II
CONSCIOUS HUMAN ACTION

Journal

What is this chapter about? *The Principles of Freedom. How do you define freedom? The pursuit of freedom begins with the questioning of common beliefs of what freedom is. Are we free, under the illusion of freedom, or determined by something other than ourselves? This questioning of freedom leads to a new question, the question of knowing. What does it mean to know why I act? What does it mean to "know" anything?*

What is its value? *To make an honest self-assessment as to the extent of one's freedom. To orientate our pursuit of freedom in the direction where we will have a better chance of attaining it.* Rudolf Steiner said, *"And one may well feel that if the soul has not at some time found itself faced in utmost seriousness by the problem of free will or necessity, it will not have reached its full stature."*

While the question of free will has challenged the greatest minds of history since the time of the Greeks, I assume I have free will without seriously looking at the issue. This chapter asks me to question what freedom is, whether I have it or not, and where it is located.

It is obvious that I cannot be free if my action is driven by unknown motives. The question is whether I am free if I recognize and understand the motive before acting on it. But what does it mean to "know" why I act? What does it mean to know anything in general?

The way I gain knowledge of things is by means of the cognitive process. To what extent my thinking is free depends on the functioning of my cognitive processes. Thus, making progress toward freedom is linked to understanding and deepening the powers of cognition.

The next three chapters examine the relationship of cognition to:
(chapter 2) willing, by recognizing how knowing the motive is essential to free action
(chapter 3) feeling, by recognizing how the desire for knowledge is rooted in one's own nature and drives an individual quest for answers
(chapter 4) thinking, by recognizing how thought is a self-supporting basis on which to understand the world

The other chapters in Part I examine four processes of cognition; 1. perception, 2. conception, 3. forming mental pictures, and concluding with the ego achieving 4. cognitive unity by means of the inner power of intuition:
(chapter 5) perception: how thought reacts to observation and is initially applied to the world
(chapter 6) conception: how intuition gives us the concept that corresponds to the world
(chapter 7) mental picturing: how we individualize the corresponding concept by forming mental pictures
(chapter 8) cognitive unity: how we achieve cognitive unity and a holistic world-view by unifying the perceptual-world with our conceptual-world to express the totality of the universe.

Study Topics
principles of freedom

2.0 The Question Of Freedom
Is the human being *free* in action and thought, or inescapably controlled by necessity?
2-1 Freedom of Indifferent Choice
(support) Neutrally choosing, entirely at will, one or the other of two possible courses of action.
(opposed) There always exists a specific *reason* to explain why we carry out an action.
2.2 Freedom Of Choice
(support) Make a free choice according to our own wants and preferences.
(opposed) We are not free to desire or not desire arbitrarily.
2.3 Free Necessity Of One's Nature
(support) Freedom is to express the necessity of our own nature.
(opposed) However complex, our nature is determined by external causes to act in a fixed and exact way.
2.4 Free From External Influences
(support) We act on an idea only if it is first accepted by our character.
(opposed) An idea is made into a motive according to the 'necessity' of our characterological disposition.
2.5 Action Resulting From Conscious Motive
(support) Rather than blind urge, we act according to a conscious motive.
(opposed) The knower has been separated from the doer. We don't always do what we know should be done.
2.6 Free When Controlled By Rational Decision
(support) Freedom is to determine one's life and action by purpose and deliberate decisions.
(opposed) A rational decision may emerges in me with the same necessity with which hunger and thirst arise.
2.7 Free To Do As One Wants
(support) To be free does not mean being able to determine what one wants, but being able to do what one wants.
(opposed) If a motive works on me, and I am compelled to follow it because it proves to be the "strongest" of its kind, then the thought of freedom ceases to make any sense.
2.8 Spontaneous Unconditioned Will
(support) Our will is the cause of our movement, the willing itself is unconditioned; it is an absolute beginning (a first cause and not a link in a chain of events).
(opposed) We do not perceive the causes that determine our will, so we believe it is not causally determined at all.
2.9 Knowledge Of The Reasons
(support) Freedom is an action of which the reasons are known.
(opposed) What is the origin of the thoughts that cause us to act?
2.10 Driving Force Of The Heart
(support) Love, compassion, and patriotism are driving forces for action where heart-felt sensibility prevails.
(opposed) The heart and its sensibility do not create the motives of action. They allow them to enter. The motives have already been established.
2.11 Idealistic Thought
(support) Love determines our action.
(opposed) Feelings are determined by thought. Love is based on the thoughts we form of the loved one. The more idealistic the thoughts, the more blessed is our love.
2.12 Perception Of Good Qualities
(support) We see the good qualities of the loved one. Many pass by without noticing these good qualities.
(opposed) Seeing good qualities is determined by love which opens the eyes to see them. The love is there because mental pictures have been made of the good qualities.

top

2.0 The Question Of Freedom

[1] IS man free in action and thought, or is he bound by an iron necessity? There are few questions on which so much ingenuity has been expended. The idea of freedom has found enthusiastic supporters and stubborn opponents in plenty.

There are those who, in their moral fervour, label anyone a man of limited intelligence who can deny so patent a fact as freedom. Opposed to them are others who regard it as the acme of unscientific thinking for anyone to believe that the uniformity of natural law is broken in the sphere of human action and thought. One and the same thing is thus proclaimed, now as the most precious possession of humanity, now as its most fatal illusion.

is man free in action and thought, or is he bound by an iron necessity?

Infinite subtlety has been employed to explain how human freedom can be consistent with determinism in nature of which man, after all, is a part. Others have been at no less pains to explain how such a delusion as this could have arisen. That we are dealing here with one of the most important questions for life, religion, conduct, science, must be clear to every one whose most prominent trait of character is not the reverse of thoroughness.

top

2.1 Freedom Of Indifferent Choice

It is one of the sad signs of the superficiality of present-day thought, that a book which attempts to develop a new faith out of the results of recent scientific research (David Friedrich Strauss: Der alte und neue Glaube), has nothing more to say on this question than these words:

> "With the question of the freedom of the human will we are not concerned. The alleged freedom of indifferent choice has been recognized as an empty illusion by every philosophy worthy of the name. The determination of the moral value of human conduct and character remains untouched by this problem."

David Strauss
1808–1874

It is not because I consider that the book in which it occurs has any special importance that I quote this passage, but because it seems to me to express the only view to which the thought of the majority of our contemporaries is able to rise in this matter. Every one who has gown beyond the kindergarten-stage of science appears to know nowadays that freedom cannot consist in choosing, at one's pleasure, one or other of two possible courses of action. There is always, so we are told, a perfectly definite reason why, out of several possible actions, we carry out just one and no other.

Herbert Spencer
1820–1903

top

2.2 Freedom Of Choice

[2] This seems quite obvious. Nevertheless, down to the present days the main attacks of the opponents of freedom are directed only against freedom of choice. Even Herbert Spencer, in fact, whose doctrines are gaining ground daily, says

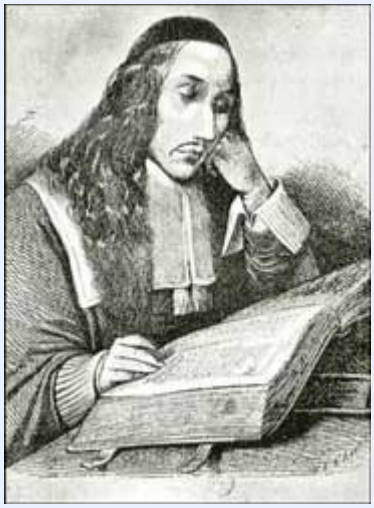
> "That every one is at liberty to desire or not to desire, which is the real proposition involved in the dogma of free will, is negatived as much by the analysis of consciousness, as by the contents of the preceding chapters" (The Principles of Psychology, Part IV, chap. ix, par. 2I9).

top

2.3 Free Necessity Of One's Nature

Others, too, start from the same point of view in combating the concept of free will. The germs of all the relevant arguments are to be found as early as Spinoza. All that he brought forward in clear and simple language against the idea of freedom has since been repeated times without number, but as a rule enveloped in the most sophisticated arguments, so that it is difficult to recognize the straightforward train of thought which is alone in question. Spinoza writes in a letter of October or November I674,

"I call a thing free which exists and acts from the pure necessity of its nature, and I call that unfree, of which the being and action are precisely and fixedly determined by something else. Thus, e.g., God, though necessary, is free because he exists only through the necessity of his own nature. Similarly, God knows himself and all else as free, because it follows solely from the necessity of his nature that he knows all. You see, therefore, that for me freedom consists not in free decision, but in free necessity.



Baruch Spinoza
1632-1677

[3] "But let us come down to created things which are all determined by external causes to exist and to act in a fixed and definite manner. To perceive this more clearly, let us imagine a perfectly simple case. A stone, for example, receives from an external cause acting upon it a certain quantity of motion, by reason of which it necessarily continues to move, after the impact of the external cause has ceased. The continued motion of the stone is due to compulsion, not to the necessity of its own nature, because it requires to be defined by the impact of an external cause. What is true here for the stone is true also for every other particular thing, however complicated and many-sided it may be, namely, that everything is necessarily determined by external causes to exist and to act in a fixed and definite manner.

[4] "Now, pray, assume that this stone during its motion thinks and knows that it is striving to the best of its power to continue in motion. This stone which is conscious only of its striving and is by no means indifferent, will believe that it is absolutely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than its own will to continue. Now this is that human freedom which everybody claims to possess and which consists in nothing but this, that men are conscious of their desires, but ignorant of the causes by which they are determined. Thus the child believes that he desires milk of his own free will, the angry boy regards his desire for vengeance as free, and the coward his desire for flight. Again, the drunken man believes that he says of his own free will what, sober again, he would fain have left unsaid, and as this prejudice is innate all men, it is difficult to free oneself from it. For, although experience teaches us often enough that man least of all can temper his desires, and that, moved by conflicting passions, he perceives the better and pursues the worse, yet he considers himself free because there are some things which he desires less strongly, and some desires which he can easily inhibit through the recollection of something else which it is often possible to recall."

[5] It is easy to detect the fundamental error of this view, because it is so clearly and definitely expressed. The same necessity by which a stone makes a definite movement as the result of an impact, is said to compel a man to carry out an action when impelled thereto by any cause. It is only because man is conscious of his action, that he thinks himself to be its originator. In doing so, he overlooks the fact that he is driven by a cause which he must obey unconditionally. The error in this train of thought is easily brought to light. Spinoza, and all who think like him, overlook the fact that man not only is conscious of his action, but also may become conscious of the cause which guides him.

Anyone can see that a child is not free when he desires milk, nor the drunken man when he says things which he later regrets. Neither knows anything of the causes, working deep within their organisms, which exercise irresistible control over them. But is it justifiable to lump together actions of this kind with those in which a man is conscious not only of his actions but also of their causes? Are the actions of men really all of one kind? Should the act of a soldier on the field of battle, of the scientific researcher in his

laboratory, of the statesman in the most complicated diplomatic negotiations, be placed on the same level with that of the child when he desires milk?

the opponents of freedom never ask themselves whether a motive of action which I recognize and understand, is to be regarded as compulsory for me in the same sense as the organic process

It is, no doubt, true that it is best to seek the solution of a problem where the conditions are simplest. But lack of ability to see distinctions has before now caused endless confusion. There is after all a profound difference between knowing the motive of my action and not knowing it. At first sight this seems a self-evident truth. And yet the opponents of freedom never ask themselves whether a motive of action which I recognize and understand, is to be regarded as compulsory for me in the same sense as the organic process which causes the child to cry for milk.

top

2.4 Free From External Influences

[6] Eduard van Hartmann, in his *Phanomenologie des Sittlichen Bewusstseins* (p. 451) asserts that the human will depends on two chief factors, the motives and the character. If one regards men as all alike, or at any rate the differences between them as negligible, then their will appears as determined from without, viz., by the circumstances with which they come in contact.

But if one bears in mind that men adopt an idea as the motive of their conduct, only if their character is such that this idea arouses a desire in them, then men appear as determined from within and not from without. Now, because an idea, given to us from without, must first in accordance with our characters be adopted as a motive, men believe that they are free, i.e., independent of external influences. The truth, however, according to Eduard von Hartmann, is that

Eduard von Hartman
1842–1906

"even though we must first adopt an idea as a motive, we do so not arbitrarily, but according to the disposition of our characters, that is, we are anything but free."

Here again the difference between motives, which I allow to influence me only after I have consciously made them my own, and those which I follow, without any clear knowledge of them, is absolutely ignored.

top

2.5 Action Resulting From Conscious Motive

[7] This leads us straight to the standpoint from which the subject will be treated here. Have we any right to consider the question of the freedom of the will by itself at all? And if not, with what other question must it necessarily be connected?

[8] If there is a difference between conscious and unconscious motives of action, then the action in which the former issue should be judged differently from the action which springs from blind impulse. Hence our first question will concern this difference, and on the result of this inquiry will depend what attitude we ought to take up towards the question of freedom proper.

[9] What does it mean to have knowledge of the motives of one's actions? Too little attention has been paid to this question, because, unfortunately, man who is an indivisible whole has always been torn asunder by us. The agent has been divorced from the knower, whilst he who matters more than everything else, viz., the man who acts because he knows, has been utterly overlooked.

top

2.6 Free When Controlled By Reason

[10] It is said that man is free when he is controlled only by his reason, and not by his animal passions. Or, again, that to be free means to be able to determine one's life and action by purposes and deliberate decisions.

[11] Nothing is gained by assertions of this sort. For the question is just whether reason, purposes, and decisions exercise the same kind of compulsion over a man as his animal passions. If, without my doing, a rational decision occurs in me with the same necessity with which hunger and thirst happen to me, then I must needs obey it, and my freedom is an illusion.

top

2.7 Free To Do As One Wants

[12] Another form of expression runs: to be free means, not that we can will what we will, but that we can do what we will. This thought has been expressed with great clearness by the poet-philosopher Robert Hamerling in his *Atomistik des Willens*.

"Man can, it is true, do what he wills, but he cannot will what he wills, because his will is determined by motives! He cannot will what he wills? Let us consider these phrases more closely. Have they any intelligible meaning?

Does freedom of the will, then, mean being able to will without ground, without motive? What does willing mean if not to have grounds for doing, or striving to do, this rather than that? To will anything without ground or motive would mean to will something without willing it.

The concept of motive is indissolubly bound up with that of will. Without the determining motive the will is an empty faculty; it is the motive which makes it active and real. It is, therefore, quite true that the human will is not 'free,' inasmuch as its direction is always determined by the strongest motive. But, on the other hand, it must be admitted that it is absurd to speak, in contrast with this 'unfreedom,' of a conceivable 'freedom' of the will, which would consist in being able to will what one does not will" (*Atomistik des Willens*, p. 213 ff.).*

Robert Hamerling
1830-1889

***Alternate translation**

"The human being can certainly *do* what he wants, but he cannot *determine* what he wants, because his will is determined by *motives*! He cannot determine what he wants? Let us look at these words more closely. Do they make any sense?

Is free will, then, being able to want something without reason, without a motive? But what does wanting mean other than *having a reason* for doing or trying to do this rather than that? To want something without a reason, without a motive, would be to want something *without wanting it*.

The concept of wanting is *inseparable* from the concept of motive. Without a motive to determine it, the will is an empty *capacity*; only through the motive does it become active and real. Therefore, it is entirely correct that the human will is not 'free' to the extent that its direction is always determined by the strongest motive. But, in contrast to this 'unfreedom', it is absurd to speak of a possible 'freedom' of the will that amounts to having the ability to want what one does not want."

[13] Here again only motives in general are mentioned, without taking into account the difference between unconscious and conscious motives. If a motive affects me, and I am compelled to act on it because it proves to be the "strongest" of its kind, then the idea of freedom ceases to have any meaning. How should it matter to me whether I can do a thing or not, if I am forced by the motive to do it? The primary question is, not whether I can do a thing or not when impelled by a motive, but whether the only motives are such as impel me with absolute necessity. If I must will something, then I may well be absolutely indifferent as to whether I can also do it. And if, through my character, or through circumstances prevailing in my environment, a motive is forced on me which to my thinking is unreasonable, then I should even have to be glad if I could not do what I will.

[14] The question is, not whether I can carry out a decision once made, but how I come to make the decision.

top

2.8 Spontaneous Unconditioned Will

[15] What distinguishes man from all other organic beings is his rational thought. Activity is common to him with other organisms. Nothing is gained by seeking analogies in the animal world to clear up the concept of freedom as applied to the actions of human beings.

Modern science loves these analogies. When scientists have succeeded in finding among animals something similar to human behaviour, they believe they have touched on the most important question of the science of man. To what misunderstandings this view leads is seen, for example, in the book *Die Illusion der Willensfreiheit*, by P. Ree, 1885, where, on page 5, the following remark on freedom appears.

"It is easy to explain why the movement of a stone seems to us necessary, while the volition of a donkey does not. The causes which set the stone in motion are external and visible, while the causes which determine the donkey's volition are internal and invisible. Between us and the place of their activity, there is the skull cap of the ass...

The causal nexus is not visible, and is therefore thought to be non-existent. The volition, it is explained, is, indeed, the cause of the donkey's turning round, but is itself unconditioned; it is an absolute beginning."*

Paul Rée
1849-1901

*More of the Rée quote: The volition, it is explained, is, indeed, the cause of the donkey's turning round, but is itself unconditioned; it is an absolute beginning, *a first cause and not a link in a chain of events... But a presumption of this kind is contradicted by experience and the universal validity of the law of causality… Let us now leave the realm of animals and proceed to consider the human being. Everything is the same here."*

Paul Rée, Friedrich Nietzsche and Lou Andreas-Salomé (1882)

Here again human actions in which there is a consciousness of the motives are simply ignored, for Ree declares, "that between us and the sphere of their activity there is the skull cap of the ass." As these words show, it has not so much as dawned on Ree that there are actions, not indeed of the ass, but of human beings, in which the motive, become conscious, lies between us and the action. Ree demonstrates his blindness once again a few pages further on, when he says,

"we do not perceive the causes by which our will is determined, hence we think it is not causally determined at all."

[16] But enough of examples which prove that many argue against freedom without knowing in the least what freedom is.

top

2.9 Knowledge Of The Reasons

[17] That an action of which the agent does not know why he performs it, cannot be free goes without saying. But what of the freedom of an action about the motives of which we reflect? This leads us to the question of the origin and meaning of thought. When we know what thought in general means, it will be easier to see clearly the role which thought plays in human action. As Hegel rightly says,

> "It is thought which turns the soul, common to us and animals, into spirit."

Hence it is thought which we may expect to give to human action its characteristic stamp.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
1770–1831

top

2.10 Driving Force Of The Heart

[18] I do not mean to imply that all our actions spring only from the sober deliberations of our reason. I am very far from calling only those actions "human" in the highest sense, which proceed from abstract judgments. But as soon as our conduct rises above the sphere of the satisfaction of purely animal desires, our motives are always shaped by thoughts.

our motives are always shaped by thoughts

Love, pity, and patriotism are motives of action which cannot be analysed away into cold concepts of the understanding. It is said that here the heart, the soul, hold sway. This is no doubt true. But the heart and the soul create no motives. They presuppose them. Pity enters my heart when the thought of a person who arouses pity has appeared in my consciousness. The way to the heart is through the head.

top

2.11 Idealistic Thought

Love is no exception. Whenever it is not merely the expression of bare sexual instinct, it depends on the thoughts we form of the loved one. And the more we idealize the loved one in our thoughts, the more blessed is our love. Here, too, thought is the father of feeling.

the more we idealize the loved one in our thoughts, the more blessed is our love

top

2.12 Perception Of Good Qualities

It is said that love makes us blind to the failings of the loved one. But the opposite view can be taken, namely that it is precisely for the good points that love opens the eyes. Many pass by these good points without notice. One, however, perceives them, and just because he does, love awakens in his soul. What else has he done except perceive what hundreds have failed to see? Love is not theirs, because they lack the perception.*

***Alternate translation**
2.12 One says: Love makes us blind to the weaknesses of the loved one. The matter can also be grasped the other way round and it can be maintained that love opens the eye in fact for precisely the good qualities of the loved one. Many pass these good qualities by without an inkling, without noticing them. One person sees them, and just because he does, love awakens in his soul. What has he done other than make for himself a mental picture of something of which a hundred others have none. They do not have the love because they lack the *mental picture*.

[19] From whatever point we regard the subject, it becomes more and more clear that the question of the nature of human action presupposes that of the origin of thought. I shall therefore, turn next to this question.