



Are We Really Free? Tensional Human Existence between Limit and Limitations

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Abstract: Do humans have freedom? Is our life our choice or is it determined by forces like nature? Though many argue that human life is determined by natural laws and that we do recognize it only because of huge number of variables involved, I argue that human life is a free choice. The things we see as limits are not limits but things that makes us human. Not being able to fly is not a limit to humans but something that makes humans human. If I fly, I am not a human but a bird. This is just like the rules of game which though seem to limit helps us to play the game. There is creative dynamism springing from the transcendental dimension of humans that makes us free. So being human and living in a context, we have the creative dynamism to choose to live a life we want.

Keywords: Freedom, Limit, Limitation, Natural law, Determined, The transcendental principle

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Introduction

Philosophy encompasses all the fields one can find as a matter of interest for human life in the world. One of the most important aspects that have been really bothering philosophers for thousands of centuries is freedom. There have been several arguments to decide whether human beings are determined or free. The daily experience of our human life possesses several pieces of evidence for both positions. I would like to reflect on this philosophical theme in trying to respond to the question “Are we bound? Or are we really free?”

The Future is Determined

There are mainly two arguments, which would convince us that all our activities are determined and we have no free will. One is from our daily direct experience of being limited physically and socially. The other is the argument proposed by scientists, especially cosmologists that our destiny is determined by natural laws.

It really does not need much explanation to illustrate that our freedom is limited. It is clearly illustrated by our inability to fly, pass through walls, occupy all space and time and escape disease and death. Socially where the other people limit our freedom. Sartre says in the play *No Exit* (Sartre, 1985) as “Hell is the other people” and also that the other’s gaze makes me into a being and restrains my dynamism.

Many scientists believe that our future is determined by natural laws. Stephen Hawking says that the laws of nature determine all things including human behaviours. In his book *The Grand Design* (Hawking and Mlodinow, 2010) he says “While conceding that human behaviour is indeed determined by the laws of nature, it also seems reasonable to conclude that the outcome is determined in such a complicated way and with so many variables as to make it impossible in practice to predict”.

Limit and Limitation

To understand the issue, we must first have clarity of two terms: limit and limitation. Human beings are physically limited, as they cannot have wings to fly. Though human beings are physically limited to fly, for a person to stammer in front of a crowd is only a limitation which they can overcome by practice.

To explain the limit further, in a game, rules limit the players from playing in a particular way. However, do rules determine the game completely? No, we use rules to play the games differently by employing our creative dynamism. Limits like rules are not fixed ends but only horizons that evoke our creativity. Thus, the physicality, social dimension and natural laws are not limits but horizons to be transcended. In the light of the ever-expanding horizon of limit and limitation and the existence of a transcendental principle, there is no determinism. Now we can ask whether humans have a transcendental principle, which has freedom?

There are several themes like Sartre's existence before essence, Simone de Beauvoir's notion of becoming of gender, Friedrich Nietzsche and Heidegger's will to power, Hannah Arendt's banality of evil, Sigmund Freud's will to Pleasure and Judith Butler's gender as performance which insist on human being's dynamism.

The Transcendental Principle

Is this transcendental principle real? There is an option that supports the transcendental principle. When we think of an object, we can speak about its essence and existence. The object essence is easily predicted. Thus, the object is

limited by the predicate. The objects of existence cannot be predicted. The essence has no limits and therefore transcends limits. It is similar to the principle of infinity in Maths, which is incomprehensible.

Now we embark in the journey of finding a transcendental principle. If it is the quality of material alone, it is the mineral kingdom. If it is a reproduction, nourishment, repair mechanism and growth, it is the vegetative Kingdom. If it is locomotion with all the above qualities, it may be the animal kingdom.

The transcendental principle is a principle of dynamism. Only humans have an urge for dynamism and creating themselves ever new. There are several themes like Sartre's existence before essence, Simone de Beauvoir's notion of becoming of gender, Friedrich Nietzsche and Heidegger's will to power, Hannah Arendt's banality of evil, Sigmund Freud's will to Pleasure and Judith Butler's gender as the performance which insist on human being's dynamism. The most important thing that makes humans, as humans, is this transcendental principle, which is never seen in any other Kingdom. The human kingdom alone was able to contemplate an unlimited principle of God. They are the ones who formed religions. It is this principle that makes poet- mystic-philosopher-theologian-scientist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin view human beings as "spirit in the world". The soul is not a special thing found in the body but matter itself has attained a higher threshold of complexification of being self-conscious. Both matter and spirit as antithesis interdependent in humans. It is consciousness becoming conscious of itself. Thus, humans are beings with transcendental principle.

The Transcendental Principle and Humans

"Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we

transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult, once, we truly understand and accept it-then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters,” holds Scott Peck.

Scott Peck speaks about the transcendental principle of knowledge helping us to move beyond all our suffering and pain. We have seen that human beings are not material with a collection of knowledge. They are not beings who can only act on impulse. They have the freedom to choose their own attitude, to be happy at any moment and transcend to choose to do what is most responsible for them.

In *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor E Frankl (1959) talks about finding meaning in suffering as a surety for survival. Seeing some people in concentration camps suffer a lot but others choosing to help people in their worst situation taking several risks makes Frankl realize that even in a very difficult situation people are free to choose their attitude. We have the choice to give up or to live. This is the outcome of the transcendental principle we as humans have.

In several ways, human beings have overcome their own limits by this transcending principle. This is why we see that the world progresses towards a higher understanding of everything. We were also able to creatively tackle problems and bring in innovative advancement. It is this principle that makes them humans, not animals or plants. Human beings are completely free to make their own choices and this makes them a mystery and unpredictable.

Another aspect is that, as human beings, we could unite ourselves with the higher reality spiritually. With this, we engage ourselves in acts of transcendental love, which gives ultimate meaning to our lives as told by Scott M Peck in his book *The Road Less Travelled* (Peck 1978). This complete freedom, in spiritual terms, may be called enlightenment or *mukti*, or liberation. This is the ultimate goal of human life. This is what makes us fully alive and fully human.

Conclusion

Limits and limitations cannot determine our future if we can transcend them. A real human being who can transcend is never contained or limited. We can see that human beings always have an urge within themselves to move towards an unlimited reality. This transcendental principle helps us as the power within ourselves to choose freely. It is always possible for us to go beyond all limits and limitations. We have a spirit in the body, which enables us at all times to move beyond these limits and be almost completely free.

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