

[Below are some of Hass's remarks on freedom, choice and obligation which were deemed by the publisher to be extraneous to the major thrust of *Existential Liberalism* – Robert Von Stricker-Beresford]

Absolute freedom is not possible, nor would we want it. It brings us back to that “beast or god” thing. That's what we have when we have *absolute* freedom. Only, when you add other human beings into the beast or god scenario, we get more than just animals killing animals outside the city walls. “Absolute freedom is the right of the strongest to dominate. Therefore it prolongs the conflicts that profit by injustice.” (Camus 1991, 287-288)

Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their limits in each other...Freedom, precisely, cannot even be imagined without the power of saying clearly what is just and what is unjust, of claiming all existence in the name of a small part of existence which refuses to die (Camus 1991, 291).

Freedom conceived in the abstract – as the ability of a person to do anything they want on a whim – even if it were possible, is only horror. The same can be said for justice.

“If there is a single and universal truth, freedom has no reason for existing” (Camus 1991, 288).

The nature of our existence, our lot so to speak, is the justification for some liberty, but a restrained liberty. This freedom – which we like – helps us understand what I've been stressing over and over and over: there is no one answer to *anything*. There can't be a single answer given that we are free, to a certain extent, to do what we want. “The mark of a free man is that ever-gnawing uncertainty as to whether or not he is right” (Alinsky 1989, 11). This is the importance of choice.

Freedom, which to me is a very important ideal, if not the most important, must be rooted in our actual existence. Whether it is actually rooted in our actual ability to say no to a given situation at a given time, or whether it is more complicated than that, human freedom is not something metaphysical such as the will.

The philosophical tradition...has distorted, instead of clarifying, the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience by transporting it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, the will, where it would be open to self-inspection (The Philosopher 1968, 145).

So freedom is not about 'the will.' As far as I'm concerned, we don't need to worry about a will as some

kind of abstract justification for freedom. If freedom exists as something external, something that needs others, needs a space, then we don't need to justify it through any claims about the soul. That works for me, since I do not believe that we have "souls" necessarily. The body's all biochemistry. We do not need to worry about problematic concepts like this in order to do our best to allow and promote actual human freedoms and liberties in the real world. We know from experience that countries that have some kind of actual system of rights that is more than just a scrap of paper but an actual enforceable institution; however dubious one might find the concept of human rights, these countries don't kill their citizens (or kill much fewer of them). People may not actually have 'rights.' I mean I don't know how I can have a concept as some kind of defence against the state. But that doesn't matter. We erect such institutions¹ to protect ourselves. Those of us who are not radical leftists or neo-cons can appreciate the practical benefits of a system of rights as the limits² of our choice need to be (reasonably) concretely defined.

Certainly the biggest theoretical issue for freedom of choice is that of obligation. Most non-western societies have way stronger traditions of obligation than the west does (the west used to have these traditions, but they got killed earlier). But I don't think we can owe something to the dead. We can cherish their memories. We can learn from them. We can benefit from their ideas. But we can't be indebted to them. Why not? Because they're dead. They don't exist any more. We cannot have an obligation to something that doesn't exist. Being thankful for the ideas of a dead person, or being grateful for the dead person's will, and being indebted to a dead person are two different things.

So the fact that we partially are "social products" in that we benefit from current patterns and forms created by the multitudinous actions of a long string of long-forgotten people, forms which include institutions, ways of doing things, and language...does not create in us a general floating debt which the current society can collect and use as it will (Nozick 1974, 95).

Being indebted is not even possible. I mean, you can feel that way. But the dead person cannot know

1 "The measure of the worth of any social institution, economic, domestic, political, legal, religious, is its effect in enlarging and improving experience" - John Dewey

2 "Political liberty is to be found only in moderate governments; and even in these it is not always found. It is there only when there is no abuse of power. But constant experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go. Is it not strange, though true, to say that virtue itself has need of limits? (Montesquieu 2002, 150)

that, ever. Which leaves you and your feelings.

We tried codified obligation already and we had feudalism in Europe, and other sorts of systems (some of which manage to persist) in other cultures. Why suppose that legally enforceable obligations, however morally desirable one may deem them, will come to anything different now? And if you are one to romanticize that 'middle' epoch, then you are crazy. Aside from paying taxes, I have a hard time seeing how the government can force obligations upon individuals when said individuals haven't consented. As with everything, there is no clear cut, moral stance here. Circumstances will *always* come into play. But it seems to me that, without some kind of contract, obligation is just sentiment. It doesn't necessarily exist because it cannot be shown to exist. Add to this the moral argument by some philosophers that kinship is no reason to distinguish between my obligations to my mother and to a complete stranger in Tanzania, and we get into such murky territory that we'll never sort it out. If we can't sort it out, how can we possibly legislate?