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Dear Frondizi,

From your last letter I gather that, of the various concepts of freedom, that which interests you (and me) most is the concept of freedom of action or potestas agendi. I suggest the following definition:

Agent x is free to do y $=_{df}$ y is a possible choice for x & x can do y .

That is, the laws (both natural and social) and circumstances of an agent present him with a whole set of possible actions, among them y . Moreover there is nothing in those laws and circumstances to prevent x from doing y. If both conditions are satisfied, x is free to do y ; if at least one of them fails then x is not free to do y .

Example 1: Any person is free to obey or disobey an order to harm someone. Example 2: A cripple may be given the chance of running a race but he has no freedom to enter the race because he just cannot run. Example 3: Nobody is free to undo his past actions, whether good or wicked.

The above definition has, in my eyes, the following advantages:

(i) it is clear, for it uses the concepts of possible choice and of capacity (or competence) to perform an act, which are presumably elucidated in science;

(ii) it exhibits the dependence of freedom of action upon both laws and circumstances

Surely some laws, maybe all of them, are stochastic (probability laws). This only shows that causality alone cannot account from freedom any more than absolute chance. But determinacy lato sensu can.

Professor R. Frondizi
Carbondale, Ill.

Freedom is based on determinacy (causal, probabilistic, or whatever) instead of being incompatible with it. (For the concept of determination lato sensu see my Causality.) In other words: in order to be free to do something you must be able to count on certain laws and circumstances, namely those involving both you and the actions you wish to perform or to avoid. In a choatic universe there would be no freedom.

Does the above sketch help in any way?

Cordially,

Mario Bunge
Professor.

dwb.