

Responsibility, the Guardian of Freedom

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Liberty means responsibility. That is why most men dread it.

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) Irish
Dramatist and critic. *Man and
Superman*, 'Maxims for Revolutionists'

The concept of freedom is not something that is learned; rather it is bound up in the essence of humanity itself. Although it may not always prevail in every human situation, it is the condition humanity desires from the core of its being. The sense of choice and the desire to choose flow from our being very early on in life. It is why man prefers to be free as opposed to being chained. It is why we think that restricting one's freedom is severe punishment. This reflects the fact that freedom is not to be understood as a privilege of a few, but is the innate impulse of all humanity. One might say that freedom is a yearning of the soul as hunger and thirst are a longing of the body. One can live with less than desired, but one cannot survive on less than is needed. Freedom is to humanity as breath is to life. When freedom prevails, humanity rejoices.

Freedom, however, is not freestanding or self-sustaining. It requires moral responsibility from all who enjoy the benefits of freedom. Without men acting responsibly in freedom, freedom will be the occasion for license which will in turn destroy freedom. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in an interview in July 1989 with *Time*, captured the relationship between freedom and responsibility when he said: "During these 300 years of Western civilization, there has been a sweeping away of duties and expansion of rights. But we have two lungs. You can't breathe with just one lung and not the other. We must avail ourselves of rights and duties in equal measure. And if this is not established by the law, if the law does not oblige us to do that, then we have to control ourselves."¹ That is, law increases where personal responsibility decreases. If we wish to extend the vivacity and promise of freedom (the inalienable right endowed by our Creator), then we must accept the personal duty to live responsibly. Living responsibly requires a commitment to a virtuous life. Virtue is not produced by freedom, it is what informs moral responsibility which is the guardian of freedom. Virtue is grounded in something beyond the self.

Though some may argue strenuously against any connection between virtue and freedom, all of history is against them. When personal responsibility is divorced from virtue, it is deprived of its guiding principles. Then the freedom to choose will present an opportunity for the selfish one to pursue personal ambition in disregard for the freedoms of others. Where virtue it is ignored, rejected, or redefined in pragmatic terms selfish pursuits of power and gain prevail leaving little to stand between anarchy and totalitarianism. In the process, the virtuous act is penalized and corruption of every kind

¹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "Warning to the West".
http://www.florerunner.com/forerunner/X0699_Solzhenitsyns_Warnin.html. Accessed 3/4/2005

triumphs destroying freedom The end result is that good and evil often become confused, if not inverted. One does not need look far or deep into human history to find examples of this.

To ignore or depreciate the necessity of virtue while praising freedom one commits the same moral genocide as spoken by C. S. Lewis when writing about the decline of the English education: “We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”² It is impossible to expect the desirable fruits of freedom to mature for all to enjoy in an atmosphere of selfishness and its corollary ---the justification of violence and corruption. Virtue is not a byproduct of freedom, it is grounding of moral responsibility which is the guardian of freedom. One can think of those in the United States who have freedom of speech, but use it to spew hate and violence, even targeting children with their message.

Freedom, at a minimum, is the reality where one has the opportunity to exercise choice, not simply to do or not do something, but the choice to pursue legitimate vocation, interests, pleasures, and the exercise of abilities within the larger social context. Contrary to Kant, freedom is not freedom from man’s “self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another.”³ More importantly, freedom to choose requires moral judgment which necessitates the transcendent in order to choose what is good and right because such ideas are not bound up in the thing itself. Solzhenitsyn notes that, “When Western society was established, it was based on the idea that each individual limited his own behavior. Everyone understood what he could do and could not do. The law itself did not restrain people.”⁴ Freedom is not a virtue, that is, it cannot guide one in doing the right or the good, it only gives the opportunity to choose. Therefore, the free man must also be the virtuous man because freedom rests on proper judgments in choosing what one names good and evil.

One can think of freedom in a general way, that is, as a constitutional (legal) state of affairs or in an individuated or particular way such as academic freedom which may exist as a subset of constitutional freedom. In each case, a person or society determines what that freedom should look like. It establishes boundaries for the exercise of freedom so as to protect everybody’s freedom. Each group of community understands when freedom prevails or at least what freedom does not include. But I am not interested in this paper on the process by which freedom obtains, or what the limits ought to be for freedom in any given context. In this paper, I am interested in what is required of those who enjoy some form of freedom. In fact, I will focus on those of us who enjoy academic freedom in some degree. By this, I include all who engage in the pursuit and declaration of knowledge⁵ whether it be those in the sciences or in the arts. While there are many important areas of freedom to consider, I want to examine the moral responsibility those

² C. S. Lewis. *The Abolition of Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 35

³ Immanuel Kant, *An Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?* in *From Modernism to Postmodernism*, ed. Lawrence Cahoon, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 51

⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. “Warning to the West”.

http://www.florerunner.com/forerunner/X0699_Solzhenitsyns_Warnin.html. Accessed 3/4/2005

⁵ Here I use the word ‘knowledge’ as it has been defined historically since the days of Aristotle. This means that knowledge in justified true belief. Therefore, knowledge to be knowledge must also be true.

in the arts and sciences in the exercise of the freedom they enjoy to pursue and proclaim that which is true. That is, what I will call the commitment to being intellectually virtuous.

I begin with the assumption that has a long history in western philosophic tradition, namely that there is an inextricable connection between thinking right and living well. As W. Jay Wood notes the pursuit of intellectual virtue was a dominant theme in the writings of “Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers of the ancient and medieval tradition. Your intellectual life is important, according to these thinkers, for the simple reason that your very character, the kind of person you are and are becoming, is at stake. Careful oversight of our intellectual lives is imperative if we are to think well, and thinking well is an indispensable ingredient in living well.”⁶ The educated person, the person who teaches others, the person who pursues knowledge on behalf of others, yes for society as a whole, must realize the enormous burden of such a privilege. It is not for him to do and say as it seems convenient for him, or do that which exalts him. He has a public trust, a trust that must be maintained with the highest degree of honesty and integrity. Whatever one discovers, he discovers it because it existed prior to discovery. We all inhabit this universe and what is true of the universe, it is true for all, not only a few. Bernard Lonergan points out that there is a social character of human knowledge: “Human knowledge, then, is not some individual possession but rather a common fund, from which each may draw by believing, to which each may contribute in the measure that he performs his cognitive operations properly and reports their results accurately.”⁷ It is not one’s position that is important, not even the advancement of his discipline that has first consideration, it is that in all things intellectual virtue undergirds his investigations, interpretations, and reporting.

The freedom to pursue and to teach knowledge is a wonderful state of affairs which has not always been so. It is, without controversy, one of the most powerful instruments within a society, one that can be used for good or evil. Historically, as intellectual freedom increased, so did the knowledge gained from nature. Without commitment to intellectual virtue

Freedom to pursue and teach knowledge must be guided by a moral responsibility on two grounds. Without intellectual virtue how will those questions that call for a moral judgment be made? Second, without intellectual virtue there is always the risk of men being blinded by self-ambition, desire to be awarded a grant, or simple lack of integrity in the process. The first is that there are such questions that must be answered that call for a moral judgment. Questions such, “Is this worthy?”. Bernard Lonergan, “There are mistaken endeavors to quieten an uneasy conscience by ignoring, belittling, denying, rejecting higher values. Preference scales become distorted. Feelings soured. Bias creep into one’s outlook, rationalization into one’s morals, ideology into one’s thoughts. So one may come to hate the truly good, and love the really evil. Nor is that calamity limited to individuals. It can happen to groups, to nations, to blocks of nations, to mankind. It can take different, opposed, belligerent forms to divide mankind and to menace civilization with destruction.”⁸

⁶ W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 17.

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 43.

⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 40.

Plato's *Republic* explains why those who pursue and teach knowledge must do so in a virtuous way. Socrates responds to Glaucon as they discuss what makes for a citizen. He says, "We would not have our guardians grow up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and up amid images of moral deformity, as in some noxious pasture, and there browse and feed upon many a baneful herb and flower day by day, little by little, until they silently gather a festering mass of corruption in their own soul. Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason."⁹ He earlier he had noted: "And ugliness and discord and inharmonious motion are nearly allied to ill words and ill nature, as grace and harmony are the twin sisters of goodness and virtue and bear their likeness."¹⁰ Plato's point is that where freedom exists to pursue and teach knowledge, there is a grave responsibility on the part of the teacher to exercise virtue in all things. Failure to do will not only bring disrepute on one's profession and person, it betrays the public trust and jeopardizes the freedom that made the pursuit of know possible in the first place.

As knowledge grew so did man's view of nature deepen but his notion of metaphysics lessen. In fact, Edward O. Wilson has suggested that all philosophy must be brought under science: "Philosophy, the contemplation of the unknown, is a shrinking dominion. We have the common goal of turning as much philosophy as possible into science."¹¹ But as Richard Weaver points out, "Good will alone fails in the same way as does sentiment without the underpinning of metaphysic."¹²

Without doubt the place where intellectual virtue is important is in the interpretation of the facts. Whereas we are all human and therefore limited in our understanding, we have a limited range of knowledge. Furthermore, whereas facts are not self-interrupting Roy Bhasker says, Both transcendental realism and transcendental idealism reject the empiricist account of science, according to which its valid content is exhausted by atomistic facts and their conjunctions."¹³

Lonergan says, When we affirm that something really and truly is so, we mean that we somehow have got beyond ourselves, somehow have got hold of what is independent of ourselves, somehow have transcended ourselves."¹⁴ Lonergan explains that self-transcendence is what Aristotle meant by virtue. He writes, "It is by the

⁹ Plato. *The Republic. In The Best Known Works of Plato*. Translated in to English by B. Jowett (Garden City, NY: Blue Ribbon Books, 1942), 67.

¹⁰Plato. *The Republic. In The Best Known Works of Plato*. Translated in to English by B. Jowett (Garden City, NY: Blue Ribbon Books, 1942), 67.

¹¹ Edward O. Wilson, *ConsilienceThe Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Alftred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998),12.

¹² Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 130.

¹³ Roy Bhasker, "Philosophy and Scientific Realism" in *Critical Realism*, edited by Margaret Archer, Roy Bhasker, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie (London: Routledge, 1998), 21.

¹⁴ Bernard Lonergan. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. Edited by Robert C.Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 35.

transcendental notion of value and its expression in a good and an uneasy conscience that man can develop morally. But a rounded moral judgment is ever the work of a fully developed self-transcending subject, or as Aristotle would put it, of a virtuous man”¹⁵

Terry Tekippe says, intellectual morality includes, “be attentive, be intelligent, and, above all, do not make judgments without proper evidence”¹⁶ Wood suggests that intellectual virtues include “character traits such as wisdom, prudence, foresight, understanding, discernment, truthfulness, and studiousness, among others.”¹⁷ Further Wood discerning points out that “we cannot be “fully intellectually virtuous without also being morally virtuous.”¹⁸

There is a growing interest in Critical Realism, first starting in the field of science and now with centers all around the world. Roy Bhasker refers to it as transcendental realism and argues that “Only transcendental realism, I will argue, can sustain the idea of a law-governed world independent of man; and it is this concept, I will argue is necessary to understand science.”¹⁹

Bernard Lonergan says, “What as come about of late is a renewed interest in critical realism. First, develop in the field of science, it has become a major movement within western thinking today with centers around the world

Bernard Lonergan writes, There is a transcendental notion of value. A transcendental notion is what is intended when one asks a question. There are questions for intelligence: What? Why? How? How Often? There are questions for reflection: is that so? And there are questions for deliberation: Is it truly worth while, or is it merely apparently good? The transcendental notion of value is the capacity to ask that question: Is it worth while? Is this right?”²⁰

¹⁵ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 41.

¹⁶ Terry Tekippe. What is Lonergan Up to in *Insight?* 131

¹⁷ W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 16.

¹⁸ W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19.

¹⁹ Roy Bhasker, “Philosophy and Scientific Realism” in *Critical Realism*, edited by Margaret Archer, Roy Bhasker, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie (London: Routledge, 1998), 20.

²⁰ Bernard Lonergan. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*. Edited by Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 142.