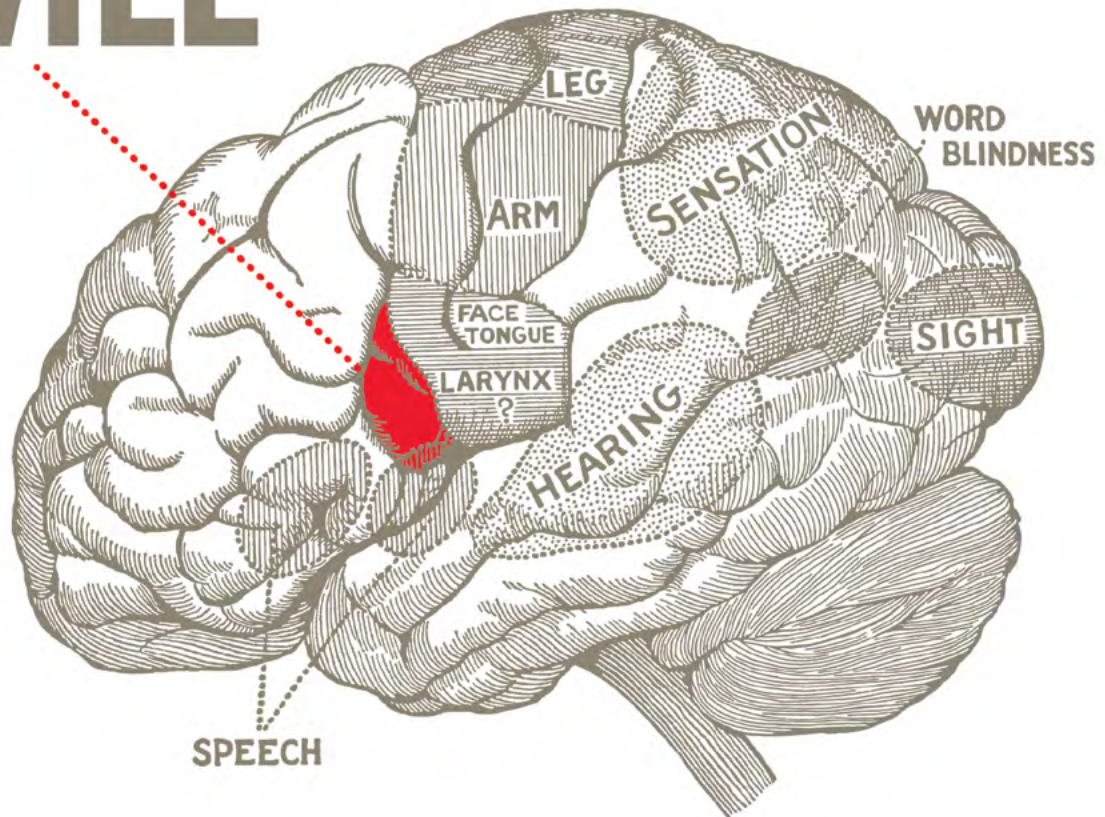


ON FREE WILL



Including reflections on the phenomenal experience of willing, the moral incentives for the belief in the freedom of the will, and the mechanistic challenges

by **JUSTIN CARMEN**

Stage Setting

1. **Out of a love of wisdom**

Welcome to our salon. We have gathered here to *philosophize*. To philosophize means to act on behalf of a *love of wisdom*. A philosopher is regarded as a *lover of wisdom*. Of course, to act on behalf of a love of wisdom requires taking time to *act as such*. It has been said that the proper way to greet a philosopher is not by saying “good day” or “how’s it going?”, but rather “take your time”. And because the philosopher is a listener and a thinker, he is one who values his time—he does not offer it for sale at a low price. In fact, this way of being, as a *listener and a thinker*, has been contrasted to that of *the buyer and the seller*. The salesman, trader, and money changer is one who *spends his time*—exchanging this most precious commodity for material and social wealth.

Of course, there is also the fact that positions such as Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer are found in nearly every major agency around the world—yet, there is hardly ever one Philosopher

among them! If we assume that modernization glorifies *expediency, efficiency, productivity*, and, above all else, *results*, then what room is there for the wisdom of the philosopher? Is it not true that philosophy makes the world more obscure and wordier than it needs to be—even unnecessarily difficult at times? If so, then perhaps it is the case that acting on behalf of “a love of wisdom” is rather an *obstacle* to modern life instead?

2. **Making life difficult**

To be sure, the kind of discordance that philosophy presents—namely, the one that lies between a life of wisdom and a life of material and social wealth—is nothing new. Even Plato wrestled with the popular opinion of his time that the philosopher is an *ιδιωτης* (*idiotēs*)—that is, one who keeps to himself and has no professional knowledge of anything. Our Modern English word *idiot* derives from the Ancient Greek *ιδιωτης*! And yet, despite this discordance, a love of wisdom has remained throughout Western history. However, it was not until 1846 that a philosopher had resolved himself in a quite extraordinary way. Rather than suffer from such a dismal discordance, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard *affirmed* it instead. He wrote that it was,

“Out of love for mankind, and out of despair at my embarrassing situation, seeing that I had accomplished nothing and was unable to make anything easier than it had already been made, I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere.”

In this salon, we venture to do the same. We will create one such type of difficulty. We seek to make strange and peculiar that faculty which we know as *the will*.

3. **Problematizing the will**

Problematizing is a word used in modern academic philosophy. Simply put, problematizing refers to making a problem out of something. We are here, in this salon, making a problem of the will—and in particular, its freedom. Of course, in making a problem of the will, we are not seeking to be devilishly mischievous. Rather, we seek to philosophize on the will in order to observe afresh that which we likely take for granted.

Of course, willing is an experience which each and every one of us can attest to. “My will” refers to one’s ability to will something. When I ask my hand

to move upward and draw the coffee mug nearer to my mouth, this event usually transpires according to my will. However, and on a more dire note, protecting the freedom of the will is a cornerstone of our democratic way of life. We have all heard the pro-choice argument “my body, my choice!” But we have also heard the libertarian who champions for “freedom!” Because of its pervasiveness, we often encounter the will as immutable and irrefutable. However, this does not mean that it is. And, if we ignore certain realities regarding the will, we might also encourage an injustice to democracy.

4. **Defining the will and its freedom**

If we are to problematize the will and its freedom, we must firstly *define* the will. Even a preliminary definition will do. After all, we can always revise the definition later. Therefore, let us preliminarily define the will as a type of *prime mover*. That is to say, the will is an agent which initiates a new movement. The will cannot be divided into further faculties or powers; rather, it is the atomic initiation of a new movement. If God is one such type of prime mover, then we have our own primordial movements of the soul, and those movements are independent of God—we call *this* our *free will*.

Of course, what should strike us immediately is that the will does not appear to be a physical object. There is no phenomenal occurrence which I could draw a contour around, capturing the phenomena of someone's will—at least, not as I could point to physical objects, such as a composite image of a black hole or a ham sandwich. At best, I could only point to phenomena which might suggest the *evidence* of someone's willing. The will could belong to an *explanation* of causal occurrences, even if the will is of such a nature that physics could not describe it. Of course, and to be fair, we do take many types of "occult" objects for granted in order to explain causal events. Things such as *social power* or *economic competition* (along with other household terms such as *luck* or *chance*) are taken up for this purpose. Each of these objects explain causal occurrences in the physical world, but do not seem to have a proper place within physical description. All the same, every one of us makes room for *power*, *competition*, *luck*, *chance*, and *the will* in our lives. The explanation provided by these descriptions does seem to add value. Therefore, in this salon, we will not *only* consider what sciences such as biochemistry or neuroscience might have to say about the will, but we will also think about the value of the will to real social,

moral, and even political matters, whether science determines the will as physically real or not.

5. **Scoping our salon. Remarks on
"the sociology" of free will**

Having said this, let us further define the scope of our philosophizing. We are interested in *the nature of the will* and to what extent it is inherently free. This must be decided before any considerations are made about any external circumstances which might suppress, control, or nudge our desires (perhaps through advertising, news media, legislation, *et cetera*). Our principal question regards *the nature of the will*. Our secondary question regards *the sociology of the will*. The second question is only possible after having considered the first. After all, we would do no justice to our problematizing of the will if we were to proceed to sociological concerns before understanding the nature of the will. In the end, if we were to discover that the will does not exist in any real sense, or that it could never be free, then any efforts to free the will from the suppression of another will be futile. In such a case, efforts to free the will would only *obscure* solutions to our social problems, because we would be aiming at an unachievable solution.

Structure of our Salon

- Setting the Stage
- About your Facilitator
- Around the Table: who are each of you
- Preparation for Guided Discussion
 - The Moral Incentive
 - Contra Determinism (Mechanics)
 - The Phenomenology of Willing
 - Contra Authenticity
- Guided Discussion

Salon Materials

- Handout: Opuscle 07
 - Visuals
 - Recording the Salon?
-

About your Facilitator

As for who I am, my name is Justin Carmien. I grew up in Northern Indiana, where I experienced both a somewhat well-off and also a somewhat poor childhood. On my father's side, my great-grandfather, John Raber, ran for the congressional office of Indiana's second district in 1964. After losing to incumbent Republican leader of the House of Representatives, Charles Helleck, my great-grandfather contributed to the community in another way—he established Raber Golf, an eighteen-hole course located just outside the village of Bristol, Indiana. This business has remained under family operation up until today. My father, for example, oversees lawn and machine maintenance. Then, on my mother's side, my grandfather was a middle school art teacher, and my mother is a nurse. After my mother divorced my father, she moved me, together with my sister and brother, to a trailer park. There I spent some of the most formative years of my life—from the age of eleven to fifteen.

In my adult life, I pursued a career within product design and marketing. I began by starting a publishing company here in the States, and then later moved to Denmark. During the last four years of that career, I served as a member of a

leadership team. Together, with four other design managers, I ran a department of forty employees. During those later years in Denmark, I also established my cooperation with Spinderihallerne, a municipality-run community and historical center in the provincial town of Vejle, Denmark. There I partnered with international community developers to host salons on philosophy.

Now, as part of this introduction to myself, I should also say that I am not an expert on our topic for this salon. I have no university degree in either the philosophy of mind, or such sciences as biochemistry or neuroscience. The highest level of public education which I completed was in high school. If anyone asked me for a reason, I would simply say that the classroom setting never made any sense to me. I am rather inclined towards education by what is commonly referred to as self-directed learning instead. However, what is of interest to me currently is what might be called “village learning”, which pursues public education by way of tradesmanships (for example, through a master-apprentice-type relationship) and seeks a “collective intelligence”. In full disclosure, my personal ambition is to establish such collective intelligence, both outside of the university and by way of salons such as this one.

The Moral Incentive

6. **What is at stake?**

Firstly, we should admit that making any decisions about the existence of the will, and particularly its freedom, is exciting. We immediately feel that something is “at stake” in deciding whether to be for or against it. But what exactly is at stake? What if neuroscience, for example, were to tell us that free will does not exist (perhaps on account of empirical evidence which suggests that our hand’s neural activity reacts before any brain activity). If we assume that everything is a series of mechanical cause-and-effect occurrences, and that all events are predestined because we are simply matter and energy (perhaps atoms or strings), then what does this mean *practically*? Isn’t it true that the entire human endeavor called *morality* rests on the foundation of the will? Therefore, and in order to dramatize our problematizing of the will, let us consider a few incentives for taking the will for granted. I have articulated five possible incentives—they are presented in numbers 7), 8), 9), 10) and 11) below. These incentives are relat-

ed to both personal responsibility and punishment. To be sure, personal accountability and punishment are of paramount importance in understanding the incentives for believing in free will, especially while maintaining *liberal values*. Of course, and despite what is reproduced in these numbers, there may be many more incentives for taking the will for granted. The subsequent numbers in this section—namely 12) and 13)—present moral justifications for punishment which do not make use of personal responsibility. These reasons are presented so that we may consider whether or not the will may be a superfluous concept, specifically regarding morality and the general project of maintaining social order.

7. **Personal responsibility and freedom for**

When thinking of the incentives for taking the will for granted, personal responsibility comes to mind. If this is the case for you, then this must be because of the *liberties* which are granted once we have made a virtue of personal responsibility. The first of those liberties can be characterized by the “self-made man” narrative, or by arguments such as “my body, my choice”. Any one of us may feel liberated when thinking of ourselves as “the master of *my* own destiny”. Let us call this liberation *freedom for*.

However, when making a virtue of personal responsibility, we also find appeal in a *freedom from*. This freedom is no less liberating.

8. **Personal responsibility and *freedom from***

When investing *you* with personal responsibility, then I am also relieved of responsibility over *your* choices. All things being equal, I don't need to concern myself with what choices you make and what consequences follow from them. We can call this liberation a *freedom from*.

9. **Personal wealth and exercising good will**

Of course, with all things being equal, and if I later find myself in more favorable circumstances than you, then I am granted the opportunity to extend my good fortune to you. In this case, I am presented with the possibility to exercise my *good will*. While this may sound trivial in personal matters, we should nevertheless consider what would happen if we were to remove financial disparities from our economic landscape—say, by securing everyone with a universal basic income on account that there is no *genuine* free will, and that each one of us are rather subjected to our life circumstances. After all, everyone has a right to basic self-sustainability “no”?

However, in the case of such basic income policies, I might be stripped of opportunities to personally exercise my good will. Perhaps a culture of volunteering, self-sacrifice, and giving may even be unnecessary. And perhaps I may find that strange, or even unattractive.

10. **Personal wealth as a gauge**

Now, in the situation presented in 9), I can also imagine a rather perverse case. Perhaps I am one who takes *pride* in feeling that I made the right decisions. Of course, while this may seem like a perversion of morality, we should not be mistaken. Consider how we today use our financial successes to gauge the value of our life choices. Our bank statement may be used as one barometer by which to measure the value of one's own contribution to their society. Therefore, we can again consider what would happen if we were to remove all financial disparities from our economic landscape—say, by securing everyone with a universal basic income, or some other social welfare policies mitigating economic diversity. If that happened, then we might lose that barometer as a result. Yet, to be sure, our lives demand rulers by which to measure “good” and “bad”. Therefore, when faced with that loss, and also not knowing

how to fill the void, we might choose to animate individual personal responsibility and the protection of the freedom of the will.

11. **Punishment and retribution**

Now, punishment can be said to exist for a variety of many different purposes. One purpose may be as retribution for the sake of justice. Regarding will and retribution, the question does arise: *if I could not hold another accountable for their choices, could I stomach the idea of their punishment?* After all, wouldn't it be unjust to punish someone who was not personally responsible for their actions? Possibly. Let us explore alternatives which might allow us some comfort with the thought of punishment, even if we were to forfeit the concept of the will, and therefore, personal responsibility.

12. **Punishment and social domestication**

Another purpose for punishment may be for the sake of behavioral correction and social order. So, maybe it is true that we are all without an ability to freely will ourselves through life (in any strict sense anyways); but even so, we must still hold someone, or *something*, accountable—and this is for the sake of maintaining social order. Therefore, we might

say that whether free will exists or not, *it does not matter either way*. We must punish, correct, and domesticate each other for the sake of social order and its preservation. Imagine a teacher, for example, publicly humiliating a misbehaving student in order to “make an example of them”. We might be able to justify this public humiliation in good conscience, even if the teacher would admit (say, in private) that the public humiliation was, in fact, quite unjust towards the misbehaving student. Therefore, in some cases, we do make individual sacrifices for the sake of social order.

13. **Social progress and “the greater good”**

Given what has been said in 12), punishment might even sound quite tolerable, perhaps. And it might appear so even if we forgo the idea of personal responsibility on account that there is no genuine free will, and that we are rather subjected to our circumstances. We may be further encouraged to follow this line of thinking if we not only consider the social order of today, but also that of tomorrow. In this case, we may be thinking of something like *social progress*. And while it may sound cruel or inhumane to punish someone today (for the sake of the greater good of tomorrow), consider that even today, we do

accept arguments for unfair policies for the sake of the future *greater good* and, to be sure, we do so even at the cost of the present. Consider our appeals to “reverse racism” in the form of affirmative action. Such policies are used with the hopes of correcting disparities between races. Therefore, it is true, in some cases, we do make room for individual sacrifices for the sake of social progress.

14. **Reason for suspicion**

Now, even if we grant ourselves these justifications for punishment, we might still be persuaded into believing in the existence of free will. If this is the case, then perhaps it is because the cases presented in numbers 12) and 13) merely complement the incentives for believing in the will as presented in numbers 7), 8), 9), 10) and 11). And, to be sure, because of the social liberties which follow from investing each individual with will and personal responsibility, we should not be surprised by the lasting endurance of the belief in the freedom of the will.

Of course, even if this is the case, then isn't there room for another hesitation? After all, might not my very *wanting* for the will to be true give reason for being suspicious about it? This is a popular way of

reasoning, to be sure. Atheists have been known to take up this *wanting* in order to criticize Christianity, for example. God, sin, salvation, and everlasting life are comforting thoughts. But are these mere coping mechanisms? Are we not deceiving ourselves with childish fairytales? With these questions in mind, and in order to continue our problematization of the will, let us now look deeper into that popular and seemingly contradictory view of the world. To be sure, “determinism” is a competing “worldview” which has been positioned opposite to (and may still pose a challenge to) the belief in free will. Therefore, let us consider that next.

contra Determinism

15. The science of free will

Recalling the introduction to this salon, we can remember the difficulty which is presented when thinking on the will in terms of physical description. If we understand the will as a substantial object (namely, as a *primordial mover*), then we understand it as a substance which is in relationship to the physical world. Yet, and at the same time, the will does not seem to be a physical object or have a proper place within physical description. At best, I might only be able to point to phenomena which suggest the *evidence* of someone's will. However, to categorize the will as an occult type of substance might feel quite shocking. After all, there is hardly any room in the modern and scientific mind for the occult. And surely, such an irrefutable faculty such as the will must not be magical! Therefore, one of the first things we may want to do is reduce the will to something which can be considered scientifically.

16. The mechanistic worldview. Determinism

We all understand quite well that physics is the natu-

ral science which studies matter and motion through measurements in time and space. Mechanics, then, is the mathematical description of that motion. Classical mechanics, for example, is characterized by *laws of physics*, which describe the universe as a series of mechanical events. "Mechanical history" (as opposed to, say, social history or the history of "man"), then, would be the record of these mechanical events. According to this understanding, it follows that we have a record of historical-mechanical events, but we also presume that there are many more events yet to come. Of course, those events which are yet to come are conditioned by what has come before. Therefore, the mechanical understanding produces a picture of the world which has been called *deterministic*. As a philosophical idea, determinism can be read as far back as the Roman Stoics. However, this understanding became more interesting after the development of Newtonian mechanics and advanced understandings of causation. Today, equipped with such mechanics, we can easily imagine the history of the universe—a "Big History" which writes a story from the Big Bang to biological evolution. This process evolves not only primates and human brains, but also human consciousness as well. In this Big History model, free will (strictly speaking) must not exist, right?

17. **Compatibilism**

At first sight, it may appear that free will and a mechanical understanding of the world are irreconcilable. Despite this, a compatibilist understanding is possible. And, after all, compatibilism is easily understood. One's will may be one component or even a necessary device within the mechanical chain of causes-and-effects. However, even if we were to grant this definition, in terms of causal explanation, we would still not have understood *how* the will is able to cause effects upon the material world—that is to ask, how can a substance of one type cause effect to another substance of an entirely different type? How can the *ψυχή* (*psūkhē*, “mind” or “soul”) cause effects upon bodies?

18. **Neuroscience of will**

The problem of the will and its ability to cause an effect upon material substances has been commented on by way of empirical investigations in the fields of biochemistry and neuroscience. Within neuroscience, for example, some researchers have reported that neural activity can be observed in the muscular tissue of the hand before any activity in the brain. Perhaps when drawing the coffee cup nearer to my mouth, neural activity can be found in the hand be-

fore there is any corresponding neural activity in the brain. This evidence seems to indicate that our experienced *intentions* are merely epiphenomenon—perhaps that our conscious experience is simply “*along for the ride*” (as American philosopher of mind, John Searle, has put it). However, even if this empirical evidence was conclusive (and to my understanding, it is not), this would still say very little regarding the will's ability to cause effect on physical material. After all, who said the will is defined by a mental process?—let alone a neural process. The will could be invested into the whole body. Or it might not be found there at all!

19. **The traditional model (mind/body dualism)**

Now, because we are considering recent discoveries within neuroscience, we may believe that we are considering a very contemporary problem. However, this is not the case. Nearly four hundred years ago, a man attempted to describe the world of *substances*, and he did so by dividing God's created world into two substances: firstly, that which was extended in space (*res extensa*); and secondly, that which was not extended as such (*res cogitans*). Of course, we are referring to the work of the French philosopher, Rene Descartes. Today, we think of these two sub-

stances as being either the equivalent to the body, or belonging to the mind. Hence, we speak of Cartesian mind/body dualism. It is only by way of this dualism that we can even ask how one type of substance ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$, “mind” or “soul”) can affect another substance of another type (the body). While Descartes’s concise metaphysical articulation provoked a revolution in thought back in his own time, what should not be ignored is that hardly any progress has been made in answering the questions which follow from this dualism—questions which, by the way, Descartes himself had already encountered in his time. Also worth mentioning (perhaps simply for the sake of trivial entertainment, if nothing else) is the fact that Descartes was not only a thinker and writer, but also a physiological researcher. Among his efforts, he was dissecting human cadavers. As we might expect, one of his principal motivations for doing so was to discover the location where a *res cogitans* is attached to a human body. He understood that this location must be a single organ, since, after all, the soul is a singular phenomenon. Therefore, and just like our neuroscientists of today, he was looking to the brain and attempting to map the “internal” mental phenomenon onto the “external” brain. Particularly, Descartes believed that the soul was attached to the

pineal gland—near to where the two hemispheres of the brain join each other. Of course, for us today, this understanding might appear as quite silly. If so, this must be because we are all roughly familiar with the advancements made in contemporary brain science. Yet today, despite these advancements, there is still no generally accepted and satisfactory theory about how the *res cogitans* can cause effect upon the *res extensa*. To be sure, there have been many endeavors to do so (for example, the case presented in number 18). Other emergent scientific disciplines, such as those following from quantum mechanics, offer a renewed hope that this problem of causation may one day be answered. However, at the time of composing this salon material, these attempts must be considered pseudoscience. Because this is the case, let us choose another path of investigation. Let us look towards our own unique phenomenal experience of willing. After all, if we are to accept the problem as to how the mind is able to cause effects upon the material world—and then seek out solutions to this problem—we should probably first *confirm* that we do indeed experience something which we would call “freedom” when any one of us makes a decision.

The Phenomenology of Willing

20. **Motivation and motion**

To consider the phenomenal experience of willing, let us take a look at the experience of *motivation*—that which can be said to precede *motion*. Let us also look into motivation through various phenomenal experiences. First, we will consider “the artist phenomenon” (what we might call “inspiration”) before moving on to the moment of decision (judgement). After this, we will move to consider a certain “primordially” apparent in both logic and the passions.

21. **Case of “the artist phenomenon” (inspiration)**

Looking back at recorded testimonies from artists throughout the ages, we can find evidence of forces which seem to be external and even prior to the artist—forces which seem to guide the artist in his creative process. We can find one example with British poet and printmaker William Blake. Of course, we should not be surprised to read that Blake’s inspirations came to him in the form of Biblical archangels. He was, after all, raised within and undoubtedly in-

fluenced by the occult figures found in Christian mythology. Similarly, we have testimony from Mozart too, who said that “*he didn’t feel like a composer as much as an amanuensis, someone taking dictation from a source outside the self*” (a passage borrowed here from Diana Fosha’s *The Healing Power of Emotion*).

22. **Judgement (decision)**

Of course, we can also admit that the experience of artistic inspiration must be a very limited or narrow case of “willing” at best. Perhaps some of us may be quick to altogether dismiss it on account of its seeming occult nature. Therefore, we owe it to ourselves to consider further this apparent subjection to external forces. But in continuing, let us now do so outside the “artist phenomenon”, as strictly understood. After all, if we are honest with ourselves, this experienced *subjection* to influence outside the self is not limited to the testimony of the painter, poet, nor composer. Consider the phenomenal experience of making a judgement. Consider the experience in which one *comes to the truth*. Imagine that two or more rationalized “fantasies” are being explored. One observes how the fantasy strikes them—but they are still and always subjected to the

power which guides them. No one can simply decide to have one feeling about a fantasy over another. This exercise can be said to characterize the jury member's psychological process, as he is presented with evidence by the attorneys. At the same time, this exercise can equally describe the scientist's psychology, as he is guided by the logic of his discipline and by the evidence of his experiments. It appears that logic itself seems to stand before and *inform* the thinker—and *form* their thoughts.

23. **The primordality of logic**

Given the example in 22), it may appear that when expanding our definition of the "artist phenomenon" to scientists, researchers and other such types of technicians, we find something actually quite peculiar. After all, do any one of us have the right to claim any one logic as our own? Do I *own* the logic which allows me to make the calculation which we know as *the square root of four*? Phenomenologically speaking, isn't it rather the case that I am compelled to answer "two" when asked this question? It seems that logic is an object which stands before me, outside of me—yet, the logic guides me. We might say that logic itself is more primal than my own decision—and that there might be a certain "primordality" to

logic. However, for the sake of taking this almost occult characteristic of logic seriously, let us consider an opposite case.

24. **The strong willed**

Consider when one's will is strong—and perhaps even more so than the power of logic. Consider the case when someone rejects the power of logic or even empirical evidence, imposing his will on the world instead. In some cases, we might consider this to be a sign of virtue; but in others, we might consider this a sign of ignorance. I would venture to say that in most cases, when one's will is stronger than the power of logic or empirical evidence, we consider that person arrogant.

25. **But does any of this disprove my will?**

Now, despite the phenomenological experiences just presented, and even if we grant them as true, we may still want to say that submitting to the powers of both logic and empirical evidence still does not *disprove* my ability to will something. Rather, it confirms it. Perhaps the fact that I can explore such "fantasies", and have such "feelings" about those fantasies, is proof of the existence of my will. Of course, in this case, we then want to ask about the

constitution of the will. *What exactly is the will?*

26. **Social and legal free will**

Perhaps it is the case that the defining feature of voluntary behavior is that one has the right to *postpone* a decision long enough in order to deliberate upon the consequences of a choice—even if the choice follows determinedly from the conditions. In this case, free will does not exist in any metaphysical sense, but is rather a social imperative. This then also implies that it is a *legal* imperative. The social and legal imperative is to secure time for deliberation so that reason may guide our thoughts to their natural (predestined) conclusions.

27. **Decision contra passion**

In most social and legal cases, the imperative in number 26) may seem like a useful conclusion regarding the constitution of the will. However, what we should notice is that if the defining feature of voluntary behavior is that one has the right to *postpone* a decision long enough in order to deliberate upon the consequences of a choice, then willing itself has been defined exclusively according to *rational thought*. In this case, *what one wills* is different from that which is done out of passion. But do we really

feel that it is fair to exclude acts of passion from our definition of willing? After all, isn't it true that what is done out of passion is, in some cases, done most willfully? And conversely, that which is done out of contemplation is, in some cases, done most indecisively? Consider that the statement "she is strong willed" refers to one's character, not her ability to have rational cognitive representations.

28. **God's will**

If we allow ourselves to step into a more occult way of thinking, we do find some helpful language for considering the phenomenal experience (and the constitution) of willing. For example, in thinking of the passions as something which obstructs one's genuine and intentional willing (say, when one cannot help but to eat the last cookie from the jar), we may remember the religious language of *temptation*. Temptations are those impulses which may come from the Devil as his tools for obstructing one from doing one's will (which is, for the religious person, always *God's will*).

29. **The strong willed and psychosis**

Now, with the language of *temptations* in hand, let us return to thinking on willing as a social and

legal imperative—that is, as a right which must be invested into each person, such that they can postpone a decision long enough in order to deliberate upon the consequences of a choice (that is, persisting through the passions and overcoming temptations), such that reason can guide them towards the most favorable course of action, and thus the most favorable outcome. Consider that even when forgoing any metaphysical concerns, and when thinking of free will solely within the domain of social and legal rights, we may *still* find ourselves with an opportunity for perversion. For example, consider a case in which a rationalized choice is actually quite misaligned with the individual’s passions and is perhaps *more* in alignment with God’s will, or with the greater will of “society”. In this case, and speaking psychologically, the individual’s conviction is likely going to be taxing to that individual. Surely then, when carrying around this burden, the individual’s reactions and their reaction time could be impeded. In this case, there is the possibility for what could properly be called a mild case of *psychosis*—a temporary detachment from reality! If so, what should we make of either God’s will or the will of society? If the individual suffers, then perhaps it is God’s will or the will of society which should be challenged. Con-

sider the kind of personal suffering which reaches critical mass, eventually leading to, say, social justice movements with the purpose of challenging common opinions and behaviors.

30. **Concluding remarks**

With these last considerations, I can expect that your thoughts will have ventured to what was named earlier in this salon as “the sociology of the will”, and also, in particular, to what might be called the “social conditioning” of one’s rational choice. Therefore, let us now conclude our philosophizing on the personal and phenomenal experience of willing. In what follows next, we will look at our advancements in metaphysical understanding—beyond Descartes’s four-hundred-year-old metaphysics of mind/body dualism. Only when looking outside and beyond the mind/body paradigm can we begin to approach a more robust metaphysics—one which can help us to understand the sociology of the will. Of course, in doing so, we must prepare ourselves. If we are to accept any new metaphysical descriptions beyond the mind and body, we should also expect a consequence to everything else which follows. If we forgo mind/body dualism, then even our current assumptions about physics may have to be displaced.

contra Authenticity

31. Recapitulation

Let us first rearticulate from the last sections. We remember that in the seventeenth century, the French philosopher Rene Descartes had introduced a metaphysics of *substances* to the Western world. Today, that metaphysics is commonplace. We understand quite well the realm of *the mind* and that of *the material world*. Today, this description is so popular that the entirety of metaphysical questioning might even appear to have been answered already. Furthermore, and given our idolization of the scientific method and the necessity of facts in today's economy, it would be fair to assume that many today are merely waiting for one of the scientific industries to fill in the missing chapters of this explanation. Other metaphysical descriptions might even appear as magical and/or occult. Perhaps the word "metaphysics" itself conjures up thoughts about horoscopes, palm reading, divination, or healing stones. Such New Age mysticism has also been reproduced in marketing narratives such as "essential oils", or any other commercial narratives which have taken

over the same aesthetics. We can easily understand why "metaphysics" might have a bad reputation. And yet, even though we may be quick to outright dismiss any metaphysics other than that of mind and body substances, we must remember that there is still no satisfactory scientific description of the will or its ability to cause effect upon material—we simply take it for granted.

However, here in this salon, we have made it our task to problematize the will, of course. Insofar as we remain diligent in executing this task, let us now briefly recount a history of the metaphysical tradition since Descartes. To be sure, metaphysicians have not simply waited patiently at bay, while researchers search for answers to their metaphysical problems. Rather, metaphysicians have sought other models—ones which seek to render this problem of causation obsolete. Importantly, they are doing so without the need for substances such as "the mind" and have abandoned the concept of the will altogether. And, as we have seen, if the will does not exist in any real sense, and if it could never be free, then this must be of great consequence to real social, moral, and even political matters. Our brief history of Western philosophy will also allow us to highlight the insuffi-

ciencies of what might be called “psychological” philosophy. Then, after considering the insufficiencies of psychological philosophy, we will consider what are arguably more robust forms of philosophizing—namely, what might be called “anthropological”, “sociological”, or even “economic” or “ecological” forms of philosophizing.

32. **Metaphysical advances**

Now, a well-known event within the history of Western philosophy, Descartes’s dualism had split Western philosophical debate over the course of the next one-hundred years. The nuances of this debate are not relevant for us to consider here. However, what is particularly relevant is Immanuel Kant’s *transcendental philosophy*, which is generally considered to have resolved this split while also concluding this period of Western philosophizing. We will now consider Kant’s project, including his understanding of the limits and scope of metaphysical description.

33. **Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason**

Firstly, we should note that during Kant’s time, Isaac Newton’s mechanics had a profound impact on the interpretation of the natural world. However, Kant acknowledged that the phenomenal experience

did not *merely* appear, but was rather *conditioned*. Speaking colloquially, we might say that there are conditions which “inform” or “form the image of” whatever we discover in nature. Today, we know Kant’s conditions as *the conditions of possibility*. Immediately, we should notice the two *domains* of explanation. Firstly, Newton’s domain, which accounts for *causality*. Secondly, Kant’s, which accounts for *the conditions* for the understanding of that causality. For Kant, nature is understood as the total of all appearances that can be synthesized together, according to *a priori* concepts. In addition, Kant also understood that causality is a rational organizing principle imposed upon nature. However, Kant also understood that his transcendental explanation has limitations. He understood these limitations as those of metaphysical questioning, generally. Kant had resigned that whatever falls outside the realm of intuition, also falls outside the scope of metaphysical interrogation. Thus, Kant speaks of *the thing in itself*,

“We rightly consider objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a *thing in itself*, though we know not this thing as it is in itself, but only know its appearances, viz., the way in which our senses are affected

by this unknown something.”

What is important for us to acknowledge is that Kant is operating with a rational model of consciousness which produces synthetic judgements about nature. Acknowledging this, and also acknowledging the placement of the occult within Kant’s metaphysical architectonic, the domain of Kant’s metaphysical description should be clear. Colloquially, we might call his domain of philosophical inquiry “psychological”. We will continue with this qualification, never minding the nuances which keep “psychological” metaphysics, such as that of Kant’s, distinct from psychology proper.

34. **The inadequacy of “psychological” philosophy**

Now, what may strike us immediately is that if we were to simply accept the conditions of possibility by way of Kant’s rational model of consciousness, then we would have *only* explained *how* the intuition of appearances and their motion is possible. What would be explicitly lacking in this form of description is an explanation as to *which* object adheres in consciousness. The problem asked about here can be further considered by way of the following example: consider that lightning is not tantamount to or mere-

ly a type of electromagnetic discharge. At most, we could say that the description *electromagnetic discharge* is a refinement of the description *lightning*. But we could never say that one is more true or even more accurate than the other. This means that whether the object “lightning” adheres in consciousness, or whether “electromagnetic discharge” adheres, neither of them can be described by the temporal synthesis alone. Rather, it must be conditioned by something other than subjective consciousness. Therefore, we must admit that a more robust architectonic would be needed to describe the conditions by which objects adhere in consciousness. Therefore, we require a deeper structure which can describe the conditions of possibility. Of course, and as is well known, the question regarding the *which* is one which *Being and Time* begins to answer by way of a more robust and “anthropological” thinking.

35. **Heidegger’s *Being and Time***

Martin Heidegger’s move away from “psychological” philosophizing and towards a certain “anthropological” orientation provides for a more robust understanding of the conditions of possibility. This is apparent in the opening paragraphs of his magnum opus *Being and Time*, which make it clear that the

subject of his architectonic is something other than the *I, myself*. When Heidegger's questioner asks into the subject under investigation, the questioner does not find an *I*, but rather a *mine*. This *mine* is not a *me*, nor is it even my consciousness. It is rather *da sein* ("being there"). Yet, my *da sein* is not even exclusive to me. Rather, my *da sein* is *the one*—this *one* is *the any one of us*. But this does not mean Heidegger's subject is *us* either. Rather, the subject of Heidegger's metaphysical inquiry is the *possibilities* available to this *any one of us*. This means that the subject of Heidegger's transcendentalism—that is, the conditions of possibility—is the possibilities available to a tribe, village, community, industry, or nation.

36. **Heidegger's leveling down**

Heidegger first sheds light on the question as to which object adheres within a tribe, a village, a community, an industry, or a nation by borrowing thinking from the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard—principally, Kierkegaard's *leveling*. For Heidegger, a *leveling down* conditions the possibilities which are available when *being there* in my tribe. Recalling section 41 of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, we remember that,

"Being there's projection of itself understandingly is in each case already alongside a world that has been discovered. From this world it takes its possibilities, and it does so first in accordance with the way things have been interpreted by 'the one'. This interpretation has already restricted the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable—that which is fitting and proper. This leveling off of *being there's* possibilities to what is proximally at its everyday disposal also results in a dimming down of the possible as such."

The devices by which the *social commercium* of the tribe "levels" the possibilities available to its members are well-understood. We may call to mind any number of social mechanisms which we might call *the sacred* or *the taboo*. For a more trivial but equally pervasive example, we can recall that in teaching Heidegger, a reference is often made to the 1980 film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. In this film, a Coke bottle is found by an African tribe, interpreting it and putting it to use for many purposes—but none of those purposes match those that are proper and familiar to us in the Western world, as we understand the possibilities for a Coke bottle.

37. **Authenticity**

Of course—and not to be overlooked—for Heidegger, such social mechanisms are not merely restrictive. And much like Kierkegaard, for Heidegger too, leveling is not a negative condition. Though, unlike Kierkegaard, for Heidegger, the positive possibilities which emerge in leveling are not to be found in the grace and gifts from God. For Heidegger, leveling down does not convey any moral sentiments. Rather, Heidegger's understanding of leveling down falls into his metaphysical architectonic. For Heidegger, leveling down conditions the possibility of *an authentic self* from out of the possibilities available to *the one*. The possibility of authenticity constitutes the positive possibility inherent to leveling down. Heidegger's architectonic maintaining, *the self* is explanatorily dependent on *the one*. This is to say, the self is always a derivation or modification of the any one of us. So, without leveling down, there could be no authentic self.

38. **Remark on individual power over
*the social commercium***

Of course, at the same time, and for those of us harboring a more liberal spirit, we may want to outright reject Heidegger's socially interpreted conditions

of possibility. However, if this is the case, let us remind ourselves that these conditioning mechanisms would remain even in a political landscape where personal responsibility and individual or group liberties are pronounced. Even in cultures such as those of the West, and particularly the United States, where choosing personal pronouns and gender identities, for example, are increasingly necessary (and which seem to indicate a profound expression of *individual power over the social commercium*), this could never count as proof against the self's conditioning in *the one*. After all, a culture of choosing personal pronouns and gender identities may actually count as *proof* of the self's conditioning. It is reasonable to assume that a deconstruction of gender institutions would only be necessary in a culture which had dramatized the differences between the masculine and the feminine to such an extent that it could no longer maintain. We might even find evidence of this *dramatization of the genders* in the American popular culture of the 1980s. If this history is correct, then this would also account for why such instances of individual self-expression are not as pronounced in cultures outside of the West, and particularly outside of the United States.

39. **The reign of “sociological” philosophy**

Now, it should be remarked that Heidegger’s teacher, professor Edmund Husserl, was disappointed in his student’s book. A bit of retroactive psychoanalysis might tell us that he was disappointed, specifically, by how much Heidegger’s anthropological form of explanation diverged so drastically from his own psychological explanation. Yet, despite Husserl’s disappointment, and when looking within the history of Western philosophy, it seems that Heidegger does stand at the inception of a new era of philosophizing; one which assumes the human animal’s *commercium* as a conditioning factor of the self. Plus, by integrating the human animal’s *πραξις* (*praxis*) into his descriptions of the condition of possibility, Heidegger’s metaphysics also provided later metaphysicians with a liberation from any concern over or skepticism about the existence of the external world. The result of this liberation was a trend in thinking towards “the sociological” and the “socially constructed”. We can cite the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrestled with Heidegger’s *Being and Time* early in his career, and who also tried to fix Heidegger’s anthropological metaphysics for the liberal palette. To a certain extent, we can even include Judith Butler, whose “performativity” is a reading of

being, which follows when interpreting *being* exclusively within the narrow realm of “a society of individuals”. Sociological philosophies such as these take the human animal’s *commercium* as a condition of possibility, but revert their attention back to the experience of the individual human animal within this *commercium*. We might even say that this prioritization of the individual human animal and its experience is the defining difference between “the anthropological” and “the sociological” philosophies.

However, and despite Heidegger’s successes in expanding the scope with which to think about the conditions of possibility, what should also be obvious is that any anthropological or sociological reading of the conditions of possibility also preserves an unfortunate basis—namely, the priority of the human animal over non-human animals, even machines, artificial intelligence, and perhaps even algorithms. Today, we must find it difficult to maintain this bias.

40. **Announcing “economic”
or “ecological” philosophizing**

To Heidegger’s credit, and when looking back into history towards a particular period of human civilization, we can see that the conditions of possibility

into which *one* has been “thrown” could be indicated by the various human tribes, villages, communities, industries, or nations which we find recorded into history by the human hand. However, when looking at our own era today, we might find these forms of human organization to be mere types of—and only particular instances of—various environmental “work worlds” which indicate *da sein*. If we follow this conclusion, then it would be correct to name the greater economic or ecological *commercium* as the proper subject matter of any philosophizing on the conditions of possibility today. For myself, and after encountering this conclusion, I have taken the liberty to name the thinking space which takes the economic or ecological *commercium* as its subject matter **first economics philosophy**. Of course, it is yet to be decided if thinking on the conditions of possibility economically can provide useful answers to today’s problems. However, it is not for us to consider the future relevance of this philosophy here in this salon. Rather, having now considered the deficiencies of “psychological” philosophizing, and also the biases inherent in “anthropological” or “sociological” interpretations of the conditions of possibility, we can now conclude our history of metaphysics and proceed to close our preparation for our salon.

41. Concluding our preparation for the salon

We can remember how we began this salon by asking into *the nature of the will* and to what extent it is inherently free. This was required before any considerations about any external circumstances which might suppress, control, or nudge our desires (perhaps through advertising, news media, legislation, *et cetera*). After all, if the will does not exist in any real sense, then any efforts to free the will from the suppression of another will be futile. In such a case, efforts to free the will would only *obscure* solutions to our social problems, because we would be aiming at an unachievable solution. We have now concluded our preparation for our salon by considering the conditions of possibility under various forms—namely: psychology, anthropology, sociology, and economics. If these conditions resonate as true—that is, *if metaphysical description resonates as true*—and if the phenomenal world, including *the self*, is necessarily a derivation and modification of the greater *commercium*, then we have answered our original question about the will. In such a case, we have also rendered any concern over “external” circumstances as pointless. Our question then becomes: what form of economy and governing mechanisms allow for a *conditioning* which liberates us?

42. **The politics of the will**

Of course, the politics of the will are well-known. We can understand those politics as *liberalism*. Liberal democracy can be characterized as a set of mechanisms which seek to secure the individual's right to *postpone* a decision in order to deliberate upon the consequences of that decision before committing to it. John Locke, for example, had denounced metaphysics and, along with it, the will also. But he did so by replacing the will with this social and legal imperative. His writings inspired Enlightenment-era statesmen during his time and many more for centuries afterward. To be sure, his writings still resonate with us to this day. Yet, even when we are animated by stories of personal responsibility, individual liberties, and the rights which secure those liberties, we must also admit a bit of hesitation towards liberal democratic mechanisms, particularly with regard to their ability to satisfy our ideal of democracy today.

43. **Failing institutions?**

It is arguable that failing institutions of democracy, such as independent news media ("post-truth"), gerrymandering, and election fraud, are all evidence that the mechanisms of representative governance (that which presupposes a society of individuals in-

vested with the social and legal right to will) are unable to satisfy the ideal of democracy. Perhaps the rise of social media conspiracy theories and social justice activism are the most telling evidence that the mechanisms of liberal democracy are unable to wholly satisfy us in today's political economy. Are these not signs that the ways in which we are conditioning each other are entirely unsatisfactory?

44. **The politics of authenticity**

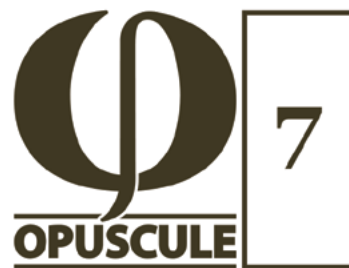
Therefore, and while it is debatable, we may wonder if championing for individual freedoms is nothing more than a caricature of a past time period. Consider the case of the pro-choice activist who champions for a freedom of choice, or those who champion for liberal gun policy under the banner of "freedom!" Even these liberal movements are possible only as a weaponizing of *a social current*. To be sure, without the social current, any individual voice would be powerless. If we allow ourselves to look at these movements from the position of someone standing from the outside, then they may appear as evidence of individual *appreciation* for self-sameness and social cohesion. That cohesion provides the individual with courage for activism. If we then assume group or identity rights as the most relevant task for liber-

alism today—no longer the task to secure the rights of the individual (and if we also treat the advocates of liberal gun policy as an identity group, for example)—then liberalism necessarily becomes a battleground over *form of life*, a battleground in which the form of our *commercium* is contested. To be sure, there are many among us who would rather live without abortion rights, just as one example. The only “ruler” which can decide the justness of *this group’s freedom* is the *commercium* itself.

Of course, if no winner of the so-called “culture war” can be decided, and if the “true liberal” ideology becomes a stale project, then the best which liberal values can achieve is a mere virtue of tolerance for one another—that is, we must learn to live with one another (and this is apparently for the sake of our material economic livelihood). However, of course, I hope that anyone sitting here with me now can agree that this is a very low bar for liberation. In this case, liberalism looks more like a domestication project. To many living today, liberalism might already appear as merely domesticative. To be sure, what is neglected in this form of governance is the social cohesion which the Christian church, for example, used to satisfy in the whole of liberal economy—namely:

inspiration, hope, and communion. Therefore, if we can accept that the phenomenal world, including *the self*, is necessarily a derivation and modification of the greater *commercium*, and if we also valiantly accept the task of conditioning each other, then perhaps we can set our goals higher than a mere social *leveling down* in the forms of liberal tolerance and domestication. Perhaps what social cohesion demands of us today is not a *battle of selfishness* between various identity groups, but rather a healthy conditioning of one another by way of civic engagement. Perhaps a *project-based governance* and *economic nationalism* could be the rightful form of our future liberation.

—Justin Carmien, August, 6th, 2022



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