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Freedom for Self-Transcendence

In the broadest sense, freedom for self-transcendence corresponds to the range of our effective freedom. The development of freedom includes the development of skills, habits and values, for example, where doing good lays a foundation for further development. Ideally, we would experience a self-confirmatory progression where our range of effective freedom continuously expands. In reality our development proceeds by fits and starts across multiple developmental streams. We contend with our own psychological biases and our own failures to do what is right. Depending on the stage of our own self-appropriation we contend with inadequate views of what makes sense, what is real and true, and how we meet our responsibilities. The reorientation of ourselves to reality and the good requires self-appropriation of our conscious acts and operations. In a narrower sense, it is this self-appropriation which is the development of freedom for self-transcendence because it is a transformation of the basic operations which support deliberately free acts and the relatively spontaneous operations that support them. This provides a broader, deeper, more dynamic and more indeterminate foundation for our self-actualization in self transcendence.

Self-appropriation moves into two areas that typically are overlooked in the natural attitude, conscious operations that are not acts, and pre-deliberative freedom. A subset of the former ground our existential sense of reality being independent of us. The latter comprise a range of decisions through which we constitute ourselves, but to which we often do not advert and for which we may not take responsibility.

Freedom is a quality of acts. It is most commonly associated with acts issuing from decisions, which are the results of rational deliberation on alternatives in terms of desires, preferences, or values. We also act freely without deliberation. This basic

freedom is found in many animals, though some also can act intelligently and, at times, deliberately within the context of their drives, interests, and feelings patterned by biologically and psychologically based behavioral systems. This independence of freedom from knowledge is the basis of the moral imperative in humans, the exigence we experience to have our doing match our knowing.

The determination and evaluation of alternatives that precedes decision and action is deliberative consciousness. Pre-deliberative actions are acts which typically precede deliberation and responsible actions or which are spontaneous actions within the process of deciding and performing the chosen actions. The distinction between pre-deliberative and deliberative consciousness is not sharp, since pre-deliberative consciousness is not always non-deliberative. There can be some minor deliberation occurring in pre-deliberative consciousness. The deliberation is typically tacit and regards operational alternatives immediately present as the intimation or nascent emergence of an operation or set of operations.

Pre-deliberative freedom is similar, but distinct from, most free skillful acts. It is similar in that there is an inadequate distinction between the performance of the act and the choice of it. Though skillful acts can be chosen in the moment with little or no thought, they differ from spontaneous pre-deliberative acts in that the choice is the result of practice or training. Pre-deliberative freedom is more immediate and spontaneous. It is associated with the directing of attention, the pursuit of understanding and judgment, and virtuosity in action. Conversely, it is manifest in inattentiveness, flight from understanding and reasonableness, inhibition of feelings, expression and performance, and impulsive behavior. To understand the role of freedom in these operations, we need to distinguish operations and acts and understand the situatedness of acts and its relation

to our effective freedom.

The most general definition of an operation is that it transforms itself or something else. For example, multiplication transforms the multiplicands into a product as addition transforms numbers into their sums. The operation of unscrewing a lid transforms an unopened jar into an open jar.

Operations form groups. The mathematical operations of addition and subtraction can be a group where each reverses the other's result. Sets of motor operations permit us to assemble and disassemble machines. By cognitive operations we synthesize ideas and analyze them into their parts, and so on. Operations that form matrices of reversible or complementary operations are skills.

However, not all operations are acts since not all operations are free. In a technical sense there may be degrees of freedom within a set of operations which corresponds to the set's effective range, but these operations are not chosen. For example, the focusing of the eye describes a range of operation in support of acts yet it almost always occurs automatically, or without any free intervention.

In learning skills, operations that once took effort and were acts come to occur automatically and become merely operations in support of acts. They too function like the focusing of the eye and are invoked with an ensemble of other coordinated supporting operations as we act.

Actions occur within their own context of supporting operations, but also within a wider context of operations that constitutes the state of consciousness at that time. Consciousness is not an ensemble of coordinated operations. It is more like a situation where there are sets of unrelated events occurring simultaneously. It is a loosely coordinated set of operations with varying degrees of autonomy. At the focus is the act,

but the act can be the partial realization of a motivational cycle, a simple shift in attention to hear a sound more closely so we can identify it, and so on. There is a penumbra of other operations to which we could advert or which could be transformed into a coordinated response or action. The simultaneous presence of operations and the potential for coordination lies in our neural network which links virtually all the operational centers with one another. Consciousness constitutes an operational situation where a number of actions are possible. As the focus shifts, there are corresponding modifications in the penumbra of operations so that some become less likely and others more probable, partly through competition for our attention (which may be related to increased neural activity, and in some cases can be conditioned by our native neural network). The presence of these other operations is not chosen. Rather, it constitutes our frame of mind, which is a dynamic given. By acting we can bring them to the fore, or to completion as they support or provide part of the context for our action.

Freedom is always situated. Attentiveness has a field of possible contents constituted variously by interests, the sensible field, intelligence and so on. In pursuing intelligibility, intelligence is situated by questions and the state of the questions where that state is a compound of past accomplishments and the current dynamic given for intelligence. Within these contexts there is an element of freedom and sets of merely operational elements. For example, at times we can control our imaginations, but in the pursuit of an answer, the imagination can work on its own supplying images of varying relevance. It is not uncommon for an insight to occur after a problem has been set aside. Freedom can be operative intelligently and reasonably just as it can be operative skillfully. For example, we can suppose different possibilities when trying to understand. We can struggle with conceptualization of an insight we have had. In these operations

freedom can be preconceptual, unthematized. It is manifest as a quality of the act, but the act can occur spontaneously without deliberation. As one grows in understanding a field and in understanding understanding and reason, understanding can become more deliberative. But within this context spontaneous non-deliberative freedom still will be active.

It is in the recognition that we fail to have our aspirations match our performance that transforming our modes of self transcendence becomes an issue. This can range from striving to acquire new values, new habits, new skills, new friends to explicitly acknowledging the need for fundamental self-transformation on the operational level. We can cast the issue, with apologies to Heidegger, in terms of thrownness.

Periodically we awaken to the fact that our lot is cast, that we are already in a world where neither the world or our selves result simply from our choices. On the side of the person, the thrown quality of our existence has at least three parts. The first is that self transcendence is free, but we have no choice but to self transcend. We can resist or direct, but we can only do so within the context of our being. Thus, we are not free to pay attention or not pay attention, but we are free to attend to this or that particular thing. The same is true with insight, judgment, evaluation, decision, action and intersubjectivity. We are ourselves in spite of ourselves. Neural demands constitute a second component. They consist of demands for biologically based behavior, fulfillment of developmental and permanent psychological needs, and for completion of the unfinished business of motivational cycles. We can repress, distort or inhibit them, but we cannot eliminate them. The third is the web of meanings, things, events, values, obligations and so on that we have constituted more or less spontaneously, so that when we wake up interiorly in a psychological, philosophical or religious differentiation of

consciousness, we are already situated in a context with which we have to deal and which we usually perceive as limiting our freedom. With the cooperative resources of our family, groups, and institutions, this context constitutes the dynamic conditions for our effective freedom.

How does this self and world as "other" arise? How is it that the whole is constituted by our selves, yet it is not a free creation? The general answer is that there are principles other than freedom at work and that we do not have control over their functioning. More specifically, there are biological, neural, psychic, behavioral and cognitive operations which are not free. They may be conscious operations, but they are not acts.

I want to concentrate on three areas where we do not have control. The first is in the occurrence of an insight. This is definitely true in the case where we discover something for the first time. It is less obvious in those instances where we have routine, habitual insights. For example, when insights are habitual we can understand what someone is saying if we want to. However, the fact that we also may understand them even though we do not want to is indicative of the independence of these processes from freedom. The same is true in the second case, the occurrence of a judgment. A judgment is the rational "yes" in answer to the question "Is it so?" that follows upon the insight into the fulfillment of the conditions for assent. At times this occurs so readily that the truth seems obvious, and the judgment is overlooked. Now, we can resist the judgment. We can try to ignore it. We can insist on our prior viewpoint and try to reverse the judgment. But we cannot authentically deny the moment of affirmation, even if it went against our "better judgment". Judgment is not a decision. Believing, on the other hand, is an act since it issues from a decision to believe another, though that decision can have as a basis

the consistency of the belief with our prior set of judgments and beliefs.

The third case is the intentionality of feelings. There are two sub cases I will discuss. The first is the emergence of feeling within behavioral systems where feelings and actions by one person evoke complementary actions and feelings in another. Such is the case in the spontaneous intersubjective experience of mother and child in attachment behavior. The second is the linking of feelings with meaning in insight via the symbolic function. This is where the association of feelings with images and experiences in inquiry results in the feelings being integrated with the intelligibility discovered in the insight along with the images which triggered the insight. Thus, as the mother child relationship develops, the child begins to recognize before the event that the mother is going to leave and, with the recognition, the feelings associated with the detachment of mother and child emerge prior to the actual event. The same phenomenon occurs if we evoke a behavioral situation, or stance in relation to another which implies complementary behavior in them. We tend to attribute the behavior to them in a projection. Now, in an ongoing behavioral interaction that may not be a projection. But if that situation is evoked only for us and does not correspond to the real situation, the judgments we make have the same emotional and rational sense of reality though they are not true. This occurs automatically. It is extremely perplexing to someone when they are told they are merely projecting. It is even more perplexing when they are not responsible for it. We get into the curious area where we need to recognize that we are doing this, even though we do not decide to do it or freely invoke it. Reversing projections is a subtle process of recognizing the moment of recognition or affirmation and disengaging from the operational events that follow, permitting alternative experiences and interpretations to emerge.

With apologies to Jung, I will clarify the issue in terms of self and ego. Our freedom constitutes our basic identity. Instantiated in habits, skills, self interpretations, values and actions, it is the core of the ego of psychological thought.

By the conscious self I mean Lonergan's notion of the self as presence where we distinguish the presence of an object in a room, the presence of an object for consciousness and the presence for which the object is present. This third sense of presence is consciousness as a quality of operations. It is in reference to consciousness as the common quality of operations that we have a notion of the unity of consciousness and of the unity of the self. The self comprises the operations and the presence to which they tacitly are referred.

Within the ego, we have operations and acts but the typical bias in our self interpretation is towards acts. The conscious self also is constituted by conscious operations and acts, but it includes the full range of both. The conscious ego is within the context of the conscious self and it follows that the ego's self-interpretation may not take into account the full range of the self. That is, we may not interpret operations not identified with the ego as operations of the self. If we acknowledge that the self and the ego also have unconscious operations, the situation becomes more complex. I will not engage in this wider discussion other than to say that I interpret these operations as the potential for self-transcendence so that there is no unconscious self or ego, but rather unconscious components of both. The fact that operations emerge conditioned by unconscious operations adds to the existential sense of their independence from the ego, and in the ego's self-interpretation, from the self.

The development of freedom for self-transcendence is a process of understanding and cooperating with these processes. It involves moving through an existential idealism

where we come to recognize that the presence of the contents of sensing, perceiving, understanding, judging, the demands that we view as external, and our full range of feelings that support or are cast in these contexts, are ourselves operating.

For example, in owning our feelings, we break through the objectivity they constitute as other. I do not have control over the emergence of my feelings (though I can repress or inhibit them and then the distorted objectification, compensation or response emerges and we do not know its source). But I can recognize them and, in some sense, the reality they intend, as me. Once I recognize them as me, I can recognize them as being transformable as my notion of the reality they intend is transformed. I can recognize them as supporting process, rather than as a fixed reality. (They get bound by the object via the symbolic function.) Then, on the psychic level, more degrees of freedom for integration via insights, apprehensions of value, decisions, acts, and intersubjectivity become possible. We move towards the openness in the moment as well as greater openness within the context of longer processes such as mastering a skill or a discipline. We are more likely to find ourselves beyond ourselves in a conversation or the total immersion in our interests, a skillful performance or the presence of another person.

A more philosophical task is breaking through the naive objectivity we attribute to sense experience where we work through a perceptual idealism to an acknowledgment of what can be known in experience and an understanding of the conditioning of our experience by our sensory operations.

The process of moving through idealism is recognizing that the "other" is always constituted by our selves. In some cases the other is ourselves, in others, it is not. It is by understanding intentional existence and appropriating judgment that we get beyond this

idealism. Of course, this is not simply an intellectual process. The development of freedom for self-transcendence involves a continuing re-orientation of consciousness where many of the tasks are not matters of simple self control but of more subtle processes of relinquishing control, passive attentiveness that permits operational sequences to complete themselves, cooperation with processes, changing our actions so that the supporting substrate is transformed as it is modified to support the actions and so on. But foremost, it involves an appropriation of the freedom of consciousness, not so we can control it (for this is not possible), but so we can acknowledge it, and ourselves, and its operational implications helping us to recognize and correct our spontaneous misinterpretations of and deviations from the responsibilities of pre-deliberative freedom.