

INTRODUCTION: FREEDOM AND PHILOSOPHY

No idea is so generally recognized as indefinite, ambiguous, and open to the greatest misconceptions (to which therefore it actually falls a victim) as the idea of freedom: none in common currency with so little appreciation of its meaning.

Hegel¹

1. The Significance of Freedom: From Politics to Philosophy

Hegel's remark is as true today as it was 170 years ago: freedom, one of our most common and powerful concepts, is used (and misused) with extraordinarily little appreciation of its significance. Worse, Hegel is wrong to say that freedom's openness to misconception is "generally recognized." Not only is freedom poorly understood, but we are falsely confident that we do understand it. This doubly unfortunate condition dissuades people from undertaking needed investigations into the meaning of freedom.

Such investigations are needed because, across much of the world, the concept of freedom plays an important role in the organization of people's lives. People strongly desire freedom, and therefore support governments, programs, policies, and candidates that they perceive to advance its cause. But what people perceive to advance the cause of freedom depends upon what they understand freedom to be. And thus what people understand freedom to be, even if their understanding is not explicitly articulated, matters a great deal to the way they live. As Robert Pippin has put it:

Modern agents can be said to be by and large committed to the right, truly authoritative modern norm, freedom, and so an equal entitlement to a free life, but suffer from the indeterminacy that the mere notion of freedom leaves us with. (As the twentieth century has made clear, libertarian, welfarist, socialist and totalitarian projects all claim a commitment to the supreme principle of freedom.)²

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Philosophers who think about freedom therefore have an opportunity to make a contribution not only to, but also beyond, their discipline. Most of the time, the analysis of abstract concepts is far removed from the concerns of anyone but professional academics. With freedom it is otherwise. Because developments in the understanding of the concept of freedom have an impact not only on the discipline of philosophy, but also on the ways in which individuals and communities structure their lives, freedom is a topic on which philosophers may do professionally respectable work while also entertaining the hope that their labor may be of some relevance to the wider world. If philosophers think about the meaning of freedom, and if such thinking improves our understanding of the conditions of our social and political liberation, then we all have a better chance of living more freely.

Of course, philosophers do not have a monopoly on thinking about freedom. Freedom is at issue across the humanities and the social sciences. To take but two preeminent examples from recent scholarship: the sociologist Orlando Patterson (in his two-volume study, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* and *Freedom in the Modern World*) and the historian Eric Foner (in *The Story of American Freedom*) have both explored the importance of the concept of freedom in the lives of nonacademics.³ But whereas such sociological and historical studies tend to focus on how freedom has in fact been understood, and on how such understandings have in fact shaped the world, a distinctly philosophical investigation must determine how freedom *ought* to be understood, and how the world *must* be shaped if freedom is to be realized in it.

The concept of freedom is thus one of the most important points of intersection between the traditional branches of theoretical and practical philosophy. Freedom is of theoretical interest because we can wonder what freedom is, and whether or not we are capable of being free. And it is of practical interest because, given that we are capable of being free, and that being free is desirable, we can wonder how to live in such a way that this capability is most fully realized.

If philosophers think about the meaning of freedom, however, they will discover an even deeper connection between freedom and philosophy. Thinking about freedom reveals that its conditions of realization include not only certain social and political developments but also the practice of philosophy itself. In other words, philosophy is directly as well as indirectly liberating: philosophy contributes indirectly to freedom by articulating the social and political conditions of its realization; but philosophy also contributes directly to freedom because freedom is not only something about which philosophers think, but also something that is produced through philosophical thinking.

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2. Competing Conceptions of Freedom

The claim that philosophy is a liberating activity is likely to be met with skepticism, if not outright derision. One of my main goals in this book, therefore, is to explain and defend it. In order to do so, I will have to argue that freedom ought to be understood or conceived in a certain way, and that other conceptions of freedom are deficient by comparison. Making such an argument requires a standard by which to judge competing conceptions of freedom. The standard I will use is that of *comprehensiveness*.

One conception of freedom (A) is more comprehensive than another (B) if, and only if, two criteria are met: first, A must include and expand upon the freedoms included in B; and second, the newfound freedoms included in A must rectify a specific limitation or dependence from which the supposedly free subject can be shown to suffer in B, and thus serve as the condition of the freedoms included in B, without which the latter would prove to be illusory.

In moving from one conception of freedom to another that is more comprehensive, nothing is lost and something is gained. Nothing is lost because the more comprehensive conception retains the freedoms included in the less comprehensive conception. Something is gained because the more comprehensive conception expands and improves upon the less comprehensive conception by recognizing that the freedoms included in the latter are necessary but not sufficient conditions of freedom.

We therefore ought to understand freedom as comprehensively as we can. It is my contention that we are able to do so by drawing on and bringing together the work of Hegel and Nietzsche. The interpretations of their work that form the bulk of this book will show that freedom, most comprehensively understood, requires not only the development of certain social and political structures, but also the activity of philosophy itself.

In preparation for these interpretations, I want to consider very briefly the two most important conceptions of freedom on which Hegel and Nietzsche build, but which they also criticize for being insufficiently comprehensive. The first and less comprehensive of these two is that of liberalism. The second, which is more comprehensive than that of liberalism but still less comprehensive than those of Hegel and Nietzsche, is that of Kant.⁴

LIBERAL FREEDOM

A free-man is he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindered to do what he has a will to.

Hobbes⁵

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Liberalism understands freedom as the ability of a person to do what she chooses to do, with as few external impediments as possible. Such freedom has come to be called “negative” liberty: it is freedom *from* the interference of others, a *lack* of external constraint.⁶

Negative liberty is represented in the common expression, “free as a bird.” Animals are taken to enjoy an enviable degree of negative liberty because they are unconstrained by the social ties, conventions, and laws to which humans are subject. Among animals, birds represent the paradigm of negative liberation because they can fly, and so are less constrained by geography and even gravity than other animals. Thus animals in general, and birds in particular, are thought to be free in this sense because they can do what they choose to do, with fewer constraints than humans experience.

The liberal conception of freedom is remarkably simple and, not coincidentally, remarkably powerful. It is likely the response most people would give if asked for a definition of freedom. And, therefore, it has enormous political significance.

This significance was recently demonstrated in American politics by the dramatic ascent of the Republican Party to its first congressional majority in nearly half a century, a development that was explicitly billed by its leaders and proponents as “the freedom revolution.”⁷ Intellectually, this revolution turned on two ideas that are at the core of liberalism: first, that government exists to secure the freedom of its people; and second, that freedom consists of individuals’ ability to act on their choices with a minimum of external constraint. These ideas were conjoined with a belief that the government of the United States, by expanding the public sphere to encompass matters that should have been left to private choice, had itself become a hindrance to, rather than the protector of, the freedom of its citizens. Given this belief, and their commitment to and particular understanding of freedom, Republican leaders drew the logical conclusion that the government of the United States should be scaled back – its budget cut and its programs reduced – and then redirected to what they understood to be its core functions: the protection of freedom from international threats through the provision of a national defense, and the protection of freedom from domestic threats through the provision of police and prisons. Running on this platform, the Republican Party enjoyed a spectacular electoral triumph in 1994, one that illustrates the importance of freedom to voters, the connection between a theoretical conception of freedom and a practical political program, and the intuitive appeal of the liberal conception of freedom.

KANTIAN FREEDOM

Will is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and freedom would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient

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independently of alien causes *determining* it . . . What, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will's property of being a law to itself? . . . Hence a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same.

Kant⁸

Kant criticizes liberalism on the ground that the ability to act on one's choices with minimal external constraint is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of freedom. Freedom, Kant argues, requires not only that individuals be allowed to act in accordance with their choices (which is all that liberalism's understanding of freedom involves), but also that they be genuinely responsible for those choices themselves. And the capacity for such responsibility requires that individuals be endowed with free will: at least some choices must be determined not by causes external to the will (which include, for Kant, an individual's own desires), but rather by the will's respect for the universal moral law that it gives to itself. In short, whereas liberalism understands freedom as the person's unfettered ability to do what she chooses, Kant insists that freedom must be understood as the will's ability to determine autonomously what the person chooses to do.

On Kant's view, then, animals are not free at all. Animals, and most especially birds, may well experience fewer constraints on the execution of their chosen actions than humans do. But to call their actions "chosen," Kant argues, is seriously misleading. Animals lack rationality, and consequently lack autonomy. The causes of all of their actions are external to them, originating not in choices determined by autonomous willing but rather in heteronomous instincts. There is nothing for humans to envy, therefore, in the negative liberty enjoyed by animals, for without rational and autonomous willing, such negative liberty fails to be freedom.

Kant's view might seem to have several obvious disadvantages in comparison to that of liberalism. First, it is notoriously complicated: the liberal understanding of freedom can be presented in a few pages, but a good explication of Kantian freedom requires a book-length study.⁹ Second, it confounds common sense: liberal freedom involves doing what one chooses, but Kantian freedom involves subjecting oneself to moral laws even in the absence of any desire to do so, and thus doing what is required simply because it is required. To ordinary ears this sounds not like freedom, but rather its opposite. Third, it is metaphysical: the subject of liberal freedom is the person, but the subject of Kantian freedom is the will, a mysterious kind of noumenal causality that can never be experienced but that must be effective if moral agency is to be possible.¹⁰ Fourth, and finally, the link between this metaphysical freedom of the will and the social and political freedom of the person is deeply problematic. In particular, for Kant a rational agent's freedom, since it resides in the noumenal will, is independent of the agent's physical and

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political situation; though he would grant that starvation or slavery makes it harder to ignore heteronomous motives, there is still no phenomenal situation that a noumenally free agent is not obligated, and therefore able, to overcome. The most Kant might say (and not without difficulty) is that some political systems and cultures are more conducive than others to their citizens' being able to ignore phenomenal motives; but social and political arrangements can never be essential to human freedom for him.¹¹

Nonetheless, the Kantian conception of freedom is superior to that of liberalism, and for the reason Kant himself provides: one may meet the liberal standard and yet fail to be free. Although independence from constraint or interference is an indispensable element of freedom, upon reflection it is shown to be incomplete: I may, like an animal, be free to do what I choose while it is still the case that my choices, and so my actions, are not truly my own. I may choose to smoke because I am addicted, I may choose to attend college because I have been raised in a particular way, or I may choose to eat because I am hungry. In each of these cases, even if my ability to act is unconstrained, my "choice" is driven by factors over which I have little or no control, and I therefore remain dependent in a significant sense. Kant thus shows that the acting and choosing of persons is truly free only if such actions and choices are determined by autonomous willing.

In other words, the Kantian conception of freedom is more comprehensive than the liberal conception. First, Kantian freedom includes liberal freedom, because the agent whose choices are determined by autonomous willing is not considered free unless it is also the case that her attempts to act on those choices are subject to minimal external constraint. Second, the Kantian conception expands upon that of liberalism by providing for freedom of the will, which the liberal conception does not include. And third, such freedom of the will is the condition of genuine freedom of choice: even if the liberal subject is free to act upon her choices without constraint, her choosing itself remains externally determined, a limitation that is rectified only if she is capable of autonomous willing.

Thus nothing is lost and something is gained in moving from conceiving of freedom as the person's unfettered action to conceiving of freedom as the will's autonomy or self-determination. Nothing is lost because the idea that freedom requires negative liberty is preserved. But something is gained because the conception of freedom as the autonomy of the will recognizes and responds to the fact that negative liberty is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of freedom. Freedom requires autonomous willing *and* unconstrained acting; the latter fails to be free without the former, and *both* are contained in the Kantian conception.

3. Hegel and Nietzsche

Although the Kantian conception of freedom is more comprehensive than that of liberalism, it is still not comprehensive enough. In the same way that reflection upon freedom of action reveals its limitations and its reliance on freedom of the will, reflection upon freedom of the will shows that it too is limited and depends upon yet another kind of freedom. Such reflection, and the development of a sufficiently comprehensive conception of freedom that rectifies the limitations of willing, are the work of this book. More accurately, the work of this book is to examine the reflections of Hegel and Nietzsche upon freedom of the will, and to show that they independently produce complementary results, which can be brought together to yield a conception of freedom more comprehensive than that of Kant.¹²

Hegel and Nietzsche, I will argue, both adopt Kant's strategic move against liberalism, whereby he shows that its particular understanding of freedom depends upon a further kind of freedom for which it is unable to account. But they then turn this move against Kant himself. In the same way that Kant shows that acting persons are truly free only if their choices are determined by a free will, Hegel and Nietzsche show that willing can be truly free only in virtue of an activity other than itself. That is, although self-determination of the will is a more comprehensive conception of freedom than unfettered action, it rests on yet another kind of freedom, without which willing fails to be genuinely self-determining.

It is this conclusion that produces the deep connection between freedom and philosophy, for the liberating activity that Hegel and Nietzsche identify as the condition of free willing is the practice of philosophy itself. Thus Hegel and Nietzsche ultimately show us not only that freedom is a central topic of consideration *in* philosophy, but also that the most comprehensive freedom is achieved *through* philosophical practice.

Philosophy is liberating in two distinct senses. First, it is indirectly liberating because it is by means of philosophy that we are able to determine what it is to be free, and thus to determine the conditions of living freely. In other words, philosophical thinking is a condition of genuinely free willing, because freedom cannot be willed in the absence of a philosophical determination of what freedom is; philosophy yields theoretical results that must be applied practically in extra-philosophical spheres, the social and political spheres in which we live and act. Second, philosophy is also directly liberating, because one of the theoretical results it yields is the idea that an important part of being free is living philosophically. In other words, it is not only the social and political applications of philosophy's theoretical results that are liberating, but the practice of philosophy itself.

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This much, I will argue, Hegel and Nietzsche agree upon. But they also disagree in several important respects. First, although they share the view that Kantian autonomy is not a sufficiently comprehensive conception of freedom, their reflections expose different limitations to which willing is subject. Second, because they expose different limitations of willing, Hegel and Nietzsche identify different ways in which the Kantian conception of freedom must be modified and enlarged. Third and finally, although these modifications and enlargements result, in both cases, in an understanding that freedom involves philosophy, Hegel and Nietzsche do not understand philosophical practice in the same way, and so have different understandings of the ways in which this practice is liberating.

My conclusion will be that the different responses of Hegel and Nietzsche to Kant prove to be complementary. Their central point of agreement – that Kantian autonomy is an insufficiently comprehensive conception of freedom – teaches us that freedom involves not only acting and willing, but also practicing philosophy. But the different ways in which they arrive at this result, and the different interpretations that they give to it, teach us that our conception of freedom as philosophical practice must be still more comprehensive than that provided by either Hegel or Nietzsche alone. We need a theoretical understanding of freedom that incorporates the insights of both Hegel and Nietzsche into what the activity of philosophy involves, and a philosophical practice that incorporates the complementary models of philosophical activity that the texts of Hegel and Nietzsche exemplify.

4. Goals and Structure of the Book

With this book I hope to make a contribution both to the project of understanding freedom, and to the project of understanding the texts of Hegel and Nietzsche. If I am right, the two tasks are interrelated: our understanding of Hegel and Nietzsche is helpfully guided by attending to their attention to the problem of freedom, and our understanding of freedom is furthered by the insights gained from that exegetical work.

To the extent that I am successful, this book should contribute to philosophical scholarship in several ways. First and foremost, it should draw attention to the fact that a comprehensive treatment of the problem of freedom cannot be provided by liberal political theory or by Kantian moral philosophy. Instead, I hope to show, the freedoms these discourses treat are dependent upon the more comprehensive freedom of philosophical thinking. The primary consequence of this is that “practical” discussions of politics and morality must be connected to “theoretical” work on the nature of thought.

Second, since this more comprehensive conception of freedom and my conclusions about its consequences will be produced by bringing Hegel

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Will Dudley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

and Nietzsche together, this book should also contribute to the history of philosophy. Although interest in both Hegel and Nietzsche continues to increase in the English-speaking world, there is still relatively little work that relates the two.¹³

Third, my interpretation of Hegel's conception of freedom is importantly different from other treatments of the topic. I do not confine myself to the *Philosophy of Right*, but instead argue that Hegel's account of objective spirit needs to be read within the context of his philosophy of spirit as a whole – in particular, we must understand the limitations to the freedom of willing that Hegel identifies, and the role that he envisions for art, religion, and philosophy in overcoming them.¹⁴ Moreover, in reading the *Philosophy of Right* and the other parts of the philosophy of spirit I make use of the *Logic*, and try to show how the introduction of logical considerations leads to an improved understanding of Hegel's conception of freedom.¹⁵

Fourth and finally, my interpretation of Nietzsche as continuing the efforts of Kant and Hegel to determine the conditions of freedom brings him into direct engagement with German Idealism. I argue that Nietzsche's discussions of decadence, nobility, and tragedy can be mapped onto an analysis of the conditions of freedom that offers critiques of both heteronomous choice and Kantian autonomy, and that ultimately issues in a positive conception of liberation.

The structure of the book has been determined by its goals. Following this introduction, the body of the work is divided into two parts, the first devoted to an interpretation of Hegel, the second to an interpretation of Nietzsche. These interpretations are followed by a conclusion, in which I attempt to show how the insights of the two parts can and must be thought together.

The structures of the two parts are quite similar. Each is composed of four chapters. The opening chapters of both Part I and Part II locate the concept of freedom in the texts of Hegel and Nietzsche, respectively, and present my approach to reading those texts. Hegel's works, of course, comprise a system, so Chapter 1 identifies the places where freedom appears in that system, and explains both how those occurrences relate to each other, and how their systematic interrelation bears on my interpretation of them.¹⁶ Nietzsche's works, of course, are unsystematic, so Chapter 5 (the opening chapter of Part II) explains both how I have reconstructed an account of freedom from them, and how their lack of systematicity bears on that account.

The second chapters of both parts are concerned with freedom of the will: Chapter 2 presents Hegel's analysis; Chapter 6 presents Nietzsche's. Both of these analyses produce positive results by negative means: they determine the conditions of freedom of the will by identifying the limitations of various types of willing that fail to achieve it. In Hegel, this

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Will Dudley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

analysis takes the shape of a critique of what he calls the moral will, and results in the conclusion that a truly free will is an ethical one, one belonging to a citizen of a rational political state. In Nietzsche, the subject of critique is what he calls the decadent will, and the conclusion drawn is that the possessor of a free will is one who is a member of a noble community.

Whereas the second chapters of the two parts determine the conditions of freedom of the will by identifying the limitations that incompletely free types of willing cannot overcome, the third chapters determine the limits to which even a free will is subject. This negative work again provides positive rewards, this time in the form of a determination of the requirements of freedom that willing cannot meet. Chapter 3, which presents Hegel's analysis, demonstrates that although ethical citizenship in a rational state is the most complete freedom that willing can provide, this political activity has limitations that only the activities Hegel discusses in absolute spirit – art, religion, and philosophy – can overcome. Chapter 7, which presents Nietzsche's analysis of the limits of free willing, demonstrates that freedom requires the transformation of noble individuals and communities into what he calls tragic ones, in which liberation is increased by forsaking noble autonomy in favor of an openness to being affected by that which is external and alien.

The concluding chapters of Parts I and II examine the roles that philosophy, as Hegel and Nietzsche understand and practice it, has to play in overcoming the limitations of willing and leading us toward the most comprehensive possible freedom. Chapter 4 presents Hegel's understanding of philosophy as conceptual systematization, illuminates it by reflecting on the systematic conceptual development that we have seen Hegel perform in Chapters 2 and 3, and considers the senses in which this systematic practice may be said to be liberating. Chapter 8 presents Nietzsche's understanding of philosophy as the genealogical destabilization and transformation of established conceptual systems, illuminates it by reflecting on the philosophical genealogy that we have seen Nietzsche perform in Chapters 6 and 7, and considers the senses in which this genealogical practice may be said to be liberating.

These concluding chapters thus attend not only to the differences between Hegel's and Nietzsche's understandings of philosophy, but also to the differences between the ways in which their own philosophical practices exemplify these understandings. Because *what* Hegel and Nietzsche say is that the practice of philosophy is liberating, *how* each of them practices philosophy is revealing of what they understand freedom to be. In other words, the different philosophical styles of Hegel and Nietzsche amount to differences of philosophical substance as well, and an explanation of their substantive views cannot ignore the styles in which those views are expressed.¹⁷