

## 25. Freedom and liberty

*‘Since we are not, in fact, free, but could not live without the conviction that we are, what are we to do?’*

Isiah Berlin

**Synopsis:** Freedom is the ability to imagine; It is constrained by the state, the information platform any individual happens to be living on—and is thus transformed into liberty (1); Freedom is impossible to attain (2); Freedom is relative (3); A human need to be free? (4–5); The state is at the same time the source of and the basic impediment to human freedom (6); States are still (‘freely’) living in an (imagined) ‘state of nature’ (7); Liberty (8); Liberty is also relative (9); A platform right to liberty exists only with regard to other humans (10); Liberty to be examined within the context of a moral philosophy at a later stage (11).

### 1. \*

Freedom is the ability<sup>732</sup> of individuals to process information to the greatest extent imaginable by them, to potentially carry out any processing operation they wish, to do what they want. It is not material, in the sense that the processing need not actually happen; it is only enough that individuals imagine that it is possible for it to happen. Freedom is ultimately the ability to imagine.

Freedom is constrained by the state, the information platform any individual happens to be living on—and is thus transformed into liberty.<sup>733</sup>

### 2. Freedom is impossible to attain

The struggle for freedom is notoriously unending: because human imagination has no limits, freedom can never be attained.

Accordingly, although everyone is born free (i.e. with the ability to imagine), there is no generally accepted threshold for freedom or generally ac-

---

732 See Chap. 5, par. 8.

733 See par. 8.

cepted definition of what it actually means to be free. Freedom is imagined each time, by each one of us, according to our imagination of either what is possible for us or what should ideally be the case—the point being that the relevant threshold is constantly changing in space and time throughout human history.

### 3. Freedom is relative\*

However, even imagination has to be anchored somewhere. Humans alive one hundred years ago could not have imagined the digital world—if they could, they certainly would have liked to process information in it too, otherwise they would not have considered themselves free.

Practically, therefore, any one person's freedom is relative to another person's freedom. An individual only imagines oneself to be more or less free than another individual, and even then freedom is in the eye of the beholder (because one can only imagine another's actual freedom). Consequently, because comparison is natural to humans,<sup>734</sup> a human is free or unfree in relation to, or compared with, an (imagined) other.

### 4. A human need to be free? \*

Notwithstanding its relativity and the impossibility of attaining it, humans (nominally at least) have striven for freedom throughout their history—they want to be free. Millions have died willingly in the name of this cause, making this a question that cannot be ignored. Is there a human need to be free? Why do most (or at least certain) humans claim that they need to be free?

As has been seen, humans need to augment their information processing. In fact, each and every human needs to augment his or her own information processing, to constantly process new information for as long as he or she lives.<sup>735</sup> However, humans strive towards an imagined, not a real end, because needs are unsatisfiable.<sup>736</sup> Imagination is, therefore, critical: humans need to be able to imagine that further, new processing is possible

---

734 See Chap. 5.1, par. 9.

735 See Chap. 5.1, par. 2.

736 See Chap. 5.1, par. 5.

for them<sup>737</sup> that may satisfy their needs (even though this is, however, never actually the case). If they could not imagine that new information processing is possible for them, they would simply stop (reducing themselves to a mechanical increase of their information processing with every new day of their lives). It is therefore humans' need to augment their information processing that causes (gives rise to) humans' ability to imagine—and, thus, to be free.

## 5. \*

One cannot know if only humans among all other animals have the ability to imagine and thus a need to be free. There is certainly empirical evidence that certain animals cannot live in captivity. Notwithstanding, however, whether animals can or cannot imagine, animals whose freedom is protected within (human) states enjoy liberty<sup>738</sup> (not freedom<sup>739</sup>).

Under the Unique Human Observer Perspective, the two other categories of Beings, organisations and artificial Beings, cannot imagine, and thus do not need to be free.<sup>740</sup> After all, having a specific purpose in their lives means that all of their information processing is constrained by it (meaning that even if they could imagine, this would happen within the confines of serving their purpose). However, it is possible that, partially at least, the algorithm behind human imagination (the comparison of a Being's information processing with that of another's and the reproduction of it—but perhaps not the innovative increase) could occur in the case of artificial Beings (specifically, computer programs).

Of course, as with animals, liberty within any given state can be shared by all, Things and Beings alike. There is no reason, therefore, why artificial Beings, specifically computer programs, should not be given rights by regulation (similar to organisations).

---

737 This does not necessarily have to be entirely new or never-before-heard-of processing; it may well be that the processing already done by others is imagined to be applicable to them as well—comparison being natural to humans.

738 The same is true for certain Things that have been granted rights in human states, such as specific rivers or trees, see also Chap. 21, par. 1.

739 See par. 8.

740 In essence, organisations and artificial Beings are treated as not able to process immaterial information and thus as lacking in creativity; see Chap. 5.1, par. 6.

## 6. The state is at the same time the source of and the basic impediment to human freedom<sup>741</sup> \*

The state is the source of human freedom, because the state is the only way for humans to become individuals and thus to be able to augment their information processing.<sup>742</sup> At the same time it is the greatest impediment to human freedom, because it controls all of its citizens' information processing. This is unavoidable: all human information processing on the information platform that is their state exists because of the state and takes place with its intermediation. The state is a (tacit, implied) participant in any and all human interaction. State sovereignty, after all, means control of any and all information processing within its territory.<sup>743</sup> In other words, the state constrains freedom because it gives humans the terms of reference necessary for them to be able to imagine.

This conflicted role accounts for all of the ages-long disputes and fights between individuals and their states over human freedom which, among others, have resulted in the creation of social contract theory,<sup>744</sup> the individual's division into two selves<sup>745</sup> and political systems.<sup>746</sup>

Needless to say, freedom is not impeded by other individuals, but liberty most certainly is.<sup>747</sup>

---

741 This also helps to make sense of Rousseau's famous opening, that 'man was born free'. Humans are born free, i.e. able to imagine. What they imagine as their freedom, however, is transformed through government and political system into liberty as soon as they are born, unavoidably restricting their imagined freedom—hence Rousseau's immediate follow-up that 'he is everywhere in chains'. In other words, the state, as an information platform, is actually found everywhere around humans (i.e. it is natural to them), thus transforming their natural-born freedom into liberty as soon as they come to life.

742 See par. 4.

743 See Chap. 16, pars. 1 and 2.

744 See Chap. 13, par. 2.

745 See Chap. 26, par. 4.

746 See Chap. 12.1, par. 5.

747 See Chap. 21, par. 3.

## 7.

In essence, therefore, states are the only Beings that are truly free today, in the sense that no other Being exercises control over their information processing.<sup>748</sup>

This shows that states are (still) living in whatever ‘state of nature’ can be imagined: a non-state point in history that predates language and consciousness (with the EU being the first state of states, an information platform for all the information platforms that are states<sup>749</sup>).

### 8. Liberty\*

As has been established,<sup>750</sup> freedom is the ability to process information to the greatest extent imaginable—ultimately, it is the ability of humans to imagine. Liberty, on the other hand, is a condition, an absence of restraints within a specific state, a permission to process information (i.e. a right<sup>751</sup>). As has also been seen,<sup>752</sup> freedom can never be attained. An individual can appear to be free (i.e. nominally proclaimed to be able to be free) but, in fact, is not free (their state being able to control all his or her processing); in any event, most of the time individuals feel themselves to be less free than others or than their imagined level of freedom.

In contrast, liberty is a (reached or at least agreed upon) level of freedom on the specific information platform that is the state. Liberty is effectively a subset of freedom, a smaller batch of processing operations than those imagined by freedom but one which is actually materialised, afforded to individuals within a state.<sup>753</sup>

In other words, liberty is materialised freedom: liberty decides whether the information processing imagined in the context of feeling free can materialise in the analogue or the digital world, or not.

---

748 Notwithstanding breaches, of course, such as those caused by the digital world or the global markets (see also Chap. 12, par. 11, as well as, note 16/1/3 on the Westphalian state).

749 See Chap. 19.

750 In par. 1.

751 See Chap. 21.

752 In par. 2.

753 Meaning that individuals have access to them, see Chap. 6, par. 6.

## 9. Liberty is also relative

Like freedom,<sup>754</sup> an individual is neither at nor not at liberty, because liberty's content varies in space and time. Most importantly, however, there is no state where some level of liberty, even minimal, was or is not afforded to individuals, that is, some absence of restraints so as to allow them to be able to process information on the information platform that was or is their state.<sup>755</sup> Whether that level was satisfactory or not each time is a matter of politics (comparison being natural to humans<sup>756</sup>).

Freedom therefore, whenever found in political discourse, invariably actually means different levels of liberty, that is, it is part of the discussion on political systems.<sup>757</sup>

## 10.

Although (some) liberty invariably exists in human states, the human right to liberty (freedom of the person) has been acknowledged as a fundamental (natural law) human right only recently. As is the case with all rights, including human rights, its acknowledgement is political, it is assumed.<sup>758</sup>

By contrast, a platform right to liberty exists only with regard to other humans:<sup>759</sup> all humans are born free from other humans' control<sup>760</sup>—but certainly not from their states' control.

Of course, whether this platform right actually materialises in any state is a matter of politics (as has been painfully demonstrated through human slavery for thousands of years).

## 11. \*

Although the provision of more liberties would intuitively appear better to individuals than fewer liberties, because in this way their information processing would be augmented even further, this is not a matter to be decided

---

754 See par. 2.

755 See also Chap. 22, par. 8.

756 See Chap. 5.1, par. 9.

757 See Chap. 12.1.

758 See Chap. 22, par. 11.

759 See Chap. 22, par. 8.

760 See Chap. 24, par. 5.

lightly, first and foremost (utilitarian reasoning notwithstanding) because it is not claimed here that the augmentation of information processing is a worthy purpose for any state to pursue<sup>761</sup> (taking into account, for example, the measures this pursuit also unavoidably necessitates). This would be a political decision.

Evidently, for the very same reasons, liberty is not analysed any further here. Liberty is to be examined within the context of a moral philosophy at a later stage; here only what freedom and liberty really are is identified.

---

761 States may need their citizens to augment their information processing (see Chap. 10), but whether needs need to be served (and to what extent) is a moral and political issue.