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The paradox of freedom (1)

The paradox of freedom that I intend to discuss is that unlimited freedom is self-contradictory, meaning that in order to be free, one must limit one's freedom. As is well known, the principle of universal freedom cannot be realised: conflicting interests and aspirations would quickly lead to anarchy. However, it is worth considering the structure of reasoning that not only confirms this prediction, but also shows that this principle contains an internal contradiction. For if we assume that everything is permitted, then it is also permitted to deny that everything is permitted; and if it is permitted to deny that everything is permitted, then it is not true that everything is permitted. This reasoning is analogous to the well-known logical principle that if a statement implies its own negation, then the negation is true and the statement is false. This is how Plato reasons in the dialogue *Theaetetus*, when he attributes to Socrates an argument that is designed to prove the falsity of Protagoras's claim that every statement is true and that it only takes skilful argumentation to win others over. The argument goes as follows: if it is true, as Protagoras claims, that every statement is true, then the statement of his opponents that not every statement is true is also true. Secondary school students encounter yet another example of such reasoning when, in school algebra, it is proved that a first-degree equation with one unknown has only one root; to prove this, it is assumed that it has two roots, after which it becomes apparent that this assumption leads to its contradiction, since two roots are one and the same root, and therefore the equation has only one root.

Then how can freedom be restrained so that one remains free? According to the common understanding of freedom, a person is free when their actions are not subject to any restrictions other than those they impose on themselves. Whether someone imposes these restrictions on himself or not, there are two types of freedom. Physical or external freedom is freedom within the limits set by natural conditions, in accordance with the laws of nature: muscle strength, agility, lung and heart endurance, which allow one to overcome physical resistance in the environment. The natural limits of external freedom become expanded as science and its technical applications progress, enabling humans to master the hostile forces of nature, become independent of them, and harness them to work for their own purposes. Man has external freedom if he is not locked up in prison, which would lead to his destruction, and if he does not act under the threat of such confinement, as does an animal that does not live in a cage or zoo enclosure. A being acting within the limits of its external freedom may be guided in its actions by a variety of motives, including both reasonable reflection and aspirations arising from primal drives and passions. However, the human personality is characterized by the ability to distinguish between good and evil and to choose between motives for action, limiting the pursuits arising from drives and passions, the lust for fame, power and wealth, if they oppose right pursuits, i.e. those directed towards good. Life wisdom has long taught us that people who consider only their physical capabilities in their actions will soon fall prey to their own desires, which will ultimately work against them. A wise man, as the ancient sages taught, reigns over his passions, guided in his actions, not by desire, but by what is right, and thus achieves freedom from his own primal nature, known as inner or moral freedom, since the dictates of morality indicate what course of action is right.

External and internal freedoms intersect within the limits of actions permissible according to internal freedom, yet they are antagonistic beyond these limits, for people who, exercising their external freedom, succumb to their desires and transgress the boundaries of what is right, are not internally free; while those who restrain their impulsive actions in accordance with what is right limit their external freedom. The conviction that it is possible to realise one's intentions – one which accompanies both external and internal freedom – was called psychological freedom. The emergence of this conviction or a conviction contrary to it is a criterion for a person acting of having or not having freedom. Like many other criteria, it can be unreliable, as it can be misleading.

Man who has attained inner freedom also respects the freedom of others, in accordance with the principle of justice, which is *suum cuique* – to give everyone what is due to them. However, justice is manifold, depending on how one understands what is due to whom.¹ And so, in the first sense, those who give everyone the same are acting justly – like a mother who divides bread equally among her children: in this sense, popular thought considers death to be the embodiment of justice, as it strikes everyone equally, regardless of any privileges. In the second sense, justice is done by those who treat everyone as they deserve; such is the justice meted out to people beyond the grave, but here on Earth, too, a person whose social position does not correspond to their merits is rightly considered to be wronged by injustice. In the third sense, justice is exercised according to the results of work; it guides a fair examiner in assessing an exam or a fair employer in determining employees' wages. The fourth is justice that gives to each according to their needs: we find it in social welfare organizations, in all kinds of sickness, disability and old-age benefits. Finally, the fifth is justice that allocates to each person what is due to them according to their status: thus, priority is given to teachers or superiors, the elderly, and revered people.

However, few people achieve inner freedom and respect the freedom of others in accordance with the precepts of justice. Thus, there is slavery as the opposite of freedom. It deprives people of external freedom; however, it is also possible to deprive a person of inner freedom by entangling them in lies imposed by a violator who abuses the trust of unaware people. A person in external slavery can retain internal freedom: because physical enslavement, through the imposition of rules on movement, communication, and the production of various goods, may block the path to the manifestation of moral freedom in action, but it does not reach its internal foundation, i.e. the intentions behind one's actions, which are considerations of justice, not drives and inclinations.

Physical enslavement will only limit inner freedom when its pressure causes someone to abandon righteousness in their actions. On the other hand, those deprived of inner freedom by false dogmas forced upon them are often unaware of their enslavement, as they may have a false sense of psychological freedom. In social life, physical violence takes two forms: as a weapon of the enemies of justice, but also as justice's own weapon in the fight against its enemies, when it becomes the

¹ Ch. Perelman, *De la Justice*; see rev. by M. Ossowska, "Ruch Filozoficzny" 1948, 16, p. 123

executor of sanctions that uphold justice in a form omitted from the previous list: legal justice, i.e. that which is embodied in the legal code and accompanied by sanctions threatening anyone who opposes it. To distinguish it from legal justice, let the term 'virtue of justice' refer to its previously described variants. Legal justice encompasses the varieties of the virtue of justice in the sense that each of them can be applied in legal justice as its specific content, but on the other hand, legal justice, owing to its specific content, may prove to be incompatible with one or another of those varieties of justice. The aforementioned dual relationship between violence and justice – violence that either offends justice or upholds sanctions – means that the relationship between freedom and justice also requires closer examination.

Violence occurs when opposing desires and actions collide: violence paves the way for one of these actions, preventing the other: when such a collision occurs between a just and an unjust aspiration, legal justice – at least in principle, though unfortunately not always in practice – sets in motion sanctions that use violence to curb unjust acts.

However, collisions also arise between actions, each of which invokes the principle of justice: in such cases, violence does not seem to be the right way of resolution, because even if it serves legal justice, the party against whom it is directed will accept it as unfair oppression. The source of such collisions is the excessive generality of the concepts we use to define the virtue of justice. Such is, in particular, the concept of 'what is deserved'. The concept of what is deserved is always some kind of good. The division of goods is based on a hierarchy, which in turn depends on the ethical assumptions that are accepted: it will be one thing in eudaimonic ethics and something else in a different ethical theory. Merits, achievements, and needs are also valued differently depending on the premises mentioned above. When two desires clash, both just in their intentions, but based on different ethical principles, and the collision leads to the elimination of one in favour of the other, the losing side will perceive the defeat as a restriction of freedom.

Ethical principles are components of culture, and differences between cultures prevalent in different societies are also reflected in differences between the various ethical systems. The convergence of cultures around the world, which we have witnessed especially in recent times, undoubtedly entails the convergence of ethics, merging into a single universal ethic. I believe that this phenomenon can be explained by the uniformity in the ability to have basic ethical intuitions, which are universal human abilities, just as the ability to experience colours, sounds, joy, and sadness are universal human characteristics. As this

universal ethic develops, the source of conflicts arising from the clash of ethics will disappear.

But this is not the only source of conflicts that limit individual freedom. There are times when two just aspirations clash because they refer to different aspects of the virtue of justice, e.g. when one demands justice that gives everyone the same, and the other demands justice that allocates goods according to achievements. It also happens that both just aspirations cannot be satisfied owing to a shortage of the goods they seek, as is the case when a single scholarship, enabling further academic development, must be awarded to one of two equally deserving candidates. If, in such cases, no solution can be found consistent with the principle of justice alone, then another principle must be sought which would allow the conflict to be resolved without imposing a decision that would thwart the aspirations of one of the parties and thus restrict its freedom. That principle is the principle of universal benevolence, otherwise known as the commandment to love one's neighbour. If each party, in full exercise of its internal freedom, is prepared, in accordance with this principle, to make concessions in favour of the legitimate claims of the other party, the conflict will be resolved by mutual agreement, without restricting anyone's freedom.

We have distinguished between external and internal freedom. External freedom comes up against three kinds of limitations: natural limitations in the forces of nature, social limitations in the aspirations of other people, and internal limitations in moral imperatives, which are accepted voluntarily and which, while limiting external freedom, leave the field of internal freedom open. With the development of social relations, external freedom is limited through new obstacles arising from them; the natural desire for freedom in all people finds its outlet in the transition from purely external freedom to internal freedom; this is achieved through understanding and recognizing the boundary between good and evil, between what should be pursued and what should be avoided. He who is free with inner freedom does not provoke conflicts that arise from the interplay of drives and passions, and therefore does not expose himself to acts of violence against himself. If he is unjustly assaulted, justice itself defends him. In the event of a conflict arising from just aspirations, people can also preserve their inner freedom by striving, in accordance with the principle of kindness, for a compromise in order to reconcile their own aspirations with those of the opposing party which they consider to be just. The purpose of the deliberations I present is to analyse concepts and the relationships between them. Its aim is to understand the meaning of the concept of freedom and how

this concept, in its various meanings, relates to other ethical concepts, in particular the concepts of justice and universal kindness. I am not going to formulate any recommendations, but based on the results of the analysis, one can identify another general correlation related to the paradox of freedom mentioned earlier. Everything we have dealt with thus far has concerned individual freedom. However, the concept of freedom also has another meaning, which concerns social relations; people fight for the freedom of subjugated nations or oppressed sections of the population. Defining freedom in this new sense is not easy; it involves political or economic conflicts. A social group striving for freedom regards it as the right to determine its own destiny and to decide, or at least participate on equal terms, in matters that affect its interests. But is it not true that those who cry out loudest for freedom and, on that basis, are entrusted by their fellow citizens to lead the fight for it, themselves become tyrants? It appears that the struggle for freedom for all in a society, where justice based on mutual goodwill and generally accepted ethical principles, cannot prevail, and that the supposed freedom for all will end up being freedom for some and slavery for others. Therefore, not every community is sufficiently mature for such freedom. Freedom cannot exist without justice and universal goodwill. Freedom for all is an ideal that can only be approached gradually, through the arduous effort of cultivating those social virtues that would preclude the use of violence both against justice and in its service. This thesis is not new, but perhaps these considerations will allow us to look at it more closely than is usually done.

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