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The paradox of freedom (2)

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. Unlimited freedom contradicts itself, which is why, in order to be free, one must limit one's freedom. Then how can freedom be restrained so that one remains free?

We distinguish between external or physical freedom and internal freedom. The former is the freedom to act within the limits defined by natural conditions, conforming to the laws of nature. A being acting within the limits of its external freedom may be guided in its actions by various motives, including rational thought and impulsive urges. The human personality is characterized by its ability to distinguish between good and evil, to choose between motives for action and to reject those that are contrary to the good. Ancient moralists taught that a wise person is guided in his actions by what is right, i.e. directed toward the good, and thus achieves internal or moral freedom, because moral imperatives dictate what is right. The belief that it is possible to realise one's intentions, accompanying both external and internal freedom, is sometimes referred to as 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.

A man who has attained inner freedom also respects the freedom of others, in accordance with the principle of justice, which is to give everyone his due. However, justice is manifold, depending on how one understands what is due to whom, i.e. whether it is the same for everyone, or according to merit, according to achievements, according to needs, or finally according to status. 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 is imposed either by physical violence, which deprives a person of external freedom (but can also deprive them of internal freedom when its pressure causes someone to give up acting according to what is right), or by moral violence, which deprives a person of internal freedom in order to entangle them in lies, abusing their trust; someone deprived of inner freedom in this manner may retain 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 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. 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. 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. 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.

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.

The results of the analysis allow us to identify another general relationship between the paradox of individual freedom, which we have discussed thus far, and the freedom of societies. 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. This ideal cannot be realised in a society where justice based on generally accepted ethical principles and mutual kindness does not prevail: the supposed freedom for all will soon turn out to be freedom for some and slavery for others. The ideal of universal freedom can only be achieved gradually, through the arduous effort of developing social virtues. This thesis is not new, but perhaps these considerations will allow us to look at it more closely than it is usually done.