

## Two Dimensions of Freedom

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**I. Clarifications.** I'll begin by stating my thesis:

A person is free exactly under these conditions: (1) the person has had their talent and potential developed into skills and strengths; and (2) they live in an environment in which they can exercise those skills and strengths.

I don't expect this thesis to be clear to you. I'm using some of the terms in it in a semi-technical sense; so I will need to explain them. The term 'talent and potential' is used in a broad sense to cover more things than just talents like the talent some people have for singing; and more things than the potential to become an athlete. It includes the *dispositions* that are necessary for developing a skill in singing or the strength of an athlete.

Talent and potential are things that a person is born with.

In normal circumstances, a person born without a foot does not have the talent and potential to become a sprinter or miler in track and field.

If developed in the right way and to the right extent, talent and potential give rise to a variety of skills and strengths. I use the term 'skills and strengths' in a similarly broad way. In addition to the skill of throwing a basketball into a hoop, it includes virtues like courage and wisdom. Because these terms are semi-technical, instead of saying, "Madam Song Zuying was a talented folk singer," I would say "Because Madam developed her talent, she was a *skillful* folk singer."

Finding a vocabulary for talking about or solving some philosophical problem is generally difficult because most words arise from a desire-or-need to talk about only a small part of the world, say, trees, cats, tables, and human beings.

But philosophers want to talk about everything or almost everything. When they do, philosophers often resort to abstract or words largely empty of meaning, 'being', 'nonbeing' and 'change'.

At other times, they pick a word that has a narrow ordinary meaning and then expand its use enormously. Think about the original meaning of 'dao' and 'tian'.

To return to my two pairs of semi-technical terms, 'talent and potential' and 'skills and strengths' indicate positive qualities. It's good to have them. Although we sometimes say that a person has a talent for lying or is a skilled burglar, I won't.

Lying and breaking into other people's houses are not skills or strengths, as I use those words in this lecture.

At the risk of departing from ordinary language, I can express my views more simply by using ordinary terms as semi-technical ones.

I call them semi-technical and not completely technical, because I don't give them precise definitions. I don't think that the phenomenon of freedom allows for precision.

What counts as freedom for one-person-in-one-culture may not count as freedom for another person in the same culture. Fortunately, I think that what counts as freedom in one culture often counts as freedom in another.

The word 'freedom' needs some clarification. It has a dual usage.

In one use, freedom is an absolute. A person is free or not free. In another use, freedom admits of degrees. Everyone in some group may be free, but some people in the group may be more free than others.

In George Orwell's satire, *Animal Farm*, it is said that all the animals were equal, but some animals were more equal than others. That joke would not work with 'freedom' b/c some people really are more free than others.

I think that people under 14 years of age should have some freedom; but not as much freedom as an adult. She should not have the freedom to drive automobiles or be able to buy alcoholic drinks in bars.

All sorts of words have the same dual usage as 'freedom'.

My shirt and your shirt are blue; but your shirt is bluer than mine.

Most of the time I'll be using 'freedom' as an absolute term, and I'll rely on your good will to accommodate what I'm saying to the relative sense.

The second part of my thesis is that people have to live in an environment that makes it possible to use those skills and strengths.

The word 'environment' covers a great deal of territory. It includes the natural and non-natural surroundings of a person's life.

The natural conditions are the air we breathe and the atmosphere; land and landscape; water in oceans, lakes, and elsewhere; food, plants, and animals of every size and kind. It also includes individual human beings as members of the animal kingdom.

The non-natural environment consist of all of the institutions within which urban people now live most of their lives. When individuals interact with other people, not as members of the animal kingdom but in their institutional roles, as presidents, police officers, firefighters, treasurers, sales clerks, teachers, and students, they are part of the non-natural environment. They are artificial persons, to use Thomas Hobbes's phrase.

Later, I'll mention that corresponding to these members of the artificial environment are the individuals whose freedom we have highlighted. That fact is implicit in the terms 'teacher' and 'student' but also in 'sales clerk' and 'customer'.

## **II. Two Distinctions: Normative and Non-normative; Internal and External:**

Choosing a vocabulary for a theory of freedom is one problem. A second problem is the extent of the substantive disagreements about freedom. Some

philosophers think that freedom is a normative concept, something that has a value in itself.

Other philosophers think that freedom is non-normative. Hobbes is notorious for holding that freedom is a non-normative concept, not to mention that he thought it caused people misery.

*A. Normative and Non-normative:* Let's begin with the normative/non-normative disagreement. By normative, I mean something that is a morally good or bad in itself.

By non-normative, I mean everything else, anything that is neither morally good nor bad in itself. (My use of normative and non-normative is narrower than the usual one in philosophy.) Let's suppose that being a sharpshooter is not good or bad in itself.

If a sharpshooter shoots a threatening person, then she uses her skill for something good. If she shoots a non-threatening person, she uses her skill to do something bad.

So what is good or bad in these cases are consequences of the free actions, not the actions themselves. A clear example of a philosopher with a non-normative theory of freedom, as I suggested earlier, is Thomas Hobbes. He defines freedom as the absence of external obstacles (*Leviathan* 21.1). For example, *you* are free to leave this auditorium. The doors are not locked. If they *were* locked, you would not be free to leave. The locked doors are an obstacle that takes away your freedom. The presence or absence of obstacles like walls, iron bars and locked doors is a non-normative fact that takes away freedom. It may help understanding Hobbes's non-normative conception of freedom if I add that he didn't think that freedom was peculiar to human beings. He thought that free-flowing rivers are free and animals in the wild. Hobbes's view accords with some ordinary ways of talking in English.

But he also had an ulterior motive for saying that nonhuman animals and inanimate things can be as free as human beings. He disliked freedom. One of his main projects in *Leviathan* was to show that unlimited freedom has bad consequences for human beings.

Notice that I say that the *consequences* of unlimited freedom are bad according to Hobbes, not that freedom itself is bad.

I mentioned above that some things that are neutral sometimes have bad consequences and sometimes good consequences. (The same can be said about abilities that are good and abilities that are bad.) The reason that unlimited freedom has bad consequences is that its consequences frustrate human desires; and desires are good. I think Hobbes recognized the irony of pointing out that something that most people think is good has bad consequences. He was a contrary person. In any case, some philosophers, hold that freedom is non-normative.

Other philosophers think that freedom is normative. Probably the most familiar examples are proponents of free will. For them, free will is good whether anyone wants it or not. According to them, a person has free will if the person could have chosen otherwise than he actually did. The person was free if he could've chosen either of two alternatives. For example, it seems to be true that right now I have two alternatives. One is to continue with this lecture without pausing at the end of this sentence, and the other is to continue speaking. I have paused. The idea of using the concept of alternative possibilities to characterize free will is often connected with something that people highly value, namely, the practice of praising people for the good things that they do and punishing them for the bad things they do. In Western Medieval philosophy, to perform an act by exercising free will is to be the ultimate source of her action. To be the ultimate source of an action is to be the first cause of an action.

Consider that the world contains innumerable causal chains.

One billiard ball causes another billiard ball to move when the first strikes the second; and the second billiard ball causes a third one to move when it strikes the third. Other causal chains in the world may not be as obvious; but the idea of every event being caused by an earlier event is central to the physics of Isaac Newton. This view was accepted by every major philosopher until well into the twentieth century. On a large scale—I am omitting the details of many intermediate events—someone's great grandparents cause the existence of a grandparent, who caused a parent, who caused a child to exist.

Free will theorists hold that human beings do **not** fall under Newton's causal principle when they exercise free will. Rather, they think that the exercise of free will begins a new line of causation. This may be hard for Chinese philosophers to understand because their model for action is different. For them, actions are caused by the heart-mind, a principle that consists of both a cognitive and affective aspect.

I have been talking about free will theorists because they hold that free will is normative. If someone doubts that free will, as described so far, is normative, I'll mention a version of free will theory that explicitly includes normativity in the concept of free will. Anselm of Canterbury, who lived in the late eleventh and early twelfth century, (before the Ming dynasty) is best known for the ontological argument for the existence of God; but his philosophical achievement is wider than that. He defined free will as the ability to choose to do what is morally right (Anselm 1967: 122-3). The ability to act freely is not a completely natural power. To choose evil is not to act freely; it is to become or to continue to being a slave to one's desires. The phrase, 'a slave to sin' is common among Christian teachers.

Slaves to sin are like ordinary slaves in that they don't control what they do.

Sin is their master. Christian freedom is the opposite. A person who does good things is his own master. The act without being caused by preceding desires.

We can get rid of the religious aspect. Many people think that alcoholics, people addicted to drugs or sex are not free because they feel a compulsion towards certain behavior. A consequence of the slavery of addiction is that a person is unable to fulfil his obligations to children, spouses, friends, and country.<sup>1</sup>

Most contemporary Western philosophers would frown on Anselm's theory for various reasons. It views the world as containing things that are inherently good and bad; and that is out of step with contemporary naturalism. I'm more sympathetic with the core idea that being free requires doing good things for the most part because the central part of the internal dimension, as I conceive of it, is having skills and strengths.

In addition to intelligence, a well-balanced emotional life, and physical health, a person needs to be able to control her behavior and not be driven to do only one or two activities. I think some actions do-diminish freedom in something like the way Anselm describes.

Let's set the moral and normative character of free will aside now and consider a different assertion of Anselm. He says that willing is not done "in order to attain what ... [the person?] willed" (Anselm 1967: 126). It's done simply for willing. His view is similar to that of Immanuel Kant, who famously said that the only absolutely good thing is a good will because too many things are outside the control of a person to require that a good choice results in a good consequence. So if Lee wills (chooses) to give a homeless person 500 yuan but discovers that he left his money at home, he has nonetheless done something good even though the homeless person is no better off.

I think that Kant and Anselm are wrong in holding that the act of will alone

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<sup>1</sup> A deep part of the doctrine of original sin is that the sin of Adam and Eve corrupted the physical ability of human beings to make decisions, to choose, from the right motive or for the right reason. According to the Christian doctrine, people are supposed to do the right thing for the love of God. But, as sinners, they are unable to love God, without the help of grace. Early Christian theologians struggled with the phenomenon of pagans who did good works. The theologians could not hold that the pagans were good because that would mean that divine grace was not necessary. The standard answer was that the apparently good works done by pagans were good according to human standards but not according to divine standards.

matters to freedom. Choice alone is not sufficient for freedom. This is all I will say about the second problem of talking about freedom.

In addition to the normative/non-normative problem, there is another substantive disagreement about freedom: is it internal to an agent or external.

The two disagreements I've mentioned yield four possible views about freedom.

In fact, I have already begun to describe the four views:

Normative internalist. (Anselm of Canterbury)

Non-normative internalist.

Normative externalist

Non-normative externalist (Hobbes)

*B. Internal and External Theories:* In addition to being a non-normativist about freedom, Hobbes is an externalist because he defines freedom in terms of the environment. "Nothing stands in your way? You are free." About the people who are so weak that they can't do what they want to do,

Hobbes says that they lack "power," not freedom. His view about power has some relation to my idea of the internal dimension of freedom. The difference is that Hobbes does not talk about the variety of things that can constitute power.

While Hobbes is an example of a non-normative externalist, Anselm of Canterbury is an example of a normative internalist. To complete the four possible views concerning normativity and dimension, I'll give an example of a normative externalist (that will be Isaiah Berlin) and then a non-normative internalist. The latter view is exemplified by the French existentialists, especially Jean-Paul Sartre, who distinguished between two kinds of being, those with consciousness and those without.

Things without consciousness have no freedom. They just are what they are.

Those with consciousness are absolutely free. They are free because



consciousness is nothing in itself but is completed by the things that it intends or chooses. So consciousness become whatever it wants to be.<sup>2</sup> If we consider his philosophy solely with respect to action, people choose between alternatives without anything outside of themselves causing that choice. In this way, Sartre is like Anselm. Sartre is unlike Anselm in that he does not put any restrictions on what a person should choose.

In his biography *St. Genet*, Sartre uses the idea of sainthood for Genet because Genet was a thief, murderer, and homosexual, at a time when virtually everyone—liberals included—thought that homosexuality was evil. Sartre's point is that people are free to create their values. Freedom itself is not a value and so not a normative thing.

When people sense their absolute freedom, they are inclined to feel that it's a tremendous burden; and they want to flee from it. One way to flee is to believe that your choices are caused by something you have no control over, his upbringing, addition, DNA. "How do you expect me to behave given that I grew up in poverty, or among a band of criminals?" Another way to try to flee from freedom is to blame your past decisions. "I'm an addict because I began taking heroin; and I can't stop myself from taking heroin now." Sartre claims that there are no excuses for one's behavior.

For him, a person is free to attribute current choices to past behavior or not. A final way that someone may *try* to flee from their freedom is to refuse to make a choice. That doesn't work. Sartre memorably quipped, "No decision is a decision."

Does Sartre really believe that freedom is non-normative? One might think that he believes that freedom is normative in the sense that he believes that freedom is bad because he says, "People are condemned to be free."<sup>3</sup> But Sartre

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<sup>2</sup> My treatment of Sartre is extremely simplified.

<sup>3</sup> One could also argue that Sartre thought that freedom was good. In his novel, the *Age of Reason*, a young boy looks at his uncle's vase, which, he is told, is three thousand years old. He looks at it with some trepidation, walks away from it and then returns. He "picked up the vase, which was a heavy one, and dashed it on the floor. ... He thought, 'I did it', and *felt quite proud, freed from the world, without ties ...*, a stubborn little excrescence that had burst the terrestrial

does not actually believe that freedom is bad. He is simply writing in the mode of a French philosopher.

To be literally condemned to be free, there would have to be someone who condemns you; and Sartre did not believe such a person existed, not God or anyone else.

Philosophers who think that freedom is good but concerns something external to human beings are the proponents of what is called 'negative liberty or 'negative freedom'. Negative freedom is the absence of obstacles, as it was for Hobbes; but philosophers who endorse 'negative freedom' believe that the absence of obstacles to action is enough to make freedom good. They also believe that positive freedom is bad. According to Isaiah Berlin, proponent of negative freedom, proponents of positive freedom believe that genuine freedom consists in properties internal to the individual. They are people who have the right goals, habits, and desires, plus sufficient knowledge or true beliefs to make good decisions.

An unattractive feature of many theories of normative internal freedom is that its theorists believe that the imposition of harsh discipline by a government or a church is essential to acquiring internal freedom.

Plato, Rousseau, and Hegel are the most famous or infamous proponents of positive freedom.<sup>4</sup> In short, positive freedom is bad and negative freedom good.

I don't think harsh and abusive institutions of authority are essential to positive freedom. Institutions can be nurturing and supportive rather than oppressive.

My view of freedom does not belong to any of the four types that have been

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crust" (New York: 1947, page 62). And near the end of the novel, Mathieu is described as "free, free in every way, free to behave like a fool or a machine, free to accept, free to refuse, free ... to marry ... [T]here would be for him no Good or Evil unless he brought them into being. ... He was alone, ... free and alone, without assistance and without excuse, condemned to decide without any support from any quarter, condemned forever to be free" (page 320 [[Bantam Books, 1968, p. 275]).

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge, 'negative freedom' is first discussed by G. F. W. Hegel.

discussed because I don't think that the internal and external dimensions are mutually exclusive. My view consists of an internal and external dimension. Concerning freedom being normative or non-normative, I don't have a strong, settled view. However, I *am* confident that more important than having a very wide range of trivial freedoms of freedom—like 57 types of cold cereal and 200 television channels to choose from—is having a few substantive freedoms like freedom of speech, assembly, political participation, and due process. Maybe the need for these freedoms show that some substantive freedoms are good in itself. But for the most part, freedom of speech, assembly, and political participation are necessary means to good ends. I'm more struck by how easy it is to abuse freedom. Fyodor Dostoyevski's novel, *Crime and Punishment*, can be seen in part as a study of the dangers of believing that one's own freedom is inherently valuable.

#### Interim Summary

I have just discussed four main types of theories of freedom:

Normative internalists: proponents of free will (Anselm of Canterbury)

Normative externalists: proponents of negative freedom (Isaiah Berlin)

Non-normative internalists: French existentialists (Jean-Paul Sartre)

Non-normative externalists: (Thomas Hobbes)

One reason for talking about several possible theories of freedom is that it's hard to convince a philosopher who supports one theory to move to another theory. While I think that each theory contains an important truth, each side mistakenly thinks that it contains the whole truth. My view that there is an internal and an external dimension is supposed to accommodate a truth that each side has.

To my knowledge, Chinese philosophy does not have a tradition of theorizing about freedom. Notwithstanding this difference between Chinese and Western

philosophy, I believe that the Confucian conception of *ren*, is analogous to freedom. Confucians are normative internalists about *ren*. *Ren* is a desirable, internal condition, which people ought to strive for [and few have]. When a follower [Jan Ch'iu] of Kunzi said he would like to be benevolent but that his "strength gives out," Kunzi replied, "the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others (*Analects*, 1979: XII.1, pp. 82-3). As regards internalism, Kunzi replied to a person who said he wanted to be benevolent but couldn't be: "A man whose strength gives out collapses along the course. In your case you set the limits beforehand" (*Analects*, 1979: VI.12). The emphasis is on self-cultivation.

I don't know of any classical Chinese philosophers who emphasize the importance of the environment for having *ren*. Munzi talks about the importance of studying books because that is how an individual acquires *ren*. Books and teachers are part of the environment; and the government plays an important role in self-cultivation. But the emphasis in Munzi's philosophy is on developing *ren* in individuals. Also, while a person cannot practice *ren* in a despotic kingdom, that does not mean that it is impossible for a person to have *ren* in such an environment.

It does not seem to matter whether a Chinese philosopher has an optimistic or pessimistic view of human nature. *Xunzi* believes that human nature is evil and thinks that education straightens the crooked nature of individuals.

Again, the emphasis is on a personal properties of the individual.

I don't want to oversimplify the Confucian position. Kunzi cares about self-cultivation, and he condemns those who inadequately prepare themselves for positions in the government. Self-cultivation includes having the right motives: he said, "It is shameful to make salary your sole object, irrespective of whether the Way prevails in the state or not" (*Analects*, 1979: "Introduction," p. 1 and XIV.1, p. 124; see also XIV.3).

He also cares about the people who are incapable of acquiring *ren*. The government has to provide for their needs. Asked about the role of the government, “The Master [Kunzi] said, ‘Give them enough food ... Guide them [people] by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves’” (*Analects*, 1979: XII.7, p. XXXX, and II.3, p. 63).

**III. More on the Internal Dimension.** One consequence of my view that the skills and strengths necessary for freedom develop from talents and potential is that people are not born free, contrary to what Western liberals say. Neonates are not born with the external constraints of chains or stone walls; but that does not make them free. They are not unfree either, because the possession or absence of the property of freedom makes sense only with respect to things that could have the skills and strengths necessary for freedom. Infants have the potential to be free; but in fact are neither free nor unfree.

Near the beginning of this lecture, I mentioned that freedom comes in degrees.

A child doesn’t go to sleep one night unfree and wake up the next morning free. Freedom develops over many years, and to different degrees in different people. People who are born with more talent and potential than average, are able to develop them into above average skills and strength, and live in an environment that allows them to develop or exercise their freedom can be freer than others. However, freedom is not the same as happiness. People with much less freedom than others may be happier than the others because of their expectations and attitudes about their lives. For one person, the freedom to travel to far-flung parts of the globe is an important aspect of their happiness. But many happy people are happy and don’t have the means to travel far from their homes. Xunzi said, “one may not be able to enjoy all the most beautiful things in the world ... yet he can still increase his joy” (Watson

1963: 155; quoted from Lai 2008: p. 44). Within a broad range, people should not regret or resent areas in which their freedom is limited, unless those limitations are the result of injustice or some indecency.<sup>5</sup>

Children take the first steps towards freedom sometime between the ages of two and eight. The period of 'first steps' is vague and broad because there's no generally accepted criterion for *taking the first steps towards freedom*.

A person can be free while lacking skills and strengths in many kinds of activities. A high degree of freedom is consistent with average skills in two or three artistic, athletic, cultural, educational, personal or social activities.<sup>6</sup> And a person skilled in several sports or several intellectual activities does not need as much skill in some of the others. It may seem that what I have just said means that the greatest freedom for an individual would be developing the person's greatest talent and potential to the highest degree in the best environment? It may be for some people. But I doubt it. For me, choosing the maximum development of one's greatest potential is narrow and doesn't result in the 'greatest freedom'. Although I admire the skills and strengths of the best athletes and the most accomplished intellectuals and scientists, I feel some sadness for them b/c their lives are narrow. Being the greatest in the world at some endeavor requires almost a total commitment of time. Many great athletes can't adjust to life after their career. And of the hundreds of thousands who aspire to Olympic greatness, less than one per cent achieve it. How many of them do not experience freedom after the disappointment of their quest to be best?

A person born with great talent for being a soccer player, a violinist, and a nuclear physicist cannot maximize the potential for each of them. (Sartre may

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<sup>55</sup> Suppose that universal health care is not owed to people according to justice. In a wealthy country, not to provide adequate health care to everyone is indecent.

<sup>6</sup> There are other ways to divide the aspects of freedom. For example, Amartya Sen prefers to distinguish between "economic and political freedoms" and seems also to include "*economic opportunities ... social facilities, transparency guarantees, and protective society*" as freedoms. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, p. xii. I'm not going to consider whether one way is more important than the other. Our views may be describing freedom from different conceptual schemes.

have made this point somewhere.) A person is probably better off developing two or more of her talents to a high degree rather than developing one talent to its greatest degree. The people who chose to maximize the development of one of their talents may well be happy. But while happiness and freedom are compatible, they are not the same thing.

I want to approach the nature of skills and strengths from a different perspective. Let's distinguish between (1) cognitive, (2) affective, and (3) corporal skills and strength.

(1) The cognitive component consists of intelligence, imagination, memory, and sensation. I hope it's obvious that cognitive properties are relevant to freedom.

A knowledgeable person who reasons well is more likely to be free than a stupid or ignorant one.

(2) The affective aspect include appropriate moods, emotions, attitudes, and values. An enthusiastic and optimistic person is more likely to develop different talents and to become more rounded than a depressive person who may need to concentrate on doing only one or a few things. A depressed person is less free because depression reduces motivation.

(3) The corporal properties are those that relate to the muscle, bones, blood, organs, and senses of a human being. They consists of bodily power, dexterity, and endurance. Physical strength and general good health are important for freedom. But they combine with cognitive and affective components. People with courage need physical strength but also judgment, and that requires knowledge, good attitudes, and values that incline a person to resist physical attacks on themselves and others in a reasonable way. Physical courage requires some wisdom. That's the point of the adage, "Discretion is the better part of valor."

One reason to make flesh, bone, and organs, part of the internal dimension is that serious disabilities affecting these can limit freedom. Deafness reduces the

range of freedom. However, a person deficient in one talent can compensate for it by developing other talents or potentials. One way to see that the lack of hearing or vision does not prevent a person from living a free life is to consider that people with perfect human abilities to see and hear perceive only a small range of electromagnetic waves. Dogs and bats and maybe cats have powers that humans don't.

I want to consider an objection now to my view, an objection that will ease the transition to a further discussion of the external dimension of freedom. The objection is that my use of the word 'internal' is a misnomer because the human body is as external as any part of the environment; in fact, it is as external as any *other* part of the environment. The human body is in the world and hence part of the environment.

My reply begins by endorsing the view that every human body other than one's own is part of the environment, which is "the aggregate of the conditions in which a person or thing lives" (Carlyle).

Most people, at least when they are not doing philosophy, distinguish between themselves and the world for most purposes. Unless there are compelling reasons to abandon the ordinary view of most people, I'm going to accept it.

**III. The External Dimension.** Let's now turn again to the external dimension, an environment in which a person can exercise her skills and strengths in satisfying and beneficial activities.<sup>7</sup> The environment consists of two kinds, the natural and the non-natural. (1) The natural environment consists of all the kinds of things that humans have not physically invented or constructed.<sup>8</sup> Land, air, water, plants and

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<sup>7</sup> The internal and external dimensions jointly constitute freedom. A person satisfying the internal dimension and living in an environment that satisfies the external dimensions is free.

<sup>8</sup> Someone may object that by my criterion, toy fox terriers are not in the realm of the natural. I



animals, weather, and climate are salient parts of the natural environment.<sup>9</sup>

(2) The non-natural environment—nonnatural, *not unnatural*—is everything in the world that has been created by human beings. That includes houses and skyscrapers, tables and chairs, clothing, motorized equipment, roads and sidewalks. It also includes all institutions, governments, political parties, corporations and charitable groups, universities, armies and navies, banks and churches.<sup>10</sup> One characteristic of institutions and many of the things generated by institutions is that they involve something non-physical or abstract. It's part of the law of England that the king (the monarch) never dies. Now it's obvious that the individual human beings who have the role of king die. But the king does not die because if he did, then England would have no government or principle of unity until a new king was selected. So there is a difference between a king and the human being who is king; and the difference is best described as something non-physical or abstract. Let me finish this point by saying that England and the laws of England are also institutions.

I now want to talk about another aspect of the distinction between natural and non-natural environment, the amount of time that people in technological societies spend in the non-natural environment. People who live in cities spend almost all of their time in a non-natural environment, among buildings, streets, sidewalks, motorized vehicles, lights, signs. Even the character of something intrinsically natural changes. Most of the trees, flowers, and grass in large cities exist where they do because human beings had a non-natural design for them to be there and not somewhere else. Hong Kong has a great aviary and botanical garden. But it's non-natural to the extent that it was built by human beings for

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can live with that result.

<sup>9</sup> Human beings can affect the natural environment, for example, causing or accelerating climate change while the climate remains natural because it is not an invention or construction of human beings.

<sup>10</sup> There are some things that could be put on either the natural or non-natural side of our classification, say, smog and chemicals that have been synthesized by human beings.

human beings and maintained by human beings. If the protective cover were removed, the aviary would be gone with the wind.

Just as possessing the internal dimension of freedom is insufficient for freedom, so is having only a rich environment without obstacles. There may be no external obstacles to enjoying a rich environment. But if a person is too poor to pay for what the environment offers or never had the opportunity to develop his talents and potential, the rich environment does not benefit him. That way of making my point is concrete. Consider now an abstract way. Supposed that that Lee has unobstructed access to one hundred square miles of land, but not more. Whether Lee can act freely<sup>11</sup> with this large environment depends on at least two things, the diversity of the land and his access to it

If Lee has normal human desires of normal intensity, he wants the land to have various features: some flatland, some hills, some streams, and lakes. (It's not important to my point if someone else prefers only level ground or only hills and valleys.) The second thing Lee desires is the quality of those features. We can imagine that some hills, plains, streams and lakes are better than others, given Lee's desires. (Again, it's not important if someone else would have different judgments about how good the features of the landscape are.)

A third consideration could be introduced that may be relevant to the quality of the external dimension, but I'm not sure what to say about it. Does it matter whether Lee believes that he's a prisoner within that one hundred square Lee or not?

**IV. The Overlap and Reciprocity of Internal and External.** I may have given you the impression that the internal and external dimensions of freedom are sealed off from each other or that they only interface. That's not my view; and that's why I say there are two *dimensions* of one phenomenon and not two things that are conjoined. A person

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<sup>11</sup>It is idiomatic in England to say that Lee can roam freely. But is insufficient for freedom.

can't develop her talent and potential without the food, healthcare, moral, mental, emotional education, and physical features provided by the environment. Also, the external dimension of freedom of a person, say, Lee, includes Other People. If Lee is in Lee's formative years, then the Other People are necessary for Lee to develop the skill and strength Lee needs to be free. If the Other People did not form part of Lee's environment during P's formative years, a society will end up with a majority of relatively unfree people in a few generations.

So an essential part of an infant's environment are older people. As the child develops, the function that older people serve in the environment takes on a different character. Eventually the one-time child relates to other adults as an adult. For most adults, each person's skills and strengths are potentially part of the environment of other people. The once-infant adult probably becomes an essential part of the environment of the infants and children who have come after her. Congruent with the cycle of life is the cycle of freedom.

Individual freedom is not a zero-sum game. The freedom of many people, parents, teachers, coaches, nurses, physicians, and social workers, exercise their freedom in helping other people. Western philosophy for at least a century has emphasized the selfishness and self-centeredness of people. But if one looks around, an enormous amount of non-selfish behavior is visible.<sup>12</sup> There are two ways of dealing with philosophical egoists. One is to urge them to consider the distinction between an agent's reason, motive, or desire for acting and the satisfaction that comes to the agent from acting. Parents, firefighters, teachers, and others generally act from the desire for the good of someone else; and in performing those actions, the person experiences satisfaction. The satisfaction is a consequence, not heo motivater.

The other way to deal with philosophical egoists is to concede, for the sake of discussion, that everyone is an egoist. Then distinguish between two kinds of

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<sup>12</sup> If someone insists on the thesis that everyone is always selfish, I will concede the point and divide selfish people into two types, those whose behavior typically benefits other people, for example, parents and firefighters, or does not disadvantage those, and those whose behavior does not benefit others.

egoists, those who intend to benefit themselves primarily by acting for their own good, and those who do not, that is, the ones who often act for their own good but also for the good of others. As long as there are many people of the latter kind of egoists, who are willing to keep the former kind of egoists in check, a society will be fine.

#### Afterword

If my thesis about two dimensions of freedom is right, then I think a stronger thesis is true. Human beings are social animals; people need people. Free people need free people. A solitary person can't live a free life for long. 2500 years ago Aristotle said, a human being alone is either a beast or a god.<sup>13</sup> And free people have to live in a free environment. The most important part of a free environment is its society. A society can't be free unless a lot of people create and conserve that. In short, individual people are free if and only if their society is free.

He, Huaihong. 2015. *Social Ethics in a Changing China*.. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.

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<sup>13</sup> Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.

