalent way.

The principle of self-origination, accordingly, stops short of what has been termed the issue of "free choice" or "free will". Self-origination is a matter of the absence of external forms of coercion. It is a matter of circumstances, of factors present or absent in the individual's environment, not in himself. Freedom is viewed essentially as the relation of the individual taken as a whole to the world without, not the world within. The relevant issue is not whether the individual is necessitated to desire as he does, nor whether he is necessitated to action by his desiring. The only relevant issue is whether the individual can enact his desire however it is come by.

And that ability to act as one desires is conceived, in turn, as a matter of situation. It is a question, at the very least, of the absence of external conditions of obstacle, force or threat which compel action contrary to the individual's desire, or prevent action according to it. For many writers, this ability is a question also of the presence in an individual's environment of a multiplicity of means and a wealth of opportunities (economic, social and political) for enacting desire. Freedom requires alternative courses of action. For some, freedom is a question of the presence, even, of such circumstances – schools for instance – as "reach inside" the individual to improve his mental and emotional condition. For others, freedom requires such aids as would make an individual more conscious of the desire that actually moves him and better able to choose apt means for its realization. But for all adherents of this view of freedom, an action is said to be self-originated if it is done in the presence or absence of the relevant external circumstances. Thus it is held that the condition and character of the person are irrelevant in the conception and issues of freedom. Men – ignorant men as well as learned men, vicious men as well as virtuous men – are equally free if similarly situated.<sup>14</sup>

This irrelevance of the internal world of the individual also characterizes the understanding of the principle of self-realization. It too stops short of adequate consideration of an important question in the conception of freedom – let us call it the question of the *measure*. The principle of self-realization tries to state the measure according to which an action is to be judged as one's own, from the point of view of *what* the action is,

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 76-87.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 111-33, 174-87; II, 533-61.

not from the point of view of who does it. Self-alienation, after all, can be accomplished as much by what one does voluntarily as by what one is forced to do. The principle of self-realization, then, declares that the individual – not some external agent nor the command of some divine or human law – must be the measure of his own good, the measure of what constitutes the alienation or the realization of himself. The standard the individual uses in taking this measure of a possible deed, however, is left unspecified. That measure is merely said to be his desire, his pleasure, his wish or his preference.<sup>15</sup>

The individual taken as a whole, then, is the only self there is in this conception of freedom. He is the real, the actual self. The desire he actually has, not that corresponding to some metaphorical “true self” or to the command of some law, is the only relevant measure of *what* the individual must be unrestrained from doing if his action is to constitute his good, to be his own, and if he, himself, is to be free. *What the individual desires to do* is, according to the principle of self-realization, what the individual must be able to do; and *he*, according to the principle of self-origination, must do it if, according to this view, he is to be free.

It is not difficult to see that an individualistic concept of the person is the basis of this view of freedom, the fundamental ground upon which it stands or falls as an adequate concept of freedom. This view of the individual whose self-realization lies in the achievement of the “good” that is the object of his “subjective” desire is also the ground of a correspondingly individualistic conception of the nature and function of government. The necessarily aggressive pursuit of individual “subjective” desire in the condition of scarcity means that the golden rule is, in fact, do unto others, *first*. Life, accordingly, is “poor, solitary, nasty, brutish and short.” Government is necessary to end the war of “every man against every man.”<sup>16</sup> Or, in a less blunt version, the golden rule is no harm to others, if possible.<sup>17</sup> But it is not possible. The unregulated pursuit by individuals of their “subjective” desire means that “each man is judge in his own case.”<sup>18</sup> It means that there is no “established known, law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong, and the common measure to decide controversies.”<sup>19</sup> Life, consequently, is characterized by “great inconveniences,” full of “confusion,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 173, 183-89.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *The Leviathan* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1950) Part I, Chs. XIII, XIV. The famous quotation is from Ch. XIII, p. 104 and p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, Ch. II, Sect. 6. Found in Ernest Barker, *Social Contract, Essays by Locke, Hume and Rousseau* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1960).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. II, Sect. 13 and Ch. III, Sect. 18.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. IX, Sect. 124.

disorder, partiality and violence,"<sup>20</sup> "mutual grievances, injuries and wrongs."<sup>21</sup>

Government is necessary, in short, to ameliorate this warfare. Its chief domestic function is "to harmonize the conflict of interests," and politics becomes, so to speak, the activity of "getting yours," peacefully. Or, to express the matter more euphemistically, government is necessary to establish the condition of order, security and peace in which the cooperation of many individuals is both possible and of benefit to all. Or finally, to express the matter in the language of this view of freedom, government is necessary to establish the conditions in which the private pursuit of "subjective" happiness becomes productive of abundance and of those other circumstances which concretely confer upon each individual "the ability to act as he wishes for the sake of the good as he sees it."

This is not to say, of course, that everyone who accepts this view of freedom is aware of its foundation in this view of the individual and his government. Nor is it to say that everyone who accepts this view of freedom views freedom as *an* end, let alone as *the* end of politics. Hobbes, who originally persuaded modern men to the acceptance of this understanding, altogether rejected freedom as a specific end of government. Many of the inheritors of his view of freedom accept it as merely one end among many, and see in politics the task of reconciling its requirements with those of other, and more necessary ends. But the kinship of this concept of freedom to that conception of politics through the individualistic concept of the person points to a serious problem with even a qualified acceptance of this freedom as an end of politics.

For individualism, the end of politics is to establish in existence its dream of the individual. The final aim of politics is to enable each individual to live as though in an imagined state of nature, as though in the state of acting for the good as he sees it, without at the same time suffering the fate of such a life, without suffering its nasty and brutish consequences. However, since the individual is as naturally needy as he is naturally selfish, one may with equal title say that, for individualism, the end of politics is power. Its aim is to cure that natural impotence which leaves the solitary individual prey to nature and its creatures by establishing and maintaining the power of Leviathan over both. Simply stated, its aim is to cure the impotence of the individual by means of the relative omnipotence of the State, and so to create the illusion that the individual lives as a god, obeying only himself.

This is perhaps the greatest irony of individualism. It points, as many have noted, to a totalitarian fruit of the liberal seed. But if this is true, and if it is true that in politics freedom partially accepted often becomes freedom totally accepted, one is forced to ask whether a totalitarian fruit

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. II, Sect. 13; Ch. IX, Sect. 123-27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. VIII, Sect. 91, n. 4.

might not eventually be the ironic product of the acceptance of individualism's characteristic view of freedom as an end of politics.

### III

Before one were to accept or reject "the circumstantial freedom of self-realization" as the end of politics, however, or before one were to accept it as one end to be reconciled with others, he would do well to examine its adequacy as a concept of human freedom. To recall the beginning of the essay, he would do well to ask whether this individualistic understanding of freedom adequately expresses that human condition which men have established republics to secure and have given their lives to maintain. If one wishes to understand freedom it is necessary to avoid arbitrariness, and to submit this widely accepted *opinion* of what freedom is to an examination of the consistency, at least, of its several principles.

The "circumstantial freedom of self-realization" is deficient on both counts. It is contradictory in its principles, and inadequate as an understanding of the condition of being men have sought to achieve through politics. More precisely, this view of freedom can be made consistent, but only at the cost of its adequacy as a concept of the freedom politics aims to secure. For it is impossible without contradiction to maintain that the condition and character of the self are irrelevant in the conception of freedom and, at the same time, to maintain that some particular condition of the person – madness, for example – is a constraint that deprives him of freedom. One cannot have it both ways: The contradiction is on the level of principle, and that is the domain of "Either/Or".

Either the internal world of the individual is relevant, or it is not. If the condition and nature of the person are not relevant, then freedom may indeed be accounted "the ability of an individual to act as he wishes for the sake of the good as he sees it". Then too, neither insanity nor imbecility can be deemed hindrances to freedom. Then *feeling* free, *thinking* oneself free, is the same as *being* free. Then too, and on that account, freedom cannot be an end of politics. Politics, surely, does not aim to help mad or criminal individuals enact mad or criminal desires. Besides, everyone is free in this sense – everyone that is, except the individual literally dragged by the physical force of another. Such a conception of freedom is thus politically irrelevant. Everyone – the idiot, the foolish, the intemperate, the insane, the diseased, the primitive, the superstitious, the cowardly, the duped, the depraved or the deprived, for example – everyone acts as he wishes for the sake of the good as he sees it *in the circumstances in which he finds himself*. If the internal world of the self is irrelevant in the conception of freedom, there is no ground for saying otherwise. The individual, it is true, may wish to exist in different circumstances. But that is another matter altogether. It is a matter, not of doing what one wants, but of existing in circumstances that accord with

one's wish, in a reality that corresponds to one's dream.

The issue here concerns the measure of an individual's realization or self-alienation. The point is that if the internal world of the individual is irrelevant in the conception of freedom then his actual desire in his present and immediate circumstances is the only possible measure of a deed as his own. But what the individual does can be the only possible indication of what he really, what he actually desires to do. Hence he always does what he wants. If the internal world of the self is irrelevant – if one really means that the actual individual in his present condition (whatever it may be) is the only self that counts in the conception of freedom; if one really means that his "subjective" desire or wish or preference (however originated and whatever it may be) is the only relevant measure of his good, of his self-realization as distinguished from what some "other" (person or law) says he ought to do – if, that is, one means what one says and maintains it consistently, then what an individual does must be taken as what, in fact, he desires, wishes or prefers to do.

There is no alternative consistent with these assertions. It is asserted that the nature and character of the person are irrelevant in the conception of freedom. And it is asserted that to be free the individual must be able to do what he "subjectively" wants to do. These two assertions taken together, effectively eliminate from the problems of freedom any distinction between the inner life of the person (between his "subjective" desire or wish or preference) and its outward manifestation in action. Given these assertions, a person who acts at gunpoint, out of his desire to avoid threatening death, acts as freely as the person who acts in conditions of civil peace, out of his desire to achieve immortal fame. Each is able to act upon his desire. Given these assertions, neither yesterday's desire nor even today's wish to be in yesterday's circumstances can be taken as relevant for the issue of freedom. They cannot be summoned as the appropriate measure of self-realization, as a substitute for the present desire prompting a deed, without denying one or the other of the assertions.

Such is the logical consequence of the unqualified assertion that the individual as a whole, in his "subjective" desire or preference, is the standard or measure of his self-realization, of what, therefore, he must be able to do to be free. His good must be understood to be what he desires. What he actually does must be taken as what he actually desires. And the individual himself must be said to act, since he is not literally moved by the physical force of another. Thus freedom, often thought to be a rare good worth much to achieve and in need of constant care, turns out to be commonplace, a common characteristic of almost every human deed in every kind of regime.

It is doubtless true that one wishes, by reason both of the experience of coercion and the habits of linguistic usage, to reject such mad consistency. Few are willing to say that a man acts freely even under the duress of a weapon threatening his life. In order to avoid that conclusion

and still maintain that freedom is doing whatever one wants, many would insist that the drug addict, the psychotic and the man under duress obviously do not do what they want. But this is not obvious at all. It is possible to maintain it only by an equivocation on the word "desire" or "want" – an equivocation, moreover, that amounts to a contradiction of the assertion that the internal world of the person is irrelevant in the conception and definition of freedom. The avoidance of that conclusion is possible only if one distinguishes among a person's desires between his desire and his wish. With such a distinction, it may be well said that the addict desires his drug but prefers to be rid of his desire; that the victim chooses to surrender his money but prefers to be rid of the bandit; or that the psychotic does what he desires madly, but prefers to be rid of his mad desire. With such a distinction, however, it is necessary to speak of freedom as doing, not as one wants or desires, but as one prefers or wishes.

But why introduce such a distinction? Obviously, to avoid the conclusion that the addict, the psychotic and the victim act freely. But why avoid that conclusion? Obviously, because it is not in accord with the experience of coercion or the accepted usage of the term "freedom." Well then, it is necessary to make a further distinction. It is necessary to distinguish between real and unreal, reasonable and unreasonable wishes or preferences. After all, if it is unacceptable to call the victim of duress free, it is equally unacceptable in the light of that experience and usage to call the contented prisoner free who loves his prison as his good, and prefers above all to remain there. By the same token, it is just as unacceptable to account the man unfree who cannot square a circle, or exist as the youth the prefers once again to be. Similarly, it is unacceptable to call the absolute tyrant unfree who cannot re-create man in the image of his mad dream. If, then, it is necessary to avoid conclusions that are absurd to the common sense of freedom, it is as necessary to distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable wishes as it is to distinguish between a person's preference and the desire that actually moves him to act in his immediate circumstances.

This, however, is to admit the relevance of the condition and character of the person in the conception and definition of freedom. It means that ignorant men and wise men, mad men and sane men, vicious men and virtuous men cannot be said to be equally free if similarly situated with respect to external circumstances. To admit such distinctions in the attempt to avoid an absurd conclusion, in other words, constitutes a radical qualification of the original assertion of the "subjectivity" of the standard of self-realization. It altogether changes the notion of freedom as "the ability of an individual to act as he *wishes* for the sake of the good as *he* sees it." The admission means at least this: The wish must be sane and the judgment sound.

This, of course, raises again the issue of the measure, though in more general terms. What is the standard or measure of soundness and of

sanity, of health and of well-being, that is, of an individual's actual good, about which he as much as anyone has opinions and may be mistaken? Since it is always a particular opinion, a particular wish or desire, and a particular judgment of a particular individual which must be measured, neither the particular opinion, wish, desire nor judgment can be the measure of an individual's self-realization. By the same token, *mutatis mutandis*, the measure cannot be the traditions of the community. Even less can it be some cross-cultural "denominator" of individual opinions and communal traditions.

In the last analysis the measure can only be the nature of an individual's human being, since this is the only possibility remaining. Concerning this measure men may everywhere have disagreed. One man may be as ignorant as another. Both may be as partial or as mistaken as the spirit of the laws of their regime. It may well be that a man can come to know this measure only "subjectively," only through a kind of participation in human being which is achieved in the fact of the individual's existence as a man, to the degree that he exists as a man and not as a brute.

But whatever may be the specific character of the measure and whatever may be the way in which it can be known, the measure of self-realization cannot be "subjective" in the sense of the principle of self-realization. It may be true that a person's good is whatever enables him to realize himself in being and in action. It is not true, however, that doing whatever a person happens to prefer or to desire will enable him to realize himself. Suicide can scarcely be imagined to constitute self-realization – if words still mean anything. The same is true of the analogous form of suicide with which experience in life or in art confronts us. Paris acts upon his love for Helen, and thereby dooms himself with his city. Joseph K. prefers not to be arrested by the real world, and ends up watching from afar as the executioner twists the knife in his heart. A young "hippie" prefers a "psychedelic" life which, in his case, results in madness. A slothful man prefers his ease and realizes nothing, whereas a lustful man, acting upon his preference, realizes only his lust. And rash would be the judgment of Hitler which saw his life as a realization of himself. In literature or in life, the world is full of cases where following one's preference or one's desire is seen to bring the opposite of self-realization – unless, of course, self-realization means whatever one wishes it to mean.

If, however, self-realization consists in whatever one happens to wish and therefore means whatever one wishes it to mean, so too does freedom. Then one is forced once again to accept those conclusions rejected above as absurd to the common sense of freedom. For (as it was the purpose of the second section of this essay in citing the Adler study to document beyond the possibility of reasonable denial), self-realization is the hinge-principle in the conception of freedom. The principle of self-origination declares that the individual must *himself* act, but the principle of self-realization defines *what* it is a man must himself do if he is to be free.

Self-realization is the cardinal principle in the conception of freedom because it specifies that in which freedom consists.

If, then, self-realization means whatever one wishes it to mean, it is necessary to recognize that freedom is not a matter of *being* anything, but of *believing* oneself to be realizing oneself in whatever one happens to do. It is then necessary to recognize that the contented prisoner is as *free* as the man is *unfree* whose discontent rests in the fact that he cannot be the god, the angel, the bird or the snake he prefers literally to be. Indeed, it is necessary to recognize that the slave – wholly in bondage to and wholly in the service of another – is free so long as he prefers his slavery, and that for him slavery is freedom. At this point, however, absurdity triumphs over intelligence. Discourse must cease the moment it is believed that opposite conditions of being become identical in fact when they are subjectively held to be the same.

The point is that to avoid absurdity, it is necessary to recognize the relevance of the condition and character of the person in the conception and definition of freedom. The man acting deliberately under the duress of a threat to his life or property can be said to act unfreely though voluntarily only by distinguishing between his desire and his wish, and by changing the concept of freedom from doing as one desires to doing as one prefers. But the experience which makes this distinction necessary and legitimate demands the further distinction between reasonable and unreasonable, real and unreal wishes or preferences. Only with this additional distinction is it possible to maintain that the prisoner, the slave, the psychotic, and the fool are nevertheless *not* free despite their preference for their condition and despite their conviction that they are realizing themselves. The point is that the admission of the distinctions among a person's desires, wishes and judgments necessary to avoid absurdity thus introduces an element of "objectivity" as the decisive thing within the "subjectivity" of the standard of self-realization. It may be that to be free the individual must be able *to act* himself for the good as *he* sees it. Perhaps he alone must judge. But the admission means that he must judge rightly, and with the right measure.

The point is, moreover, that the admission of the necessary distinctions is an admission not only of the relevance, but above all, of the primacy of the nature and character of the person in the conception, itself, of human freedom. The person's good, his condition of real and not imaginary self-realization, is thus declared to be the measure of the *content* of freedom, of its *matter*, of *that which* the individual must be able to do to be free. This means that freedom cannot be primarily understood as a matter of environment. It cannot be conceived as *essentially* consisting in the presence or absence of external circumstances. The absence of guns and threats and tyrants as well as the presence of a city's advantages may indeed be necessary if an individual is *to be* free. But the presence or absence of these circumstances can be understood neither as the *sufficient* condition of an individual's freedom, nor as *that*

*in which it consists.* The standard of self-realization, however “objective,” is declared to be within the individual, not in the external world of circumstances constituting his environment. In fact, this measure, because it is the measure of what freedom is, is the ultimate ground of any judgment concerning what environmental circumstances are even relevant, let alone destructive of freedom or requisite for its establishment.

The point is, in short, that the distinctions necessary to avoid the conclusion that everyone acts as he desires or wishes, or to avoid the conclusion that everyone *is* free who *believes* himself to be free, establish the primacy of the individual, of his nature and his well-being, in the conception and definition of human freedom. The point is that the necessary distinctions – among a person’s desires, between his desires and his wishes, between his good and his opinion of his good, between being and thinking, reasonable and unreasonable, sane and mad – lead to the recognition that freedom is not so much a question of the condition of an individual’s environment (however much it may require an environment of a certain kind), as it is a matter essentially of the nature and quality of his action. What the individual does must be in the nature of action as distinguished from mere movement. He must act, not merely re-act, not merely be moved to disrupt in some way the arrangement of things in space. And what he does must be action of a certain kind. It must be action according to the measure of a person’s good, in virtue of which an individual exists as a man and realizes himself as an individual.

Either the internal world of the individual is relevant, then, or it is not. If the condition and nature of the person and the character of his desire or wish are not relevant in the conception of freedom, then freedom may indeed be conceived as a matter of doing whatever one wishes. But because of this irrelevance, the individual must be understood to do what he wants. Given the “subjectivity” of the standard of self-realization – because the individual’s desire is then unqualifiedly the measure of what he must be able to do to be free – what the individual actually does must be taken as arguing, revealing, *being* what he actually desires or wishes to do. Everyone accordingly does what he really wants. Everyone is always free except in the one instance where he is moved as a leaf upon the wind. Everyone accordingly is almost always free and freedom is, as Hobbes maintained, merely voluntary as distinguished from involuntary action. Freedom so conceived is thus politically irrelevant. It comes to the individual with the mere fact of his existence. It exists in any regime; it is dependent upon politics neither for its establishment nor for its security. It is the starting point of politics, not its end.

If, on the other hand, the internal world of the individual is relevant in the conception and definition of freedom, then freedom may perhaps be taken as a reality politics aims to establish and secure. But in that event freedom can no longer be conceived as the ability, merely, of an “individual to act as he wishes for the sake of the good as he sees it.” It is then necessary to qualify this conception in the light of that world. It is

necessary to qualify this conception both with a view to the problem of internal constraint and deficiency, and with a view to the problem of the "objectivity" of a person's being and self-realization. It is necessary, in short, to qualify this conception in light of the determination of what makes an action both *genuinely* self-originated and *genuinely* self-realizing.

Freedom, everyone admits, is a matter of the nature of an action as well as of its source. It is a matter of action that is a person's own in the double sense that he originates it and that it conforms to his own aims, not another's. Freedom, in other words, may still be conceived of as a matter of action that is both self-originated and self-realizing. But the principles of self-origination and self-realization must take into account the nature and interior world of the person. The principle of self-origination, accordingly, must be able to distinguish movement to which an individual is necessitated by some internal as well as some external force. It must also be able to distinguish such movement from action which a person does of himself; and to distinguish, as well, such action from merely conditioned or instinctive reaction. It must, in brief, be able to distinguish choice from voluntary response, and voluntary response from involuntary movement. The principle of self-realization, on the other hand, must be able to distinguish what an individual *believes* to be self-realizing from what *is* self-realizing in the uniqueness of his situation and his person. It must be able, so to speak, to take into view the aim of a person's being for its well-being, and to be able to distinguish according to that measure which aims the person has taken are straight and which are crooked with respect to hitting that mark.

If, then, the internal world of the individual is relevant in the conception of freedom, it appears that freedom cannot be conceived as the ability of a person to do as he desires, wants, wishes, likes, prefers or thinks fit – that is, to do whatever he pleases. It appears that freedom must be conceived, instead, as the ability of a person *to act* – to act not merely as *he* desires but also as he *chooses*, and to act for the sake of the good not only *as he sees it*, but also *as it is in fact*. In short, it appears that freedom must be conceived as the ability of a person to desire, to choose, and to do what is really his good, to do what will in fact enable him to realize himself.

#### IV

It appears, however, that with this concept of freedom the investigation of what freedom is has become impaled upon the other horn of the dilemma of adequately defining it. If the common opinion of freedom as doing what one pleases ends up, if consistently maintained, in the assertion that everyone acts freely because he does what he wants in his circumstances, this sophisticated view of freedom seems to lead to a conclusion equally unacceptable to common experience and the habits of linguistic

usage. It seems to lead to that identity of the good man and the free man which Professor MacIver condemned as enabling “men to justify in the name of liberty the most extreme suppression of liberty.” Far from clarifying the ambiguities in the common sense of freedom, the investigation seems to end up in that dangerous sophistry which “proclaims that we are free only when we do what we ought to do – or rather what (others) think we ought to do (or) . . . to desire”.<sup>22</sup> If a man is a good man to the degree that he actually desires, chooses and does what is good, the argument seems to end up in the unacceptable if not dangerous conclusion that only the good man is free.

The issue at bottom of the objection to this identification concerns the asserted “objectivity” of the human states of being good and being free on the one hand, and the “subjectivity,” on the other hand, at the core of popular – that is, both positivist and humanist – conceptions of freedom and goodness. It may be that “ought” implies both obligation and authority, that the “ought” can be viewed as a commanded good. But for the positivist the “subjectivity” of the good as the groundless, merely projected object of individual desire or “subjective preference” means that the “ought” is always reducible to some private preference that has gained authoritative status as social custom or public law. To do as one ought, accordingly, is to do what someone else has commanded. It is, *ipso facto*, to serve the interest of another. At best – because law is as Professor MacIver points out, “a basis of social order” and a “restraint of restraint” – it is to serve one’s own interest only incidentally, or by coincidence. That, however, well defines the condition of a well-kept slave who exists as such to serve not his own, but his master’s aims. Thus the implied identification of the good man and the free man in the notion of “doing as one ought” is rejected as a sophistry characteristic of tyranny. It is thought to correspond to the dream of the cunning tyrant who would make citizens into willing servants of his self-interest through their indoctrination in the belief that their goodness consists in lawfulness, and their freedom in obedience to the laws of his regime. It is the sophistry of the tyrant who would, in a vulgar understanding of Rousseau’s phrase, “force men to be free.” Thus it is believed that “doing as one ought” must be rejected as an adequate concept of human freedom.

The basis of this rejection is the reduction of the good to private interest if not “subjective preference”; the consequent denial of a public or a common good, and the corresponding equation of law with the interest of the stronger. This view of politics as the struggle of individuals (singly or in combination) for the power to realize their “subjective” interests is the counterpart of the view of freedom as doing what one wishes. It is therefore subject to a similar dialectic. Either this view is correct or it is not. If it is correct, then politics is indeed “the struggle for power.” But its end – if one can still speak of an end – is power, not freedom. Freedom

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<sup>22</sup> See above, p. 107.

as the ability to do what one wishes remains the starting point of politics. Its end can only be victory – that is, the power to make citizens the servants of one's private interest and to make a world that corresponds to one's dream. It thus appears that this view of freedom is no less dangerous than the alternative view it rejects as a tyrant's sophistry. It is, in fact, a far more dangerous view since its teaching that man is by nature solitary and selfish confers upon him the soul of a tyrant. If the good is what a man subjectively prefers or wishes, then nothing is forbidden – not even Auschwitz.

But it is simply a mistake to see tyranny in the concept of freedom as the ability of a person to desire, to choose and to do what is really his good. In fact, the "objectivity" of the measure of this good – the "objectivity" of the human condition of self-realization – is the fundamental basis of the distinction between tyranny and its opposite in the first place. Without that "objectivity" there is ultimately no intelligible ground for the distinction between the legal and the just. Without that distinction there is no abuse of power – at least, not on the part of a legally constituted and procedurally correct sovereign. And if there is no abuse of power, "tyranny" is merely a name the loser gives to the regime of the winner in the struggle for power. The alternative to freedom as doing what one pleases, in short, may well be freedom as doing what one ought. But this cannot be rightly understood as doing what the tyrant pleases. It must be understood instead as a matter of the individual's desiring to do what justice demands, of his pleasing to do what is in reality good.

This, however, still implies the troublesome identification of the good man and the free man. The ability of an individual to act for his good implies prudence at least, if not wisdom. The ability both to desire to do and to choose to do (hence, please to do) what is good implies the development of the other moral virtues. But the acquisition of these virtues is a constant and difficult task. Few succeed. Both their development and the ability to act according to their requirements, moreover, are not entirely within the power of the individual. Both the acquisition and the actions of these virtues ordinarily require not only a certain natural endowment on the part of the individual, but good up-bringing, opportunity and other circumstantial advantages as well – in brief, good nature, good parents, good teachers and good laws. What is troublesome then about this identification of the good man and the free man is this implication that if freedom implies virtue as well as circumstance, goodness implies circumstance as well as virtue. The trouble, in short, is that if according to this concept of freedom only the good man is free, it appears that only the fortunate man has the possibility of being either good or free.

This "objectivity" of freedom as an acquired, and in part, circumstantially dependent condition of the person seems to run counter to the essential "subjectivity" in popular – this time humanist, not only

positivist – notions of the good and the free man. The slave who chooses martyrdom is with difficulty thought to be free while on the rack. Though courageous, he need not be thought of as particularly temperate, or just, or prudent. Yet some men would admire his integrity, and many would consider him good in virtue of his obedience, “even unto death,” to the dictates of his conscience and his faith. The slave’s martyrdom might even be considered the supremely free act that establishes or confirms his goodness. By similar token, the same slave, laboring in the double yoke of life’s necessities and his master’s commands, would be considered by many Christians to be good – and by a few of them to be even free – in virtue of his humility in the “acceptance of his lot in life,” of his charity in the turning of his cheek to his master’s lash, and in virtue of his hope that the Living God of his faith (whose inscrutable Providence “writes straight with crooked lines”) will lead His beloved through many a valley of darkness to a life of eternal blessedness.

The issue here concerns the nature of the measure whereby some men see the goodness, and perhaps the freedom, of a Job in the steadfastness of his faith and in the dust and ashes of his submission to the Will of the Almighty; or else, in the “authenticity” of his life and his suffering. The issue here concerns the “subjectivity” of conscience and integrity as the measure of human goodness, and so also, as the measure of freedom. This measure is apolitical in the extreme. It describes, in Whitehead’s phrase, “a freedom lying beyond circumstance.” In Professor Adler’s words, it describes a “freedom to live as one ought (that) is essentially a freedom of the inner life.” a freedom that “consists in a man’s ability to *will* as he ought,” who therefore “remains free whether or not he can enact what he wills.” The issue concerns the radical “subjectivity” of a measure that makes goodness and freedom essentially a matter of “being able to will as we ought, whether or not external circumstances permit us to do as we will.”<sup>23</sup>

This integral freedom of the human will in steadfast adherence to the dictates of conscience, it must be noted, is not that quality of the will which is at issue in the debate concerning a person’s freedom of choice. The question of free will in the sense of choice – in the sense of not being necessitated to all one’s acts either by instinct, by training or by desire – concerns that minimum of responsibility for one’s deed that common sense and common law have always assumed as the threshold of human action, as the hallmark of the moral and political world. As was noted above, free choice concerns the problem of self-origination.<sup>24</sup> It is a matter

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<sup>23</sup> Adler, *Op. Cit.*, I, 250-54. Adler calls this notion of freedom the “acquired freedom of self-perfection.” He describes it as “a freedom which is possessed only by those men who, through acquired virtue or wisdom, are able to will or live as they ought in conformity to the moral law or an ideal befitting human nature.” *Ibid.*, II, 6.

<sup>24</sup> See above, p. 110, and p. 119.

of what makes an action distinguishable from mere response or movement, and one might add, what makes a self distinguishable from an instance or an example of a species. This question of free choice is a matter of the nature, itself, of the person and his act of willing. The issue in the debate is whether man is of such a nature as to have an inherent power of choice. If he is, he has; if he is not, he has it not. In Professor Adler's terminology, it is a natural, not an acquired nor a circumstantial freedom. "Neither circumstances nor acquisitions of any sort confer this freedom upon men or deprive them of it."<sup>25</sup> If there is such a freedom, natural as breathing is natural, its existence is obviously not a matter of human action. As a natural freedom, it cannot be understood as an end of politics.

The relevant issue in the troublesome identification of the good man and the free man is thus not the issue of an evil man's responsibility for either his deeds or his condition. The assertion that only the good man is free does not necessarily mean that only the good man has choice. But neither does it mean that a man is free simply in virtue of his ability to will as he ought. It is this restriction of freedom to the inner world of the person that is at issue here. That is the "subjectivity" at issue in the humanist measure of human goodness and human freedom. It is a "subjectivity" that makes freedom essentially independent of circumstances and eliminates it as a specifically political end.

The radically apolitical or subjective character of this freedom is most easily seen, perhaps, in its specifically Christian version. "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil I would not, I do." That is the unfreedom which St. Paul describes in the famous seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. "Wretched man that I am, . . . I do not do what I want, but the very thing I hate . . . It is no longer I that do it but sin which dwells within me, . . . in my flesh, . . . in my members, . . . (in) this body of death." The point is that this "slavery to sin" is a purely subjective servitude – subjective, that is, not in the vulgar sense of imaginary or fictitious, but in the sense that it is a wholly interior servitude. The slavery to sin is a matter of the person's inability to rule himself because of the war of his "spirit" and his "flesh," if not also because of some terrible duality and paralysis within his spirit itself.

But just as this servitude is radically subjective, so too is the freedom which replaces it. That freedom is, as it were, an ability to turn up another cheek, to break the "reign of sin," "to yield oneself to God as a man brought from death to life." It means that "sin will have no dominion

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<sup>25</sup> Adler, *Op. Cit.*, I, 156. The concept of freedom which is ordinarily at the root of this controversy concerning free choice is called by Mr. Adler the "natural freedom of self-determination." He describes it as "a freedom which is possessed by all men, in virtue of a power inherent in human nature, whereby a man is able to change his own character creatively by deciding for himself what he shall do or shall become." *Ibid.*, II, 6-7.

over (the Christian) since (he is) not under law, but under grace." He has been "set free from sin" and has become "a slave of God." "The return . . . is sanctification and its end, eternal life." This freedom comes to the person as a "free gift from God," and enables him, at least potentially, "to walk in newness of life," "dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ." (*Romans*, 6 : 4-23).

The point is that according to Christian belief this is a subjective freedom which no man can give, and a freedom that only the individual himself can destroy. The point is that this new life of freedom *from* sin and *in* Grace is not of this world, but of the subjective world within the person. As a subjective, not to say a "supernatural" freedom, it cannot be understood as an end of politics. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of stoic or humanist versions of this freedom.

It appears, then, that the basic trouble in the identification of the good man and the free man on the one hand, and the main problem in determining the freedom that can be an end of politics on the other hand, turn out to be one and the same. The problem seems to be in the notion of goodness which turns up at the root of the concept of freedom. If a positivist insists that freedom is a matter of doing what one wants, it is finally because he understands the good as merely "subjective preference or taste;" and because he sees, albeit inconsistently, a person's good as the (not at all subjective) object of his private interest, or projection of his singular desire. If a Christian insists that freedom is essentially a matter of willing as one ought, it is finally because he understands a direct, unmediated union with God as the supreme good; and thus sees the individual's steadfast adherence to His Word in Faith and Charity as the essential element of personal goodness. If an ancient stoic or contemporary humanist insist that freedom is an affair of the individual with himself, it is finally because he conceives of goodness as essentially a matter of self-mastery, or personal integrity. And if one asserts, as this paper has tentatively done, that freedom is a matter of doing what is good, it is because goodness is viewed as the perfection of a nature – a nature, moreover that is specifically political. Accordingly, a person's good is seen as his ability to live and to act as a man among men, and to achieve thereby a special excellence of his own being.<sup>26</sup>

A conception of goodness thus appears to be the basis of a concept of freedom. It spells out, as it were, the principle of self-realization. It states

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<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that goodness as adherence to God's Will and goodness as excellence in being a man are incompatible notions. Famous are the attempts of every great Christian theologian from Augustine to this day to demonstrate that the two *formally* different concepts of goodness are nevertheless *materially* the same. After all, begins that demonstration, can a God who is "Love" will anything but the excellence and perfection of a person's being? The success of the theologians is not at issue here. The two concepts of goodness, and the correlative concepts of freedom, are, as argued, quite different notions.

the measure of a person's realization or alienation. It declares the basis of judging whether or not a deed or an aim is one's own. A concept of goodness is thus "warp and woof" of a concept of freedom. It defines what freedom is by specifying that activity or ability or quality in which a person's freedom consists. Thus the chief problem in determining what freedom can be an end of politics reveals itself as a problem of determining the nature of the human good. For to be free is to participate in the activities of goodness.

If, then, freedom is an end of politics, it cannot be understood merely as the ability of a person to do as he pleases. That is the start of politics, not its end. Everyone does what he wants in his circumstances, and any qualification of this makes freedom another matter altogether. Nor can the freedom which politics aims to establish and secure be conceived of as the ability of a person merely to will as he ought. Since that is an essentially subjective freedom which is "beyond circumstance," it is a freedom that is beyond politics.

It would thus appear that the freedom which is an affair of politics must be understood instead as the ability of a person to engage with his fellows in those activities which will achieve the particular excellence of his being, and in virtue of which he can exist as a man. And to take this understanding of freedom as an end of politics is to say that politics aims to discover such solutions to common problems and to construct such forms of common life as will assist each person, so far as possible, to realize for himself a life that is both truly human and his own.