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Implications of Freedom

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Considerable interest was aroused by the American elections of a year ago. The press in general welcomed Kennedy's victory, interpreting it as an augury of a stronger, more vigorous America. *The Guardian* (November 8, 1960) pointed out that "Most people in this country have a natural attachment to the Democratic Party, based on the memory of Franklin Roosevelt and the foreign policy of President Truman." Two days later it hailed "Mr. Kennedy's election . . . as a tribute to the people who elected him." It observed that "Mr. Kennedy has already shown himself to be an adroit and courageous politician, and he has a strain of ruthlessness without which no President can succeed. He will need all his courage—and much of his ruthlessness."

Patrick O'Donovan of *The Observer*, in a "forthright appraisal of the United States' new President-elect" which appeared in the November 11, 1960 issue of *The Universe*, wrote: "He (Kennedy) is a man who will make the idea of America exciting once again. He will have America call the tune, pour out the new ideas and suggestions, not Russia. He will make America true to its tradition of gentle revolution. He will make it once again good and stimulating to be on her side. His will be a strong and enterprising America. It will not be noticeably a Catholic one."

The Times Weekly Review (November 17, 1960) offered this piece of advice: "He (Kennedy) will increase confidence on this side of the Atlantic if he can command the support in high office in Washington of such men as Mr. Adlai Stevenson, who is certainly in England the best-known leader of the Democratic Party and in the opinion of many the finest exponent of what should be its liberal principles."

Whether or not, after lapse of a year, Mr. O'Donovan and the writer for *The Review* are to be adjudged good prophets is still argued within the United States; although even Mr. Kennedy's strongest (non-political) opponents have had to admit that the worst they anticipated has not befallen. But the press opinions cited at least show how high British expectations were.

RENATO PUENTEVELLA

Implications of Freedom

In view of the grave danger in which the freedom of the world stands at the present moment, and in view of the controversies on freedom that appear on the Philippine scene from time to time, it is opportune to study the philosophical basis on which freedom rests

and bring out some of its implications. In particular, because men tend to exaggerate its dignity and subordinate all other values, even those of morality and religion, to it, we need especially to remember the limitations of freedom.

St. Augustine wrote in the *Confessions*: "What then is time? If no one asks me, I know; but if I wish to explain it to one who asks, I do not know." Like the word, time, the word, freedom, is one which everyone seems to understand, but when asked what it is men begin to find out, much like the Platonic characters interrogated by Socrates, that they really know very little about it. How far can we get in our notion of freedom?

1. *Freedom can be only exercised towards finite objects, i.e. not towards the infinite.*

Strange to say, we do not, because we cannot, really *choose* something of infinite value or of infinite goodness and beauty. If a good of infinite value were presented to a man's mind and will, he could not but be drawn to it *irresistibly*; he has to love it, he has no choice. Psychologically he would not feel free to turn around and reject it.

The reason for this is that man's free-will is made for the *good* and the *beautiful*, so that when there is something completely good and beautiful, something that has nothing in it at all of what is ugly or disagreeable, the human will cannot but leap out for it. Thus we are not free to choose the infinitely good and lovable One, God; and if men do reject him, it can only be because they see some disadvantage or some evil in loving him. Their idea of him is imperfect and not really an idea of the true God as the All-Good. Thus when a man is said to "choose" God, or deliberately to "reject" him in favor of a creature, it is because he sees God not *as he is* but as in a glass darkly and as involving some disadvantage for the man himself.

Choice or freedom, therefore, can only be towards *finite* things.

This implies that in every finite object of desire there is concomitantly seen with the good something that is not good, some disadvantage. For this reason man *can* choose, is *free* to accept the finite good *in spite of* the concomitant evil, or to reject it because of the concomitant disadvantage.

So true is this that even the divine nature of God, considered as possessing freedom, can exercise that freedom, not towards its own Infinite Self, but only towards creating or not creating a world, i.e. a *finite* being; or towards effecting this or that particular event—a finite happening—in human history. But towards its own Self, divine Will is *not free*; it cannot but love and rejoice in its Self.

Thus the knowledge and love in God, or the proceeding of the Son from the Father, and of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son—that is not a free act, not left to God to have or not to have.

The idea of freedom, then, since its object is *finite* goods, is in this sense subordinate to the idea of *necessity* which is rooted in being that is full or *infinite*. Freedom presupposes a necessary being or a necessary law for its norm, and draws its reasonableness or intelligibility from it.

Another way of expressing the same idea is: Because free-will is a choice between two good things, it implies that one object has *some good* which the other does not have. Otherwise, if one contains *all* the good which the other has, and its own proper good besides, there would be no motive or basis for choosing. Thus, in a choice one object cannot be an *infinite* good, or one containing every possible good and known as such; but both objects are *finite* and *limited* goods.

2. *Free-will is not an Absolute, but looks beyond itself for its norm.*

Free-will has for its object finite goods, not the All-good. Now finite things, because they could not have existed by their own power from all eternity, were necessarily produced, and therefore by an *infinite* being. Just as a produced thing or an effect is always a reflection or imitation of its producer or cause, so all finite beings imitate the Infinite, which is their great Original. Thus, as Plato surmised, the greatness or perfection of finite beings grows according to the extent or degree that they resemble the great Original more closely. Their complete *raison d'être* is not within themselves, but looks beyond themselves to the Absolute.

Now freedom, since it is directed towards these *finite* things, has to look beyond them to find the norm of their goodness and perfection. Free-will, like the finite goods it seeks, is itself forced to seek its ultimate aim beyond finite goods. St. Thomas expresses this idea when he defines choice as desiring something for the sake of obtaining another thing (*Summa Theol.* 1,83,4). Free-will, therefore, although it connotes a certain independence, is not wholly self-sufficient or absolute; it is dependent, and looks to the infinite Good for its final norm. This is the ultimate reason why *all* human freedom, of its very nature, has *restrictions*; is not really free to do things "as it *wishes*" but only "as they *ought* to be done". Free-will then *must* follow the prior laws or patterns of being, but do so knowingly and deliberately.

This idea—that freedom is not absolute and its own norm—is of great importance in our day. By a kind of cult for exaggerated exaltation of freedom it is presented at times as the supreme good

of man, to which all else should be subordinated, even religion and the moral dictates of reason.

3. *The Purpose of Free-will.*

Briefly, it is that we may serve God *willingly*, out of deliberate choice, and not by physical or psychological compulsion, however natural this instinct might be.

More fully, this purpose may be expressed thus. In creating, God had a clear purpose in view, a definite good to be gained, or a definite amount of good to be given out from his inexhaustible supply and shared with his creatures. Now there are two ways by which he could achieve this purpose:

1) By creating a world in which there is no choice or freedom at all, where all things act in definite ways, following inner and external compulsive instincts and forces. Thus he could force them, by stringent laws ruling their bodies and beings, to actions which would automatically carry out his plans and carry them out to perfection.

2) Or he could create beings that could know and understand his plans and, seeing their excellence, *deliberately choose* to act according to them.

The second way is certainly better and more to God's glory, because:

a. It reveals a *greater love* on God's part, for by it a person shares in the quality more characteristic of Divinity itself: independence, self-sufficiency or self-determination.

b. It shows *greater wisdom and power*—that a creature would, from interior conviction and willingly, not automatically, agree with God, pursue his plans and obey his laws and wishes.

c. It produces a new and *superior* kind of creature, unlike all others which are wholly bound by matter, a being with powers superior to anything else in the whole universe, namely, intelligence and freedom.

Thus we see the gracious purpose of Nature or of God in producing this loftiest of creations—free-will: for man, it enables him to cooperate *willingly* with God's plans for nature and for history; for God, it manifests greater divine love, greater wisdom and power, and produces the very highest and noblest creature possible.

4. *Free-will increases a creature's sense of Uniqueness and of Personal Consciousness.*

In the scale or hierarchy of beings, it is easy to observe that the *lower* the being is (e.g. a stone), the less individuality it has; in the

sense at least that being wholly material and unendowed with the higher properties of life and consciousness, its differentiating or individuating traits are *fewer* and less significant. On the other hand, the *higher* in the scale of being a thing is (e.g. an angel), the more of an individual it is or the more *unique*. Thus St. Thomas theorizes that of *man*, whose spiritual half is tied down to matter, there is *one* genuine species (one human nature), which is multipliable into many individual human persons. But for *angels*, who are pure spirits or wholly without matter, there is no means of individualizing them—except by differentiating them according to *species*. In other words, there is no *one* angelic species common to all the angels, but each angel is a distinct *species* of angelic life in himself, so that there are as many different species of angels as there are angels. Thus the higher a being, the less in common it has with other things, or the more *unique* it is—until we come to the infinite being of the Divine Nature, which is so unique and singular that it has nothing at all in common with any other thing, except in a partial and analogical manner.

5. *Internal Freedom is vastly more important than External Freedom.*

In democratic countries, including the Philippines, there has always been much discussion and exaltation of freedom: freedom of speech, of the press, academic freedom, from tyranny, from oppression... It is to be noted that the restrictions of freedom which are cited for condemnation are all or mostly all *external* to the freedom itself. Thus the enemies of freedom are cited as tyrants and dictators, graft and corruption in public offices, prohibitions imposed by authorities on the press or on professors, etc. Similarly, the freedom desired and fought for has to do with something *external* to the freedom itself, e.g. to write, speak, teach or act freely.

It is seen from this that in our modern democratic way of thinking much greater importance is given to *external* rather than to *interior* freedom or the inner freedom of the will. In fact, few seem to realize that there *is* such a thing as interior freedom and fewer still that it is vastly more important than external freedom, being the root of all freedom.

The interior freedom of will is more important and a more genuine form of freedom. For freedom radically is *choice*. Now it is the *will* alone ultimately that can choose and the will is something deeply *within* one's self, not external to a man's being. Choice is preference or desire of one thing or course rather than of another; now preference and desire are actions which are immanent and most personal to a man. Thus a man may *externally* be completely restricted, e.g. in a dark prison cell at Dachau, chained to the wall. But *interiorly* he can feel most *free*, wholly in possession of his powers,

completely "captain of his soul." He may be tortured bodily in the worst ways possible, but in his heart he can continue to say: No. On the other hand, a millionaire may be revelling in wealth and power and pleasure and proudly ignoring all laws of nature, state and society, but deep in his heart he may feel himself a *slave* to all that, and feel he has lost all will-power to say: No—and break away from these interior bonds.

There can, then, be interior freedom without the exterior, but there cannot be true exterior freedom without the interior. The interior freedom or freedom of will is the *root* and *origin* of the external and without it external freedom loses its meaning.

It is very strange that the present democratic mentality in the free countries of the world should almost universally neglect the root of the freedoms they are struggling to save: the internal freedom of man's will. Stranger still that even some of their keenest thinkers, viz. their philosophers and scientists (e.g. the late Albert Einstein), should stoutly deny the existence of this root, of a real freedom of will. This neglect of the essence and source of all true freedom might indicate the reason why the modern democracies are failing, why in spite of the vast expenditures of money and energy spent in eulogizing freedom, its deterioration increases from day to day. The reason is—the safeguards of freedom are applied superficially, to the externals or to the symptoms of freedom; but the disease attacking the hidden roots of interior freedom is left alone to weaken man's will and in the end to enslave him wholly to the inner tyrants of that will, man's passions and selfish desires.

6. *Freedom is Liberation from Men, not from Nature and Her Laws.*

(1) Men daily make their appearance in the world and notice that an *order* or definite arrangement of things is in possession before they came, long before any man appeared on the scene. The newcomer's mind forces him to admit that that order *has* to remain and that *he* has to keep it. It is not just something optional or highly recommended but a thing of grave *obligation* and weighing on his particular conscience. Somehow man feels that the order he finds in nature, both physical and moral, is powerfully maintained by an extremely mighty Power and imposed on all men by a superior Will against whom it is futile to argue.

As said earlier, free-will is a gift of God to man; is given man so that the ends of nature which unthinking animals and things attain *automatically* by following interior compulsive forces (instincts, etc.) man may attain *willingly*, i.e., he may know those ends, see their reasonableness and goodness, and freely choose to seek them. The purpose of the human free-will, then, is (strange to say) *not* to enable

men to decide *any way they wish*, but to enable them to decide *willingly in favor of nature and her laws*. What men, therefore, really desire when they cry for freedom is not liberation from nature or acts natural to man, but liberation from external and internal restrictions that prevent the will from deciding in favor of nature and her laws. These restrictions proceed from the inordinate passions and selfish desires of men and especially of the *will itself*. For although the purpose of the will is to follow the natural law, yet the will can develop within itself by a lack of self-discipline a habitual inclination towards what is contrary to the natural law, or towards evil. This inclination is rooted in the compulsions set up by a man's selfish desires and passions.

(2) Freedom is posterior to Necessity, as has already been pointed out. Something has first to *be* before it can *be free*. So free-will supposes *being*. It is subordinate to being and to the laws of being. Its norms are, thus, *outside itself*. It cannot make *itself* its norm of choice. It cannot choose to do (say, think) anything *it wishes*. Rather, free-will is what it is (a power for choosing) as a *result* of other qualities in a being, such as consciousness, intelligence, appetite for the All-Good. Consequently, free-will has to seek to enhance the natural perfection of the being in which it resides, or to act and decide in accord with the nature of that particular being.

Freedom, then, is not liberation from the *nature* of the subject in which it is, but from the *obstacles* to the perfecting of that nature, or from the disordered passions of men (including one's self) which attempt to prevent the rightful exercise of freedom.

These are basic considerations and, as such, reminders of what is greater, what is lesser, in our struggle to safeguard freedom. Despite all our exertions, vocal and physical, put forth on behalf of freedom, it is at least possible that we have been less than universally successful (to put it mildly) because we have thus far been tackling the problem wrong-end-to.

HERNANDO MACEDA