Till forskar seminariet 12.9.2011

[Den här texten är väldigt ofärdig, vilket väl är ett skäl till att den kan fungera som underlag till en diskussion. Jag tror inte heller att den ska bli klar i den här formen, eftersom jag snarare ser de här tankarna som en del i ett större projekt.

Dispositionen verkar nog väldigt märklig, om det nu alls finns någon. Poängerna kommer helt enkelt i den ordning de slagit mig under arbetet, så texten har ofta en rätt associativ karaktär.

Tyvärr är texten som mest oklar och kortfattad på de punkter som jag själv tycker är viktigast, men det kanske ligger i sakens natur. Så bli inte förvånad om något jag säger framstår som obegripligt jag kan (förhoppningsvis) förklara det bättre under diskussionen. På några ställen går jag dessutom in i ett filosofiskt språkbruk som inte är mitt; den där dåliga vanan bör hur som helst kritiseras, men när det inte ens skrivs ut vad det är jag anspelar på blir det där särskilt dunkelt.]

On “the freedom of the will”

When Freud says that the belief that there is such a thing as psychical freedom is unscientific, since this means supposing that there are holes in the causal web, he is more right than one might be inclined to believe. Freud:

Is he [his imagined interlocutor] maintaining that there are occurrences, however small, which drop out of the universal concatenation of events – occurrences which might just as well not happen as happen? If anyone makes a breach of this kind in the determinism of natural events at a single point, it means that he has thrown overboard the whole Weltanschauung of science.¹

The problem is, however, that he does not realize in what sense this is true.

For it is quite right that the belief in the freedom of the will is, in a sense, unscientific. If we have one case x₁, which leads to y, and a case x₂, which leads to z, and we institute a scientific inquiry into the nature of these cases, we would try to find a difference between x₁ and x₂, explaining the different results. Saying that the results are simply different would not be a solution to the problem, it would be saying that one has given up. And if I give up, this does not mean that other people could not find a solution, now or in the future. What

determining that a difference could *impossibly* be found would mean is not at all clear. One example: Some microbe does sometimes bring with it a particular disease, sometimes not. Why? Here one could try to find differences: does it depend on who is infected, and, in that case, what are the decisive differences between the groups? And perhaps a difference is not found. But what would it mean to say that a difference can impossibly be found, that all we could say is that the difference is an expression of the freedom of the microbes?

My way of phrasing this – in terms of the possibility of asking for differences and causes – is not accidental. On the contrary, it is a way of trying to by-pass some difficulties the one who denies the freedom of the will easily ends up in. If one, as I did when introducing the quotation from Freud, uses phrases like “causal web” (despite the fact that Freud himself did not do so), it will soon become unclear what this is supposed to mean. For the picture one easily gets stuck in – colliding billiard-balls – is no more than a picture; what the determinist means is that the will is placed in the connection of causes and effects, not that this connection has to be of *that* kind. (With the help of Aristotle, one can come to see that this picture is misleading. In many cases, the cause is not one thing, but that two things happened at the same time (#example). In that case, it may be possible to explain why each of them happened then and there, but their happening at the same time may still be a coincidence. If one says that there is an explanation of the fact that they happened at the same time, one says that they are, in some sense or other, connected, but this need not be the case.\(^2\) One ends up in other problems if one instead says that the denial of the freedom of the will should be phrased in these terms: it is always possible, at least in principle, to predict and manipulate the actions of the individual. First, there is not necessarily a conflict here: why should free action be more irregular, and thereby more difficult to predict and manipulate, than unfree action? Second, it is, to say the least, unclear if such an absolute possibility of prediction and manipulation exists.\(^3\) (I will come back to this.) Hence, to make the denial dependent on this weakens it considerably. A third alternative would be to deny the freedom of the will by saying that the belief in such freedom is in conflict with the principle that everything has a cause. But then it becomes unclear why one should give dogmatic credit to such a metaphysical principle.

Instead it is better to phrase the denial in the terms I used: it is unclear what it would mean to claim that there is a limit to the possibility of asking for differences and causes, a limit to

\(^2\) Physics 195b-197a.
\(^3\) MacIntyre #.
the possibility of doing scientific research. And in that sense the belief in the freedom of the will would be unscientific.

However, this way of phrasing it is somewhat misleading, first since scientific inquiries do not always have this form, second since an inquiry is not relevant as such but becomes relevant against a background (which should be paid philosophical attention to). Scientific inquiries do not always have this form. If a historian asks why Napoleon invaded Russia, this is not a question about the difference between Napoleon and someone who were in the same situation as he was but did not invade Russia. Nor would it be enough to refer to a law saying that whenever someone is in this and that situation, he or she will do so and so. This would not be enough, since that would not remove that contingency we want removed. For such a law, if it exists, is, in the end, no more than a contingency. The necessity we are looking for we find if we get hold of Napoleon’s reasons for invading Russia, reasons the reasonability of which does not need further grounds. But that these reasons have become clear for me, does not mean that I see what he did as the only possibility. In many situations there are good reasons for many different alternatives; there may be good reasons for invading Russia and for abstaining of doing so. The necessity we are looking for is not of the kind which excludes all other alternatives in that sense; the necessity consists in the fact that the situation is not the situation it is in isolation from the thoughts of the people involved, and since these thoughts show themselves in how they react to it, the reactions are not externally related to the situation. But first and foremost the scientific inquiry is not relevant as such, but becomes relevant against a background. There is not a general search for correlations; searching for correlations between two phenomena becomes relevant to the extent this is a way of arriving at an answer to the question one is working on. Even though it would be wrong to say that there is a limit to the possibility of asking for differences and causes, it is clear that against the background of the problem one is working on, there is a point where one will not ask such questions any longer, since the problem has been solved. These problems will in one way or another be connected to the descriptions we are already making – if I want to understand why someone invaded Russia, this will be done against the background of this description (“invading Russia”), with the extensive human context making such a description possible

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4 Collingwood #.
4 Here a complication enters (which I will come back to later). For to the extent the explanation of the action is supposed to be a good reason for carrying it out, what I will, and will not, see as an explanation, depends on who I am. It is possible that for me nothing is a good reason for invading Russia, since I do not see anything as a good reason for waging war. However, it is not enough that this is the way I see things, I must not even be tempted to see things differently.
and intelligible – and their possible solutions will be solutions to these very problems, so phrased.\textsuperscript{8} The descriptions open for \textit{some} types of questions, and hence for \textit{some} forms the solutions may take (\textit{some} differences become relevant to search for, other differences not, \textit{some} causes become relevant to search for, other causes not).\textsuperscript{9} Vice versa some problems one runs into will not even be seen as problems of principle. In a test situation there are some phenomena I want to find the causes of. But there are lots of things which may interfere with the test – things possibly so disturbing that we are not able to restrain and check them – without this being seen as an objection to the possibility of the project, a refutation of the belief in a cause. I (the experimenter) decide to stop the test, for some reason or other; the person being tested refuses to do what I wish her to do (choosing between A and B); the fire alarm sounds and the test is terminated. For these difficulties will be seen as external to the phenomenon under study. So even if these difficulties were to turn out impossible to do anything about, this would still not show that the cause, hence impossible to discover, does not exist, that a difference, explaining the different effects, does not exist. (The same thing goes for the endeavor to predict and manipulate, even though it is often harder to get clear about one’s failures in such situations.) And this means that “there is no free will” is not a hypothesis being tested, for what in some cases could be taken as a counterinstance will be seen as an interference entering the test situation externally.

What all this means is that “human beings have a free will” is not a possible scientific result. On the contrary, a starting point for the scientific work is that such a concept is not

\textsuperscript{8} Lite om möjligheten att ett problem överges, för att det t.ex. ses som baserat på ett missförstånd?

\textsuperscript{9} The endeavor to replace “folk psychological” modes of expression should therefore not, I believe, be understood as an endeavor to replace them with more “scientific” modes of expression, but as an endeavor to find modes of expression which would make a scientific treatment of the phenomenon possible. Hence, this endeavor precedes the possible distinction between what is scientific and what is unscientific, since that distinction presupposes that there are results possible to accept or ignore. As in the case of another endeavor of that kind, not comme il faut anymore, the endeavor to find an ideal language in order for a mathematical-logical treatment to become possible, I take it that the opponents of “folk psychology” underestimate how radical such a change must be, how different from the demands the endeavor to make a scientific treatment possible brings with it the a-scientific modes of expression are, and thereby the difficulties are also underestimated. It is, among other things, unclear to me how a concept like action, or anyone similar to it, should be retained if what one wants is that kind of treatment. (Which means that it is unclear to me how actions – what we call actions and what is similar to them, be it closely or distantly – is to be connected to causes in a systematic fashion.) For actions, what is counted as two different actions or two actions of the same kind, are often not individuated by their causes and effects, but by their, in a wide sense, historical context, which means that the same action does not always have the same cause or the same effect (and different actions not always different causes and different effects). An action has a beginning and an end, is not seen as a part of a continuous wave motion. This beginning and this end are only in some cases to be placed at definite points of time, which makes it difficult to draw a sharp boundary between the cause of the action, the action itself, and its effects. In the end it is yet clear that, how ever important, in their own particular sphere, such results, arrived at after drastic conceptual changes, may be, they require the modes of expression they were supposed to replace for their intelligibility: it is by means of, and with reference to, them the new modes of expression are explained. So what ever one’s opinions about them, the task of understanding actions as actions still remains.
used. And this is not an arbitrary starting point, as if it were some kind of working hypothesis. No, it would be unclear what it would mean to do science in that way, and this means that the concept “free will” is not an erroneous one, it simply belongs to a different sphere.

“But even if this is so,” someone might say, “isn’t the opposite possible? Even though ‘human beings have a free will’ is not a possible scientific result, ‘human beings have not a free will’ could be one, couldn’t it? Aren’t there lots of results pointing in that direction?” To this one could answer in line with what I have already said: since it is, to say the least, unclear what should be counted as a scientific discovery of the freedom of the will, this concept is independent of this context, and is not an empirical (or rather, since there are different ways of relating to the empirical, not an empirical-scientific) concept. If it is unclear what it would be to prove something, it is unclear what it would be to refute it. The one who takes experimental results of that kind to be of essential interest (in contrast to the kind of interest the specific character of, say, a correlation might have), takes it to be possible that there is a limit behind which we cannot go, a limit which we now – surprisingly enough! – have discovered did not exist at this point, takes it that the meaning of the concept “free will” has to be that there is a barrier impossible to break through – that would give substance to the concept – even though it is not possible to know whether a particular barrier is essentially impossible to break through. But talking about “barriers” in this way would confuse things. What one could say, is that when investigating something scientifically, one regards this phenomenon as an object of the scientific practice. The “barrier” is then that it is not possible to investigate something in this way without regarding it as such an object; but that is not, strictly speaking, a barrier, for it is unclear what the barrier is a barrier to. The same goes for the endeavor to manipulate and predict. Here one will not run into a barrier not possible to break through (but, possibly, interferences entering the situation externally); what is not possible is to manipulate without being manipulative.

But let me connect to that kind of experimental results which is said to show, or suggest, that human beings do not have a free will. (The one who objects to what I have said this far could say that these results show that it is always wrong to talk about a “free will”, that this concept is not alien only to the scientific practice.) A famous result of this kind is that it is possible to imagine a case where science gets into large difficulties, with the result that the practice, as we know it, comes to an end. But this is hard to imagine in detail, of course, and furthermore this means that the understanding we do have, and this is what I try to investigate, has the character I here describe it as having. 10

10 Perhaps it is possible to imagine a case where science gets into large difficulties, with the result that the practice, as we know it, comes to an end. But this is hard to imagine in detail, of course, and furthermore this means that the understanding we do have, and this is what I try to investigate, has the character I here describe it as having. #Formulera ev. om.

11 If that would be possible, if the freedom of the will were a thing, a thing possible to run into or miss, what would be possible would be to find it, whereas what conclusions should be drawn from the fact that we have not found it would be open. But now “the freedom of the will” or “the free will” is not a thing, is not understood in that way in the scientific practice.
possible to register the initiation of an act before the subject felt that she wanted to do it: an experimental subject is asked to flick her wrist at any time she wishes to do so, and the time of the act, of a so-called “readiness potential” (an electrical indication of certain brain activities preceding the actual movement), and of the subject’s awareness of her wish to flick her wrist, are registered, and the latter feeling is shown to appear after the start of the readiness potential but before the act. But what is surprising here? The details may be of some interest (i.e. the specific how of the result), but this is possible is precisely what might have been expected. If we see actions and decisions as links in causal chains, then there must be things that preceded and caused the action and the feeling of wanting to do this and that accompanying it; this is internal to regarding things in this way. What is new here is rather that the feeling seems to be a by-product, that the causal chains run to the action independently of it. This should not really matter, since even if the chains run via the feeling to the action, the feeling would still be a product, but this gives a particular aura to the experiment. But that depends on the fact that the way concepts like action and, above all, “wanting to do this and that,” are here used is very odd. Let me explain.

Does it matter whether there is a feeling of wanting to do this and that or not? (I simply flick my wrist, without at all thinking about it as something I do.) What role could “decision” have in this situation? And could one say that it is me who “starts” the action by deciding to do so, but not until later becoming aware of this decision? If one takes the phrase “coming to a decision one is not aware of” to be absurd, wherein lies the absurdity? One role the concept “decision” has is that it connects the action to reasons. When reasons are important, it is also important to say that I decided to do what I did, that I did not just do it; when one connects the decision to the possibility of giving reasons, saying that I am not aware of the decision I have come to becomes odd. But what is distinctive of the experiment is that there are no reasons for flicking one’s wrist at one point of time and not another one. This is no accident. For if one had carried out an experiment in which there was room for considerations, it would be unclear both what it would mean to say that I came to the decision on a specific point of time (so that we could determine whether it preceded the start of the readiness potential or not), and the decision would not be connected to any particular feeling. Furthermore, it would in many

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12 See Benjamin Libet, “Do We Have Free Will?” in The Volitional Brain: Towards a Neuroscience of Free Will, ed. Benjamin Libet, Anthony Freeman, and Keith Sutherland (Thorverton: Imprint Academic, 1999), 47-50. (Here I will not question the way the experiment is carried out, even though that is possible, since someone could agree to my criticism but still say that an experiment, with some similarities to this one but showing what it possibly does not really show, is possible. And that is the question that interests me right now.)

13 Dessutom: det vardagliga sättet att veta vad någon kommer att göra, bättre än hon själv.

14 Libet’s definition of free will (ibid., 47), which according to him is “in accord with common views,” includes the criterion that “the subject should feel that he/she wanted to do it.”
cases be unclear when the action starts. Say that I am about to choose which electricity company should supply my power. I have two alternatives, and I want to choose the cheapest one. But in order to determine which alternative is the cheapest one, I have to do some calculations. Here one could say that the calculations are the decision: when I have calculated the answer, there is not anything in addition to this to be done (except filling in the form and sending it in). Furthermore, here it is very unclear what it would mean to have chosen the one alternative and not the other before the calculations were completed. And if one would say that I had “started” one of the actions already before the calculations were completed, I would, if I come to see that the action I had started was not in line with the result of the calculations, regret what I had started doing and do the other thing instead. Alternatively, one could say that the decision consists in choosing the cheapest alternative (and not, say, the alternative that is friendliest to the environment). But what this decision means is that I do the calculations. What would it mean to start doing these calculations (that a readiness potential for doing this action occurs), before being aware that I have come to the decision of calculating which alternative is the cheapest one? The strength of the experiment is consequently its weakness. The conceptual connections between decision and reasons are cut. And the “feeling that one wants to do it” has been hypostatized, as if it had a sense of its own, independently of the action giving it its meaning.

Another example. “When did you decide to give in your notice?” “When my boss scolded me.” Here I need not be aware of this decision precisely when my boss scolded me; the feeling I had then was not one of decision but of, say, anger or humiliation, and the thought running through my mind could have been “he’s an idiot,” not necessarily “I’ll give in my notice.” So is what we have here an everyday example of what the experiment shows, that I came to the decision before being aware of it? “No,” someone might say, “since in that case you did not decide to give in your notice when your boss scolded you, even though you say so. You come to a decision when you are aware of it as a thought, or, alternatively, when you

15 Perhaps one could arrive at a situation which reminds of the experiment in this way. Say that I have been tempted to choose one of the alternatives (the advertisement speaks to me “immediately”). In that case I could justify my decision to myself, after having filled in the form and sent it in, by saying that I have chosen the alternative which surely is the cheapest one, without knowing whether it really is the cheapest one or not. But in such a situation, it is central that I could say that I have been tricked and change my mind. The point is that this incident is a part of a wider context, a context which cannot be delimited in a definite way. The experimental situation is in that respect very different. (Libet is open to the possibility that “conscious-will might block or veto the process, so that no act occurs” (ibid., 52), but this has not much to do with changing one’s mind or regret what one has done, as his example shows (ibid.):

All of us, not just experimental subjects, have experienced our vetoing a spontaneous urge to perform some act. This often occurs when the urge to act involves some socially unacceptable consequences, like an urge to shout some obscenity to the professor. (It is hard not to see this as a joke, but Libet says it in earnest.))
act concretely (actually giving in your notice).” The one who says this has definitely distanced herself from the way one speaks about decisions in the experimental situation above. But an answer of that kind seems to be an example of how philosophical prejudices lead one to invent new phraseologies. For answering the question “when” is often, for example here, to give a *reason*, not to point to any specific thought processes or feelings. Nor when I actually do something concretely – filling in the form, giving in my notice – this need to be accompanied by a thought of or feeling of decision, irrespective of whether they precede it or come later; I simply do what I do, in, say, anger. On the contrary, it is clear that there is room for a description in which the situation itself immediately leads to the action, in which the situation *is* the reason and the decision.\(^\text{16}\) For we will end up in a regress if we take every reason to need an additional reason in order to be able to motivate an action, every decision an additional decision.\(^\text{17}\) **In order for a reason to be a reason, it must at least be possible that it could lead to action directly, without additional mediation; in order for a decision to be a decision, it must at least be possible that it could lead to action directly, without additional mediation.** Another example of this is when someone says “pass me the salt” and I do so, as a direct answer to what he says, without thought or decision. But what I do is not a reflex action, as when I pull away my hand when touching a hot object. In that case, it is very hard, if not impossible, to resist; but it is not at all hard not to pass the salt to someone who asks me for it. To say that I choose to pass him the salt, or that I decide to do it, indicates that there is a reason not to do it. If I am not able to state a reason of that kind, a reason which I considered or could actually have considered, it is unclear what referring to choice and decision here means.

Perhaps the one who is fascinated by the experiment finds what I have said here about concepts such as decision and action beside the point. However, what is important right now is primarily only that the result of the experiment is not at all surprising. This is how things must be: from a causal point of view there must be things preceding the action and causing it, the feeling of wanting to do this or that must be a product in such a chain. If this experiment had failed, one had not said that this failure indicates that there is not anything which precedes the action and the decision.

As long as one considers things in a scientific way, one will consequently not use the concept “free will”. But the word “scientific” is ambiguous. For it can mean two things: on

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\(^\text{16}\) På ett sätt innebär det här att jag inte är fri, om frihet ska betyda fullständig explicithet (som alltså inte är möjlig).

\(^\text{17}\) #spell out!
the one hand it stands for some practices in contrast to other practices (physics is a scientific practice, artistic work is not), on the other hand it is a commendatory expression within scientific practices (some ways of doing physical research are scientific, some are not). When Freud says that the belief that there is such a thing as psychical freedom is unscientific, this is right to the extent he uses the word in the first way. But if this was what he meant, it would not have the weight he wants it to have. The one who uses a concept like “free will” would then simply be doing something else than science, and this would not as such be a problem; a problem would only arise if the person in question used the concept within the scientific practice, but not since she committed a fault or did something prohibited, but simply since she would be unclear about what she is doing. It is on the second sense Freud takes his stand, where “scientific” is a commendation and “unscientific” blame. But this has a weight only to the extent someone is or claims to be part of a scientific practice; as we have seen, “there is no free will” is not an utterance within the scientific practice, i.e. is not a scientific result, since it, one could say, characterizes the scientific practice as such.

However, one thing I said above is misleading. I have said, or intimated, that if the concept “free will” does not have a place in the scientific way of regarding things, it has a place outside science. But saying this is misleading. For if one looks closer at what philosophers have meant with “free will”, one will come to realize that this concept has a specific meaning. One example. In a dualist tradition, the concept “free will” has a strange role. What is strange in Descartes is not, as it is often said, that the relation between res extensa and res cogitans, between body and soul, is unclear, but that they are both said to be res, that the soul is some kind of body without a body. (Descartes’s infamous pineal gland shows how the soul is understood as just another form of matter.) And then the idea of a science of the soul arises, where the will is nevertheless understood in (quasi-)causal terms:

[T]he will is by its nature so free that it can never be constrained. […] And the activity of the soul consists entirely in the fact that simply by willing something it brings it about that the little gland to which it is closely joined moves in the manner required to produce the effect corresponding to this volition.

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18 #Det där kan tyckas stå i strid med sådana som säger att konstnärlig verksamhet är ”utforsknande”, men gör det inte.
19 It is also possible to say that those ways of doing physical research which are not scientific, are not ways of doing physical research at all. In that case, what you think, or say, that you do, is not what you actually do. Artistic work is not non-scientific in this way, it is not claimed to be scientific.
20 #Forskningsfusk som självbedrägeri.
#Några olika citat, som pekar i delvis olika riktningar:
The problem is consequently not that he does not manage to relate them, that they are too sharply distinguished, but that they are not distinguished enough, so distinguished that an idea of uniting them or an idea of relating them in any determinate way would not arise. This

"Now among these figures, it is not those imprinted on the external sense organs, or on the internal surface of the brain, which should be taken to be ideas – but only those which are traced in the spirits on the surface of the gland H (where the seat of the imagination and the 'common' sense is located). That is to say, it is only the latter figures which should be taken to be the forms or images which the rational soul united to this machine will consider directly when it imagines some object or perceives it by the senses. And note that I say 'imagines or perceives by the senses'. For I wish to apply the term 'idea' generally to all the impressions which the spirits can receive as they leave gland H. These are to be attributed to the 'common' sense when they depend on the presence of objects [...]" (p. I:106)

"Thus, because we have no conception of the body as thinking in any way at all, we have reason to believe that every kind of thought present in us belongs to the soul.” (p. I:329)

"[...] we need to recognize that the soul is really joined to the whole body, and that we cannot properly say that it exists in any one part of the body to the exclusion of the others. For the body is a unity which is in a sense indivisible because of the arrangement of its organs, these being so related to one another that the removal of any one of them renders the whole body defective. And the soul is of such a nature that it has no relation to extension, or to the dimensions or other properties of the matter of which the body is composed: it is related solely to the whole assemblage of the body's organs. This is obvious from our inability to conceive of a half or a third of a soul, or of the extension which a soul occupies. Nor does the soul become any smaller if we cut off some part of the body, but it becomes completely separate from the body when we break up the assemblage of the body's organs. [...] We need to recognize also that although the soul is joined to the whole body, nevertheless there is a certain part of the body where it exercises its functions more particularly than in all the others. It is commonly held that this part is the brain, or perhaps the heart – the brain because the sense organs are related to it, and the heart because we feel the passions as if they were in it. But on carefully examining the matter I think I have clearly established that the part of the body in which the soul directly exercises its functions is not the heart at all, or the whole of the brain. It is rather the innermost part of the brain, which is a certain very small gland situated in the middle of the brain's substance and suspended above the passage through which the spirits in the brain's anterior cavities communicate with those in its posterior cavities. The slightest movements on the part of this gland may alter very greatly the course of these spirits, and conversely any change, however slight, taking place in the course of the spirits may do much to change the movements of the gland.” (pp. I:339-40)

"[...] I do not think that the soul is so imprisoned in the gland that it cannot act elsewhere. But utilizing a thing is not the same as being immediately joined or united to it [...]” (p. III:149)

"[...] the small gland which is the principal seat of the soul is suspended within the cavities containing these spirits, so that it can be moved by them in as many different ways as there are perceptible differences in the objects. But it can also be moved in various different ways by the soul, whose nature is such that it receives as many different impressions – that is, it has as many different perceptions as there occur different movements in this gland. And conversely, the mechanism of our body is so constructed that simply by this gland's being moved in any way by the soul or by any other cause, it drives the surrounding spirits towards the pores of the brain, which direct them through the nerves to the muscles; and in this way the gland makes the spirits move the limbs.” (p. I:341)

"[...] how can the soul move the body if it is in no way material, and how can it receive the forms of corporeal objects? These questions simply give me the opportunity to point out that the author of the Counter-Objections was being quite unfair when, under the pretext of objecting to my views, he put to me a large numbers of such questions which do not require to be answered in order to prove what I asserted in my writings. The most ignorant people could, in a quarter of an hour, raise more questions of this kind than the wisest men could deal with in a lifetime; and this is why I have not bothered to answer any of them. These questions presuppose amongst other things an explanation of the union between the soul and the body, which I have not yet dealt with at all.” (p. II:275)

"The soul is conceived only by the pure intellect; body (i.e. extension, shapes and motions) can likewise be known by the intellect alone, but much better by the intellect aided by the imagination; and finally what belongs to the union of the soul and the body is known only obscurely by the intellect alone or even by the intellect aided by the imagination, but it is known very clearly by the senses. [...] It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of forming a very distinct conception of both the distinction between the soul and the body and their union; for to do this it is necessary to conceive them as a single thing and at the same time to conceive them as two things; and this is absurd.” (p. III:227)
means that the question about the freedom of the will, when this free will is understood in a traditionally philosophical way, only arises in a causal perspective (and should then be answered in the negative). My point is then simply that there are other perspectives than the causal one, but that this does not mean that these other perspectives have to have some specific form, by, for example, emphasizing “the freedom of the will.” On the contrary, such an emphasis could, but does not have to, lead to the kind of problem I have already mentioned now and again, where “the will” is given a foundational role.

Even if both – or rather, many – perspectives would be possible, someone could take one of them to be possible to isolate or take one of them as the foundational one. Fichte writes:

The thing, that which is constituted independently of our freedom and by which our cognition is supposed to be guided, and the intellect, which is supposed to cognize, are inseparably connected within experience. The philosopher is able to abstract from either one of them, and he has then abstracted from experience and elevated himself above it. If he abstracts from the first one, he retains an intellect in itself, that is, abstracts from its relation to experience; if he abstracts from the latter one, he retains a thing in itself, that is, abstracts from the fact that it occurs within experience, – as explanatory ground of experience. The first procedure is called idealism, the second one dogmatism. These are […] the only possible philosophical systems.

Neither of these two systems can refute the opposing one directly […] idealism is unable to refute dogmatism. […] The dogmatist is equally unable to refute the idealist.

The ultimate difference between the idealist and the dogmatist is consequently the difference of their interest. […] What kind of philosophy one chooses, consequently depends upon what kind of person one is: for a philosophical system is not a dead household item one could put aside or pick up as one pleases, but it is animated by the soul of the person that has it.

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22 #Vilket jag väl inte gjort??
23 Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre*, in vol. 1 of *Fichtes Werke*, ed. Immanuel Hermann Fichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 425-26 (my translation). Ibid., 430 (my translation): According to him [the dogmatist], everything that occurs within our consciousness is a product of a thing in itself, consequently also our alleged determinations by freedom, as well as the opinion itself that we are free. This opinion is produced by the influence within us of the thing, and the determinations that we derive from our freedom are also produced by it: only we do not know it, therefore we do not attribute a cause, but freedom, to it.
24 Ibid., 429-31 (my translation).
25 Ibid., 433-34 (my translation).
Here one could ask why one must choose one or the other. I will come back to that: what the
temptation, to answer a question belonging to one perspective as if it belonged to the other
perspective, comes from. The problem I would like to bring up for discussion right now, is
that even though the causal perspective could be said to be a third person perspective, this
does not mean, as Fichte seems to be intimating, that the proper contrast to this is a first
person perspective. In a third person perspective, what someone believes – that this alternative
is the cheapest one, say – is seen as the result of a causal process. The question whether what
she believes is right, reasonable, plausible, justified, etc., or not, does not arise here. (Bringing
such a question up for discussion means regarding her belief in a different way than regarding
it as the result of a causal process. Saying that she is wrong is not to bring in an additional
causal element in order to make her change her mind, for the point of saying that someone is
wrong is not that this is the most *efficacious* way of making someone change her mind. The
one who uses the concept “free will” could here say that I appeal to her freedom when I say
that she is wrong.) In a first person perspective, a question about whether what I believe is
right, reasonable, plausible, justified, etc., would however not arise either, even though I do
not here regard what I believe as the result of a causal process. For I do already believe that I
am right; if I am convinced I am convinced, whatever, if anything, has given rise to this
conviction. And therefore the third person perspective might appear to be superior. From a
third person perspective, the first person perspective is limited: in the latter, I have the
convictions I have, and is unable to see myself from the outside in a radical way, seeing what
gives rise to my convictions. (My self is like a shadow I cannot get rid of, a shadow that
accompanies me when I adopt a third person perspective and mars it; unfortunately, I cannot

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In some Marxist perspectives, Fichte’s emphasis on freedom is seen as the most typical example of reactionary
ideology. See V. I. Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy*
(New York: International Publishers, 1927), passim. (But note that this is not to be found in Marx and Engels
(and this could be explained by referring to the fact that Lenin’s materialism, in contrast to theirs, is manifestly
undialectical); to be sure, Fichte is criticized (see above all Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1, in vol. 23 of *Marx
Engels Werke*, 5th ed. (Berlin: Dietz, 1970), 67), but he is also held up as a forerunner (Friedrich Engels, *Die
Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft*, in vol. 19 of *Marx Engels Werke*, 2nd ed. (Berlin:
Dietz, 1969), 188): “wir deutschen Sozialisten sind stolz darauf, daß wir abstammen nicht nur von Saint-Simon,
Fourier und Owen, sondern auch von Kant, Fichte und Hegel.” It is not hard to see what the one who
characterizes Fichte’s philosophy in this way is thinking of. But in the light of present day bourgeois thinking,
one should be wary of switching the emphasis from the one side to the other: if some kind of “spiritualism”
characterizes Fichte’s thinking and the bourgeois thinking of his time, a consumer society is often associated
with some form of materialism. If ideology critique is what one is interested in, a position like Fichte’s seems not
to be the most topical object of critique anymore. (If spiritualism could be said to defend injustices by claiming
that the focus on them is a focus on what is superficial and not really real, materialism does not care to defend
anything but tries to short-circuit all political thinking by claiming that it is not really possible, or, less
extremely, that it is useless. In that respect, the one who merely turns Fichte on his head is in dangerous waters,
the emphasis on freedom after all being a (failed) attempt at emphasizing morality (which is not as explicit in
Fichte as one could expect, in the light of his dependence on Kant’s locating freedom in the sphere of the
practical); one need not refer to 20th century “real socialism” to realize that.)
get rid of it, but ideally it would disappear.) But precisely for this reason, the two perspectives
do not affect each other; they are just placed side by side, the one just an addition to the other.
In what perspective is it then that concepts such as right, reasonable, plausible, justified, etc.,
are found? To be sure, they have a place in the two perspectives already mentioned. If one, in
the third person perspective, observes the convictions of other people and tries to find out
what gives rise to them, one will nevertheless place those convictions about causes one forms
when doing this under these concepts. And in the first person perspective I might look over
the calculation and realize that I have made a mistake. But this only means that the two
perspectives are not isolated and closed; in the last example, we see that the two “visions” are
understood, in a perspective of meaning, as related, as two instances of the same thing and
thereby making it possible for one of them to correct the other.

This perspective of meaning could be called a second person perspective. Of course, this
perspective has its primary home in a conversation between different persons (with a “you”),
but has also a place in myself, as we have seen, when I converse with myself, when I, as it
were, contrast my “former self” with “myself.” It is within the active life it makes sense to say
that there are things I cannot do (I try to climb a rock but fail), but this means that there is a
distinction between success and failure, a distinction which has its home in the life I live
together with others.

Saying that it is a “second person perspective” is somewhat misleading, however. For it is
not a perspective, not in the sense in which the first person perspective or the third person one
are perspectives. It is not a specific way of regarding things; pointing out a “second person
perspective” makes us only aware of what is involved in all our different ways of regarding
things. (This is what gives the two perspectives above the (limited) intelligibility they have,
which means that isolating them would dissolve them.) If one wants to say – this possibility
was mentioned above – that telling someone that she is wrong means appealing to her
freedom, this means that freedom coming to the fore is an expression of the fact that this
perspective is involved. However, the point is really a negative one: no perspective under

26 Fichte is on the verge of realizing this. See Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, in vol. 2 of
27 These distinctions are obviously not possible to make in a third person perspective; strictly speaking, there are
no actions there, nothing with a beginning and an end. The life I live together with others does not only come in
in the way above; if one tries to picture a real life situation in which the above example (taken from Maurice
436, 439) has a place, it would be pride (obviously a social emotion) which makes me claim and believe that I
managed to climb the rock when I did not do so, and the way out of the self-deception is not a solitary will to
truth but is, again, related to others, in many different ways. (The point Merleau-Ponty is making by means of
the example – that it is “freedom which brings into being the obstacles to freedom” (ibid., 439) – is, I would say,
more misleading than helpful, even though it is, when expressed in a different way, close to what I am saying.)
which we can regard things is exhaustive. When one says “human beings does not have a free will,” one does not mean what one is saying, as it were; what one says explicitly is denied implicitly, for the act of saying this is not exhausted by the perspective one adopts in one’s saying.\textsuperscript{28} Expressed in another way: no perspective under which we can regard things is exhaustive, since the space in which we are, among other things, trying to exhaust things is for that very reason not exhaustible, which means that the one who wants to argue for the supremacy of one perspective must do this in the open – the second person “perspective” – and thereby implicitly presuppose what she explicitly goes against.

But this does not mean that what one should really say is instead that human beings have a free will. The fact that the second person perspective is not a perspective also sheds light on what I said above, that the question about the freedom of the will only arises in a perspective in which it has to be answered in the negative. The point is simply that questions about, say, causes only have restricted application; we do not always (or, rather, only in specific situations) ask such questions, and in many (or, rather, most) situations it would be fundamentally unclear what asking such questions would mean. And that means that emphasizing the freedom of the will is a strange thing to do.\textsuperscript{29} Using a somewhat paradoxical

\textsuperscript{28} Intuiting theoretically (and in that way establishing, say, a causal relation) is doing something, i.e. an action. Thus the causal attitude also expresses something else – it is adopted in the theoretical employment of reason, which is, after all, an employment of reason – but this does not mean that it is an example of that kind of freedom which the causal attitude could, possibly, accept, a freedom relegated to another sphere: it is not in a void it takes place, not outside the world, it is not an “inner” freedom.

\textsuperscript{29} In the same way as the emphasis on the freedom of the will could lead us astray, could make us search for a specific answer to the question instead of seeing the restricted application of the question, the emphasis on “the will” could lead us astray in the same way. In fact, it is only against the background of the philosophical tradition (or traditional canon) that it appears to make sense at all to talk about “the will” in this general way. For if one thinks about it, it is easy to see that saying that all that I really do is an expression of my will is a very strange thing to say; talking about what I have done (or what somebody else has done) in this way only makes sense in some situations, is a way of emphasising some aspects in contrast to other ones. Most of the things I do, I do not “want” to do, which does not mean that I do them against my will. The same thing goes for the emphasis on choice (as, say, the place of freedom). Of course, there are situations in which it makes sense to answer the question “did you choose to do x” in the positive. But note that this does not suggest that I necessarily did some deliberation, only that I did x and that there were alternatives; so there is no emphasis on some activity of choosing (in which I am free in the most exemplary fashion). Furthermore, such a question makes sense only in some situations; obviously we would end up in a regress if we took it to be generally applicable. So the idea that freedom means consciously having done what one did into one’s own dissolves.

The genealogical idea that the fact that one’s ideas (and the like) are possible to trace back to some kind of historical situation is for this reason not as interesting as it may initially appear to be. But there is a related issue which is more interesting. Collingwood writes (The Idea of History, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 83-4):

If that which we come to understand better is something other than oneself, for example the chemical properties of matter our improved understanding of it in no way improves the thing itself. If, on the other hand, that which we understand better is our own understanding, an improvement in that science is an improvement not only in its subject but in its object also. By coming to think more truly about the human understanding we are coming to improve our own understanding.
formulation: the freedom of the will is as most evident when we do not pay attention to it. Freedom “is” not. What would discovering the existence of freedom be? The point is not that we search for causes and have a name – freedom – for our failure, but that we do not always search for causes and that there is a point in asking such questions only in specific situations.

“But everything has a cause! Are the causes supposed to vanish as soon as we do not talk about them?” What this shows is not that the concept cause has a general applicability, but one of the points of saying that “everything has a cause.” This saying is an answer to a question and in order for the saying to have a point this question must be topical. Said out of the blue, uttering the above objection would not be intelligible either. “But haven’t you yourself said that it is always possible to ask for differences and causes?” Well, not really, the point was simply that there is no limit to the possibility, as if there were a place were we wanted to ask such a question but could not do so. But anyhow, that something is possible to do does not mean that one actually does it; on the contrary, the scientific practice presupposes that one will content oneself sooner or later – an indeterminate place, of course – and take the question to be answered. (Furthermore, as I have emphasised again and again, a question (about, say, differences and causes) have not a general applicability: is the question generally understandable, is the question intelligible in any situation, is it always clear what wanting to ask the question would mean?) Above all: Whether the question is topical or not is partly a moral question. If I see it as topical, I could ask myself what attitude this “seeing it as topical” is an expression of. Such an existential self-examination may result in me not asking the question as naturally, or in the same situations, as before. The question is not topical on its own.\(^{30}\)

But what is then the relation between what I have said here and traditional ways of solving the problem of the “freedom of the will”? Is it an argument for dualism? No, for at least two reasons. First, there are not just two ways of speaking about things. “The more the merrier,” I would rather say, pace Occam. Second, there “are” no substances, whether one, two, or many. There is, sometimes and not always, a point in using some specific concept. Even the attempt at reducing some way of talking to another requires some question for its intelligibility, and we do not always ask this question, nor would it make sense to do so. Is it then an argument for some form of compatibilism? No, for the same reason. The compatibilist is a determinist.

\(^{30}\) #Det här är röligt

And this means, as he points out (ibid., 85), that the attempt at understanding oneself better means giving up control of myself: with this understanding I will have changed, so I may then do (or abstain from doing) something I now do not want to do (or do). One way of testing a conception of freedom is to see whether it could be applied here without ending up in an antinomy.
and hence takes the question about causes to have a general applicability; the same thing
could be said about the person who argues for some form of psychophysical parallelism. So
the basic problem is Fichte’s saying that one has to choose one philosophical system. The
problem is not that one takes one perspective as foundational and not the other one; the
problem is to believe that there is a foundational perspective.

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