

## FREEDOM AND AUTHORITY

Man can be 'good and evil' in his actions, reasonable and unreasonable—not to say, insane: this is his liberty. Hence his responsibility, which is born of this liberty. There can be no liberty without responsibility.

The question: is Man rational in his actions? cannot be answered by a simple 'yes': that some of his actions are rational is proved by the very fact of our existence; that not all of these actions are rational is proved by our present situation. On the other hand, if we do not perish, this is no proof of Man's rationality. Nor is it proved by the evolution of all creation, which undoubtedly moves from low to high. But it is not difficult to see that of all living beings Man alone is capable of acting rationally. Where Man's reason does not reach, there rules the law of selection. This latter prevails, likewise, wherever Man acts irrationally. Out of a senseless 'urge to be'—as Schopenhauer calls it—that being asserts himself who enjoys some kind of primacy, who is superior in no matter what sphere—whether by his force, velocity, protective colouring, or any other way, it does not matter, except in the individual case.

The problem 'liberty-responsibility' would be easy to solve if Man

were an isolated individual, born of himself. But Man, and beyond him everything in the universe, is part of a coherent whole, of an ultimate unreachable unity. Therefore he is a communal being (*Gemeinschaftswesen*), i.e., he is in relation with his fellow men and with whatever else exists in the universe. His freedom of action therefore has a certain influence on his surroundings and his fellow beings. Where he acts in his own interests, he violates the sphere of interests of his fellow men. It is against this background that his responsibility becomes visible. No matter how small the action in question, he cannot find his responsibility within himself. He must feel responsible also for the world surrounding him. If we consider now that Man lacks a system of order which would give him a clear perspective; if we recognise that he is not always able to calculate the consequences of his actions; that, moreover, he is not always willing to calculate them because he recoils from thinking—we will understand that he faces the world in a state of fear. This fear is the mother of cowardice. But cowardice will seek authority: something that will relieve the coward of his responsibility. The search for authority has moved men closer together, and thus created society. Man enters society, willing or unwilling, in order to give up his liberty, either partially or wholly, in favour of something bigger.

But if we remember that cowardice can engender only submersion, we will understand that the act of joining a community calls for courage; even more than that: that this act has been completed with the purpose of overcoming cowardice, of relieving man of his sense of loneliness.

Society, as the sum of many individuals, is viable only if it possesses an order, and if this order is observed. This requires an authority, power—unless subordination is voluntary, rational, and unconditional, thus enabling the order to hold society together. Such subordination would be possible only if Man were really Man, or in other words, if Man were rational. But Man lives in a world in which nothing can be rational except himself. With this exception, a being can assert himself in this world only if he is superior to the thing he needs. The most powerful wins. This recognition is an heirloom of our mind and instinctively penetrates everything around us. It is the lowest limit of a metaphysical force which passes reason, rationality, and eventually leads to imagination (fantasy), penetrating the universe in infinite forms of evolution. The practical efficacy of this force is bound to the individual; it cannot be transferred. It is not difficult to see that Man is not ready to be rational but that he strives to gain power. The stage of life thus is dominated by two scenes: the struggle for power among societies,

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and the struggle for power within each society. Reason matters little and is exercised only when it is enforced by authority. Reason leads Man to recognise that the demolition of power would mean chaos; it does not induce him to understand that this power would not be needed at all if he renounced his struggle to gain it.

There is no form of society of any importance where authority does not rest on power. The various forms of society differ from one another only in that they claim more or less of the individual's freedom. In the political sphere we call a system democratic if it leaves to man a part of his liberty. A system that restricts individual freedom more severely is called a dictatorship. The democracies as well as the dictatorships of our age have historical precedents. All such forms have been overcome in the past, for the urge towards liberty is probably as strong in Man as is his cowardice. Any power which rests on an order restricting the liberty of the individual must count with the eventuality of rebellion—especially when the dominated have overcome their cowardice or have nothing to lose. It would therefore be rational to prefer forms of power which would restrict individual freedom as little as possible. It should also be kept in mind that a dislocation of power will be less noticeable in a 'democracy' than in a 'dictatorship'.

What has been said up to this point applies to the kind of authority which cannot claim investiture from any higher source. Just as society arises from the recognition that two are stronger than one, thus power rests on the recognition that order must be preserved unless chaos is to break out. But it should not be forgotten that society cannot adequately protect one member against the ambitions of another. In so far as the stronger member keeps within the limits of reason and does not overrate his forces, the scales will be kept balanced in a steady upward and downward movement.

But there is another kind of authority which should be called 'natural authority'. This authority is not based on power in the above mentioned sense. It has always existed and will continue to exist, as long as there is personality. It does not coerce; it is recognised; not because people believe in it but because it persuades people. This authority rests on a clear, unequivocal, understandable relationship with the environment. The security with which its bearer moves unperturbed through any difficulty inspires confidence. Reason manifested in this way is like an island in a stormy sea. Liberty here is associated with responsibility. There is no bargaining, there is only action; there are only true measures, measures eternally valid. Thousands are remembered here, who have no power, but

to whom nevertheless we owe our escape from chaos. They are those who now and again bear light into the darkness, who come and go unnoticed. If once in a while they emerge from the narrow sphere of their action, they are admired, considered as men of grace; but their example is hardly ever followed. God, for them, is duty, not business.

The assumption that these men do not exist would be erroneous. They live amongst us. Their number may be small compared with that of the market-cryers; and, besides they are often disavowed. Many a feat of love has sprung from this source; even though this source may be disavowed. Without them Man would forget how to be 'good'.

Freedom and authority are genuine only where responsibility comes into being.

Life can exist only where it can destroy. The limit of necessary destruction is drawn by Reason and Responsibility. Here it becomes clear that the living being capable of developing reason must be protected, at any price, against destruction. More than that, this living being must be helped and encouraged if we want to get beyond a phase of evolution which has been dominated not by reason but by irresponsible power. Unless we agree to become reasonable, any reference to culture is a hoax. Then we must prevent Man from invading the spheres around him; for there lies the gravest danger of our destruction.

Man is not an individual born of himself. Heidegger says: 'Wherever man directs his eye, his ear, and all his mind, he does not achieve an uncovering by his own strength, but everywhere he finds himself transported into what has already been uncovered'. This is true. Man does not begin where the first man began. The only question is: Does he really open his eyes, ears, heart, and mind? He can receive the uncovered only where there is a will and a force. He can receive a part, and change its meaning. He can reject the whole, close himself completely. This is his freedom. But the consequences of his action, in other words, his lack of responsibility, he does not bear alone; the world around him must bear it too, more or less—perhaps even without him. In this irresponsibility Man does not act alone: already those who put him into this world and failed to inculcate in him a feeling of responsibility were irresponsible. The first thing man is taught is obedience: submission to an authority. Therefore he flees from responsibility also later on, and takes refuge behind authority. By supporting it he gives power to this authority, and always finds a scapegoat if it fails, if it acts irresponsibly against him who supports it.

Man is a free individual, but he is rooted in the world around him, and

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his action is connected with its action. Therefore he is responsible not only for himself but also for his environment. To safeguard this responsibility is the first condition for being human.

But where do we act responsibly? Only where we watch and calculate the consequences of our action, and on this basis do what is rational.

It is not enough to believe in an authority. Our faith opens to this authority the way to arbitrariness, to the irresponsible abuse of power. Though the sphere of action of a powerful individual may be limited by time, such time-limits are wide enough to permit such an individual to carry us to the verge of chaos. And the channels leading to power, are they not clogged with dubious personalities?

The remedy consists in creating responsible men. That is the ground on which true liberty and true authority can grow. All the rest are palliatives; there is no other cure. If Jaspers notes that man does not know how to use his liberty, this is an effect of our system of education. Men are educated to obey; on the basis of this education they evade responsibility. But how could there be liberty without responsibility?

Jakob Grimm says of authority: 'It is an heirloom which parents for countless years have carried with them and transmitted to us, which we in our turn preserve as a legacy for our descendants. . . . But if its origin be sought, it recedes ever further into the past; beyond discovery and shrouded in mystery, it remains concealed in darkness.'

Does he not try to insinuate the light of a soft sunshine into a scene which in reality is stormy?

The authority of one's parents, is it always founded on faith in one's parents? The parental orders, 'Thou shalt, thou shalt not . . .', are they not paralleled by analogous orders of larger organisations?

What would happen if a child rejected the authority of his parents? First of all, the child will not be able to do so, unless he wants to deprive himself of his biological foundations as well. But when he is in a position to do so, he will soon rid himself of their authority. Or perhaps, he will not have the necessary courage. Among those who have that courage we must count all those who leave their native land to seek their fortunes abroad. But when they are again importuned by authority, they may go as far as breaking even the last bond, and the seeker of freedom becomes a harried and persecuted individual. This may be the extreme opposite of the situation described by Jakob Grimm; but it occurs no less frequently than the situation arising from faith in authority.

Rarely is Man subject to genuine authority. Whenever he escapes one

form of domination, he succumbs to another. He must obey, obey, obey. He obeys wherever he lacks the courage to oppose. In many cases he is unable to oppose because he lacks the vision necessary to find rational solutions for the problems besetting him.

We have mentioned those who left their native land. Many of them found their way into the 'New World'. Though there they may have lived freer lives, they could not prevent the rise of power in the place of genuine authority—not even there. They could not prevent individuals from grasping positions of power. Perhaps the day is not so remote in which 'old' world and 'new' will hardly be distinguishable from each other. Or has that day already come?

Since time immemorial we are in a situation where there exists only obedience or power. Where we are inferior to power, we obey. Where we have the possibility of exercising power ourselves, we do so. Those who reject power and break out, seek to exercise their own power. They do not understand that the thing against which they try to defend themselves with all their might cannot be broken this way. Even the flight into 'collectivity' does not bring freedom, nor genuine authority. It merely transfers power from one hand to another. As long as the individual, educated to obey, seeks power in order to break through this obedience, freedom will remain a doubtful thing: because the stronger will decide over it. The possession of power is not a thing eternal, but one bearer of power will take the place of another. There will be severe masters and mild masters, or, in political terms, dictators and democrats.

When Man will have been made responsible for the liberty of his fellow men, then the birth of genuine authority will be an accomplished fact.

It was our intention to try to lift whatever may have remained of the veil covering the problem of genuine freedom and genuine authority. This attempt had to be continued also in those regions where the excellent analysis of Karl Jaspers<sup>1</sup> left both concepts still suspended in the transcendental. The last step had to be attempted which would lead both concepts from faith to rational understanding. Also in this, Man's responsibility must be made manifest. Both can be done. Only one thing is required: the will that it be done. This is the same Will that pervades the universe, as an all-embracing force, since the first beginning of time; which determined the course of creation, at least where we speak of 'life'. But the universe also harbours a contrasting potential development: if we lack this will

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<sup>1</sup>Karl Jaspers, 'Freedom and Authority', *Diogenes* 1, pp. 25–42.

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'that it be done', it must be said with Nietzsche: 'God is dead'; for it is this will that creates God—this breath that pervades the All like a mighty hurricane, not grasped by us, yet sensed somehow, since the beginning of time. We mean the way we must go, on which to progress, step by step, from the graspable to the ungraspable transcendent: for it is only this progress which will cause to exist that which determines the sense of our existence: God.

The stronger this will, the more light in the darkness around us; and Man will be able to discover where faith was superstition.

If we wanted to say: genuine freedom and genuine authority are not possible, we would miss the essence of truth. Both lie before us, uncovered. Let us bring them into existence.

Obviously this cannot be done the way a radio can be switched from one station to another. Many steps in this direction have been taken ahead of us. The traces have been blurred and covered by subsequent travellers. Let us seek out those traces and enlarge them into a passable road.

It will not be possible for us to complete the road that leads away from all untruth; but the portion we are able to construct is worth while by itself.